LEARNING, WORK AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Lifelong Learning Book Series

VOLUME 13

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"Lifelong Learning" has become a central theme in education and community development. Both international and national agencies, governments and educational institutions have adopted the idea of lifelong learning as their major theme for address and attention over the next ten years. They realize that it is only by getting people committed to the idea of education both life-wide and lifelong that the goals of economic advancement, social emancipation and personal growth will be attained.

The *Lifelong Learning Book Series* aims to keep scholars and professionals informed about and abreast of current developments and to advance research and scholarship in the domain of Lifelong Learning. It further aims to provide learning and teaching materials, serve as a forum for scholarly and professional debate and offer a rich fund of resources for researchers, policy-makers, scholars, professionals and practitioners in the field.

The volumes in this international Series are multi-disciplinary in orientation, polymathic in origin, range and reach, and variegated in range and complexity. They are written by researchers, professionals and practitioners working widely across the international arena in lifelong learning and are orientated towards policy improvement and educational betterment throughout the life cycle.

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LEARNING, WORK AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

CHALLENGES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN A GLOBAL AGE

by

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ISBN 978-1-4020-9758-4 e-ISBN 978-1-4020-9759-1

DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008942997

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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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For Sarah and Matthew

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Author's Introduction

The concept of individual responsibility has taken on a significance comparable to that of 'choice' in the global rise of neo-liberalism of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The rise of neo-liberalism is most often analysed through the lenses of theory, governmentality and societal structures. There has been a tendency for analysis to become overly abstract with the subjective experiences of the social actors missing dimensions in the literature.

This book draws on more than 20 years of international research that has focused on the subjective experiences of people as actors in changing social landscapes. These landscapes are differently positioned politically, economically and socially, in relation to the rise of neo-liberalism. Comparisons enable the differences in people's experiences to be located, explored and explained in relation to different socio-economic landscapes, thus throwing into relief the effects of neo-liberal policies where they are found.

My approach is to create an extended dialogue between ideas and evidence, starting close to home, and then extending to specific international comparisons and to wider explorations of the central themes of the book: human agency and social responsibility. Finally, I return to social landscapes of Britain, to review the position and potential for social change in societies that exemplify what Sennett has termed 'Anglo-American regimes', in contrast to 'Rhine regimes' as exemplified by Germany.

Chapter 1 is rooted in the British social landscapes of my own experience, drawing in essay style on popular and literary portrayals of social phenomena as well as a range of social science sources. My analysis moves outwards to systematic comparison of the experiences of young adults in British and German cities that highlight the contrasts between environments governed by deregulation and the growth of marketisation, the struggle to maintain social democratic values in changing contexts and the post-communist transition from a command economy. Analysis of effects of the regulated, diverse and polarised socio-economic environments in which people get started on their occupational and learning careers provides a basis for better understandings of the work and learning experiences of adults in a range of different settings, particularly those at the lower end of the earnings distribution. Work and learning are considered in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 from the perspectives of the people who are differently positioned in their social landscapes: as employees or

hidden workers, as students who anticipate work through learning, as unemployed people trying to gain a foothold in the labour market and as hidden workers who support the vast amounts of unpaid work. Cross-cutting themes are drawn out, with issues of gender, participation, citizenship and social life explored more fully in Chapters 6 and 7. The evidence is drawn from a series of UK Research Council Major Awards, EU-funded projects and other research carried out at national and international levels. I am indebted to the research colleagues and partners with whom I have travelled in these social landscapes over 20 years, particularly Walter Heinz, John Bynner, Martina Behrens, Claire Woolley, Peter Rudd and Jens Kaluza (Anglo-German Studies), Gerald Heidegger, Beatrix Niemeyer, Bettina Hoffman, Sue Saxby-Smith (youth and adult transitions, gender and qualification), Edmund Waite, Maurice Taylor (Anglo-Canadian studies), Lorna Unwin, Helen Rainbird, Phil Hodkinson and Natasha Kersh (improving workplace learning).

Chapter 8 sets out conceptual schema to assist rethinking of 'social structures' in relation to human aspiration and capacities for change in learning, work and social responsibility. From a theoretical standpoint, the book develops an analysis of the scope ordinary people have for fulfilling their aspirations and the ways in which they strive for this through work and learning. This focuses attention on connections between the bounds of human agency and the individual, mutual and social responsibilities enacted in the social world. Chapter 9 returns to the themes introduced in Chapter 1, showing how popular beliefs in meritocracy and the openness of opportunities to all could evaporate very quickly in the new generation of adults as it becomes apparent that the qualifications chase eventually becomes a zero-sum game for all but the most advantaged. Assessing claims that the neo-liberal trends are approaching a 'stall point' in societies such as Britain and the USA, it is argued that the culture of contentment is disturbed by growing inequalities to the point that even the middle classes recognise that what is being created is a zero-sum chase and a context of insecurity in which inequality, in the end, is bad for everyone. Greater social responsibility exercised throughout society means *replacing individual responsibility with mutual responsibility as the core construct.* The mutuality of social responsibility requires reconnection and voice for the ordinary citizen, exercised through work and the workplace as well as in the wider social world.

The argument, put simply, revolves around social justice and active and engaged citizenry. The relentless pursuit of economic advantage distances us from these goals.

There is an increasing mismatch between the aspirations of ordinary people and policies designed to help them fulfil their aspirations. Policies to encourage lifelong learning are based on the view that individuals must learn new things primarily to secure employment in an ever-changing world. The result of these polices has been to open up unsustainable inequalities which ordinary people are unlikely to tolerate for much longer. There is the prospect that social movements will increasingly counter these trends as dissatisfaction grows. For politicians, bringing politics closer to the life worlds and aspirations of ordinary people will mean seeking solutions based on broader and fairer forms of meritocracy and bringing work and the pursuit of broader social purposes into a better balance at all levels of the social world.

Editorial By Series Editors

Since the publication in 2001 of the first work in the Lifelong Learning Book Series, ***International Handbook of Lifelong Learning*** (edited by Aspin, Chapman, Sawano and Hatton), the subject of 'Lifelong Learning' and a range of issues, policies and problems arising within and from this topic have been confirmed as a central theme in education. International and national agencies and governments and educational institutions have realised that it is only by getting people committed to the idea of education both life-wide and lifelong that the goals of economic advancement, social inclusion and personal growth will be attained.

The ***Lifelong Learning Book Series*** aims to advance research and scholarship in the domain of lifelong learning addressing and pertaining to those themes. It further aims to offer a rich fund of resources for researchers, policy makers, scholars, professionals and practitioners in the field.

The volumes in this international series are written by researchers, professionals and practitioners working widely across the international arena and are orientated towards policy improvement and educational betterment throughout the life cycle.

Our colleague Karen Evans has addressed such a range of problems, topics and issues in her book ***Learning, Work and Social Responsibility***. She has drawn on more than 20 years' international research, focussing in this volume on the ideas of individual responsibility and people's notions of and approaches to it in their roles as social actors located in different and changing social landscapes. Karen addresses the notion of the subjective experiences of such actors and the senses they make of their living and working in different social, economic and political environments, where the concurrent tensions between neo-liberal and social responsibility perspectives are most strongly being played out. She approaches the study of these tensions by creating an extended dialogue between ideas and evidence, starting her inquiry from the range of social landscapes in which she has most recent engagement – those of the United Kingdom – before moving on to locate the interplay of such tensions in a range of international settings, perhaps best exemplified in the contrasts in approaches to ideas of social change between what she terms 'Anglo-American regimes' and those that are seen in operation in the 'Rhine Regimes' of Western Europe.

The major contrast here is that between government policies of deregulation and the growth of 'marketisation' and those where there is still to be found a

commitment to such social democratic values and concerns as those promoting policies of social and economic inclusion, the increase of democratic access, equity and participation and the development and extension of the ideas and values of individual autonomy and personal growth. Commitment to such values will be furthered by actors' involvement in programmes of learning, both generally in schools and occupational, professional and other learning programmes for adults. Here Karen's concentration moves particularly towards possibilities for learning in the workplace and the labour market, where actors' experiences as those in work or seeking work or dealing with the difficulties of securing work and getting a footing in the labour market are investigated, analysed and reflected upon. She notes the fruitful possibilities of commenting upon the intersection of such themes with issues of gender, participation, citizenship and social living.

Karen moves on to explore the possibilities for change in learning, work and social responsibility engendered by her reconceptualisation of the notion of 'social structures' and their relationships to people's individual aspirations and capabilities. Her argument is that these possibilities have greatest potential for being realised if the value placed upon individual autonomy and social responsibility is best reconsidered by moving to a notion of social mutuality. This means replacing the stress on individual responsibility with an emphasis on mutual responsibility as the core concept and central value in all such thinking and policy-making. Karen concludes that 'her argument, put simply, revolves around social justice, active and engaged citizenry. The relentless pursuit of economic advantage distances us from these goals'. She writes that she sees 're-establishing the relationship between education and real life in terms of broadening public appreciation of what is genuinely educative in people's lives, as conceptions of worthwhile learning break free of narrow institutionalised confines' – noble aims, as we believe.

For this is an argument and a point of view with which we have much sympathy and on which we have already written at some length ourselves. It is an issue that impacts directly on the conception, framing and institutionalisation of policies for schooling and learning in post-compulsory settings of all kinds – formal and informal, institutional and alternative, in the workplace and other learning environments - that will promote such ends and a number of which are now being worked upon by governments across the international arena seeking to address the learning needs of their citizens, countries and regional and international connections for the purposes instanced by Karen Evans in this book.

All these ideas are set out and explored in a volume that is designed to shape, inform and aid the process of reflection upon the responsibility educators and policy makers have for developing peoples' repertoires of knowledge and understanding, helping to shape and frame their values, and by their policies and initiatives in the worlds of learning seeking to influence the kind of society in which we live. It is this process of critical reflection on issues raised by the concepts of learning in all its various modes, stages and locations, work as a site of learning and advancement and policies for the development and enlargement of a sense of social responsibility among all citizens of a modern participative democracy that will best promote the values instantiated in them, which should continue throughout life.

We take pleasure in launching this volume as evidence of the excellence and range of the work undertaken since the commencement of this series by Springer. As editors to the series, we trust that its readers will find this collection to be as thought provoking, controversial and stimulating to the advancement of their own work and thinking on these and the many other related topics and to their own framing of responses to it as its author would wish. Karen Evans merits no less, and we commend her argument to all those working in this area of interest, activity and intellectual enquiry. We hope that it will encourage their continuing critical thinking, research and development and academic and scholarly production and mark a further advance in their individual, institutional and professional progress and development.

November 2008 David Aspin and Judith Chapman

Chapter 1
Learning for a Living: The Powerful, the Dispossessed and the Learning Revolution

The real priority must be to re-establish the relationship between education and real life, throughout the whole of life. To raise the school leaving age to 75 is the only sensible objective of education policy.

Tony Benn (1987)

A learning society is not necessarily either a pleasant, efficient nor an egalitarian place; on the contrary, it may well generate even more deeply rooted inequalities than we have yet seen, it may place its citizens under renewed stress and pressure and it may involve the creation of forms of instruction that have little or no impact upon human productivity and creativity.

John Field (2002)

Finding the right relationship between education and 'real life' has preoccupied educationalists and politicians for most of the last century. I start this book on *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility* with the words of a controversial English politician, known for his lifelong commitment to the pursuit of social justice and equality through education. For Tony Benn the link between education and real life was best exemplified by part-time study in the extra-mural tradition, through which people could develop real skills which served social purposes. He was emphatically not advocating an extension of linear front-loaded academic education. In a characteristic piece of Bennite debunking, his statement about the 'real priority' was prefaced by his view of academic education: 'It is all very well doing your BA and MA and your postgraduate work and your doctorate and your postdoctoral and post post doctoral research', he said. 'One day I shall open a funeral parlour, named post-doctoral services incorporated, because by the time people have got two doctorates they are ready for the mortuary'.[i] One of the social purposes which most preoccupied Benn and his contemporaries in the white heat of that earlier so-called revolution, the 'technological revolution', was the need to control what he termed 'this new block of power'. We needed to control it in exactly the same way we had controlled other blocks of power in other periods of history, and that was by educating ourselves.

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_1, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

In 2003, countless consultants' reports and official documents foretold an inevitable future of permanent learning which cannot be resisted and which is therefore beyond our control:

> The world is changing faster than ever. The implications of new technology and the effects of globalisation are so radical, that those who resist a life of continuing learning risk finding themselves socially marginalised, if not excluded. Organisations which employ reluctant learners and fail to get them into further learning will share their fate.[ii]

This is learning for a living, the life sentence version. It is based on a political ideology as surely as Tony Benn's position is. The ideology in question is that of globalism,[iii] supported by a revolution in learning. These ideologically based accounts cannot be taken at face value. The predictions of globalists have been reviewed by Andy Green in his centenary professorial lecture (2002), with the conclusion that they are profoundly ahistorical and undialectical. This provides a context, but is not my main concern. Instead, I aim to link the international, the global, with the local. I start with the social landscapes in which people live and work; I ask about the control people have over their lives and what a learning revolution means for them.

The theoretical positions that inform my analysis are those that have something to say about how human capacities and potentialities can be released from the ties that bind them, asking how the human desire to 'transcend and influence the organisation of society' be realised. We are all constrained and supported by conditions and relations with others.

While a classic Marxian analysis would argue that the constraints are too great for people to rise above them, my analysis takes a rather different view that springs from the recognition that the circumstances that are held to shape and form consciousness are not independent of human activity but are themselves social relations that have been created by human action. My focus on social landscapes is consistent with the Habermasian view of the lifeworld as the world of the personal in which people live, move, communicate and have their being. How do people's lifeworlds develop? How do 'ordinary people' learn what they know, both tacitly and explicitly, and play out in their day-to-day lives? How do these lifeworlds relate to the system worlds dominated by political and economic institutions? Habermasian views see lifeworlds as 'colonized' by system worlds that draw people into frameworks of thinking and acting that are consistent with the dominant discourses of the time and thereby the interests of the political and economic institutions that generate them. People are not directly impelled to subscribe to these accounts of the world or to legitimise themselves in their terms, but advantages and penalties accrue from subscription or non-subscription in ways that people come to recognise. This applies as much within the particular organisations that people work in as it does within the wider societal framework. The extent to which these processes become visible or not depends on the points of reference and comparison that people have available to them as they move in social landscapes. Different rationalities co-exist in the social world.

The fact that one rationality appears dominant at any one time does not mean that the others have lost their power to engage and persuade. My argument questions

dominant ideas and brings forward other rationalities in three ways. I argue, first, that claims that a learning revolution is taking place reflect dominant political and economic interests in sustaining the belief that people have to ‘learn for a living’, to maintain their livelihoods. Since this process appears to be reinforcing inequalities and increases the gap between the powerful and the powerless, it cannot properly be called a revolution. Second, I argue that popular beliefs in meritocracy and the openness of opportunities to all could evaporate very quickly in the new generation of adults, as it becomes apparent that the qualifications chase eventually becomes a zero-sum game for all but the most advantaged, those who can stay in the race longest. A sense of crisis might provoke a response whereby even the complacent middle classes might seek change, as even they lose out in the end as the relentless chase for positional advantage through qualifications reaches its ultimate conclusion in global markets.

Finally, re-establishing the relationship between education and real life will mean broadening public appreciation of what is genuinely educative in people’s lives, as conceptions of worthwhile learning break free of narrow institutionalised confines. ‘Learning for a living’ can be linked to wider social purposes, in ways which recognise that people are social actors moving in changing social landscapes, trying to take control of their lives in new ways, including through work. Employment is not totally alienating, insecure and unrewarding for many ordinary citizens, and working life also affords opportunities for the exercise of social responsibility. Advocacy that people should ‘take more control of their lives’ has to be combined with expanded channels for ‘voice’ and influence in the day-to-day business of living and working. This is a minimum condition for creating a learning revolution worthy of its name.

1.1 Actors in Changing Social Landscapes

Overstated claims about ‘revolutions in learning’ permeate both popular and academic literature on education. Accounts swing from claims that a revolution is needed because hardly anybody learns and half the working population is semi-literate to pronouncements that a massive revolution in learning and skills has already taken place.[iv] The problem with such statements is that they have become detached from the realities of people’s lives. I focus on social landscapes because it is in these that people live, work and learn, and I begin with two landscapes of personal significance.

The first has personal research significance. It is the City of Derby, an urban area with a social history rooted in the Industrial Revolution. Post-industrial Derby is now designated a ‘city of learning’ and is home to one of Britain’s most innovative universities, when it comes to widening participation. One of my highpoints, as a researcher, was the ESRC grant awarded in 1998, which enabled me to build on my earlier Anglo-German studies[v] by mounting a study of how people exercise and experience control in their lives, in landscapes which represent the different socio-economic options in the fast-expanding Europe. Derby was my chosen English city,

representing the realities of the market-led English version of what is loosely termed 'a learning revolution'.[vi]

My second chosen social landscape is the Douglas Valley in Scotland, with its history in the rise and the fall of the coal, iron and textiles industries of the region. It is the area of Lanarkshire which produced Keir Hardie, the Lanarkshire coalminer, who became the founder of the Labour Party. It also produced my grandfather, who spent all of his working life in the collieries, first as a coal face worker and later as pit safety officer in one of the Douglas Valley mines. It also produced my father and then me, both with lives transformed by versions of the educational scholarship and free place/direct grant systems which gave narrow gateways for a few to the types of knowledge which really did, at that time, give power and potential of new kinds, but left the prospects of the majority unchanged. Once an area known for its social activism (which almost matched the People's Republic of South Yorkshire at one time), the Douglas Valley is now an area marginalised, if not devastated, by the broad sweep of social change.

Both of my chosen landscapes have a significance which goes beyond their immediate localities. Both are closely linked with sites recognised by UNESCO and preserved as 'World Heritage Sites' for their contribution to the history of ideas and social advancement and are themselves directly linked historically.

The Derbyshire mills are at the centre of the area's social history. An old silk mill in Derby city centre pronounces to the 21st century's city of learning the 19th-century message that 'Knowledge is power'. Close to Derby is the home of the crucibles of the Industrial Revolution; Cromford, site of Arkwright's mill, is a monument to invention rather than social advancement, although the factory village provided many people with better access to a regular living and reasonable living conditions (as long as they did not fall ill or become an impediment to efficient production in other ways). A local historian recounted to me the story of the factory worker in the Cromford mill who lost his fingers in an early version of the machines. A court case ensued. 'Did the factory worker get compensation?', I asked. A momentary pause told me my question was out of historical context. The worker was not suing the company. The company was suing the worker for clogging up the machinery with his body parts, leading to the loss of a day's production. Unsurprisingly, trades unions soon mobilised in the mill towns, becoming part of the wider social revolution which strived for a new balance of power between owners and workers.

In 1784 Sir Richard Arkwright was entertained to a public dinner in Glasgow and was invited to travel the next day to my second social landscape to the site now known as New Lanark, at the end of the Douglas Valley, at the Falls of Clyde. New Lanark was destined to become the focus for a social experiment and one of the first ever Institutes for Lifelong Learning. Arkwright pronounced the physical environment to be one of the best he had seen for the development of an automised mill, offering the potential to make the area into the 'Manchester of Scotland'. A business partnership led to the construction of four huge mills and housing for about 1500 people. But New Lanark took on completely new and progressive dimensions from 1800 when ownership passed to Robert Owen, one of the earliest utopian

socialists.[vii] Owen had managed a cotton spinning factory in Manchester in the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution and had seen conditions for workers and children which appalled him. He knew what ‘creating a Manchester in Scotland’ could mean. New Lanark became, for Robert Owen, the focus of his great social and educational experiment. As early as 1816, Owen was thinking and writing about society in the next millennium. When he opened his lifelong learning institute, which he called the Institute for the Formation of Character, he said,

> What ideas individuals may attach to the ‘millennium’ I know not, but I know that society may be formed so as to exist without crime, without poverty, with health greatly improved, with little if any misery and with knowledge and happiness increased a hundred-fold; and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment except ignorance, to prevent such a state of society becoming universal.
>
> (From *A Development of the Principles and Plans on Which to Establish Self-Supporting Home Colonies*, R. Owen (1841))

He believed that environment shaped character and behaviour and that the role of education was to provide an environment in which people, together, could flourish and extend themselves. His approach was genuinely lifelong. Building on an educational structure originally put in place for the ‘pauper apprentices’ who made up much of the original workforce, he extended this to nursery education for all children as soon as they could walk and provided one of the first infants’ classes in the world. Families were discouraged from sending their children to work in the factory too early, before they could benefit from the broad curriculum provided in the school. Classes and activities were provided in the evening for those young people and adults who had already started work. The scope of these was cultural, social and vocational, with some recreation added too – singing and dancing were reported as favourite pursuits.

Owen’s vision of a co-operative community built around an educated workforce did not go uncontested. His board disapproved of profits being distributed as benefits to the workers, a challenge he survived. He was, after all, a very canny businessman running a profitable business. In 1819 Sir Robert Southey, who came up from London charged with making an evaluation of Owen’s experiment, said it was based on application of almost totalitarian power and dependency of his workers and that Owen’s lifelong learning institute, known as the Institute for the Formation of Character, threatened to ‘suppress all individuality and domesticity’:

> His system, instead of aiming for freedom, can only be kept in play by absolute power
>
> He jumps to the monstrous conclusion that, because he can do this with 2210 people who are, totally dependent on him, the whole of mankind might be governed in this way
>
> (Robert Southey 1819).

Despite these 19th-century criticisms,[viii] Robert Owen had designed a workplace environment which in 2009 we might describe as ‘expansive’ as well as profitable. In fact, Scottish schoolchildren are today challenged with the question, Robert Owen: utopian socialist or enlightened capitalist? Discuss . . .. His company certainly had a high reputation for education and training as well as a good business reputation. It also had an interesting and unusual approach to performance management – the

Silent Monitor. For every worker in the mills, there was a piece of wood, painted four different colours. This was hung up 'to denote their conduct and is always conspicuous to the eye. The name of each person is entered in a book: the number 1, 2, 3 or 4 is placed opposite each name every evening by the overlooker of the room'. No threats, punishments or penalties were allowed. Instead, Mr Owen, on his walks around the factory, would always look at the silent monitor, and anyone showing the colour denoting poor performance would receive a stare so dark and penetrating that productivity would improve instantly without a word being said, to paraphrase *The New Views of Mr Owen of Lanark, Impartially Examined,* by Dr Henry McNab (1819).

In 2002 I visited, while on holiday, a millennium educational experience sponsored by the Scottish Education Department and offered in New Lanark. We entered a time capsule in which Harmony, a 12-year-old time traveller from the year 2200, took us back from the Millennium Year to the 19th century and forward to 2200 in the quest for universal harmony. The time travel revealed continuities and discontinuities with the present. In 2200 Harmony took the same delight in her friends and the latest fashions, but hated getting too much homework. She enjoyed birthdays which brought together five generations of her family, including her great, great grandmother who was 125 years old, but didn't look a day over 100 (with an appearance that most 60-year-olds would be happy with in our current time). Her workstation gave her access to structured and coordinated access to learning through universal knowledge banks, combined with the ability to expand and share her knowledge by teleporting around the world.

This is fantasy with an underpinning of Owen's utopian educational and social philosophy. In the 21st century, Owen's vision of peace, sharing and harmony could not be further away. 'Knowledge is power' has disappeared from sight. 'Knowledge is light' has replaced it in international discourses, as illustrated by the well-known philanthropic organisation, the World Bank:

> Knowledge is like light. Weightless and intangible, it can easily travel the world, enlightening the lives of people everywhere. Yet billions of people still live in the darkness of poverty-unnecessarily.
>
> (World Bank 1999 p. 1)

I suggest that this statement is no less fantastic than that of Harmony, sharing experiences by teleporting. Light transmission is an inadequate metaphor. It misses the human mediation, the dialogue and debate and the social forces that accompany context and culture. Owen's 19th-century philosophy held that education was the glue which could hold society together. A 21st-century cartoon published in *The Times* alongside an account of the launch of a new UK national research centre into the Wider Benefits of Learning showed a globe splitting apart under the weight of global capitalism. An educator was standing by, trying ineffectually to glue the cracks together while consulting a manual titled *Sticking with Education*. I return to the simple, but powerful, point which started this book. The real priority must be to re-establish the relationship between education and real life, throughout the whole of life.

1.2 Re-establishing the Relationships Between Education and Real Life

> for we are all divorced from life . . .
>
> (the little clerk from Dostoyevsky's Notes from the Underground)

> It is an uneasy lot at best to be what we call highly taught yet not to enjoy. To be present at this great spectacle of life, yet never to be liberated from a small, hungry shivering self
>
> (George Eliot)

What is this relationship, and what should it be? What ideological or theoretical base do we choose for our analysis? Our starting point could be that the exercise and preservation of democracy is of predominant importance in real life (we go to war in its name), that real life is about active and engaged citizenry and that the proper relationship between education and real life has to be understood in terms of lifelong engagement with the ideas and practices of democracy. It is, for example, about educating ourselves collectively to exercise control over social impact and advances of technology. This version was important in western Europe in the early part of the 20th century, at the time of the foundation of many civic universities and the international sweep of emancipatory discourses[ix] which are equal and opposite to the globalisation discourses which are sweeping the world we inhabit a century on. In Britain it was reflected in the 1919 Ministry of Reconstruction report, which advocated education in adult life and which was 'inextricably woven with the whole organised life of the community and rooted in the social aspirations of the democratic movements of the country . . .'.

These versions take the social dynamics of power as their starting point. If we take a different starting point for our analysis, in which the flowering of human potential is of predominant importance, then the logic of the learning individual begins to define the proper relationship between education and real life. *Learning to Be* (the Faure Report, 1972) defined the humanistic aim of 'Lifelong Education' as 'the fulfilment of man, through the flexible organisation of different stages of education', a process which should last the whole life for individuals and not just be tacked onto school or university for a privileged or specialised few. Husen, in his well-known articulation of the concept of a learning society, emphasised not only 'second chance' conceptions of lifelong learning but also that untapped potential has to be seen as the norm, not the exception, in the population. International bodies such as UNESCO used the humanistic version of lifelong learning to provide its master concepts for educational planning, but their use represented worthy ideals with relatively little to show in the way of tangible advances in access to lifelong learning opportunities.

The global political consensus on lifelong learning which emerged at the end of the 20th century was apparent in the Delors Report, the EU Competitiveness and Economic Growth Agenda and statements of intent of OECD, the G8 countries and the Delhi Declaration. Taking up the ideas of learning through the life course as necessary to sustain livelihoods in times of critical social change fundamentally reshaped the discourses of lifelong learning. The basis for analysis of the 'proper

relationship between education and real life' came to be defined by the knowledge-driven economy, in which 'work is the new consumption' and the relationship between education and 'real life' is that 'the more we learn, the more we earn'.[x] We are engaged in a lifelong competition for livelihoods – learning for a living.

The role of government is recast as providing the means and encouragement for people to take responsibility for their own 'employability', as it is claimed that national governments can no longer guarantee employment in a global competitive environment.[xi]

The political consensus did not hold for long. The projections of OECD in 1997 showed growing awareness of the consequences of reducing learning and lifelong learning in particular to investment in exploitable economic capital. Contrasts were drawn between the sense of control 'over their own lives and their society' which comes from successful experience of education, with the isolation of the excluded:

> For those who are excluded from this process, however, or who choose not to participate, the generalisation of lifelong learning may only have the effect of increasing their isolation from the world of the 'knowledge-rich'. The consequences are economic, in under-used human capacity and increased welfare expenditure, and social in terms of alienation and decaying infrastructure.

An equal investment in 'social capital' was called for, but is the attempt to balance these two types of capital – social and economic – inherently contradictory?

The analyses of governmental organisations and international agencies have concerned themselves principally with the social organisation of institutions of learning and the ways in which they need to be reorganised around new priorities to respond to social and economic changes. In this process the discontinuities of change are exaggerated, while the continuities of disadvantage are underestimated. New forms of learning are superimposed on old forms that nevertheless retain much of their original power. Social institutions, old and new, continue to interlock to shape typical life courses, that is life courses which may still be typified according to social position. As Alheit and Dausien have argued, policies which aim to balance economic and social capital have to take the 'learning individual' much more seriously if they are to avoid becoming trapped in the contradictions which lie at their heart. As well as continual reorganisation of the institutions of learning, we need to try to understand better the reflexive ways in which people's lives are shaped, are bounded or change direction as they engage with these education, labour market and workplace institutions.

Researchers have mapped aspects of learning and real life 'throughout the whole of life' in biographical studies (Alheit and Dausien 2002; Preece and Edirisingha 2001; Williamson 2001; Heinz 1999b) or through longitudinal tracking studies such as those conducted by Bynner et al. (2002), with Antikainen (1996) being most notable in documenting changes in dominant values as each generation passes to the next.

More accessible accounts of relationships between education and real life at different points in history often come through in literary portrayals, which often enlarge or accentuate these aspects of their characters' lives in telling ways. There

is no shortage of romantic portrayals of struggles of learners overcoming barriers which excluded or threatened to exclude them from the opportunities of elite forms of education. In my first inaugural professorial lecture, I used an example now rather threadbare from widespread popular use of *Jude the Obscure*. *Educating Rita* was another example marking the opening up of higher education opportunities to adults and illustrating how Rita had to struggle for identity in an institution inhabited by those from other worlds and generations. While we may be tempted to dismiss the modern-day relevance of the accounts of the struggles of Jude and Rita, arguing that the barriers have long since been lifted, it is worth reminding ourselves that the most significant decline in engagement in adult learning at the start of the 21st century in England has been among mature entrants to higher education as age-related funding hurdles have been introduced. In working-class communities which previously had a strong tradition of self-improvement of the type Jude sought in Hardy's novel, male participation in adult education has also declined (NIACE 1999).[xii]

In Derby, my research team conducted interviews with students up to the age of 25 in higher education to explore the importance of social characteristics for life chances, as perceived by the successful entrants to the university system. Many of the participants had their origins in families unfamiliar with higher education, reflecting the strong 'widening participation' policies of the University of Derby. Even in this environment, where traditional middle-class entrants thought that 'social class doesn't matter anymore', those, like Mel, from working-class backgrounds were very clear that it did:

> It doesn't matter what you try to do here, they just won't let you cross that barrier. It's fair enough I might be doing a degree and I might be doing better than someone who lives in a really nice area but they never let me past the fact that I'm a single parent from a council estate. They just won't let me do it.

Others were among the first from their families to go to university. Darren felt he was 'forging new links' and going in a completely different path to his parents:

> So their advice is not really . . . valid. And they can only say 'this is what I feel', because they haven't had the experience of going to university and doing a degree, their advice isn't really relevant to me. I feel that I'm going through life [according to] what I think more than what my parents think.

Other students, while asserting the independence of their plans, talk of the considerable role their parents played in their development, in such a way that alternatives to higher education were not seriously considered. Darren had to make his own way, without the advantages of family's accumulated knowhow. We know that families and social networks provide resources which people translate into outcomes in education and the labour market. Not everyone operates in networks or families which see life as a ladder of opportunity, although systems are organised as though it is.

The process of making plans for a future ladder of opportunity has been shown over most of this century to have its foundation in social class. The well-established class-based patterns of deferred gratification through schooling were also demonstrated in Ashton and Field (1976) empirically based distinctions between

careerless, short-term and extended career-orientated, and in 2000 I published findings showing similar patterns extend to 18–25-year-olds in the present generation.[xiii]

When the results were further analysed for those who had successfully entered higher education, a less familiar pattern emerged. Dispositions towards long-term planning were higher among the children of skilled working-class families. For those from managerial and professional families, the process of entering higher education is often one of simply staying on the escalator (getting off it would require the planning). Those non-traditional applicants who actually do enter higher education appear to have done so via a process of planning which is untypical for the broader population of young people from working-class backgrounds. This adds to the evidence that there are features of both middle-class and working-class experiences which keep the majority of people in the socially reproductive 'line of least resistance'. As well as sorting out the muddle and disincentives in the financing of higher education, the current policy debate needs to recognise more generously that it takes considerable self-belief and courage for people from disadvantaged social backgrounds to make their way even in the most open of UK higher education institutions.

Here I have drawn on only a fraction of the available evidence that, as far as our universities are concerned, we are very far from free and equal access to lifelong learning for all, but our angst about using the term learning society for what is so far removed from the utopian ideal is eased when we realise that, as John Field has argued in one of my opening quotes, the utopian and dystopian aspects co-exist in the here and now.

While the experiences in our universities (and public schools) have long provided the substance for literary portrayals of class consciousness and struggle of the non-traditional entrant, literary portrayals of the flexible consumer of learning and work in the utopian versions of lifelong learning are harder to find. But there is no shortage of literary portrayals of 'conscripted' learning, the dystopian face of lifelong learning, as individuals get caught in the traps and contradictory assumptions of education and work policies. Those who run out of patience with academics' endlessly critiquing policies would do well to turn to the representations that come through in the books and media of the time, for commentaries on social realities. The experiences of those conscripted to learning used to be depicted in the merciless lampooning of liberal studies lecturers' attempts to cope with what Wilt (Sharpe 1985) called the 'collective barbarism' of the apprentices in Meat 2 or Plumbing 3. The days of compulsory liberal studies are now over in English Further Education Colleges. The indignities suffered by Adrian Mole's father come closer to modern forms of conscripted learning, as recorded in his fictional diaries (Townsend 1982). When Adrian Mole's father was made redundant, his family joined the ranks of what his mother termed the ranks of the 'nouveau poor'. On 5 March, his training assignment came through from the Manpower Services Commission – Canal Bank Renovation Supervisor, in charge of a gang of unemployed school leavers. After school, Adrian walked home along the canal bank:

> I found my father bossing a gang of skinheads and punks about. They were looking surly and uncooperative. None of them wanted to get their clothes dirty. My father seemed to be

the only one doing any work. He was covered with mud. I tried to exchange a few civilities with the lads but they spurned my overtures. . .

Newly radicalised by his history teacher at school, Adrian pointed out to his father that the lads were alienated by a cruel and uncaring society, but his father dismissed these unsolicited observations as ‘a load of lefty crap’, while intensifying his efforts to engage his charges in what the handbook terms ‘meaningful on the job learning experiences’.

These are cartoon versions of the realities of the schemes which force people to learn for a living when there is little living to be had. Their versions are now found in most European societies, even the most socially egalitarian landscapes of the Nordic countries. But as well as the contradictions, the literary and popular portrayal does capture the wider, social capital consequences of engagement in learning. These are the experiences incidental to the forced learning, the networked and socially interactive learning which comes into focus when we look through a new lens, that of the learning individual moving in wider social landscapes. Wilt, in a rare serious aside to his account of the nightmare of trying to ‘teach, or at least awaken some intellectual curiosity’ in his charges, reveals that if they had not learnt much from him, he had at least been able to go home in the evening with the knowledge that he had gained something from them. And on 12 March, in the Mole household, father had had a good day on the canal bank: To celebrate, he brought the lads round back to the house for a glass of home-made beer. Mother looked shocked when the lads trooped in; father introduced Buz, Daz, Maz, Kev, Melv and Bov; everyone relaxed, and Adrian made a new friend: Buz – expert bike fixer; ‘he’s been stealing them since he was six’ – was going to help him fix his brakes.

This is not quite what Edmund King (1976) had in mind when he talked about the communications society as the new ‘educational idiom’ in which all learn and all teach in the everyday business of life, but the examples portray how coercive elements are platted with incidental learning in our flawed ‘learning society’. The social capital can be dense, highly localised and socially reproductive, as Richard Hoggart showed in the 1950s. Basic skills research carried out internationally[1] shows how poor work, low qualifications and weak basic skills are often combined in mutually reinforcing ways with family and neighbourhood networks and resources which are a long way removed from the more romanticised versions of the relationships between social capital and engagement in lifelong learning. Despite this, remarkable transformations are possible, as shown by examples from EU and ESRC studies of adults with interrupted occupational and learning biographies that are explored later in this volume. Some of our research participants returned to adult residential colleges to follow programmes that have achieved marked successes with adults whose life histories are stories of deep-rooted, multiple disadvantages. One such adult learner reported that no one had told her that the course she had just successfully completed was of first-year university standard – ‘if they had told me I would have been frightened’. For another, the supportive college environment, combined

[1] See publications of the National Research and Development for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) and the National Center for the Study of Learning and Literacy, NCSALL.

with her own sense of autonomy gained through overcoming setbacks and a practical learning disposition, had changed her life. Destined to become one of the losers of the learning society (with no qualifications and a damaged career history), she was now re-positioned in the social landscape, with conventional qualifications and confidence in her personal attributes. She was accepted for a degree course in a college of the University of London, but decided instead to take an administrative post in a professional organisation. Adult learning can be astonishingly transformative, but (as Williamson 2001 has also shown) financial constraints kick in sooner or later in the competition for credentials.

In changing social landscapes, learning as a process of reflexive self-redefinition becomes an all-pervasive aspect of people's lives, a perspective elaborated by Alheit and Dausien in 'The Double Face of Lifelong Learning' (2002). As we move in our social landscapes with our 'biographically acquired knowledge', we do not consciously reflect on every step, every signpost until we find ourselves stumbling or losing our way. At this point the pre-reflexive knowledge we have gathered on the way is retrieved and comes into play in the present. It can even be used to influence or change some of the features of the landscape in which we find ourselves. These processes, it is argued, do not take place inside the individual. They are embedded in life, world and learning environments – learning worlds which are historically rooted and biographically produced. To illustrate the concept further, I turn to the literature of the 19th century and a third social landscape of Middle England – the fictional provincial town of Middlemarch, notable for its ordinariness. Eliot is said to have called the town Middlemarch, because it combines ordinariness with a 'march' which has connotations of advance and disputed territory. Middlemarch had become a highly competitive environment. The inhabitants had been displaced by successful settlers who 'came from distant counties. Some with an alarming novelty of skill, other with an offensive advantage in cunning', and success belonged to those with the highest powers of adaptation. Middlemarch life exhibited the interdependence of social actors in this social landscape, but none of the harmony, or the peaceful unity of the 'organic social ideal'.[xiv]

Its main characters were engaged in learning of various kinds. There was Mr Brooke, a dabbler who had 'gone into everything at one time or another', the scholarship for deferred gratification of Mr Casaubon, who 'had imagined that his long studious bachelorhood had stored up for him a compound interest of enjoyment,' and Dorothea, who despite the limitations of her young ladies' education, was clever in ways that went beyond mere aptitude for knowing and doing. She had designs to marry Casaubon and looked forward to higher initiation into the world of ideas.

> she did not want to deck herself with knowledge – to wear it loose from the nerves and blood which fed her action. But something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent, and since the time had gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, . . . what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil? And who more learned than Mr Casaubon?

These people in 19th-century Middlemarch were themselves transformed by the surrounding changes, 'altering with the double change of self and beholder'. They

became reflexive learners. For Young (1998) and Guile (2001), reflexivity and connectivity symbolise the learning of our time. Field calls it the 'silent revolution' which turns on the concept of the learning individual as the mark of the new learning revolution of our time. The problem for him, as for Giddens, is showing how this, in fact, represents anything new. Brown and Lauder (2001) also claim that we are in the midst of silent revolution, but their version of the silent revolution appears in 'overheated competition for credentials and jobs'. In their book, *Capitalism and Social Progress*, they show how social trends are revealing the extent to which the capacities of the few have in the past been exaggerated, while the capacities of the majority have been greatly underestimated. The inability of the systems to deal with this unleashing of talent has produced an 'opportunity trap'. It is to further consideration of these features of the so-called silent revolution that I now turn to.

1.3 Defining the Learning Revolution and Its Limits

So far I have argued that the coercive and expansive potentials of lifelong learning can be found in individual learners' lives, both real and fictional, as they move in changing social landscapes. I have also hinted that these phenomena are not altogether new. I now ask whether the 'silent revolutions' are really revolutionary? For this we need to think a little more clearly about the defining features of a revolution. A true revolution involves fundamental alteration in the institutions or normative codes of a society and of its power distribution. According to Moore (1963), changes in relative power may be gradual, continuous and orderly – even the simple process of providing incrementally 'more and more' power has revolutionary overtones if the power of the ensuing system eventually lacks continuity with former conditions. So in that sense, more and more learning opportunities combined with devolved powers for organising and providing them could, potentially, be genuinely revolutionary.

But revolutions also centre on the tensions of inequality. Rules governing assigning people to positions and their unequal rewards and the values which justify these 'rules' will never be accepted as totally valid by those who are thereby excluded, nor by those who do not achieve as much as they would like to. Writing at the peak of the meritocratic 'ideal', Moore showed how stratification systems may in fact endure for considerable periods without causing rebellion or revolt but because of the differential distribution of power (including knowledge). The critical question is 'how will the poor, the powerless, the denigrated members of the system react to possible alternatives?'

Conditions at the start of 21st century reflect new sources of conflict in the competition for positional advantage. Weber (1945) showed how groups of competitors try to mobilise power in order to expand their share of resources and rewards. Brown and Lauder have shown how this positional conflict has intensified. Credential inflation reinforces inequalities in opportunity because it favours those with the personal and family resources that are able to meet the costs associated with an extended competition. Put differently, it creates equality only in the opportunities

to be unequal. In the 'ceaseless competition for positional advantage', the playing field is anything but level, and those who have the power to define the rules of the game are most likely to win it. Globalisation is now intensifying positional competition internationally. The narrow meritocratic rules of the past have given way to market rules, with advantages for those already on the conveyor belts into primary markets (Evans et al. 2000b), but with increasing congestion and opportunity traps are becoming more and more apparent in the competition for livelihoods.

For these changes to amount to a silent revolution (rather than the potential for one), this underestimation of the talent of the majority and the scope for emancipation through new scope for reflexivity in learning has become reflected in

1) mass participation covering all social groups;
2) redistribution of power, including changing of inequality patterns; and
3) feelings of greater control over their lives by the majority.

In England, evidence from 1997 and 1999 surveys sponsored by NIACE (Sargant et al. 1997; Tuckett and Sargent 1999) and the Skills Survey (2002) showed a steady rise in the proportion of the population participating in adult learning, although this masks decreases in some groups, notably male working-class participation and some recent downturns (Aldridge and Tuckett 2005) in participations that have stemmed from policies privileging employment-linked provision. In higher education in England, the proportion of adult students has expanded considerably. They are participating in institutional structures that were originally designed with different age and social groups in mind.[xv] This could be seen as revolutionary if new expanded systems begin to lack continuity with former conditions but not if they involve little more than the overlaying of old forms and structures of learning with the new, in ways in which the old systems still retain their power.

Internationally, in all countries in which data can reasonably and reliably be compared, the statistics suggest substantial increases in participation in organised adult learning. Demand for qualifications has increased worldwide, with economic liberalisation (Little and Evans 2002). Is this expansion beginning to overcome the inequalities embedded in the former systems, or is lifelong learning legitimating individual lack of skill as a more socially acceptable basis for inequality? Do reluctant learners 'create their own exclusion'? Scratch the surface of the new inequalities and the NIACE surveys show many of the older inequalities coming through: social class, gender and, increasingly, age. A comparison of people born in 1958 with those born in 1970 in the cohort studies carried out by Bynner et al. (2002) also shows a widening divide between the haves and have-nots. At the international level, Richard Wade (2001) argues that new evidence shows that global inequality is 'worsening rapidly', while Brown, Green and Lauder (2001) have shown income inequalities to be most marked in countries pursuing neo-liberal policies. The learning revolution, when tied to market policies, may be generating even more deeply rooted inequalities as Field, Heinz, Belanger and many others have asserted.

Since the mid-1990s, parties and governments of the centre left have attempted to address growing inequalities with policies which aim for redistribution through new opportunities to work and to learn, rather than the traditional means. This involves

urging people to take control of their own lives and is closely linked to ideas of reflexive modernisation.

1.4 A New Generation of Adults: Taking Control of Their Lives?

German sociologists developed the idea that a process of ‘individualisation’ is taking place in society and in people’s lives. Beck (1992) outlined a new type of society based on ‘reflexive modernisation’, which emphasised the influence of people taking responsibility for shaping their own life courses, in what Beck called a ‘risk society’. This notion emphasised the increased uncertainty and unpredictability of the individual’s life course as each one of us takes control and learns to ‘conceive of him or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect of his/her own biography’ (p. 135). He believed that individualisation heralded the dissolution of factors traditionally seen as determining many aspects of life in industrialised societies – class culture and consciousness and gender and family roles. In England, this work was paralleled by Anthony Giddens’ more critical accounts of reflexive modernisation (1991; 1998).

More recently, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argued that these accounts of individualisation are misleading. They claim that the social world has only come to be *regarded* as unpredictable and filled with risks that can only be negotiated on an individual level, while, in fact, structural forces operate as powerfully as ever and the chains of human interdependence remain intact.

England and Germany are the societies which provided the starting points for Beck and Giddens, although the influence of their ideas has spread internationally. These seemingly opposed theoretical accounts of recent social trends can be explored in the light of the everyday perceptions and experiences of people.

The opportunity to conduct comparative research in England and Germany enabled me to investigate the experiences of 900 people in the early stages of adult life (from 18 to 25) with their peers in the cities of Hanover and Leipzig, respectively. These comparisons make more visible the effects of socio-economic labour market and cultural contexts on people’s lives and their beliefs in their abilities to improve their life chances by their own efforts (which I call personal agency).[xvi]

One of the most striking findings of this study has already been that most of the young people in our study, regardless of city or setting, see educational qualifications as of ‘considerable’ importance in influencing opportunities in life, relative to other ascribed social characteristics of gender, ethnicity, social class and family background.[2]

Of course, the type of education received and the level of qualifications obtained depend on a whole complex of structural factors as well as on individual effort. Home background, social class, gender, ethnicity, quality of teaching, locality and a host of other factors have been shown to influence educational achievement to

[2] See Fig. 2.2 in Chapter 2.

different degrees. However, in survey responses and in the follow-up group discussions, these young adults stressed again and again the importance of individual effort and the need to work for qualifications. As one put it,

> Qualifications are not only important for the job market. They are generally important to survive.

There were strong indications that these young adults generally believed in the idea of a 'meritocracy' and that if you 'failed' (in terms of obtaining qualifications), then this was probably your own fault and down to a lack of effort and determination. Other indicators of personal agency, such as active job seeking and 'trial and error' in the search for work, are more evident in the English labour market, which has been deregulated for longer and where individualised behaviours have been most strongly encouraged or enforced.[3] However, while the German young people from both Hanover and Leipzig were less proactive in relation to the labour market, they showed higher levels of politically active group behaviours involving activities such as participation in political events and engagement in political discussions, all of which indicate a continuing trust in collective, rather than individualised, solutions.

Taken together, the findings supported the thesis that highly structured environments are associated, in people's minds, with the idea of reduced scope for individual, proactive effort. In highly structured environments, opportunities are open only for those following clearly defined routes, and consequently, it is those same structural opportunities or barriers that are held responsible by individuals for any failure. This was shown to be the case for the two German cities.

The Derby data suggests that one of the consequences of an environment which fosters a belief that 'opportunities are open to all' is that people blame themselves for their failures in education and the labour market. In the highly structured German system, external factors can more easily be held responsible for failure, giving people greater scope to develop a positive sense of self in the early stages of adult life.

Among 300 people affected by unemployment, there were strong similarities among those experiencing unemployment. They felt that

- their own weaknesses matter and
- chance played the major part in their present situation.

They also scored higher on factors which indicated poor self-image and feelings of powerlessness. In Derby they also appeared to take a more proactive approach to seeking work than their German counterparts. This could be because they have to be more individually active to deal with their situation and because of the diverse and often confusing array of options before them. In general, the uncertain status of unemployed young people and their inability to keep abreast of their peers who are in work or establishing homes and families of their own is reflected in a sense

[3] This evidence is expanded in Chapter 2 with reference to figures and tables.

of frustrated agency rather than fatalism and in a readiness to buy the message that qualifications can provide a way out of such predicaments.

In the employed groups, the experience of having gained a foothold in the labour market was associated with greater feelings of control and agency than was manifest among peers in higher education and unemployment settings. If you are learning for a living, there is considerable uncertainty about your destination while you are outside the job market, no matter how good your qualifications.[4] To be in work gives a sense of control that goes beyond the independence of the wage packet, irrespective of the job level. The control is tempered with experiences of pressure at work, repeatedly referred to in interviews with employed respondents.

In line with findings reported earlier, many more of the young people in Derby indicated that finding a job was mainly down to the individual (38% compared to 25% in Hanover and only 17% in Leipzig). This is one very basic indicator of higher individual attributions of success in the individualised English job and training markets.

The relative importance of talent and luck, or chance, was also significant. The question about whether ‘talent always rises to the top’ produced, in all three cities and settings, responses which emphasised:

- the interplay of talent with ‘diligence’ and what you do with it;
- the environment in which you operate; and
- factors which influence whether talent is recognised.

Talent on its own was not seen as decisive. Most groups saw social connections as important, and some specifically emphasised luck, referring to employment chances as being like ‘throwing a dice’. Reliance on chance rather than on planning is one of the relatively few variables associated with being from a manual occupational background. Those in the most precarious positions often emphasised chance rather than planning in their biographies, possibly reflecting their experience of unpredictability and difficulty in controlling events. However, it is at the margins, where young people are most vulnerable to the fluctuations of the labour market, that proactive behaviour can make a difference. Behaviour in response to chances can be critical (Evans et al. 2000b). The present findings confirm that young people believe in the importance of chance factors, contacts and significant relationships in charting a path into work. The right intervention at the right moment can produce turning points, often in unplanned situations. Work, training, educational experience and social life often overlapped, showing again how social life may be dense, local and reproductive of patterns of inequality, or may allow for forms of participation which can expand horizons.

[4] A significant proportion of those experiencing unemployment were from middle-class backgrounds, more than would have previously been expected.

1.5 Discussing the Future

It was not always possible to disentangle young people's understanding of external influences from the motivation to 'take control' of their lives, and their responses sometimes appear contradictory, as both perspectives are embraced. The following extract from the Hanover Higher Education group discussion illustrates this point, as the participants try to explain the extent of their hopes and aspirations for the future:

> Q: How do you see your future prospects?
>
> I see a lot of possibilities to do anything in the future, rather than shrink from the risks. There's no other way of handling it, is there? If you don't jump in, you'll come a cropper. It would be really terrible. As I see it, the future will be a better, more enjoyable time and I'm looking forward to it already.
>
> Looking at previous decades, it can only get better.
>
> Q: Will it get better for everyone or only for people like you?
>
> For everyone, of course. It's not just my future. I regard it as a general issue. I think there's every indication that it will be a positive future.
>
> Well, I would describe the future with a single word: demanding. I have the feeling that it's demanding and a strain, this responsibility to organise your own life being in your own hands. Also, the temptations and possibilities are all part of it. So, it's very exciting and thrilling. It's like conquering something, I suppose.

We developed the concept of 'bounded agency' to capture such combinations of personal activation and structural influences which were often apparent in young people's responses. It emphasises the fact that the new generation of adults in our study was undoubtedly manifesting a sense of personal agency, in the expectation that they could influence factors affecting their lives by their own efforts. But they were also aware of a number of boundaries or barriers which were beyond their control and which circumscribed and sometimes prevented the expression of agency. Contrast the views of the beneficiaries of higher education discussed above with their unemployed peers below, discussing their view of the future:

> R1: I'm not sure. I don't know what the future will bring.
> R2: The future is what comes your way.
> R1: But you alone are responsible for your future, nobody else.
> R2: You're right in a way, but it also depends on other people's actions.
> R1: OK. But to a very high degree your life is in your own hands.
> R3: It depends how you look at it. It's your attitude. You have your goals. He has none. He lets everything come his way, like destiny.
> R2: I do have goals and will try to achieve them. But I don't know whether I'll really reach them or not.
> R3: That's up to you.
> R2: Not always. How about if you have health problems?

1.6 Choice, Optimism and Expectations

In previous research, the belief in the importance of individual effort seemed to be accompanied by the optimism young people felt in relation to their own prospects. We asked whether this optimism would decline as young people got older and the realities of the labour market and other constraints were experienced more directly.

Optimism comes to be tempered with greater realisation that there may be setbacks, with increasing age and experience of the labour market. For instance, respondents of the Derby unemployed group:

- feel 'forced' into unemployment schemes and therefore not 'in control';
- feel individually responsible for their predicament;
- believe it is down to them to get out of their situation, despite the negative environment;
- experience stress in dealing with their situation; and
- emphasise 'being realistic' about what they can achieve.

In Leipzig, which has the highest level of unemployment, the inhabitants, for whom state provision has historically been seen as the norm, perceive the raft of special schemes and programmes introduced by the German government as a kind of 'second' labour market. When expectations of these are disappointed, more negative views set in.

Nevertheless, one of the most important findings was that young people were rarely fatalistic. Even among unemployed young people, responses suggested frustrated agency rather than lack of control or a fatalistic acceptance of things as they are. The overriding perspective is that the future is in one's own hands, and while setbacks will be encountered, it is down to the individual to find ways to cope and to overcome them.

Further explanations are needed as to why young people, many of whom have an awareness of external constraints, continue to see the problems and the solutions as lying primarily with the individual.

One possible explanation is that these young people have been 'socialised into' a belief in choice. A decade or more of 'enterprise culture' has led the majority to believe that there are employment opportunities available and that they will succeed if they make the individual effort required. This approach can be associated with the notions of a ladder of opportunity and a 'meritocracy'. If this explanation is correct, the ideological aspects of the new vocationalism of the early 1990s, based on enterprise culture, have successfully been transmitted to this new generation of adults.

The fact that young people put their own success or failure down to themselves as individuals does not necessarily mean that they believe in a culture or a system based on individual effort alone, nor does it mean that they are unaware of the structures operating upon their age group's economic opportunities. Their comments about 'luck' and 'chance' should not be taken in isolation, but need to be complemented with their perspectives on race, sex and area influences. Interestingly, the view

we found in earlier research in England, that 'unemployment was something that happened to somebody else', was not evident in this study.

It was also the case that work, training and educational activities and social life often overlapped. Some people's levels of social confidence may have overlapped with and boosted, or undermined, occupational expectations. As we saw earlier, social life may be dense, local and reproductive of patterns of inequality, or may allow for forms of participation which can expand horizons. The work values of all stressed security and money most highly. The numbers who rated social contribution and service to others in their top three priorities were very small (see Fig. 7.3, Chapter 7). Those in the Leipzig labour market whose previous socialisation stressed subordination of the individual to the collective now have work values very similar to their Western counterparts. Individualisation theorists would claim that such individualised values reflect the need of people to minimise risk for themselves in a risk society. Richard Sennett (1998) would say that they confirm a 'corrosion of character' which is inherent in the manufactured uncertainty of a high insecurity society.

1.7 Marginalised by the Broad Sweep of Social and Economic Decline

> The integrated working class community is a persistent image, but now largely belongs to the past. Civic involvement is least developed in areas and neighbourhoods marginalised by the sweep of economic and social change . . . with external support, local initiative can reverse even strongly embedded

Geographical areas which have been marginalised by the 'sweep of social change' are often overlooked in these research studies.

My own research evidence, from urban areas, does not test this bold claim. My personal experience, combined with evidence from local sources, allows me to evaluate it. I return to my social landscape of the Douglas Valley. I spoke at the Alumni Annual Guest Lecture in London (2002) about the experiences of my family of origin in this mining valley. The official history gives an account of the prospering communities in the pit villages in the first half of the 20th century. It talks of the integrated working-class community which Giddens says is a thing of the past. Was it an integrated community? As I grew up, I did not need Goldthorpe's (1964) study to tell me that working-class communities are not homogenous – there were the traditional, the aspiring, the 'respectable' and the 'not respectable' to say nothing of the patriarchy and gender politics, nor the religious sectarianism that criss-crossed these small communities. The colliery closed in 1967, the year in which I went to university, the first in my family to do so, now in the south of England, as members of the middle classes by virtue of narrow ladders to social mobility which were available at that time. But back in that pit village, the decline was catastrophic. The bands, clubs, football teams, shops and railway disappeared as people scattered to Ayr, Fife, Lothian and even the enemy territory of England in search for work.

So can external support reverse deeply embedded decline, as Giddens claims? Strathclyde community education providers have become involved in the plight of the area, as I discovered when externally examining at Strathclyde University. The area was researched in the 1990s, showing the extent of the frustration of poverty, poor housing and ill-health. Boredom of the younger people was reflected in high levels of crime, drinking and drugs:

> Youths did not have a real role in the community and could not look forward to the steadying influence of a job alongside older more mature adults. Twelve young people were chasing every available job in the area. Underachievement in education was reflected by the fact that young people from these villages were three times more likely to need guidance and support than their peers from other villages and few stayed on beyond the minimum school leaving age.
>
> (Strathclyde Community Education Report, Cox 2002)

There was also inter-generational conflict. The younger people were labelled by ‘the older generation’ as disinterested and apathetic when the reality was that they had narrower life experiences than others from different social backgrounds and localities. Application of some of Owen’s thinking about the impact of environment would not go amiss in this, its area of origin, in the 21st century. The lifelong learning offer for adults in the area also speaks volumes: ‘Get your mits (hands) on IT’ and ‘Computing for the Terrified’ offered through the old Miners’ Welfare Centre. Those on the wrong side of the learning divide are also on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Grants from a major charitable body which only funds community development projects which genuinely put the community in the driving seat have now given the Douglas Valley villages a funded community worker they appointed themselves, together with transport and facilities, and there is a village website which shows how a few local activists are campaigning for improvements to amenities and housing and attraction of investment into the area. Ironically, the coal reserves have been found to be plentiful, and open cast mining has been restarted in five locations.

These are all positive moves, but as Crouch (2001) warns, falling back on do-it-yourself politics remains a relatively powerless position in comparison with the might wielded by governments and multinational corporations unless alignments with key cause organisations can be found.

1.8 The Social World of Work

In earlier work, I considered different metaphors for the relationships between education and the world of work. The first metaphor was that of sculpting by education to shape people to fit into the ‘niches’ of the labour market. This could be argued to be a metaphor for the 1960s in Britain, arguably still for today in Germany. The second was the metaphor of pathways, as though paths branch out before us as we reach the end of the trunk road of initial schooling. The third metaphor, navigation, was the metaphor of the risk society, shooting the rapids, seeking individual solutions to

permanent states of risk and insecurity. The limitation of all these representations is that they do not look beyond to the wider landscape in which they are embedded. In particular, they say nothing about the social world of work, the social relations of working environments to which we are inextricably bound by various versions of the work ethic as well as economic necessity.

The 'work ethic' is embedded in the fabric of many societies. People want to work, and for many, their sense of self is rooted in work, at all levels of the workforce. People also want to provide well for their families, family commitment being the other dominant ethic in people's lives. The view which assumes that significant numbers of people, given the option, will choose to live off benefits rather than work is not well supported by available evidence. In the UK context, attitude surveys have shown that paid work is seen by most people at any given time as a highly important part of life and that most people would continue to work even if they did not have to as a matter of economic necessity (Billett 2006; Turner et al. 1985; 'Meaning of Work' Study 1987).

These values transcend national boundaries, although there are variations in the intensity from one culture to another, as comparisons of Japan and Britain have shown (see Noon and Blyton 2002). There are also variations according to gender, ethnicity and social class. Men, for example, have been claimed to give work higher centrality in their lives than women on the basis of some statistical analyses, but as Hakim (1991) has shown, such findings are misleading as most females have a dual focus. For many women these are not matters of choice. The importance of paid work is very different for those with full-time jobs from those who undertake unpaid or 'hidden' work in the roles of homemaker, carer or voluntary worker. The disproportionate representation of women in jobs at the lower end of the earnings and status distribution and the prejudices they face in pursuing long-term career development also influence the ways in which they approach their family, work and lifelong learning priorities, as further discussed in Chapter 6.

For those who are unemployed or underemployed, lack of work means lack of a sense of purpose. As Jahoda (1979, p. 313) has observed:

> Work roles are not the only ones which offer the individual the opportunity of being useful and contributing to the community but, without doubt, for the majority they are the most central roles and consequently people deprived of the opportunity to work often feel useless and report that they lack a sense of purpose.

Unemployed people cannot gain the recognition and approval they often seek through activities that involve work but are carried out unpaid and for other returns, such as household improvements. Recognition and approval are also withheld if they work 'unofficially', except possibly within an immediate peer group. The non-recognition and lack of approval do not extend to parenting roles, particularly when carried out by women. As Noon and Blyton note, these are often accorded moral approval in the public perception as they are seen as making a social contribution in bringing up the next generation and not as forms of self-reward. Identities and sense of worth are thus also tied up in work, both paid and unpaid, in complex ways. The work identities of older male workers were forged through early work

entry before the youth labour market started to evaporate in many countries. For adults, their occupation once embarked upon shapes their identities as contributing members of society (Breakwell 1986; Billett 2006). This is at least as important as their identification with a specific occupational group.

When unemployment increases in society, the fear also grows that the work ethic will decline in sections of the population most excluded from the workforce. While this has materialised to some degree, where generation after generation of a family of community is affected, at the same time the scarcity value of work is increased as unemployment becomes a threat, leading to what Watts (1984) termed tightening of the bonds between education and work as many seek to optimise their 'employability' – a notion actively promoted by governments seeking to counter the negative political consequences of rising unemployment without actually engaging in job creation.

The relationships between obligation and entitlement in work can be understood in broad social terms or interpreted according to narrowly individualistic precepts. According to Noon and Blyton (2002), implicit in the work ethic are both a moral perspective and a wider social view that everyone should have the right to a meaningful and interesting job with proper training, combined with the duty to contribute to society by working to the best of their ability. The balance implied in this social view of rights and responsibilities has been reflected in the dominant late-20th-century discourses of lifelong learning and continuing education in France, which have differed markedly from the Anglo-Saxon in their insistence on securing rights and entitlements of employees at all levels (see Rainbird 2002). It contrasts starkly with the imbalances of the social view that places the primary focus on the responsibility of individuals to secure their own working situation in a precarious labour market, with an obligation not only to work but also to continue updating and improving their skills in order to remain in the workforce. Yet a realignment of the work ethic along these lines has been taking place gradually, particularly in the more market-orientated systems, for some time. The responsibilities placed on individuals are not just to engage in productive employment, but also to develop the new skills and offer the new flexibilities that a changing labour market is deemed to need. This view is encapsulated in earlier work consultants' quote concerning the fate of those people who are positioned as 'reluctant learners' and of the companies who employ them.

This realignment has to be seen in the context of changing social landscapes of work. Changes in contemporary work in Western economies that most affect people as they engage in work in their social landscapes are threefold. First, the work that is available to individuals differently positioned in social landscapes shifts over time. For example, jobs previously available to graduates become inaccessible as first-entry jobs, and the lower level jobs taken by graduates displace others lower down in the qualifications hierarchy. In particular geographical areas, too, industries grow and decline, often dramatically altering the availability of work. The example of the mining community in the previous section of this chapter is one such example. Second, there are changes in occupational practices arising from technological innovation, from new regulations such as safety requirements and from changes in

the competitive environment, particularly from cost-driven innovation. As well as these externally driven changes, occupational practices are shaped and reshaped by the ways in which employees and workers engage with them. All of these processes entail, for individuals, the sense they have of their own capabilities, the worth of their work and their role in the social world.

From these considerations arise deeper questions of the quality of work and how it is experienced by those who engage in it. A second set of distinctions become important here, between work as conscientious endeavour (effort) and work as disciplined compliance (obedience).

Work as disciplined compliance relates closely to present-day preoccupations with performance and productivity. The approaches of 'Human Resources Management' tend to emphasise the individual dimensions of diversity while ignoring collective pluralities of interests and imbalances of power in organisations. Corporate cultures and identities are forged, promoting organisational compliance and commitment in pursuit of increasingly productive 'performance' (Noon and Blyton 2002). So the dynamic of endeavour–obedience is controlled by surveillance and monitoring not very far removed from the 18th-century example of the 'silent monitor', apart from the sophistication and reach of its techniques.

Thus, traditional notions of the work ethic are being realigned through promotion of the 'individual responsibility' of adults not only to engage in productive employment but also to develop, update the 'skills' and offer the flexibility that a changing labour market is deemed to need. Thus, 'reluctant learners' determine their own fate, as do the companies that employ them.

Research into the working and learning practices of companies that pursue these approaches highlight the contradictions into which middle managers are trapped and the limitations on learning that are imposed by top-down approaches heavy on performance control (see Evans 2006). In the same way, that belief in meritocracy is tempered by real-world experiences of how it operates in practice. The operations of power relations in the corporate culture are widely recognised by those subjected to them. They are resisted, day by day, in work practices, found throughout contemporary organisations, by which people create spaces for themselves and their own purposes, while appearing compliant for the rewards that compliance brings. Evidence suggests that going further down the road of control and compliance will not tap latent potential any more than the qualifications race will.

1.9 Individual Responsibility in a Social World

The relationships between human agency and the responsibilities of people moving in the social world are too often reduced to narrowly individualistic conceptions of the individual taking control of his or her own life, thereby becoming responsible for his or her own position, prospects and ultimate fate. In understanding the relationships between human agency and responsibility, distinctions have to be drawn between individualistic conceptions of individual responsibility and social conceptions of the responsibilities of people, to themselves, their families and one

to another. This is the point often missed by present-day commentators engaging in the individual-social debate. This was recently encapsulated in a Royal Society of Arts debate[xvii] held in London in 1999 between opponents arguing for and against an emphasis on individual responsibility.

The following quotes typify how the opposing arguments are drawn up:

Ball, of the Campaign for Learning:

> I assume we share we aim of developing a society in which we realise the vision of effective lifelong learning for all. The problem is to find the optimum balance between the principle of individual responsibility and the strengthening of social support for learning. My view is that we have underestimated the former and focused too strongly on the latter.

Arguing that there is no lack of potential or opportunity, his argument goes on to say that 'persuasive/marketing' is more likely than social intervention and support:

> Individual responsibility is both prior to social process and more important ... Relative potential and lack of opportunity (bewailing) are not the real barriers to the creation of a learning society .... If we create a learning society it will come from insistence on the principle of individual responsibility, limited investment in the learner (not the provider of learning) encouragement of learners to invest in themselves, deregulation and promotion of a popular learning market and imaginative marketing.

Coffield counter-argues that there is extensive evidence that non-participants are not randomly distributed in the population but in clearly identified groups and sections of the population:

> all major surveys of adult education shows the class, gender, age , disability lines – must be directed to the well established differences between groups rather than individuals policy of passing the responsibility to individuals without giving the latter power to effect change ... (there is) too much responsibility being passed to those with least capacity to exercise that responsibility. Motivation is to do with incentives. The learning society operates at three interconnecting levels ... there is a need to pull of all three levers. Improving the quality of learning means paying attention to the social relationships and arrangements which stimulate it.

These arguments, while lively and illuminating, and also important in drawing attention to the interconnecting levels of individual (micro), institutional (meso) and the wider societal inputs, miss the point that there are both individualistic and social versions of the responsibilities of individuals. The individualistic version is encapsulated by the Ball view that merely brings up to the date the 'pulling yourself up by own bootstraps' view of learning in ways that, according to Coffield, do not trouble the already advantaged.

The social version of individual responsibility does take into account the wider social context at both meso- and macro-levels, by emphasising that people in all social groups do engage in agentic ways with each other and with the wider social world. They do find ways of expressing their own goals and interests while acting interdependently in and through the contexts in which they operate. This always involves motivation; sometimes it involves resistance rather than compliance, and it always involves mutual responsibility, social contribution and learning too, as later chapters will demonstrate.

A more contextualised understanding is needed of how individual and mutual responsibilities are played out and expressed in action in the social world, particularly in relation to work and learning. This goes beyond the important but familiar rehearsal of the social regularities of the winners and losers of social change, to focus on the spaces and scope for people to influence the things that affect their lives. This applies to individuals and to people coming together in clusters of interests. The interdependencies between people acting in pursuit of their legitimate goals and interests are as important as the expressions of their individualities. Institutional and societal force factors contain but do not entirely mould human interdependencies and expressions of mutual responsibility. A focus on negotiating pluralities of interests rather than accommodating individual diversity makes the social relations involved in human agency more visible and recognises that not all interests that are pursued are necessarily for the wider good.

Sennett has made broad distinctions between Anglo-American and Rhine regimes, in mounting his arguments about the ways in which the processes of the former ultimately lead to the 'corrosion of character'.

According to Walters and Haahr (2005), the broad-based social democratic project of the Rhine regimes is losing ground to complex, 'third way' versions of neoliberalism. These versions are driven by the 'logic' of the market while claiming commitments to fairness and social cohesion, seen as achievable through various forms of partnership and decentralised decision-making.

The Anglo-German research introduced in this chapter has provided a unique platform for moving outwards from experiences of social actors in the English version of the Anglo-American model to make direct comparisons with their counterparts in a 'Rhine' regime. The experiences of actors in the social world are explored in the next five chapters in different contexts. This book is about how work and learning are experienced, from the perspective of the people who are engaged in both as employees and hidden workers, the students who anticipate work through learning, the unemployed people trying to gain a foothold in the labour market and the hidden workers who support the vast amounts of unpaid work. These are actors moving in social landscapes. The social landscapes are diverse, and they structure expectation and action differently. Linking 'learning for a living' to wider social purposes goes far beyond individual responsibility. Releasing the capabilities to effect changes in their lives begets mutual responsibility and social responsibility at all levels.

1.10 Summary and Conclusions

There are both individualistic and social versions of the responsibilities of individuals. The individualistic version is encapsulated by the view that merely brings up to date the 'pulling yourself up by own bootstraps' view of learning in ways that do not inconvenience or make demands on the more privileged in society.

The social version of individual responsibility does take into account the wider social context at both institutional (meso) and societal (macro) levels, by emphasising that people in all social groups do engage with each other in ways that reflect their strivings and aspirations and with the wider social world. They do find ways of expressing their own goals and interests while acting interdependently in and through the contexts in which they operate. This always involves motivation; sometimes it involves resistance rather than compliance, and it always involves mutual responsibility, social contribution and learning too, as later chapters will demonstrate.

A more contextualised understanding is needed of how individual and mutual responsibilities are played out and expressed in action in the social world, particularly in relation to work and learning. This goes beyond the important but familiar rehearsal of the social regularities apparent in the backgrounds and characteristics of the winners and losers of social change. It focuses our attention on the spaces and scope for people to express their innate desire to rise above social constraints through their own efforts. This applies both to individuals and to groups of people coming together in clusters of interests. The interdependencies between people acting in pursuit of their legitimate goals and interests are as important as the expressions of their individualities.

This chapter has challenged claims that a learning revolution is taking place. Opportunities for organised learning have expanded throughout the life course, but much of this expansion has been driven by dominant political and economic interests in sustaining the belief that people have to 'learn for a living', to maintain their livelihoods. Since this process is more likely to increase the gap between the powerful and the powerless, it does not meet the defining characteristics of a revolution. It does not hold out prospects for redistribution of power or for experience of greater control over their lives by the majority of the population. Popular beliefs in meritocracy are undermined as social mobility decreases, and confidence in the openness of opportunities to all could evaporate very quickly in the new generation of adults. This is not a counsel of despair if it begins to create the conditions for learning throughout the life course to be reconnected to wider social purposes, as people strive to take control of their lives in new ways, including through work.

Anglo-German research evidence has provided a unique platform for moving outwards from experiences of social actors in the English version of the Anglo-American model to make direct comparisons with their counterparts in a 'Rhine' regime. These and other comparisons focus attention on how the underlying features of the social landscape influence work and learning experiences, from the perspective of the people who are engaged in both as employees and hidden workers, the students who anticipate work through learning, the unemployed people trying to gain a foothold in the labour market and the hidden workers who support the vast amounts of unpaid work. Their strivings and aspirations in the social world are explored in the next five chapters.

Notes

i. see Benn , T. (1987) Out of the Wilderness: diaries 1963–1967, Hutchinson, London, p. 503.
ii. Bamford Taggs report.
iii. which advocates transformation of the world along neo-liberal market lines.
iv. Times Higher Educational supplement 22 November 2002.
v. carried out with John Bynner, Walter Heinz and Ken Roberts.
vi. Comparing Derby with the German cities of Hanover and Leipzig provided a unique opportunity to understand better how the underlying structural features options whose significance extends far beyond the borders of England and Germany. Market-based versions of the 'learning revolution' have been widely contested but extensively exported. Regulation-based social markets in German system widely admired but least exported. East Germany the greatest social experiment, the only Eastern Bloc country to be systematically incorporated in the process which was optimistically called re-unification outside Germany, but the Germans called 'accession of the new States to the Federal Republic of Germany'.
vii. the term socialism not used in print until a few years later. Owen talked of a new social system, attributing Plato, Bacon and More's utopia.
viii. Robert Owen tried his social and educational experiments elsewhere, notably in the USA, but never enjoyed quite the degree of success he achieved at New Lanark. He later pursued his vision through work in the trade unions, co-operative and labour movements, also campaigning for the British government to set up a national education and training system and introduce reforms of employment conditions. His engagements with government on these matters left him profoundly dispirited.
ix. see Aldrich's reference to the inspirational doctrines of the period, IoE centenary, 1904.
x. Phil Brown, 2002, The Opportunity Trap: Education and Employment in a Global Economy, ECER Lisbon.
xi. as governments seek to maximise their share of high-skill, high-wage jobs in global economy.
xii. The social class divides in both higher education and adult learning have been well documented by the National Audit Office and by NIACE in its 1999 Study 'The Learning Divide' by Schuller et al.
xiii. When planning dispositions were examined in relation to social class, in the total sample of 900 young people, long-term planning dispositions and the alignment of decisions and choices with long-term goals were found to be strongly associated with the social class of the respondents (see Table 3.1). This presentation, however, masks differences between the three groups in the sample.
xiv. See commentary in the 1997 (ed. M. Harris and J. Johnson) Orion edition of Middlemarch, by George Eliot.
xv. which advocates transformation of the world along neo-liberal market lines.
xvi. The National Audit Office report (2002). The project used a structured questionnaire survey, which was given to all 900 young people. This was followed by a series of interviews with groups of six to eight volunteers drawn from the questionnaire samples. These volunteers were matched by setting, gender and age with the aim of maximising comparability of the groups. At least two groups of young people from each of the three settings were interviewed in all three cities. Interviews were also carried out with service providers and practitioners in the fields of education, training and employment.
xvii. see RSA Journal volume CXVIII No. 5491 pp. 83–90.

Chapter 2
Taking Control?: Early Adult Life in Contrasting Social Landscapes

2.1 Introduction

As the exercise of control and the ability to influence life chances increase from the late teenage years to the mid-20s, much can be learnt from the experiences and perceptions of young adults about the processes involved. According to evolutionary psychologists, humans are 'hard-wired' for progress by the maturational tendencies of the young to reject the status quo and strive for change (OECD 2007). Many developmental psychologists have explored these processes, but few have explored them internationally with differences in the social positioning of young people in view. The focus on adolescence in much youth research has also missed the most informative time – when young people achieve adult status and come up against the realities of the labour market. The years between the late teens and mid-20s can be regarded as a pivotal period in the life course, during which young people exercise their personal capacities for change. They often do this through resistance, pushing the boundaries and taking risks, shaping social and cultural practices as they engage in them, individually and collectively. These social and cultural practices are highly differentiated by social group and position in the social landscape.

In all European countries, young adults are experiencing uncertain status and are dependent on state and parental support for longer periods than would have been the case a generation ago. Faced with changing opportunity structures, people have to find their own ways of reconciling personal aspirations with available opportunities and their own values in the domains of education, consumption, politics, work and family life. Achievement and recognition of adult status comes at different times to different spheres of life.

Social changes in the inter-related domains of work, education, family and community all affect transition behaviours, which themselves reflect personal identities and aspirations as well as the opportunity structures with which young adults are faced. The social dynamics against which policies and programmes are assessed have to include growing individualisation of the life course (Evans et al. 2000b; Dwyer and Wyn 2002).

Families can impede or support the transitions of early adulthood. For many young adults, the experience of physical separation from the family for extended

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_2, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

periods may result in improved understanding and appreciation and is part of the process of negotiating independence, as Evans (2001d) have shown. For others, escape from the parental home is seen as the only way to achieve a sense of self and to exercise choices, however restricted these may in reality be. For some young adults thrown back into involuntary dependence on family through welfare policies, prospects for achievement of independence and citizenship may be impaired. It can be argued further that it should be a basic social right not to 'have to rely' on their family because alternatives do not exist (Finch 1996).

In the context of social changes and individualised transitions, the parental role becomes even more one of support rather than guidance. Few parents have experience of the options facing their children because of the pace of change in all aspects of work and education. Policies in many parts of Europe have progressively increased financial dependence of young people on their parents as access to unemployment benefit has been removed and training rates have assumed parental support. The interconnections between the three main transitions (or 'careers') of the youth phase become significant here, as Coles (1995) has argued:

– education, training and labour market careers (from schooling to post-school education and training and jobs);
– domestic careers (from families of origin to families of destination); and
– housing careers (from living dependent on families to living independently of them).

Young people's sense of control is crucial to the way in which they negotiate their environments in work, education and their personal lives. This chapter explores to what extent 18–25-year-olds feel in control of their lives in higher education, unemployment and work settings. The processes by which young adults become independent, effective and engaged in the social world or become marginalised and excluded from it are central concerns in all societies. This chapter provides both local and international perspectives by focusing in more detail on young people in the three city regions introduced in Chapter 1. These are regions experiencing economic transformations in England and Germany, which also encapsulate features of the wider socio-economic dynamics of their national context and socio-political histories: Derby, Hanover and Leipzig. Empirical encounters which explored the experiences of young adults in these contrasting socio-economic environments also laid the foundations for rethinking how feelings of control and agency play out in different phases of the life course, providing ideas and perspectives that can be elaborated or challenged in the light of new evidence gathered from encounters with mature adults in other contexts.[i]

The perspectives of these young people on their lives and those of their generation showed that

- Young adults experience a clear sense of control, allowing them to exercise their personal 'agency'. However, their proactivity and independent behaviour are restricted by social and institutional factors. Their agency is 'bounded'.
- Almost all recognised the overwhelming importance of qualifications in influencing their chances in life.

- Longer amounts of time spent in education and training do not lead to increased feelings of dependency on the family.
- German respondents were more aware of the effects of gender, ethnicity and social class than those in England.
- Young women felt more of a need to prove themselves, were more politically active and expressed a heightened sense of agency.
- Unemployed people mainly attributed their failure to a lack of opportunities, qualifications or experience.
- In the highly structured German system, people could hold external factors responsible for failure, allowing them to develop a positive sense of self and a belief in collective action. In contrast, the English system – which claims that opportunities are open to all – makes it more likely that individuals will blame themselves for failure and see themselves alone as having to provide solutions to difficulty and failure.
- Young people in employment were generally optimistic, attributing their circumstances to their own plans and interests. German respondents expressed strong feelings about stability and predictability, while their English counterparts relied more on chance in the search for work.
- Most research participants attached considerable importance to the following factors in forging an independent pathway in adult life: individual effort, working hard and gaining qualifications. Social connections, image and self-presentation were also recognised as influential factors in affecting one's opportunities in life.

2.2 The Wider Significance of Comparisons Between England and Germany

2.2.1 Rapid Changes in England and Germany

Both England and Germany are experiencing rapid social and economic changes that are making the transitions of early adult life more uncertain. Changes in technology and work organisation are creating new and higher requirements for skills and knowledge. At the same time, entry-level jobs are increasingly hard to obtain. Competitive pressures on companies and individuals are increasing as barriers to trade are reduced, public sector activities privatised, restrictions on international capital flows removed and economic activities increasingly globalised.

In 1999, politicians faced high levels of youth unemployment:

- Every fifth young adult under 20 in the European Union was unemployed.
- Youth unemployment in Germany stood at 11%, slightly higher than the general unemployment rate. The rate in the eastern states was double that in the western states.
- In the UK, youth unemployment was 14%, double the general unemployment rate.

European policy makers were faced with accelerating social inequalities and the risk of widespread social exclusion in this age group. In response, a number of programmes were launched to create better education and training opportunities for young adults, both at the national and the European level. At the same time, policy makers promoted the exchange of experience in different countries in order to learn from others' ideas and models. A recent example of this approach is the modelling of the German JUMP programme (Youth with Perspective) on the British New Deal system.

JUMP and New Deal have had similar approaches and the same aims: to widen opportunities for young adults in the training and labour market. However, they originate from different socio-economic settings, which represent the main alternatives in the European Union with regard to training and education.

2.2.2 Regulated Germany, Diverse Britain

Germany has a highly regulated transition process for young adults based on occupational structures and the apprenticeship system, while Britain has a diverse and unregulated approach to young adult transitions into the labour market. In addition, England has market-based policies, while Germany has a highly institutionalised system, challenged by the effects of reunification of East and West.

Both England and Germany had centre-left governments with the declared aim of reducing social inequalities, at the time of the research. These policies aimed to achieve this through new opportunities for individuals to work and learn rather than through traditional policies and mechanisms. This has involved moves towards the reform of welfare and social insurance systems combined with a sustained increase in employment. Both governments called for substantial contributions from their education and training systems. England is expanding further and higher education and has introduced the 'New Deal' for unemployed people, while Germany has revived the alliance of federal government, industrial associations and trade unions.

At the same time, governments in England and Germany ask for more individual engagement and call upon people, young adults in particular, to 'take control of their lives'.

In England, in 1997, the newly elected 'New Labour' government reasserted this commitment, referring to the creation of new agencies as the next step in the transformation of what was essentially a passive benefit system into an active welfare state, to create a society of opportunity, fairness and mutual responsibility.

> We want to give people the chance to fulfil their potential. We want to raise people's expectations and their self-belief, by giving them the tools to help themselves.
>
> (Blair 2002).

In addition, 'better and more responsive' services would be tailored to individual needs and asking the question 'What can we do to help you become more independent?' (DWP 2001).

Engagement lies at the heart of newly introduced programmes in England, especially Connexions, which emphasised re-connection for young people into social life and their active participation in shaping the services provided for them (DfES 2001b). Alternatively, the German government continued to use special measures to support and reinforce the traditional pathways into the labour market, while emphasising young people's own responsibility to take advantage of opportunities.

How do 'agency' and 'structure' affect the views and experiences of transitions into work of 18–25-year-olds in England and Germany?

- **Agency** refers to the young person's sense of control over his or her life. Agency can move people out of predicted pathways. It operates within socially constructed limits and possibilities and also through chance.
- **Structure** refers to the young person's awareness of input from national and local institutions, the effects of labour markets and broad social influences such as gender and social class.

These factors are central to many of the debates about the effectiveness of education and the kinds of resources and support needed in early adult life, in Europe and internationally. They link with questions about the extent to which young people have control over their own career destinies. In general terms, a confident, optimistic young person is more likely to feel in control of his or her transition through education and training and into work than a less-confident, pessimistic young person. Particular systems may foster or discourage a sense of personal control. Differences in perceptions of control among three groups of young people in England and Germany - those who are employed, unemployed and in higher education - can be expected, but what lies beneath these differences?

The research asked:

- How do young adults experience control, and how do they exercise personal agency in their personal lives?
- What subjective views do they associate with choice and determination under different social and cultural conditions?
- What are young adults' beliefs about their future possibilities?
- How far do they feel in control of their lives?
- What is the interplay between these subjective views and age, gender and social class?

This involved rethinking the concept of agency as a process of social engagement, shaped by past habits but also projected into the future in the form of young people's aspirations and their perception of future possibilities. These perceptions and beliefs about future possibilities shape

- how they respond to day-to-day situations;
- how they recognise and make choices; and
- how they respond to chances which arise unexpectedly.

2.3 Transitions Involve Negotiating Different Structures

Previous studies have looked at the ways individuals negotiate and experience structures and opportunities in the early years of adult life. One such study in England was the ESRC 16–19 Initiative, a report of which was published as *Careers and Identities* (Banks et al. 1992). It was a multi-disciplinary study of young people, which mapped the economic and political socialisation of young adults. Further examples are the Anglo-German Studies, as reported by Bynner and Roberts (1991) in *Youth and Work: Transition to Employment in England and Germany*, and Evans and Heinz's (1994) *Becoming Adults in England and Germany*, which compared career trajectories and institutional structures for transitions in these two countries.

Both the UK and German systems were found to have strengths and weaknesses. In general, transitions to work in England tended to be 'accelerated', whereas in Germany they were more 'extended'. These studies used an innovative methodology of cross-national matched sampling (Evans and Heinz 1993). They provided much useful statistical evidence and contributed to the development of the notion of a *career trajectory*. These trajectories describe broadly similar routes to employment which have their origins in structural factors such as education, family background and focused attention on 'the predictability of ultimate destinations in the labour market' (Bynner and Roberts 1991, p. xvi).

These studies emphasised the importance of structural factors in young people's lives, including social class, gender and ethnicity, and the influence of economic features such as labour markets and unemployment rates. A number of metaphors have been used to describe these socially structured transitions, including niches, pathways, trajectories and navigations, all of which draw attention in different ways to the operation of factors which lie largely beyond an individual's control (Evans and Furlong 1997). The concept of *individualisation*, which suggests that progress through education and into working (or non-working) life, is based on complex interactions of individual agency and structural influences.

The German sociologists who first developed the idea that people of all ages in contemporary society are increasingly going through a process of 'individualisation' linked this to the dissolution of factors traditionally seen as determining many aspects of life in industrialised societies – class culture and consciousness, gender and family roles.

Baethge (1989) took these ideas further by applying them to young people in industrialised societies. He referred to 'the disappearance of class-specific socialisation structures' and to a new trend of 'double individualisation' (Baethge 1989, pp. 28–31), which involved

- the disintegration of broad social classes into individualised sub-groups and
- the formation of individualistic identities at the expense of collective identity.

More recently, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argued that these accounts of individualisation are misleading. They claim that the social world has only come to be *regarded* as unpredictable and filled with risks that can only be negotiated on an individual level, while in fact, structural forces operate as powerfully as ever and the

chains of human interdependence remain intact. An aim was to show how these theoretical notions come to life in the discourse of the young people who participated in the research.

To explore the extent to which these seemingly opposed theoretical accounts of recent social trends adequately reflect young people's perceptions and experiences in everyday life, the three economically and geographically distinct areas – Derby in England, Leipzig in Eastern Germany and Hanover in Western Germany – afforded multiple possibilities for comparisons and contrasts. All are currently undergoing profound economic transformations and restructuring of traditional industries. However, the eastern and western parts of Germany share a common culture, but had totally different socio-economic systems under communism. West Germany and Britain had different versions of the same socio-economic system, but different cultural histories. Britain and East Germany have experienced, from different starting points, strong effects of market forces and deregulation of previous systems. Yet government policy in both countries has been focused on 'people taking control of their lives'.

2.4 The Significance of Subjective Viewpoints

The issue of the degrees of control people exercise over their lives and career destinies is central to much of the literature on transitions into the labour market and on employment in adult life. Much hinges on the significance of individual choice in the transition to work, along with the importance and relative influence of national and regional contexts such as the local labour market and structural factors such as gender, ethnicity and class. However, there is often a tension between an individual person's response to such questions and the evidence provided from broader social and economic trends and patterns. For instance, a young person will typically be optimistic and, when asked, will respond that he or she is in control of his or her life course and that occupational success is largely based on individual effort. In contrast, there may be a considerable amount of data and theory which suggest that many young people have only limited chances of conventional success in the labour market due to the operation of broad, socio-economic influences. The same applies to adults, as Billett (2006) has shown in his accounts of adult workers, and as shown in later chapters of this book.

This is a classic problem not only for social and educational researchers, but also for everyone working to support young people and adults in work and social settings. Policy makers tend to use large-scale surveys as evidence on which to base their policies. Only recently, in the work of the Social Exclusion Unit for example, have they begun to listen to people's views as well. It has now become clear that there are often major differences between individual/subjective viewpoints and the findings of larger-scale social and structural patterns and trends data.

It is one thing for academics to write about relatively abstract concepts of career trajectory, transition behaviour and individualisation, but quite another to draw out empirical evidence about these concepts from the experiences and observations of

people themselves. Researchers need to consider how to discover, articulate and map people's attitudes and beliefs relating to their education, training and career opportunities and particularly the part people themselves play in creating these opportunities. Many people will not be able to see the point of abstract enquiries about individualisation and structures, but are more likely to have plenty to say about concrete aspects of their lives such as the type of employment they desire, decision-making processes in their personal lives and their experiences of work and the labour market.

By listening to the views of young people about such issues, the research strategy linked theoretical concepts with the real-life experiences of young adults experiencing transitions, setbacks and opportunities.[ii] With the co-operation of the college and university principals, their heads of department and the subject tutors, chambers of commerce, labour administrations and a range of voluntary and community organisations, the research put together groups of research participants (sample populations) that were broadly matched by age group (18–21 and 22–25), gender and types of educational and employment setting. These structured samples allowed direct comparisons across the cities and settings. In all, 900 young people took part in the study; at least 100 young adults in each city, in each of three contexts – education, work and unemployment; 900 in all.

2.5 Pressures, Constraints and Resources

This section brings together evidence for the view that young people in all three cities were aware of being affected by factors such as locality, gender, race, social class and family situation. The following section brings together young people's views on the role of agency, in the form of a sense of control over one's life and the ability to take decisions. However, it was not always easy to separate out of their accounts influences derived from external sources and inputs from the young people themselves; some of the responses illustrate how both types of influence were simultaneously present in the decision-making process.

The survey showed that young people experience pressures and constraints and make use of resources stemming from a variety of structural factors. These include their background – social class, gender and ethnic group – and opportunities in the form of education, training and their local job market.

2.5.1 Perceptions of the Effect of Area on Employment Opportunities

In choosing an area-based research design, it was the premise that the structural and cultural features of area, city and labour market are likely to impact in important ways on the experiences, perceptions and decisions of young adults. This underpinned the choice of the three cities. Figure 2.1 shows the responses to the question 'To what extent do you think where you live affects your chances of getting a job?'

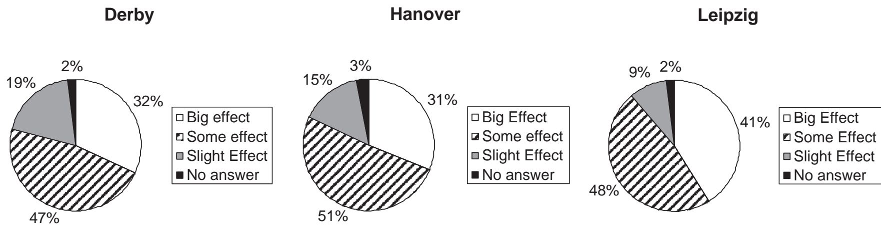

Fig. 2.1 Numbers who think that where you live has a 'big effect' on getting a job

Although only about one-third of the whole sample saw area as having a 'big' influence, more respondents in Leipzig, particularly in the higher education and employment settings, saw area of residence as having a big effect on their employment prospects. Over 40% of our respondents in Leipzig chose this option, compared to just over 30% in Derby and Hanover. This may reflect a continuing awareness in the Leipzig group of the dramatically changed labour market situation in which they are operating, 10 years after the collapse of communism.

One in four young people in both the Derby employed and unemployed groups thought that where you live has only a slight influence on your chances of getting a job. In fact, labour market differences between areas are at least as great in England as in West Germany, probably more so, but young people's awareness of their impact appears to be less in England. However, we also found that unemployed young people in both England and Germany were the least likely to consider leaving home or moving from their home areas in search of work, a finding which needs to be explored more by both researchers and policy makers.

As can be seen from Fig. 2.2, a higher proportion of German respondents stressed the importance of all the structural factors – social class, gender and race or nationality – than their English counterparts. However, to put this into perspective, both

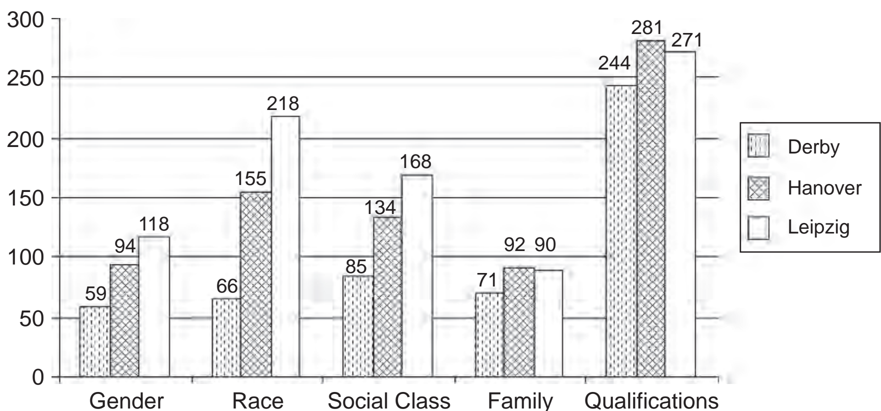

Fig. 2.2 Young people's beliefs about the effect of different social characteristics an opportunities in life

English and German young people perceived educational qualifications as considerably more important in determining their life chances than any of the social characteristics we asked about. This tendency to ascribe primary importance to their own educational efforts seems to lend support to the idea that young people see agency as primary. This will be explored further in the section on 'Agency, control and views of self', Chapter 6 (gender) and Chapter 8 for young people's awareness of the influence of social class, gender and race or nationality. Views on the importance of social class varied markedly between settings. Views on race varied markedly according to ethnicity and locality, as expected. Just over one half of ethnic minority respondents to the survey in the English city thought that race had a considerable effect in shaping life chances.

2.5.2 Young People's Views on the Influence of Family Background and the Influence of Peers

About 40% of the research participants reported that they had permanently left their parents' home. Slightly more of the Derby respondents had left home, compared with their Hanover and Leipzig counterparts.

The overall impression, derived from both the survey and interviews, was that the relationships between these research participants and their families tended to be based on support, advice and encouragement, usually without too much pressure on them to follow particular pathways. Figure 2.2 shows that less than one-third of the respondents from all three areas felt that family background – as distinct from social class – was important when looking for a job. Nevertheless, it appears that families do have considerable *indirect* influence; the interviews revealed many ways in which the social resources of the family shape young people's views of the future and provide useful contacts through social networks. This suits young people at a time when they are striving to establish their own adult identity and commensurate levels of independence. Support from the family was felt to be there if they needed it, but at the same time they felt they were free to 'make their own way'. They felt that their educational and occupational destinations were under their own control and that they were free to seek advice outside the family, from official sources and from friends.

Q: Do you feel independent in the decision-making process?

> Yes, I do. My parents didn't interfere while I was trying to find out what I wanted to do in the future. I found out information about all the possibilities – which by the way are very plentiful – and discovered I'd prefer to work as a computer specialist. I learned about the future possibilities in this field but also about earnings and where you can apply later on and things like that.

Q: How much influence do other people have on your decisions?

> I try to decide on my own. Once in a while I take advice from others but not necessarily from my parents. The person who usually helps me in finding a solution is my older sister.

> I sometimes ask her: 'What have you done in this situation?' or 'Could you help me?' but basically, I try to decide on my own.
>
> I'm not influenced by my parents anymore. The first thing I decided without consulting my parents was my course of study and whether to study at all. I simply don't ask them to give me advice. And I don't want it either. If I really need advice I have girlfriends to turn to. They probably know me better than my parents do. As far as my parents are concerned, I'm still a child. I want to be given advice by people of my own age, from adults.

Others perceived more subtle dimensions when asked about how far their decisions were influenced by parents, as the following sequence of points from one of the Hanover groups illustrates:

Q: How far do your parents influence your decisions?

> Well, in the sense of 'as long as you take money from us you ought to do this or that . . .' I would say I'm not influenced by my parents. On the other hand, I cannot shield myself from it completely. I think there are influential factors that are very subtle, and I can feel as independent as I want – they are there. Sometimes there are situations where I say to myself 'I think you allow yourself to be influenced by other people'.
>
> But being influenced by someone isn't necessarily a bad thing. It starts when you mention something at home and your parents react to it. And that can influence how you make decisions.
>
> Yes, definitely. It can be a positive thing because they know you inside and out.

Others distinguished between the kinds of decisions that had to be made.

> There are different types of decisions. You can make small decisions yourself. But it's different for bigger, more important decisions, for example when you're still living with your parents and want to move out. OK, you make the decision on your own but you talk to your parents about it. Another example is when you're buying a car. With a big decision like that, there's a fear that you could make the wrong decision. So you ask for your parents' or your friends' advice, people who know something about your problem.

2.6 Agency, Control and Views of Self

The young people participating in the research often asserted their individuality and talked in terms of making their own decisions independent of their family, peer group and other structural influences. This section brings together some of the findings which identify similarities and differences in feelings of control, agency and self-responsibility across settings and cities.

2.6.1 Overview: Feelings of Control

Investigating 'Agency'

The concept of 'agency' refers to the beliefs that young people have that they can change things by their own efforts, individually or collectively. It is reflected in aspects of the decision-making process that are personal, creative and proactive and that often involve resisting external pressures. As a first step, analysis of the survey

data identified 12 factors associated with positive and negative feelings of control and agency. They are that the young person

- feels sociable/confident;
- has a fulfilled work life;
- has a fulfilled personal life;
- believes that opportunities are open to all;
- believes that own weaknesses matter;
- believes in the efficacy of planning, not chance;
- believes that ability is not rewarded;
- engages in active career seeking;
- is politically active;
- wants work/training involving helping/caring for people;
- is unlikely to move from home area; and
- has a negative view of the future.

Embedding these factors into individual and group discussions drew out the young people's views about individuality, self-confidence, responsibility and independence, thus gaining insight into their perspectives on agency. In addition, levels of optimism and pessimism were considered, on the basis that if these young adults were generally optimistic, then they must have some expectation that they can overcome negative factors such as local unemployment rates and discrimination. To find out about alternative sources of feelings of agency and being in control, questions were included about how far they saw themselves as active agents in their lives outside work and training, and how this compared with their 'institutionalised' lives and work values.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the ways in which profiles of young people could be compared by setting within area, according to indicators of agency, optimism and pessimism. Similar analyses were prepared for each group and setting. These types of comparison enabled us to gain further insights into agency in personal lives as well as in job markets and institutional settings.

These figures illustrate several interesting contrasts between the attitudes of different groups of young people to issues about work and self-realisation and to the way in which young people seek to achieve their goals in life. Respondents in the two German cities were more likely to have fulfilling experiences in their personal lives than in their work lives, revealing a cultural norm and expectation that one ought to make constructive use of personal time and that not to do so is wasteful (Fig. 2.3). In contrast, young people in Derby felt more fulfilled at work or college, indicating the effect of a freer, less-institutionalised work and education environment which is more responsive to the needs of the individual.

Other indicators of personal agency, such as active job seeking and 'trial and error' in the search for work, are more evident in the English labour market, which has been deregulated for longer and where individualised behaviours have been most strongly encouraged or enforced (Fig. 2.4). However, while the German young people from both Hanover and Leipzig were less proactive in relation to the labour market, they showed higher levels of politically active group behaviours

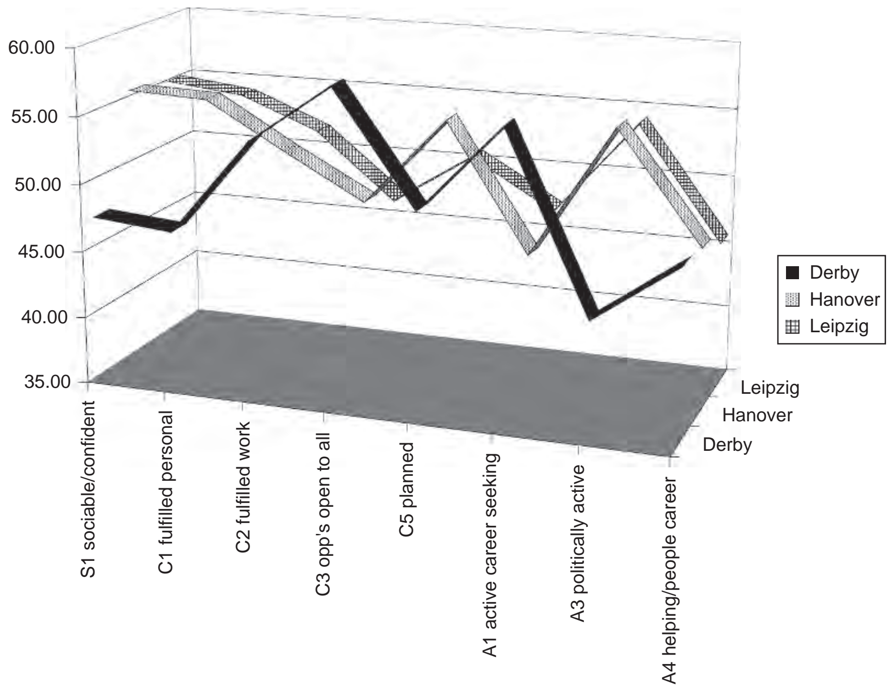

Fig. 2.3 Relative profiles on factors indicating a positive sense of agency and control among employed young people

involving activities such as participation in political events and engagement in political discussions, all of which indicate a continuing trust in collective, rather than individualised, solutions (Chapter 7).

These findings support the thesis that highly structured environments are associated, in people's minds, with the idea of reduced scope for individual, proactive effort. In highly structured environments, opportunities are open only for those following clearly defined routes, and consequently, it is those same structural opportunities or barriers that are held responsible by individuals for any failure. This is the case in the two German cities. The Derby evidence suggests that one of the consequences of an environment which fosters a belief that 'opportunities are open to all' is that people blame themselves for their failures in education and the labour market. In the highly structured German system, external factors can more easily be held responsible for failure, giving young people greater scope to develop a positive sense of self.

These results can be reviewed alongside those from previous work, which asked whether the more highly structured and regulated German education and training systems tend to foster more strategic planning than the English systems. There are some indications that feelings of training and work pathways 'being planned' are stronger in Hanover, the city which epitomises the structured West German system in operation. Outside the standard career trajectories of education and employment,

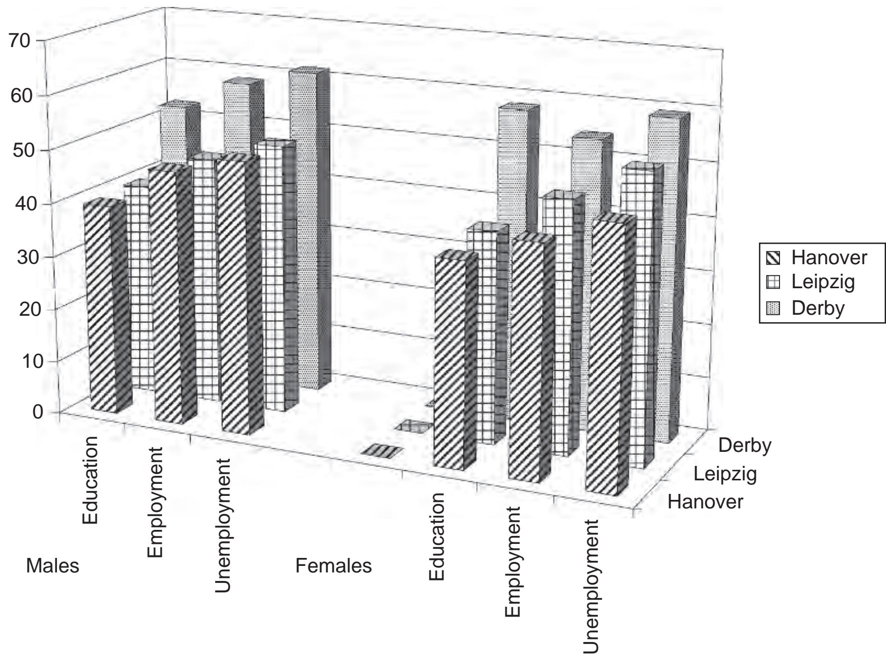

Fig. 2.4 Activity in the search for work

though, the planned career routes appear to break down. But a review of the full set of evidence shows that the main preoccupation of young people in West Germany is still to establish themselves in the standard, institutionalised career paths which have historically carried people into long-term careers in the labour market.

Cutting across these area-based patterns is the fact that the sense of agency and control is affected by whether young people were unemployed, employed or in higher education. The unemployed young people in our study generally scored lower on questions which aimed to tap positive self-image, a sense of being in control, feeling able to be proactive and being optimistic. They also scored higher on factors which indicated a poor self-image and feelings of powerlessness.

There were strong similarities among all the unemployed young people, especially in Leipzig and Derby, who felt that

- their own weaknesses matter and
- chance played the major part in their present situation.

Figure 2.4 shows that the young people in Derby also appeared to take a more proactive approach to seeking work than their German counterparts. This could be because they have to be more individually active to deal with their situation and because of the diverse and often confusing array of options before them. In general, the uncertain status of unemployed young people and their inability to keep abreast of their peers who are in work or establishing homes and families of their own is reflected in a sense of frustrated agency rather than fatalism and in a readiness to buy the message that qualifications can provide a way out of such predicaments.

The overall picture presented by the employed group was one of optimism, and this was irrespective of status or earnings. The large majority, in all three cities, attributed their present circumstances to their own plans and interests. This group manifested relatively high levels of control and agency, but there were some international differences. The young employees in German cities expressed strong feelings of stability, whereas their English counterparts relied more on chance and ‘trial and error’ in the search for work. In the employed groups, the experience of having gained a foothold in the labour market was associated with greater feelings of control and agency than was manifest among peers in higher education and unemployment settings. This is consistent with the evidence that control beliefs are higher in situations of change which directly affect one, rather than in anticipation of change in the future.

The higher education group in all cities reported positive perceptions of their life experiences, including feeling a sense of achievement and high levels of personal responsibility.

Earlier findings revealed the extent to which young people felt that the area they lived in greatly affected their chances of finding a job. Another question aimed to compare young people’s perceptions of the relative importance of area and one’s own personal effort: ‘When it comes down to finding a job, to what extent does success depend upon the individual or on the job opportunities in the area, or both?’ Responses to this question are presented in Fig. 2.5.

In line with findings reported earlier, many more of the Derby respondents indicated that finding a job was mainly down to the individual (37.7% compared to 25% in Hanover and only 17.3% in Leipzig). While the majority of respondents in the three cities see success in finding a job as equally dependent on the area and the individual, 72.3% of those in Leipzig attributed labour market success to the opportunity, or lack of it, provided by the labour market, as much as to individual. However, despite an unemployment rate as high as 18% in Leipzig, only a few Leipzig respondents saw the area as the *primary* determinant of success in finding a job, in common with the other cities. Actual experience of unemployment cut across these findings; unemployed young people in Derby were more likely to attribute their difficulties to the conditions of the local labour market – in other words, their views were more like those of young people in Germany. But the Derby employed or higher education students were twice as likely as their German counterparts to attribute the success in finding a job mainly to the individual, rather than a balance of area and individual features.

Young people’s perspectives on agency were also explored by asking about the relative importance of talent and luck, or chance. The question about whether ‘talent always rises to the top’ produced, in all three cities and settings, responses which emphasised

- the interplay of talent with ‘diligence’ and what you do with it;
- the environment in which you operate; and
- factors which influence whether talent is recognised or not.

Talent on its own was not seen as decisive. Most groups also mentioned the importance of social connections, and some specifically emphasised luck, referring

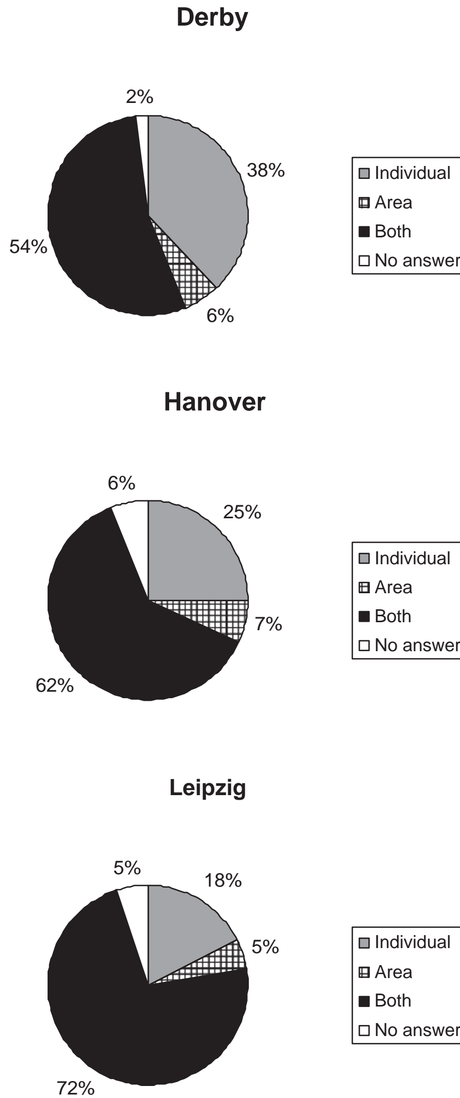

Fig. 2.5 Does finding a job depend mainly on the individual, mainly on job opportunities in the area, or on both?

to employment chances as being like 'throwing dice'. The discussion among the unemployed group in Hanover revealed the interplay of perceived factors.

Q: The questionnaires show that the majority believe talent is a decisive factor for professional success. Do you agree?

> By all means, talent is a huge advantage. And a person is almost invincible if they can combine talent with knowledge.

> It depends where you're working, what the company is and whether you have the chance actually to use your talent.
>
> Talent isn't the only important factor for professional success. There's luck too.
>
> You need luck wherever you go and whatever you do.
>
> For example, you can be a talented linguist, but that talent is useless if you don't have an opportunity to use it, say in an office. But to work in an office you need office qualifications, too, not just the ability to speak a foreign language.
>
> Sometimes you're not given the chance. For example, there are some very talented singers who don't get the chance to show off their talent. And consequently they don't get the chance to be a high-earning superstar.
>
> That's what I meant when I said that luck matters as well.
>
> Being in the right place at the right time. That's important too.

Many believed that luck and chance play a part in finding employment. But the extent to which they 'leave things to chance' varies. As mentioned earlier, reliance on chance rather than planning is one of the relatively few variables associated with being from a manual occupational background. Those in the most precarious positions often emphasised chance rather than planning in their biographies, possibly reflecting their experience of unpredictability and difficulty in controlling events. However, it is at the margins, where young people are most vulnerable to the fluctuations of the labour market, that proactive behaviour can make a difference. Behaviour in response to chances can be critical, as our individual case study interviews have shown (Evans et al. 2000a). The present findings confirm that young people believe in the importance of chance factors, contacts and significant relationships in charting a path into work. The right intervention at the right moment can produce turning points, often in unplanned situations.

2.7 The Importance of Qualifications

It has already been shown that most of the young people in our study, regardless of city or setting, see educational qualifications as of 'considerable' importance in influencing opportunities in life. Of course, the type of education received and the level of qualifications obtained depend on a whole complex of structural factors as well as on individual effort. Home background, social class, gender, ethnicity, quality of teaching, locality and a host of other factors have been shown to have at least some influence on educational achievement. However, in written responses and in the follow-up group discussions, these young adults stressed again and again the importance of individual effort. The need to work hard for qualifications was a prominent topic in the group interviews, as this exchange illustrates.

> Qualifications are not only important for the job market. They are generally important to survive. I believe that if you don't continue your education throughout your professional life, one day you will not be qualified anymore for your job as demands increase.
>
> In particular, specialised qualifications are in demand in businesses. The more specialised your knowledge, the better your chances in the job market.

There were strong suggestions that these young adults generally believed in the idea of a 'meritocracy' and that if you 'failed' (in terms of obtaining qualifications), then this was probably your own fault and down to a lack of effort and determination.

2.8 Self-Confidence, Independence and Responsibility

The respondents' levels of self-confidence in relation to employment issues supported the view that they felt they had been able to take important decisions independently. Approximately half the young people felt that their present position was a result of their own plans, with chance being the second biggest perceived influence, followed by social connections.

In a Hanover discussion group, the following comments were made about self-confidence:

> I think I can claim to be quite self-confident. Nonetheless, I always try to keep it at a moderate level. It would be wrong to seem arrogant to people. I want to find my strengths, which I do – especially in my studies – and let them grow. But on the other hand, I feel the need to scrutinise myself closely, that is, either doing it by myself or letting others do it. That is my aim.
>
> I just thought about something you mentioned: reflection. I'm not very self-confident in some situations, especially when they are new and unknown to me. However, I know a lot of my strengths and weaknesses. I can assess myself well. I love to reflect on things. And that is how I would define 'self-confidence'. When I find myself in a situation where I feel insecure, then it is easier for me to understand myself.

The young people were also asked how often they experienced a range of different types of responsibility at work, in their training schemes or in college and in their lives outside these settings - whether they felt able to set their own goals, felt stretched, felt able to make decisions, felt able to use their own initiative and felt a sense of achievement.

These patterns of responses on questions of responsibility and achievement are dramatically different from those obtained with a younger sample of 16–19-year-olds in an earlier study, (see Evans and Heinz 1994). This found that young people in England felt more stretched and challenged and had more exposure to work-related responsibilities than their German counterparts at that age. We suggested that this was a reflection of the accelerated transitions into the labour market which were still common in the UK at that time, bringing earlier exposure to the challenges and responsibilities of the workplace. We noted that it was probable that young Germans, with longer periods of work preparation with trainee/student status, would experience these responsibilities later and possibly at a higher level.

The more recent study revealed a complex picture among our older age group, which was affected by their experiences in education and the labour market. We found that for those in higher education, young people in Derby were more likely to report taking the initiative and being able to take their own decisions, but German higher education respondents were more likely to report feeling stretched and to experience a sense of achievement, particularly in the Leipzig sample. Initiative and

decision-making also appear to be frequently experienced by more employed young people in Derby than their German counterparts, who, like their counterparts in higher education, were more likely to report a sense of achievement and feelings of being stretched. But all the unemployed groups were less likely to report experiences of responsibility and achievement than the employed and higher education groups. We concluded that the English system does seem to foster characteristics that indicate a greater sense of agency and control, even though the demands made are similar. However, experience of unemployment produces a sense of powerlessness and lack of achievement which overrides national experiences.

We also compared young people's experiences of responsibility and achievement *outside* the work or training environment. Higher education students in all three cities reported feeling stretched more by their studies than by their life outside, but the other groups felt that their life outside training gave more scope for the exercise of responsibility and initiative. Among employed young people in Germany, the picture is one of lives outside work offering at least as much, if not more, experience of responsibility and challenge than life at work. In contrast, young people from Derby reported that most experiences of responsibility arise in the work setting. The unemployed young people, both English and German, reported much richer experiences outside their training schemes than elsewhere. Again, both current experience of education, work or unemployment and cultural background seemed to affect young people's sense of agency and control outside the work setting.

It was not always possible to disentangle young people's understanding of external influences from the motivation to 'take control' of their lives. Their responses sometimes appear contradictory, as both perspectives are embraced, as the extended extracts on risk and responsibility given in Chapter 1 showed (see page 18).

The concept of 'bounded agency' captures such combinations of agency and structural influences which were often apparent in young people's responses. It emphasises the fact that the young people in our study were undoubtedly manifesting a sense of agency, but were aware of a number of boundaries or barriers which were beyond their control and which circumscribed and sometimes prevented the expression of agency.

2.9 Choice, Optimism and Expectations

In previous research, the belief in the importance of individual effort seemed to be accompanied by the optimism young people felt in relation to their own prospects, whatever the state of their local labour market: whether they lived in a 'depressed' East London borough or in a buoyant labour market in the South-West of England, 16–19-year-olds were primarily optimistic about their job prospects and believed they had a considerable degree of control over their transition to work. We wanted to know whether 18–25-year-olds in our new study would, on coming up against the realities of the labour market, show similar feelings of control over their transitions and future lives. We asked whether this optimism would decline as young people got

older and the realities of the labour market and other constraints were experienced more directly.

On first sight, positive views of prospects again appeared prevalent in responses to questions on employment prospects. One question in the present study asked respondents how confident they were about avoiding unemployment in the future. On closer inspection, the experience of unemployment seemed crucial. Young people in the employed and higher education groups continued to reflect the relatively high levels of optimism shown by our previous full-time education and apprenticeship-based groups, and there were no differences by level of job. However, the responses of the unemployed groups were less optimistic about future prospects and were coupled with an awareness of the part played by structural factors, such as lack of opportunity locally. Thus, it appears that negative views of future prospects do begin to bite in more economically depressed areas among the 18–25 age group, as people come up against the realities of the labour market. Optimism comes to be tempered with greater realism and an appreciation that there may be setbacks, with increasing age and experience of the labour market. For instance, respondents of the Derby unemployed group

- feel ‘forced’ into unemployment schemes and therefore not ‘in control’;
- feel individually responsible for their predicament;
- believe it is down to them to get out of their situation, despite the negative environment;
- experience stress in dealing with their situation; and
- emphasise ‘being realistic’ about what they can achieve.

Nevertheless, one of the most important findings of this study was that young people were rarely fatalistic. While respondents who were unemployed, not surprisingly, saw their futures more negatively than others, a sense of future possibilities and the need to act upon them to overcome setbacks and constraints was apparent in their responses. Even among unemployed young people, responses suggested frustrated agency rather than lack of control or a fatalistic acceptance of things as they are. The overriding perspective of young people is that the future is in one’s own hands, and while setbacks will be encountered, it is down to the individual to find ways to cope and to overcome them.

This is an important finding with significant theoretical and practical implications. It contributes to the theoretical discussion about whether social-structural or individual-motivational factors provide the main explanation of school to work transitions, but it also has practical importance. For example, young people’s conviction that they are responsible for their fates indicates that compulsion in training and employment schemes may be counterproductive, and particularly so in the UK environment where individualisation has gone further than in Germany. Consequently, explanations are needed as to why young people, many of whom have an awareness of external constraints, continue to see the problems and the solutions as lying primarily with the individual. We consider several possible explanations, taken from a range of subject disciplines.

One possible explanation already offered is that these young people have been ‘socialised into’ a belief in choice. A decade or more of ‘enterprise culture’ has led the majority to believe that there are employment opportunities available and that they will succeed if they make the individual effort required. This approach can be associated with the notions of a ladder of opportunity and a version of ‘meritocracy’ that has been transmitted successfully to this cohort of young people. Whether this is desirable is a separate issue. However, believing in choice while at college and then finding out after you have left that your options and opportunities are severely limited because of high levels of unemployment and a depressed local economy does generate new insights and awareness of the structures that operate upon your age group’s economic opportunities, as the responses also showed.

A second explanation emphasised the importance young people place upon their social and leisure contexts, as well as upon their job aspirations. The young adults in our study may have been confident partially because of the existence of social support networks provided by friends, peers and family members. Training activities and the young person’s social life often overlapped. Some young people’s levels of social confidence may have overlapped with or boosted occupational expectations. So it could be that many of these young people were generally confident and optimistic about life, not just in terms of skills developed and qualifications gained.

A third type of explanation attributes the respondents’ levels of optimism and confidence to the psychological attributes associated with this age group. At this age, and in these circumstances, young people may feel they have to show reasonable levels of confidence and high expectations. Additionally, group dynamics may have been operating in the interview sessions; for example, it is possible that an admission of a strong possibility of unemployment is less likely within a group than in a one-to-one situation.

Furnham (1991), in a review of the literature on youth unemployment, has shown how a psychological approach may help to explain these types of outlook. He found that attributions about getting a job are frequently internal (relating to personal qualities and abilities) rather than external (relating to environmental or structural factors). Confidence, perseverance and qualifications were all considered to be primary factors responsible for success in finding employment. Yet failure to get a job was rarely attributed to the personal shortcomings of job seekers themselves. Thus, success was attributed to internal factors and failure to external factors.

We found that many young people did attribute success to individual effort and the achievement of qualifications, while at the same time expressing the opinion, for example, that an unemployed person was not really to blame for his or her situation. Interestingly, the view we found in earlier research in England, that ‘unemployment was something that happened to somebody else’, was not evident in this study. The majority now think it at least possible that they will face and experience unemployment in the future. But when asked to respond to items at the personal level, expressing their own internal feelings, young people in the most vulnerable positions were more likely to believe that their own weaknesses matter. This was not confined to unemployed groups, however. Young women, including those in higher education, felt this more strongly than their male counterparts.

Finally, we also considered a geographical explanation of students' expectations. All the young people in the present study lived in predominantly urban areas with a large labour market and also a large labour supply. While the hunt for work would undoubtedly be competitive, at least there were vacancies to be aimed for, and these could be in a diversity of occupational areas. In Leipzig, which has the highest level of unemployment, the inhabitants, for whom state provision is seen as a norm, perceive the raft of special schemes and programmes introduced by the German government as a kind of 'second' labour market. When expectations of these are disappointed, more negative views set in.

The existence of 'dead end' training schemes and low-paid, low-status jobs was less obvious in these three urban areas than would have been the case in rural labour markets. In a village, with a restricted travel-to-work area and an agricultural hinterland, the limitations of local job opportunities are obvious. In Eastern Germany, the plight of people in some of the rural areas is extreme. In England, Church and Ainley used this reasoning to explain continued high levels of job aspirations in East London despite increasing unemployment levels in a period of recession. According to Church and Ainley, although the Docklands labour market was very depressed, 'the City and the West End of London represent relatively buoyant labour markets compared to other urban areas and the perceived, but not necessarily real, job opportunities in these areas maintain the aspirations of some interviewees' (Church and Ainley 1987, p. 83).

2.10 The Impact of Employment Schemes: New Deal and JUMP

Research in the 1980s and 1990s (Evans and Heinz 1994) found that many employment schemes in England had the effect of 'warehousing' young people – holding them for a while and removing them from the employment statistics while not contributing to the improvement of skills or achievement of qualifications. In Germany, the metaphor of the 'escalator' seemed more appropriate: young people's skills improved, but did so equally for all groups, without reducing existing inequalities or skilling new workers in line with changing labour market conditions. 'Taking control' showed that, while New Deal and JUMP shared similar objectives, they have been reshaped by old moulds which reflect the structural and cultural features of their settings.

In Derby, low-level training provision which reflects poor opportunities in the local labour market still means that skills are little improved by the New Deal experience, indicating its effects may not be very different from the earlier 'warehousing' schemes. At most, it may help to prevent downward drift in the growing numbers of young people with low qualifications who cannot enter the labour market. In the German cities, the picture of the 'escalator' still applies to JUMP; so far, the skills imparted reflect there is little adjustment to the new labour market situation, and disadvantaged young people remain so, in relation to the rest.

However, 'Taking Control' found that the experience of going through 'New Deal' and JUMP produced similarities and differences in young people's perspectives on vocational training and the world of work:

- All acknowledged the importance of qualifications and a good education in providing a foundation for self-sufficiency. Those who had vocational qualifications or were in the process of achieving them felt themselves to be in control and that their fate was in their own hands.
- Experiences of failure, such as unemployment, were frequently ascribed to external factors, thus preserving some self-esteem.
- Both New Deal and JUMP employ a 'carrot and stick' approach to recruiting unemployed young people, but contrary to governmental rhetoric about 'taking control', these schemes offer only limited choice. Young people may choose whether to accept assistance to employability, but the penalty for turning it down is often severe hardship, and the system offers few alternatives. The rewards offered for accepting are low-level financial support and the possibility of qualifications.
- The structure of the New Deal and JUMP, coupled with the fact that jobs are scarce at the levels needed by their participants, means that insecurity remains about future employment. The English system provides more lower skill jobs, and this channels young people into the labour market more quickly than in Germany, but they are more vulnerable to later downturns in the job market than their German peers.
- New Dealers often felt forced to participate and to accept what was provided by the scheme rather than pursue their preferred subjects. In other words, they often felt the scheme neglected what they thought were their real needs for getting into work. JUMP participants did feel that they were on their way back into an established career, but the extent to which this belief is justified remains unclear.
- However, the shaping of unemployed young people's experiences by policy and provision is only part of the picture. Expressions of belief in opportunities and abilities to control events are also significant: unemployed young people's beliefs about the extent to which opportunities are open to all played an important role in their assessment of opportunities, and the experience of unemployment was mitigated to some degree by supportive personal, family and social networks engaged with in their free time (see Behrens and Evans, 2002).

2.11 Summary and Conclusions

The findings reviewed in this chapter shed light on the ways in which 'meritocracy' is experienced by those in early adult life – a pivotal life stage, at the frontiers of changing work and life expectations that will fundamentally affect their futures.

Most young people attach considerable importance to individual effort and express the belief that if people work hard and achieve suitable qualifications then they should be able to follow their own independent pathway in adult life. They also emphasise the importance of image, self-presentation, forging social connections and making them work for you. But they also have an implicit understanding that when it comes to the crunch, individuals are also dependent on luck and external factors. These might include employers' preferences, recruitment policies and the

state of their local job market and employment schemes, as well as the social characteristics explored in this report. The importance of social and economic structure is still there and recognised by young people, but is being reshaped and re-formed as they realise that, as ‘actors’ in this social landscape, they have to be ‘realistic’ in their individual aspirations and goals. The differences between young people in England and Germany reveal the influences of dominant discourses and socio-economic structures in shaping beliefs and aspirations.

These findings have lent support to the idea that a process of structured individualisation is taking place. This is reflected in the beliefs in choice and self-determination that people sustain within the constraints and limits of socially structured environments. They have also shown how, in the perceptions and realities of young people, ‘choices’ and actions are shaped by past experiences, the chances present in the current moment and the ways in which possible futures are conceived. Most young people have aspirations for themselves, accompanied by a strong sense of the risks they face in work, learning and their personal lives. Risk in the social world is perceived as operating at the individual level; young adults in market economies, particularly those who have experienced difficult transitions, are unlikely to be able to identify with any stable group, which can provide a voice or platform for collective action. Through their accounts, it becomes apparent how social crises can appear to be personal ones that the person must resolve for himself or herself. However, there are some important indicators that perceptions of social risk are held in common and that young people are certainly not blind to the societal forces that sustain inequalities of gender, race and social class irrespective of the extent to which they are themselves individually affected by inequalities of treatment.

People are social actors moving in a social landscape. To extend the metaphor, how they perceive the horizons depends on where they stand in the landscape. The horizons change slowly as they move, sometimes opening up, sometimes closing down. Where they go depends on the pathways they see, choose, stumble across or clear for themselves and the terrain and elements they encounter. Their progress depends on what they feel is important to spend time on, how well they are equipped, the help they can call on when they need it, whether they go alone or together and how they engage with others on the way. This metaphor begins to capture the ways in which people’s beliefs in their ability to change things by their own efforts are constrained, ‘bounded’ by features of the part of the social landscape they currently inhabit. Yet these beliefs can also change over time, as people move in these landscapes, influenced by the chances of the present moment, past experiences and the sense of future possibilities.

This chapter has focused on experiences and aspirations in early adult life, a pivotal life stage at the frontiers of changing work and life expectations that will fundamentally affect the futures of all in every stage of the life course. How people’s aspirations and their inherent desire to change their lives for the better play out in the contexts of higher education, in adult working life and at the margins of the labour market are expanded in the chapters that follow.

Notes

i. The full data sets and report of these empirical counters can be found in the ESRC data archive, where they can be accessed for secondary analysis. See also Evans, Rudd, Behrens, Kaluza and Woolley (2005), Young People Talking about the Future in Education, Training and Personal Lives, National Youth Agency, for a fuller account.

ii. Questionnaire surveys, focus groups and key informants' interviews were carried out. For details see ESRC Data Archive.

Chapter 3
Students Anticipating the Future

Higher education is the most internationalised domain of educational experience, as student mobility increases and the interconnection of academic and research communities accelerates through global communications. Within Europe, the scope and potential for enhanced mobility and internationalisation of both teacher and student experience have been recognised by national governments. Education ministries have set in train the 'Bologna Process' to work towards harmonisation of credit recognition and qualifications across the universities of Europe (Bologna Declaration of June 1999).

In this chapter, the exploration of the subjectivities of actors moving in changing social landscapes continues, with a focus on the terrain of higher education. Student perspectives on higher education have to be interpreted now with an appreciation of the international context that influences their studies and future careers, as well as the local/national cultures in which their day-to-day experience is embedded.

Gellert (1993) refers to a number of 'essential areas of change' in higher education systems worldwide, linked to expansion. These include institutional differentiation (the establishment of new institutional forms), new approaches to teaching and learning, changes in government intervention and accountability and widening of access and participation. These changes are intertwined with the direct and indirect effects of European Union initiatives and longer term strategies.

The prognosis for Europe is that students' choices will increase and universities will have to attend to their expressed preferences and take student satisfaction indicators much more seriously than has been the case in the past. This state of affairs has already arrived in the United States and is already well advanced in the universities of the United Kingdom. A main driver for the Bologna process, other than the European long-term vision of integration, is, as Haug (2004) has observed, the international recognition that there are limits to the extent to which public funding will be available to support institutions much beyond the normal duration of the degree. Defining what can and should be considered 'normal' in terms of entitlement has been at the heart of the Bologna process and is experienced as particularly challenging for societies such as those in the Germanic tradition and other countries in the expanded Europe where relatively long duration of study has been the norm, for example in the Czech Republic.

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_3, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

Yet there are very great differences in the ways in which different societies are aiming to make the Bologna process work for them. The initial complacency in the United Kingdom that UK models are simply being exported has given way to a better recognition of the challenges. The structural differentiation between countries is marked. Structures range from the Nordic models of integrated and unified higher education combined with equitable procedures for ensuring access irrespective of individual background (see Osborne et al. 2004) to those that reinforce binary divides (Germany) and increase institutional stratification and reinforcement of hierarchies combined, in some cases, with opening up of diverse higher education opportunities in a widely distributed system (United Kingdom). European models can generally be contrasted with those of the United States and Canada where community college courses mesh with universities in many cases, but not universally. In Canada, for example, there are some marked distinctions between provinces such as Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia in the policies and practices adopted, providing further warnings of the dangers of making undifferentiated assumptions about national systems that ignore systemic and other differences that occur within the social landscape. These often profoundly affect student experience 'on the ground'.

While the dominant features of national systems are relatively slow to change, multiple avenues for making first degrees more relevant to the labour market have been opening up. Marga (2002) has identified as a prime example the Romanian creation since 1998 of national network of university colleges offering 'short cycle' higher education. This is a stratified system working towards links between sectors to increase participation. Cerych (2002) also provides examples from the German Fachhochschule, the Dutch HBO (Hoger Bereops Onderwijs), and shows how the OECD concept of 'short cycle'–sector higher education has inspired Czech reforms.

The Bologna process stems less from the 'European vision' than from profound changes in the environment of higher education. As Haug (2004) has argued, educational agendas have become less and less autonomous, more and more driven by labour market and economic concerns. As this trend takes hold, the prospect grows that higher education will be drawn more and more fully into the scope of EU directives. As this coincides with a slow-down in growth, many universities in Europe and Northern America are now positioning themselves for intensified international competition in the recruitment of students.

Chapter 1 showed how long-term inequalities in access to higher education have become so much a part of the social fabric in the UK that portrayal in the popular media and literature of the social class and other barriers provides many commentaries to add to those that continue to flow from research and government. The United Kingdom has been among the first in Europe to raise tuition fees, to tackle the 'funding crisis' of supporting an expanded higher education system. The rationale for doing this in tandem with the policy of 'widening participation' appears contradictory to many international commentators. There are also apparent contradictions between the lifelong learning commitments espoused by government and the increasing alignment of the widening participation mission with earlier and earlier interventions in schooling and front loading of educational opportunity in the credentials race outlined in Chapter 1. To unravel some of these complexities,

there is a need to distinguish between increasing access for disadvantaged groups competing within the same peer age cohort and a life course approach based on an appreciation of the complexity and fluidity of individual lives and premised on latent potential in all sections of the population.

3.1 Barriers to Widening Participation: Student Experience in England

Unravelling factors which account for the apparently intractable problems in widening access to higher education among disadvantaged socio-economic groups in the United Kingdom has pre-occupied the national educational press in recent times. Many initial commentaries pointed to the deterrent effects of the changes in England in the funding support for students and the introduction of tuition fees, but more considered analyses have identified a host of interacting factors associated with low participation. Many of these have been set out in the National Audit Office (NAO) 2002 study, *Improving Student Achievement in Higher Education*. The NAO study showed that higher education institutions themselves have been inclined to blame low entry rates from non-traditional groups on the relatively poor examination performance at A level or equivalent among working-class pupils and have pointed to evidence that working-class students who do achieve two A levels are as likely to proceed to higher education as their middle-class counterparts.

The NAO report (2002) has shown that a significant proportion of universities in England discriminate against students from working class and disadvantaged backgrounds. According to the report, qualified working-class applicants were 30% less likely to be offered a place at some universities than their counterparts from higher socio-economic groups. Once in higher education, drop-out was associated with A-level scores. At this stage there was very little correlation with social class. Social class differences became apparent again at the end of higher education, in the form of disparities in the earning power of people with equivalent qualifications on entering the labour market. Graduates from social classes IV and V earned on average 7% less than graduates from social classes I, and these disparities have continued.

Young people from working-class families and disadvantaged backgrounds take a financial risk if they decide to go to university. It has been argued that these groups take more risk and are more debt averse than their middle-class counterparts and are less certain of the benefits of higher education. In addition, they do not have role models within their families and communities for successful participation in higher educations and careers. This chapter considers these factors further, using comparative evidence from 18–25-year-olds in England and Germany as a springboard for consideration of wider questions of the aims and purposes of higher education in the minds of students and the relationships between universities and educational agendas that espouse access and lifelong learning. As discussed previously, the comparisons allow the effects of socio-economic, labour market and cultural contexts to become more visible and help to shed light on some of the characteristics

of the respective systems as enacted through institutions and experienced by the participants.

In this chapter, the experiences of 18–25-year-olds in higher education are considered in relation to the changing context of higher education in the two countries and to the significance attached to wider participation and social support. Features of the student experience in the University of Derby, a ‘new’ English university, were selectively compared with the experiences of German students attending local universities at the cities of Hanover and Leipzig.

The data allow an exploration of four questions which are central to the widening participation debate:

- What are the subjective perceptions of 18–25-year-old higher education students in England and Germany about the effects of social characteristics in determining life chances?
- How does part-time work and financial support impact on their lives as learners in higher education?
- How do differences in dispositions to ‘plan for future employment goals’ relate to participation in higher education?
- How do choices, pathways, participation patterns and experiences reflect the wider socio-economic environment, particularly with reference to forms of regulation and the operation of markets?

German universities differ from those in the UK in a number of important ways. They tend to be more ‘traditional’ and conservative than their UK counterparts and less diverse, although there are newer and older institutions with slightly different missions. On the whole, young Germans attend their local university. Higher education tuition in state universities has been free until recent times, when controversial measures have started to introduce fees in many of the states. In universities approximately one half of the students are female, compared to approximately one-third in the Fachhochschulen, which are universities of ‘applied science’ similar in some ways to the former English polytechnics. In universities the primary route into higher education is through the gymnasium (grammar school). In the ‘new Länder’ or Eastern Germany and in the ‘old Länder’ or Western Germany, 54% and 74%, respectively, came through this route into university in 1998, seven years after the political changes. In Fachhochschulen the share of students with ‘non-academic’ backgrounds is higher. In 1998, 33% of students in the ‘old Länder or Western Germany and 62% in Eastern Germany came from non-traditional backgrounds. Social background plays an important role in the orientation of young people when they first enrol in higher education, both in determining whether they can take a ‘semester abroad’ and in the financing of their studies and participating in additional part-time work.

Germany has a clear ‘academic/vocational’ divide, but the right of young people to attend their local university means that the system is non-selective once the threshold of the basic university entrance qualification has been gained. In 2002, the head of the Centre for Higher Education Studies (Frankfurt) blamed the ‘outdated’ allocation of study places by the Central Office for Allocating Admissions (ZVS)

for the lack of student mobility. Only 18% of places were allocated according to the grade of the Abitur, the academic school-leaving certificate and university entrance qualification. Critics say that this system 'compounds the mediocrity built into the German education system, and [it] reinforces the dropout rate of 33%' (THES 2002). Some want to abolish the central admission system and allow selection, pointing to the competitive nature of the growing number of private universities.

These systemic features, as well as institutional variations, are reflected in the populations of 18–25-year-olds in the Anglo-German comparative research undertaken in the chosen city regions. In the German cities, most of the students attending their local university had enrolled in higher education immediately after passing the Abitur examination. Only 15% had previously begun any vocational training. Many English students move straight from A levels into higher education. However, about 50% of the Derby sample reported having left full-time education at a younger age (16% at age 16 and 39% at up to age 18). This would be an unusual profile for the more traditional universities in the UK, but is not untypical for newer universities that have positioned themselves in the higher education 'market' as champions of wider access. This indicates that many probably had some experience of work or unemployment. For German students, studies may last for 7 or 8 years, although according to the national survey (BMBF 2002), more students than before are claiming that they are hoping to finish their studies as soon as possible, anticipating the beneficial effects of their move into the labour market. Students in their first semester in all subjects expect to stay about 5 years at university or 4 years at Fachhochschule.

Although students aspire to reduce their time at university, most of them stay longer than the period within which the course should have been completed both in the old and in the new Länder. In 2000, in the old Länder, the average age of a university student was approximately 25 years and more than 26 years for students at Fachhochschule. One-tenth of students were older than 30 years and 'still doing their first degree'. These are not 'mature students' as commentators in the UK would understand them. They have registered as conventional students but have then extended their studies over a long period, often undertaking part-time work in parallel with their studies. According to these students, there are two factors which slow down their progress through their studies: first, course regulations and second, part-time work.

In the higher education market of England, a wide range of higher education opportunities have opened up, distributed around a diverse multiplicity of institutions with different missions. While universities are broadly, and rather crudely, regarded as being in tiers ranging from the elite 'top 13' to the colleges of further and higher education that can provide a limited range of university-level courses, national review and assessment arrangements have enabled 'pockets of excellence' to be recognised as such, irrespective of their institutional location in all parts of the system; for example, single departments within former polytechnics have on occasions achieved national research ratings in excess of the equivalent department in their 'elite' neighbour .

3.2 Perceptions of Qualifications and Life Chances?

An important opening set of questions, in exploring the experiences and perceptions of students as actors in changing social landscapes, centres on how they see the significance of qualifications for them and for their young people generally. It should be noted that qualification, in the wider European sense, is about a set of abilities to do certain things rather than being synonymous with 'degrees' or 'diplomas', these partially testifying to the abilities of the holder to do certain things, so even the term is differently interpreted among English students in continental Europe, a point that had to be accounted for in the survey design and translation.

Chapter 1 introduced one of the most striking findings, that of the almost universal recognition by young people, irrespective of their position in the social landscape, of the importance of qualifications in influencing life chances and employment. Those in higher education have been able to pursue qualifications as personal goals. The means for achieving their goals have diversified in both countries, but more in England than in Germany. Respondents in the two German cities were more aware of the effects of the ascribed characteristics of gender, ethnicity and social class than their counterparts in the English city. The pattern of response in the higher education group is given in Table 3.1, showing that higher education participants rate the effects of higher education on their life chances most highly, and their perception of social class as a barrier is comparable with the perceptions of the

Table 3.1 Opinions on the importance of social characteristics in affecting life opportunities (numbers and percentages) delete if elsewhere

Percentages rating social characteristics as 'of considerable importance' in affecting life opportunities
(n = 300 in each city)

	Sex/gender	Race	Social class	Family background	Education Qualification
Derby					
1. Higher Ed	**20**	**24**	**32**	**28**	**87**
2. Employed	13	13	21	22	80
3. Unemployd	26	29	32	21	77
Total	59	66	85	71	244
%	19.7	22.0	28.3	23.7	81.3
Hanover					
1. Higher Ed	**26**	**45**	**46**	**31**	**97**
2. Employed	39	58	42	36	94
3. Unemployd	29	52	46	25	90
Total	94	155	134	92	281
%	31.3	51.7	44.7	30.7	93.7
Leipzig					
1. Higher Ed	**46**	**80**	**58**	**37**	**96**
2. Employed	37	71	53	25	95
3. Unemployd	35	67	57	28	81
Total	118	218	168	90	272
%	39.3	72.7	56.0	30.0	90.7

unemployed groups. They have slightly stronger perceptions of the impediments of social class than their counterparts who have already entered employment. Gender is seen as less of an impediment by those still in education (as one would expect) in England and the Western German city, before labour market realities have been fully experienced, but in the Eastern German city, gender is perceived as more of a barrier by those in higher education. An explanation could lie in these students' new encounters with different forms of gender discrimination and the observed downward mobility of women in the eastern states. This is likely to impact most strongly on the perceptions of life chances among those in higher education, with aspirations for professional careers.

Group interviews with higher education participants in the three cities explored the importance of social characteristics for life chances, as perceived by the successful entrants to the university system. In Derby, the group discussions contained many participants from non-traditional backgrounds, reflecting the policy of the University of Derby in relation to widening participation. For the most part, the significance of social class was discussed in relation to university life. One group focused on 'how you were seen by others', and a second group focused on access and financing of higher education courses. There was some tension between the views of participants in both groups. For some students, the 'area you come from' was important in shaping experiences in higher education. One research participant, for example, felt that no matter how well she did, people of a 'higher' social class did not look beyond the fact that she comes from one of the poorer council estates in the area and is a single mother. Another young woman in the group expressed the view that social class was not important within the university:

Young woman Derby(1): I've never really experienced any divisions in social class really. Not like, especially not university, you don't really care. Nobody really cares how much your parents earn, whether they're employed or not. You know, it's you they're interested in not your background.

Young woman Derby(2): Depends what area you come from though. Geographic. Say if you were on a border of like a posh area and you know like a council estate or something, if you went and had friends in the posher area they might sort of look down at you rather than look at you as someone else.

Young woman Derby (3): It doesn't matter what you try to do here, they just won't let you cross that barrier. It's fair enough I might be doing a degree and I might be doing better than someone who lives in a really nice area but they never let me past the fact that I'm a single parent from a council estate. They just won't let me do it.

On the issue of the effects of policies on tuition fee, there were perceptions of 'unfairness' from several points of view. Some articulated the view that it is unfair that some must 'scrape' by on what they receive from the state whilst others 'blow their parents' money'; others observed that the recent move away from government grants towards loans is excluding the poorest from higher education and that it is those in the middle whose parents earn slightly more than the cut-off figure for

entitlement to a grant who suffer the most. There was also a degree of confusion about what the entitlements actually were:

Young woman Derby (4):	So, I do think in a way the (influences of) class come in there, because if you're middle class then you tend to suffer, you know middle, middle class, you tend to suffer more than if you're top end of the scale or bottom end of the scale. I think that is a big effect money-wise . . . I do think that the classes still are affected, especially when it comes to coming to university because although people tend not to be oh you're middle class, you're high upper class, you're lower class, there always seems to be a band that, I mean if you've got no money at all you get a full grant, you get a full loan . . .
Young man Derby (5):	I think, I think you're missing sort of, I feel the main point here is that, is that with the government stopping the grants it prevents the sort of lower classes of people going to university, so that you get those people who can go to university are going to be the people who can afford to pay the fees so you're going to eradicate the sort of people who couldn't normally afford to go. So I think that's, that's . . .
Young woman Derby (6):	Going back to the pre-historical the rich get educated and the poor . . .
Young man Derby (5):	Yeah, yeah I mean I thought that had been abolished sort of ages ago, but now it's sort of re-occurring.
Young woman Derby (4):	But if you think about it, the, the poorer, as they say, those with less money are getting the full, are getting an extra loan on top of er . . .
Young woman Derby (6):	But they don't.
Young woman Derby (4):	That's what I got.
Young man Derby (5):	If, if, if it's a loan then you've got to pay it back.
Young man Derby (4):	Oh yeah you've still got to pay it back.

Many students are employed part time in casual jobs, often in addition to receiving parental support. This applied to 68% of respondents in Derby, 74% in Hanover and 75% in Leipzig. A survey of students in Germany (Bargel et al. 1999) revealed an extensive change over the last 15 years in relation to the employment behaviour of German students while still in higher education. In particular, paid employment during the semester has increased dramatically, alongside the interest-free loan and grant system. Today, about two-thirds of all students nationally work during term time. The survey found that 50% of those who worked did so in order to finance their studies. Others worked to earn additional money. Gaining practical experience and bettering post-graduation chances on the labour market were reasons given for working by one-third of students. This is paralleled by increases in part-time working among students in England. Tensions surrounding financial structures were most marked in the English sample studied.

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the interviews with students in Derby was difficulty in making choices between earning money, borrowing money from the state, accepting parental support and time spent studying. These decisions and their outcomes were a considerable source of stress for many students:

Young woman Derby (4): But in the back of your mind you're always thinking you know when I come out I'm going to have to pay off like £10,000 worth of debt and it's just a nightmare to think about it like that. But still.

Young woman Derby (7): And I mean my parents would contribute but I don't want to ask them to, you know what I mean, I'd rather pay my own way, because I'm independent even though I still live at home really. So I mean I do struggle with money a lot.

Young man Derby (5): Through term, I only work week-end at the moment, I used to, used to work, in the second year I used to work like three or four days a week or five days a week. I found that, looking back I found that that was too much and now I only work sort of Saturday and Sunday and I find that a lot better, because I've sort of made it so that I get paid the same amount of money on the week-end and I can still have time to do my work as well Monday to Friday.

Interviewer: And that makes a better balance between your study time and your work?

Young man Derby (5): Yeah, 'cause I feel that because I only get the grant and a student loan it doesn't sort of cover my expenses, so I feel that I have to work to support, because if I didn't work I would be in that much more debt so, so rather than get in that much more debt I'd rather work as well as study.

Young woman Derby (6): I, myself, have only got the money that I have here. I have no other savings or anything. I saved all my money up and had jobs while I was college and at school and saved all my money up and basically spent it getting stuff to get me here. Because my parents recently got divorced and so we didn't have anything to send me here with, so I had to buy all my pots and pans and bedding and everything which is unbelievably a large amount of stuff. So I have no money, so presently I have minus four hundred and something pounds. So next to nothing.

Interviewer: So money is a bit of a struggle?

Young woman Derby (6): A little bit. But I don't think I'd have time for a job really.

Young woman Derby (4): I mean I don't have a problem, I am a very strict budgeter I have to be, because of what I'm living on, I'm basically feeding myself on a thousand pounds a year, I get no help from my mum or my father and I just live on my loan and what I earned so. But I know it is a big problem for some of the other people that are in my house they don't budget. And therefore, they end up with no money at the end, spent it all at the beginning and that is stressful, but in a way that's mismanagement as well, so I mean I don't think there is anybody there to teach you either.

3.3 Independence, Responsibility and Achievement

Most of the English students in the sample stated that both of their parents had encouraged them to stay in education when they reached the end of compulsory schooling. The German students were more likely to report that their parents had left the decision up to them.

In all three towns, a large proportion of students is partly dependent on their parents (61% in Derby, 55% in Hanover and 51% in Leipzig). In Derby, 24% considered themselves to be financially independent of their parents, a striking comparison with Hanover and Leipzig where only 16% and 8%, respectively, feel independent.

Many of the young adults felt that they had come to be in higher education as a matter, of course, in line with their family background, and very often pursued the same subjects as their parents (e.g. dentistry). Although for many, parental pressure to continue studying was not strong.

Young woman Leipzig (1): It was very fair of them not to put any pressure on me to do as they have done. ... The admission to the period of practical training at a radio station arrived quite late but they said start to study and you might change your subject of study once. I used that offer. Coming directly from grammar school to the university, anyway, my parents do not really care what I am doing at university. Of course, they want to see results of examinations and tests etc., all that. I had thought of them as being really mean, if they would have forced me to study economics, followed by a ten-year working experience and the examination as a tax adviser and then I could take over the office because it might be a secure thing.

Occasionally, family expectation was experienced as pressurising, such as in the case of this female student from Derby.

Young woman Derby (1): Well, I'm here because my mum had the opportunity to be a teacher and turned it down to marry my dad and they split up so she wanted me to do well so I didn't really get much option, I kind of had to go.

Interviewer: So you, you felt her expectation of you.

Young woman Derby (1): Yeah. I was always sort of expected to do well in our family.

Interviewer: And well meant going to university?

Young woman Derby (1): Yeah.

Despite parental influences, the discussion of students in Hanover shows the need for more career guidance at the end of school. At the same time, the interview extracts give insight into the variety of motivations young people had for choosing certain subjects:

Young woman Hanover (1): The wish for self-realisation. It is really true! It sounds very cliché-like but you are always searching for the one thing that will make your life worth living. At least that is my personal attitude.

Young man Hanover (1): But you do not know for sure when leaving school . . .

Young woman Hanover (1): No. Regarding this aspect, you receive no preparation at all. With me it was the following: when leaving school with the A-levels then, well yes, somehow you start to think about your professional future.

Young man Hanover (2): ... I, more or less, knew what way to choose for me. And it did not take a very long time before I made it reality. Maybe it was not the sense of self-realisation that made me study

mechanical engineering but the pure consideration of the situation on the labour market.

Interviewer: **Are these, for you all, two very important aspects in what to do in your future professional lives, that is, to pursue what you really want to do and the consideration of the situation on the labour market?**

Young man Hanover (2): I never cared about the situation on the labour market. If I had cared, I better should not have started to study political science and history. ... However, I cannot claim to have let myself be influenced by the situation on the labour market up to the intermediate exam, that is, until the fourth semester. Right after the intermediate exam I went abroad. From then on my foremost goal was to do the thing I have started as well as I could and to find a job. I have always been very convinced of that. It simply would not be true, if I claimed I was guided by the wish of self-realisation when making the decision what to study. It played no part at all. Studying has always been to stressful and challenging to me as if I could constantly and intensively think about myself.

Young woman Hanover (1): I, in contrast, have very thoroughly thought about what I can do with that kind of education on the labour market. How good are the chances to get a job after having finished your study? I really cared about these questions. Most important, I think, is that I did feel some kind of urgency for self-realisation when I chose adult education as my future course of study. How can I explain it to you? To me self-realisation is very much connected with doing what you think is fun, that is, what you like to do. But at that time I did not dare to do what I would have really liked to. I had a very kind student advisor who told me: ‘Well, yes, why do not you do what you like best? Do not give a damn about what your parents or anybody else says about the situation on the labour market and your future prospects. Simply do it’. So I thought, okay, why not?

Students see their various dependencies on their parents clearly, but at the same time this does not cause marked stress or strain. They are, on the whole, realistic about the need to come to terms with some degree of reliance on parents whilst studying. This is well illustrated by another student in Leipzig:

Young man Leipzig (3): Financially it is the same with me, absolutely dependent. Apart from that I can do whatever I want although I am living with my parents. I got used to the way of living there so that it appears to me quite independent. One should be at home at midnight, not forgetting to put one`s clothes at the right places – then you feel dependence but it is not stressful for me. I never had a flat of my own. When I will be standing on my own two feet, I will talk differently, for sure. Now I am carefree although I am dependent.

The financial dependence does not appear to undermine the status or the self-esteem of the students. Whether financial dependency on parents exists or not, the students

often have strong relationships with their parents. These Leipzig students reveal the links:

Young woman Leipzig (3): I was just thinking about the subject. Financially I am dependent on my parents, although I have got a flat of my own and although I am in Leipzig, I am very dependent on my parents – also in social terms. I need them in my special way and Sunday afternoon at four o` clock I know I must sit at the coffee table. I am dependent as well when I have a test. I always have to give them a ring and tell them how it was going. They have called me before, wished me luck and I tell them the next day whether I passed or not. That is a kind of a dependence to me.

Young woman Leipzig (4): It is very similar with me. I would even go that far that I am most dependent socially because if somebody calls to wish me luck before a test then it is not only my parents but also my grandmother, my aunt or my uncle. It may be a very unimportant test, they call. I really avoid telling them. The telephone bill is quite immense at times. Financially, I am not completely on my own two feet but I hope this is going to change very soon.

This student's opinion is that she would never want to feel socially independent, since she understands herself to be a member of the human community and that means living interdependently.

Most Derby students reported feeling that their parents were generally supportive and could be relied upon to help if help were needed. However, mostly they also said that they wished to do things for themselves before looking to their parents.

Young woman Derby (2): I think my family are totally behind me in anything I might want to do.

Young woman Derby (3): If anything they push you, not restrict you.

Young woman Derby (2): They're always there if I need them, not just for money or anything, but for anything.

Interviewer: So they're very supportive?

Young woman Derby (3): Yeah, very. They totally support what I am doing.

Young man Derby (1): They didn't really want me to leave home but they, they supported me in what I'm doing.

Young woman Derby (3): I'm not totally independent, but I mean, it's not an issue of having them to rely on, my parents, I know they will be there but I'm not relying on the fact, and I'm not expecting anything from them to get me going.

Young man Derby (2): I think I've, I've sort of made myself sort of totally independent now, 'cause I haven't actually been at home for a year, I've sort of spent the whole year in Derby so it's like, like Dionne, I haven't had any help from anyone at all so that sort of everything's off my own back, you know I live off my own back if you see what I mean.

Many students are employed part time in casual jobs, often in addition to receiving parental support. This applied to 68% of the young adults surveyed in Derby,

74% in Hanover and 75% in Leipzig. A survey of students in Germany (Bargel et al. 1999) revealed a substantial change over the last 15 years in relation to the employment behaviours of German students (while still in higher education). In particular, gainful employment during term time has increased dramatically. Today, about two-thirds of German students work during term time, and half of them do so in order to finance their studies. Others work to earn additional money. Gaining practical experience and bettering post-graduation chances on the labour market were reasons for working given by one-third of students.

Young man Hanover (1): I have always tried to be self-reliant and independent. That is probably why I have started to work very early. Due to the fact that I have got a cheap room of my own, I am able to feel independent. In order to be able to afford a little more, I invested some more time in working in semester breaks. At the beginning, my health insurance company interfered because I did not get BAFÖG (supporting payments of the state for students) or only a very small sum. Now I get nothing at all. I was always sort of proud to be so independent. It feels good to be so independent. I could not understand those who accepted money from their parents in order to survive financially or who take their clothes to their mother to have them washed. I have always been very happy not to be so dependent on my parents anymore.

One of the most prominent themes to emerge from the interviews with students in Derby was that of difficulties experienced in having to make choices between earning money, borrowing money in the form of student loans to finance their studies, accepting parental support and time spent studying. These decisions and their outcomes were a considerable source of stress for many of the students.

Young woman Derby (4): But in the back of your mind you're always thinking you know when I come out I'm going to have to pay off like £10,000 worth of debt and it's just a nightmare to think about it like that. But still . . ..

Young woman Derby (7): And I mean my parents would contribute but I don't want to ask them to, you know what I mean, I'd rather pay my own way, because I'm independent even though I still live at home really. So I mean I do struggle with money a lot.

Young man Derby (2): Through term, I only work week-end at the moment, I used to , used to work, in the second year I used to work like three or four days a week or five days a week. I found that, looking back I found that that was too much and now I only work sort of Saturday and Sunday and I find that a lot better, because I've sort of made it so that I get paid the same amount of money on the week-end and I can still have time to do my work as well Monday to Friday.

Interviewer: And that makes a better balance between your study time and your work?

Young man Derby (2): Yeah, 'cause I feel that because I only get the grant and a student loan it doesn't sort of cover my expenses, so I feel that I have to work to support, because if I didn't work I would be in

that much more debt so, so rather than get in that much more debt I'd rather work as well as study.

Young woman Derby (1): I, myself, have only got the money that I have here. I have no other savings or anything. I saved all my money up and had jobs while I was college and at school and saved all my money up and basically spent it getting stuff to get me here. Because my parents recently got divorced and so we didn't have anything to send me here with, so I had to buy all my pots and pans and bedding and everything which is unbelievably a large amount of stuff. So I have no money, so presently I have minus 400 and something pounds. So next to nothing.

Interviewer: So money is a bit of a struggle?

Young woman Derby (1): A little bit. But I don't think I'd have time for a job really.

Young woman Derby (4): I mean I don't have a problem, I am a very strict budgeter I have to be, because of what I'm living on, I'm basically feeding myself on a £1000 a year, I get no help from my mum or my father and I just live on my loan and what I earnt so. But I know it is a big problem for some of the other people that are in my house they don't budget. And therefore, they end up with no money at the end, spent it all at the beginning and that is stressful, but in a way that's mismanagement as well, so I mean I don't think there is anybody there to teach you either.

In Derby, it has already been noted that significant numbers were the first from their families to go to university – the university in question being one of those which emphasise their widening participation mission. In the case below, the person felt that he had 'taken control' of his life in departing from previous family norms:

Young man Derby (4): Because I'm going in a completely different path to both my parents, I'm sort of forging new links so to speak. I'm the first person out of the family that'll get a degree. So their advice is sort, is not really sort of valid. And they can only sort of say 'this is what I feel', 'cause they haven't had the experience of going to university and doing a degree, their sort of advice isn't really relevant to me. I feel that I'm going through life in what I think more than what my parents think.

This case underlines another important barrier to advancing in higher education that is experienced by many 'first generation' students. Role models, tacit knowledge and life experiences in a person's immediate networks are often taken for granted and their power underestimated in supporting or impeding transitions into higher education. But as Heinz (1999b) has pointed out, social networks provide very significant differential resources which people use and engage with daily as they move in their social landscapes. These lifeworld resources translate, eventually, into outcomes in the labour market.

Similar numbers of English and German students recorded positive experiences of working at their degree studies. Those experiences included 'Feel a sense of achievement', 'Have a chance to use my initiative', 'Make decision for yourself', 'Feel stretched and challenged', 'Set your own goals and targets' and 'Feel that you are being given responsibility'. Where satisfaction was low, inadequacy of

their qualifications or barriers put in their way were blamed. In their free time, however, English respondents reported fewer positive experiences compared with their German counterparts and tended to judge their social abilities and their self-confidence, their ability to make decisions at a level that was a little lower than the German respondents. Long-term career aims/considerations played a role in decision-making with most. This is true for more students surveyed in Hanover and even more in Derby. Comparable items asked in the students' survey (Studierendensurvey, University of Konstanz) showed motives for the choice of the subject are moving closer together in the old and new Länder. 'The special interest in the subject, connected with an analogous assessment of the own talent for the subject is a priority motive when choosing a subject'. Interest in particular careers tends to be stronger in science or medicine than in other subjects. The Leipzig students included a high number studying science and medicine, who had strong professional ideas and goals already at the beginning of their courses. Students in the arts and social sciences were more vague about their further career. Another possible interpretation of the strong emphasis on long-term career goals in Leipzig is that, in the eastern states, aspirations have traditionally been directed towards completion of higher education that equips for a profession. It is also interesting that a few more English and West German respondents were prepared to disagree with the statement that 'my work will be the most important thing in my life' compared with East German respondents. Overall, there was relatively little divergence in the reported experiences, but English research participants were more likely to report less positive use of their free time.

3.3.1 Control of One's Own Life

The less positive experience of use of 'free time' perceived by the students in Derby is significant for wider considerations of learning, since spaces afforded for leisure, social and creative activities open up new avenues for younger people to participate in different social environments as well as to broaden their learning for life in general.

As described above, there are considerable differences in the judgements made by higher education students about the structural and individual factors that are important for chances of success in life. Family background, region, sex, ethnicity and social class were of great importance for the East German respondents. Students in Derby reflected the patterns in the wider survey (Chapter 2), believing more strongly that chances are open to everybody and therefore gain control over their lives and ascribe less influence on chances to structural factors. On the other hand, Leipzig students appeared to benefit, regarding feelings of control over their own lives, from stronger alignments of their present lives with long-term aims, career plans and their own interests.

In all three cities, negative factors affecting the students' feelings of control over their own lives revolved around how they perceived their own weaknesses (including

not being able to hold a viewpoint against most others). Beliefs concerning how important individual disposition and talent are in the search for work differed between English and German students, with German students being the more pessimistic. The German students were clearly of the opinion that people who are successful do not necessarily deserve it. Taking the indicators together, the English students could be said to exhibit a stronger sense of control in expecting to be able to influence their own life chances through their own efforts.

3.3.2 Plans for the Future

Plans for the future showed few regional differences in these student populations. For a small number of students surveyed in Derby, Hanover and Leipzig, it was ‘unlikely’ or there was ‘no chance’ that they will move to another region, want to move to another country or will learn a foreign language. As would be expected, students expressed a markedly greater readiness for mobility and flexibility than their employed and unemployed peers.

More of the German students were unsure of whether they ‘will find a job they really want’ in comparison with their English counterparts. This depiction of future expectations is completed by the fact that more English respondents had definite plans for their future. The absolute majority of students in Hanover and Leipzig had ideas for the future in mind rather than being definite (in comparison Derby 52, Hanover 80, Leipzig 81). Overall, students had an optimistic (but far from euphoric) view of their future, reflected in the extent to which they were aware of the fact that they actively can take part in their own development after they have graduated, although young Germans, as reported previously, were more sceptical about the extent to which the successes people experience in working lives are earned and deserved. One of the few attitudinal and dispositional variables significantly associated with social class (defined on the basis of the English registrar general’s scale) was the disposition towards long-term planning. While life chances may have become more strongly influenced by abilities to be proactive and to plan for the future, the findings confirm that dispositions towards planning found in our respondents have structural foundations in social class. When planning dispositions were examined in relation to social class, in the total sample of 900 young people, long-term planning dispositions and the alignment of decisions and choices with long-term goals were found to be strongly associated with the social class of the respondents (see Fig. 3.1). This presentation, however, masks differences between the three groups in the sample.

When analysed separately, the findings for the higher education students showed that the higher education group with the strongest long-term planning disposition in the English city was from the ‘skilled non-manual’ class (3A). While the numbers were insufficiently large for strong conclusions to be drawn, the results intuitively made sense. For those from managerial and professional families, the process of going to higher education is often one of simply staying on the escalator (getting off the escalator would require the planning). Those non-traditional

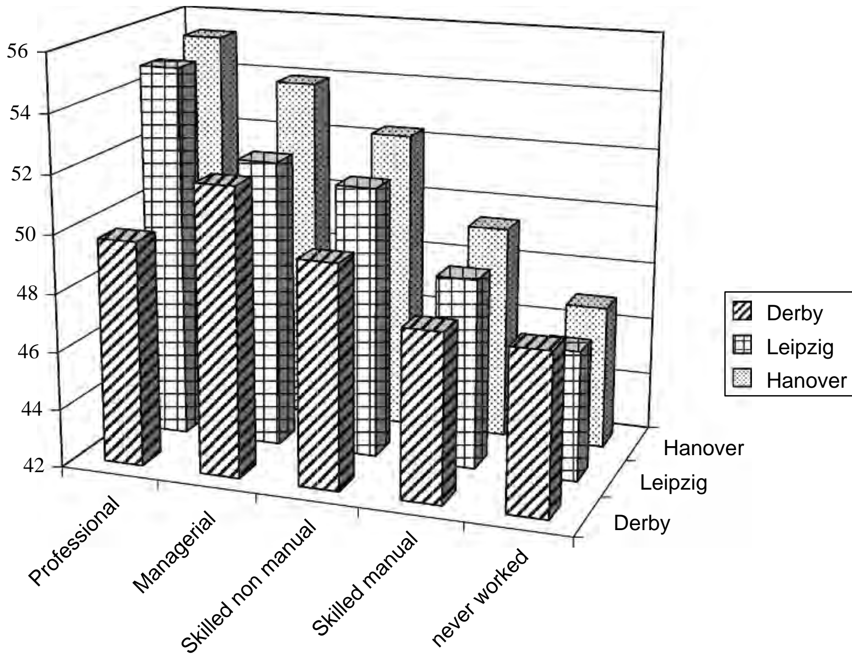

Fig. 3.1 Planning dispositions by social class (control indicator) (n = 900)

applicants who actually enter higher education appear to have done so via a process of planning which is untypical for the broader population of young people from working-class backgrounds. This again adds to the evidence that there are features of both middle-class and working-class experiences which keep young people in the socially reproductive 'line of least resistance'.

The students' own explanations help to put these high figures into context. Students talk of the way that their parents played a considerable role in their development: they have been socialised in such a way that alternatives were not seriously considered. Their life and professional 'planning' often followed the line of the parents, with no conscious awareness that this was the case. Possibly for some students, the naturalness of the 'taken way', the easiness of the decision, the lack of weighing up of possibilities and a lack of assessment of the alternatives led – retrospectively – to the opinion that their 'own plans' were more decisive for their current situation than was actually the case.

3.3.3 Assessment of Own Behaviour

Only a small minority of the students think it unlikely that they will move (region/country) or learn a foreign language. The awareness of the importance of active behaviour in these respects tended to correspond with active behaviour in

the past, namely the extent to which students use all options available when looking for training or workplace. More students in Derby made use of various ways when searching for training or a job. As mentioned before, the German respondents had fewer experiences with the labour market compared with the English respondents. Few had once held a full-time or part-time job (for comparison: Derby 54, Hanover 18 and Leipzig 7). The situation is similar regarding experiences with unemployment (for comparison: Derby 20, Hanover 2 and Leipzig 0). There were only minimal differences in how the students fit their own behaviour into a social context. Looking at what the students ‘want most from work’ in all three cities, only few students consider ‘relationships with a wider circle of people’ or ‘to contribute to society through own or group effort’ as important (compared with the importance given to ‘good job security’, ‘good pay’ or ‘good career prospects’). Work preferences are primarily seen in the context of one’s own needs and interests and appear to correspond with processes of individualisation in social system. It is, however, interesting to see that individualistic preferences *do not* emerge more clearly among students in England as might have been expected from previous, more generalised analyses.

3.4 Scope for Action in Contrasting Socio-Economic Environments

In German society, the regulated socio-economic environment requires young people to clear more hurdles than their UK counterparts in entering the labour market. Once in jobs, they have more stability than in the UK. English young people use more ‘trial and error’ approaches. Young Germans experience more ‘hurdle jumping’ and have to respond to more highly structured external demands to make their way. Standardised careers and more clearly defined options provide clearer maps. It was also the case that most of the young Germans had relatively little direct experience of employment compared to the English students. The higher education students in all three cities reported positive life experiences, including feeling a sense of achievement and high levels of personal responsibility. It was also important to ask how far 18–25-year-olds are active agents in their lives outside work and training, and how this compared with their ‘institutionalized’ lives and work values.

Students in the two German cities reported more fulfilling experiences in their personal lives, revealing a cultural norm and an expectation that one ought to make constructive use of personal time and that not to do so is wasteful. Individualised market-oriented behaviours are shown most strongly in the setting in which markets have been deregulated and individualised behaviours have been most strongly encouraged or enforced, that of the English labour market. While the German groups from both Hanover and Leipzig were less proactive in relation to the labour market, they showed higher levels of politically active group behaviours involving activities such as participation in political events and engagement in political discussions.

In their views of the future, all higher education respondents were optimistic. Among the Derby students, there was a sense that they had to remain optimistic if they were to succeed in achieving their goals.

Young man Derby (8):	I'm hopeful. I'm quite confident.
Young man Derby (9):	You've got to be fairly optimistic really else you'll never achieve anything.
Young woman Derby (10):	If you thought at the end of it you weren't going to get a job then you'd just think, well, what's the point in studying for a degree. You know you've got to think at the end of it there's really going to be something that's made it all worthwhile. And you've got to think optimistically or you'd never do all this work and everything, I think you'd probably get a job now.
Young woman Derby (4):	I don't know! I don't know at all. Erm, I guess I was at first, I mean I had a big set back this summer when everything was rosy and now it's gone, so I mean I had a big set back, but in certain ways yes, I'm optimistic that I'm going somewhere. But I'm not sure where.
Young man Derby (9):	I just think that if you've got a positive attitude then you can do almost anything really. I mean if you can sort of get yourself to think yeah I can do that no problem, then you have that confidence and that confidence shows.

German higher education students also showed a high degree of optimism, with a sense of demands, risks and limits, as the extracts in Chapter 1 have already exemplified. The optimism in these cases was accompanied by statements of high self-confidence that were more hesitantly expressed in the English cases. The interview extracts in Chapter 1, referring to 'conquering' the challenges and the risks, striving in the face of demands and the 'breathtaking' possibilities that they perceived as being open to them, were from German students, from Hanover.

Evidence from the wider study (Evans 2001d) has shown that 'agency', as represented by young adults' beliefs in their ability to influence or change their life chances by their own efforts, operates in differentiated and complex ways in relation to the individual's subjectively perceived frames for action and decision. Thus, a person's frame of reference has boundaries and limits which can change over time, but which have structural foundations in ascribed characteristics such as gender and social/educational inheritance, in acquired characteristics of education and qualification and in the segments of the labour market into which these lead. In this and other respects, the hypothesis that a 'structured individualisation' process is apparent in the experience, values and behaviour of young people is supported.

While structured individualisation accounts for the variety of experiences in all social groups as well as for the class-based and gender-based linkages in planning dispositions and horizons, it shifts the attention back onto the operation of structures rather than understanding human agency as it relates to the underlying features of the social landscape. Goldthorpe's answer to the agency problem (1998) is that a calculation of costs and benefit is involved, while accepting that rationality operates within individuals' horizons and social norms and calling for more cross-cultural

studies to illuminate this. The Anglo-German cross-cultural researches did not set out to study the rationality, objective or subjective of our respondents' decision-making, but they revealed the apparent rationality of our respondents' perceptions and actions in relation to the features of the three labour markets involved and their positions in the 'social landscape'. However, these are as well explained by the individually perceived need to maximise their options and minimise social risk as they are by any calculation of 'cost and benefit'.

Furthermore, the findings support the arguments that social divisions can become obscured by a universalised belief that 'competence' and good 'performance' will be rewarded in the labour market. This was most advanced in the market-oriented environments of the English labour market of Derby. Group interview transcripts demonstrated how social differences are perceived and collectively experienced but how, in discussion, questions of 'competence, will and moral resolve' permeated and often dominated the discourse. This was particularly marked in extended discussions of gender differences (see Chapter 6).

English higher education students in the 'first generation' to attend university also appear to be converting social and cultural inheritance into action in new but socially differentiated and bounded ways. The apparent differences in orientations to 'life project planning' may be explained in part by interactions between the generations and the extent to which parents are able to secure the prospect of 'better lives and opportunities' for their children. The changing but bounded aspirations and expressions of agency may also be explained by socio-cultural influences experienced in their peer groups and institutional settings, as well as by the contingencies inherent in life transitions. There are some important indicators of 'collectivities' in shared perceptions of the social landscape and common experiences which are well articulated (and may therefore be surmised to be well internalised). Socially bounded agency means that roles and social relations will be reshaped over time as they strive to 'take control of their lives', and this reshaping will have collective and cultural, as well as individual, features.

3.5 Systemic Implications

Social responsibility at the meso- and macro-levels is often viewed in terms of society's stakeholders (whether in government or the social partners) systematically and equitably providing the institutionalised support and resources as well as the incentives young people need to make their way in acquiring the responsibilities of adult life. The interdependencies in this relational process are often overlooked. The evidence from the full set of empirical encounters supports the view that the most insecure and flexible system (represented by the English labour market of Derby) necessitates greater proactivity and the maintenance of a positive approach to 'opportunities'. This arises out of individual attributions of success and failure, which are themselves linked with beliefs that 'opportunities are open to all'. For young adults in Eastern Germany, our previous findings showed that market signals were picked up quickly, and in case studies conducted seven years after the political

changes (in 1996–1998), behaviours in the eastern city of young people on the threshold of employment were aligning, to some degree, with those of their English counterparts as unregulated ways into the labour market opened up. Those entering the higher education escalator were generally following the family line and were not usually tempted by such possibilities, although those coming to the end of their higher education were, in some cases, looking for entrepreneurial possibilities that would not have been dreamed of, not remotely possible, in the previous generation. Within a further five years, many young people were showing renewed hopes of ways back to standardised careers through government intervention in their region. Among those in higher education in the East German city, this was associated with a longer term planning orientation towards envisaged professional futures, a different kind of proactivity from the short-term reactive responses of young people differently positioned in relation to labour market opportunities.

The effects of measures taken at the meso- and macro-levels in the forms of governmental and non-governmental interventions in the eastern states of Germany operated unevenly according to the social actors who engaged with them – people and families whose actions and responses were in turn reflexively shaped by their own histories and purposes. For example, the temporary nature of government interventions was not understood by the families of the young people who interpreted the moves to create quasi-apprenticeships as re-creation of a state-controlled labour market and participated on the basis that this would be a long-term feature of the system, thus creating the political necessity for longer term survival of the schemes than might otherwise have been the case.

Despite the apparent belief in meritocracy, young people entering 'mass' higher education in the UK are certainly not blind to class-based inequalities and discriminatory behaviour. Policy needs to address more directly the muddle and disincentives in the financing of higher education studies and the stress of juggling competing demands in the short-duration UK full-time degree. It also needs to recognise more generously that it takes considerable self-belief and courage for people from disadvantaged social backgrounds to make their way even in the most open of UK higher education institutions under present labour market and policy conditions.

3.6 Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning

These patterns and 'social regularities' in the experiences of people moving in contrasting social landscapes lead into deeper questions of how wider participation in higher education is connected with individual and social responsibility in the social worlds of learning and work. In the United Kingdom, such discourses are constructed around the idea of mutual benefits accruing from investments in the future by the different stakeholders – the individual young person invests (through a loan system) in the expectation of a future career that will increase their expected earning potential substantially, while government invests in human capital in the national

interests of the economy and the wider society. This is a version of the 'stakeholder' approach that assigns meanings to the notions of capital and investment that are far distant from the traditions that underpin the German system or indeed those that underpin the public service and radical aspects of missions of universities as they have evolved historically within the United Kingdom.

There are manifest difficulties in making generalisations across international boundaries in this field. As this book argues throughout, such matters are emdedded in the interdependencies that operate in different social landscapes. As Osborne et al. (2004) have shown, the assertion that there has been rather limited success in widening participation is best made in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia where sophisticated quantitative data exist. The National Center for Post-Secondary Improvement (NCPI) in the USA stated in 2002 that despite 'notable progress on the frontiers of reform since the 1960s and 1970s, higher education's core practices remain largely unchanged' and 'achievement gaps in higher education persist between students of lower and higher socio-economic status, and across ethnic and racial groups' (NCPI 2002 p. 3). Comparable evidence for Australia was provided by the Australian VCC, while evidence from Southern European countries such as Spain also shows that versions of the 'short-cycle reforms' designed to achieve counter-inequality of opportunity for those from the lower socio-economic strata have had only limited impact (see San Segundo and Valiente 2002; Albert 2000; Petrongola and San Segundo 2002). Both practices and achievement gaps in education are heavily entrenched in social advantages of the users of the system. The middle classes strive to turn resources into higher educational credentials everywhere, in ways that transcend cultural and systemic differences.

Within the UK and other parts of the world heavily influenced by Anglo-Saxon approaches, both intended and intended consequences have stemmed from the combination of English 'stakeholder' approaches (in which those who stand to benefit are expected to contribute to the cost) with expansion of the system through various forms of innovative 'entry' and degree programmes. The stakeholder approach tends to lead into increasingly instrumental behaviours and attitudes to 'getting in, getting through and getting on' through higher education among an increasing number of users of the system. This is an intended consequence and is fuelled through fees and loans as well as the public discourses that legitimise them. The unintended consequence is that the expanded entry continues to come predominantly from middle-class constituencies, while the long-term under-representation of young people from working-class backgrounds comes to be viewed as an intractable problem that can only be significantly impacted on by setting up special entry measures that allow the less qualified (in terms of certification) to enter the system. This contrasts with longer term measures introduced elsewhere, notably in the United States, that set out to identify and nurture the talents of the socio-economically disadvantaged from an early age, an approach paralleled in the UK in the setting up of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY) in the UK amidst controversy that this will become as yet another vehicle which the vocal and articulate middle classes will manipulate to gain further advantages for their children. Special entry

programmes used to widen participation beyond its usual constituencies in the UK, researched by Haggis and Pouget (2002), also have unintended consequences: (1) sense of injustice and alienation deriving from their learning experiences, (2) lack of effective learning strategies for coping with formal learning and (3) performance depending greatly on the strengths of relationships and support mechanisms.

Attempts to widen participation of new, non-middle-class constituencies within the peer age group have foundered in various ways. Wider social forces have interlocked to undermine intended reforms in ways that benefit the already relatively advantaged more than the intended beneficiaries. Throughout these processes, the potential for widening participation to be realised through universities' complex and sometimes contradictory relationships with the ideas and practices of lifelong learning has been under-explored.

Universities' engagement with lifelong learning remains difficult to characterise, not least because of the ambiguity of what lifelong learning actually means in terms of institutional long-range goals, purposes and guiding principles, otherwise known as 'missions'. There is also often a gap between goals as espoused and the practices that are enacted lower down the organisation. Lifelong learning is best understood when viewed through the lens of the learning individual rather than institutional structures and missions, and it is therefore as difficult to encapsulate what it means in terms of institutional missions, whether for schools, non-advanced colleges or universities, beyond rather vague statements of intent to 'develop lifelong learners – people with a motivation to go on learning through out their lives'.

A central mission of all universities is critical independence in knowledge creation and communication. An advocate of the higher education market would say that this is the core business of universities. Their stock-in-trade at international level resides in their critical independence in knowledge creation and communication. This uniquely defines universities, and, in market terms, the status of this critically independent knowledge creation drives the global demand for its 'products'. Hence, we see the global market in university degrees from publicly funded, autonomous institutions barely dented by those private providers whose critical independence is often considered diluted or rendered suspect by the profit motive. The market in higher education is sustained by the esteem and status of these autonomous, public institutions in the eyes of its worldwide constituencies (including individuals (the public), governments and business organisations). It is hardly surprising then that institutions benchmark themselves in terms of international research excellence and international post-graduate indicators rather than their contributions to their local communities, however worthwhile these are.

The market analysis would not have been used earlier in history, when most university foundations had an immediate and essential ingredient of service to the community in their agreed mission and purpose. There were great movements in Europe and in the USA in universities in the 19th and 20th centuries that had their roots in missions to their communities. In Britain, for example, the civic universities and polytechnics had strong local ties and commitments to public service in those communities. Extra-mural education, sponsorship of town-gown cultural links and university 'settlements' were championed by many elite universities and came

to be the foci for radical educators and lobby groups committed to social justice. These were able to benefit from harnessing the status and intellectual standing of the wider university to their cause, while the universities themselves kept these functions at the periphery, allowing enclaves to develop that could demonstrate an institutional social conscience while operating at a distance from the core business of the day.

Commitments to the community have also taken on other shapes and forms in Britain. Regional agendas combined with the anticipated growth in people progressing from school or college to their local university as an alternative to the three-year residential experience of the mid-20th century have led to 'compacts' being developed between higher, further and secondary organisations to serve communities in geographical areas. More recently, foundation degrees involving a high degree of participation of business, public service and community organisations have provided a basis for progression to higher education for many employees and young people who would not previously have been among the traditional entrants to university education. The courses have to be capable of being 'topped up' to a full honours degree, to ensure their participants do not end up in dead ends or cul-de-sacs. The history of land grants and people's universities of the USA similarly also provided a backcloth to the introduction of associate degrees that articulate with degree structures in the universities. As Lay (2004) and Watson (2005) have argued, these types of organisational response to social as well as economic priorities can point to numerous ways in which higher education can connect with the wider society. In so doing, they offer channels for re-establishing the relationships between education and real life, throughout life.

Wider international movements beyond the Bologna process have had a significant part to play in encouraging universities' engagement with lifelong learning, but in a way that confuses the issues somewhat with references to credits being 'obtainable in non-HE contexts such as life-long learning' (HEPI 2004). The international organisations identified in Chapter 1, together with key reports such as Faure and Delors, have played their part in developing frameworks which, although contested, have brought some political leverage to those wishing to move varying versions and values of lifelong learning forward. Following the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's 1973 moves to tie the higher education sectors into cycles of recurrent education, the European Union has used the umbrella concept of lifelong learning and its funding programmes to encourage higher education (originally outside its competence) to participate in a range of programmes and activities. Many of these were recently consolidated in the action programme set out for Lifelong Learning 2006–2013. Another indicator of the increasing significance of lifelong learning as a discourse and as a 'big idea' for the times was the designation of 1996 as the European Year of Lifelong Learning, while UNESCO has continued to build on its early espousal of lifelong learning principles in its international programmes. Yet the ways in which lifelong learning ideas play out on the ground depend very largely on the socio-political landscapes in the regions and localities as well as the different cultural contexts of the diverse member states, with the weight of traditions and the inertia of systems and vested interests slowing

the pace of responses to putative globalised changes that are presented as urgent, inevitable and irreversible.

Efforts to achieve this will be suboptimal in their effects unless and until the higher education community strives for ways of widening participation that are in line with broader visions of their role in society, centred on independent and critical knowledge creation and communication.

There are two distinct approaches to widening participation.

The first involves changing the dynamics of access in the younger age cohort/peer group, to draw in all those deemed willing and able to benefit. Ability to benefit is itself open to wider interpretations than those in play when the expression 'willing and able' was first used in the 1960s, in the context of expansion of entry to UK higher education. This approach to widening participation dominated in most societies at the start of the 21st century since economic returns to learning feature strongly in the calculations. Within this approach, different strategies are found. Universities may be encouraged to compete for the most able from disadvantaged backgrounds and minorities (the approach used in the USA and beginning to be used in the UK through NAGTY) or to encourage special measures to support entry of people from a wider band of 'prior attainment' within the age group by recognising different indicators of merit and potential in what people can achieve.

The second approach to widening participation prioritises the widening of participation in the adult population, focusing on the learning individual engaging with higher learning as and when needed or desired. This has profound implications for the organisation and practices of the university. Flexibility and responsiveness to needs include credit accumulation and transfer, accreditation of prior learning, time tabling and expanded forms of student support, all of which require a fundamental rethinking of the resources and environments needed for learning and how these can be made more readily available to students whose patterns of attendance are dispersed and flexible. These features have to become 'mainstream' – what used to be irregular hours and places of study now have to be brought into the definitions of the norms if newer constituencies of students are to feel part of the university community. Less frequently cited but at least as important is the intergenerational effects and social benefits of widening participation – the more educated the parents, the greater the aspirations of the children. The widening of participation has important wash-back effects on the school curriculum. It also affects the profiles and capabilities of the body of graduates whose impact on the labour market and in businesses has yet to be fully realised.

All of these potential and actual effects of widening participation connect institutional mission to the social as well as economic priorities of the wider society and have considerable implications for lifelong learning. In practice, greater diversity is being achieved, but significantly changing the social class mix has to be recognised as a long and slow process, which will falter unless very actively fuelled and sustained.

The approach to widening participation that focuses on the adult population rather than, or alongside, the younger age cohort is very actively pursued by some universities. For example, Warwick, an elite tier university in the UK, has introduced

the 'Learning Grid' as a complementary library facility, designed for 'inclusivity' and responsiveness to student diversity within a 'commitment to lifelong learning'. (Edwards 2007[i] Higher Education Academy). Many other examples can be found in British universities. Yet however enthusiastically initiatives and innovations are advanced, the social dynamics of the system are always pulling day-to-day practices back towards the previous norms, in ways that continue to privilege the full-time undergraduates and place the full-time undergraduate experience at the centre of the teaching system. 'Non-traditional' students are too often marginalising, enclaves are created and innovative practices are undermined by, instead of incorporated into, the mainstream. It is also the case that systems that appear 'on paper' to offer flexibility such as credit recognition between institutions rarely materialise as intended. In the UK there is evidence that many students who would qualify for credit transfer on the basis of previous studies had received none (HEPI 2004; paragraph 7).

There is a danger of exaggerating individual self-direction and empowerment when we research individual actors situated in specific settings. This can be seen, for example, in some intervention studies into aspects of workplace learning (see e.g. West and Choueke 2003) that often highlight how major changes in perspective and work attitudes can be achieved with certain kinds of workplace intervention, but seldom consider these in the context of the prior learning and characteristics of the actors. Even fewer consider the structural conditions that fundamentally affect the longer term sustainability or transferability of these 'interventions' into other contexts exaggerated ('participants became empowered and prepared to generate impressive solutions' [West and Choueke 2003: 224]). In Chapter 1, it was argued that social institutions, the institutions that so fundamentally influence our experiences in education and the labour market, continue to interlock in ways that shape life courses, yet these may be rendered invisible. Research into the dynamics of higher education participation and labour market entry is increasingly uncovering the social processes at work, as Whitty et al. have shown in *Destined for Success?*.

Universities are not in themselves providers of lifelong learning, but they sit in a context of lifelong learning both in policy terms and historically, as Watson (2008) has shown. The question is how far they are sensitive and responsive to the needs of the learning individual, while pursuing their core mission of independent knowledge creation and dissemination.

Actual and potential students of higher education, moving as actors in these social landscapes, often experience something different from that intended in institutional accounts of achievements and statements of intent, and these gaps multiply the further the student is from the well-trodden pathways (or indeed escalators) of the middle-class 'standard' routes into higher education, as the Anglo-German evidence shows. A focus on the learning individual in the social landscape of higher education reveals

- unintended consequences;
- opportunities partially realised; and
- in-built inertia and resistances impeding changes to traditional norms and practices.

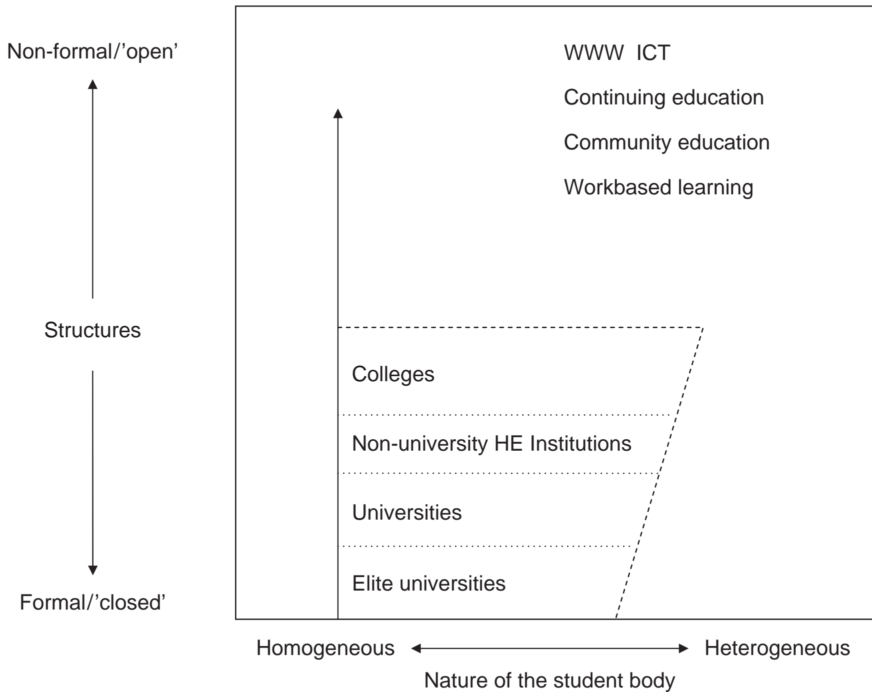

Fig. 3.2 Higher education and lifelong learning: a framework of change

Institutions are differentiated in the extent to which flexibility and openness of access feature in their missions. Schuetze and Slowey have demonstrated that the resulting reinforcement of institutional hierarchies around traditional patterns of provision is almost universal, as they set out in Fig. 3.2 below. Formal, or 'closed', structures are associated with high status and traditional provision. The more open and flexible the institutional structure, with the features that are 'more likely to make lifelong learning in higher education actually happen', the lower the status and public esteem.

In the UK, the growth in numbers taking part-time or other flexible modes of study, together with the continuing rise in the average age of participants, might suggest a growing culture of acceptance and indeed promotion of the principles and practices of lifelong learning in UK universities. Yet as Slowey and Watson (2003: 3–19) have shown, even in the UK context the students and potential students encounter barrier after barrier in their day-to-day experiences as the rules of the game and the associated practices continue to be set by traditional norms. This continues to happen despite the fact that the practices work well with decreasing proportions of the constituencies they are meant to serve.

Some commentators look to the 'liberating effects of mass' as offering most promise for emancipation through higher education and the pursuit of social justice

(e.g. Watson 2008). It is undeniable that the potential contribution to social justice is significantly enhanced by expansion of higher education systems all round the world, although that potential is largely unrealised because of the forces and factors outlined in Chapter 1, stemming often from middle-class dominance and the reluctance of politicians, thinking of the ballot box, to challenge this status quo boldly enough.

The challenge lies in converting this potential to actuality. This means creating conditions which open up alternatives to the meritocratic zero-sum race, outlined in Chapter 1, in which the most privileged participants are nearly always the winners over their less well resourced peers and the disadvantaged who cannot participate at all in higher education are left further behind. This includes tackling poverty in families and communities and huge disparities in the quality of initial education, within as well as between particular geographical areas. So whether we take the perspective of the learning individual or the perspective of the institution trying to widen participation, another lens needs to direct our gaze to the connections between institutions of higher education and the specific social landscapes in which they have their influences. While some of these are international and already well served in the drive for world-class status, others are distinctly local/regional. A focus on learning regions has considerable promise here – the idea (Osborne 2007) that multiple players, including universities, 'have a role in promoting and facilitating learning that develops the economic and social well-being of their locality' (p. 36). For universities, Osborne advocates, this role extends far beyond the economic into the exchange or transfer of knowledge that is not directly amenable to commercialisation: 'From cooperation with museums to educating citizens on topical and controversial issues ... they contribute not only to knowledge transfer and to public understanding of science and technology, but also to knowledge being valued in the community' (p. 37). Seeing 'the public', with its diversity of interests, as a fourth and crucial party in the alliances of universities, businesses and government is in line with the history and traditions of social responsibility, both for universities and for the communities in which they are set, including providing renewed and reshaped access for the 'million willing adult learners' who, according to Tuckett (2007 p. 17), are being pushed out by 'rising investment in younger students and a shift in priorities that privileges the interests of learning in the workplace'.

The 'reflexive' argument put forward by Watson focuses on connections of a reflexive kind between universities and life beyond their walls that will 'engender, over time, responsiveness to the ways in which the diversity of those who engage with the university want to shape their experience of it'. Within the configuration of UK institutions, this can be achieved in ways that consolidate and safeguard the critical independence that give universities their unique position in the market for education as well as in building on the best traditions of public service and social responsibility. The vision will only be achieved, however, with much fairer systems of support for the diversity of learners. These are essential conditions if social responsibility is be restored to its historically central position.

3.7 Bringing Social Responsibility Back into the Equation

A vision of learning that embodies social responsibility alongside dimensions of worth and value was encapsulated in one of the first announcements of the newly elected Labour Government in UK in 1997:

> As well as securing our economic future, learning has a wider contribution. It helps make ours a civilised society, develops the spiritual side of our lives and promotes active citizenship. Learning enables people to play a full part in their community. It strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us fulfill our potential and opens doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake, as well as for the equality of opportunity it brings. (DfEE 1998: foreword)

Although this vision that appears to have been overtaken with pre-occupations with a far narrower skills agenda at national level, how far can the 'Learning Region' approach offer prospects for bringing social responsibility back onto the agenda in modern ways, which avoid the patronising of the past? Can improved reflexive connections between organisations, including universities with their unique role and status of critical independence, reduce barriers to participation in higher education for people viewed as actors in changing social landscapes? Can they go beyond the world of work and its demands for 'skills' and human capital, the relentless march of 'credentialism' and the contemporary pre-occupation with employment-related skills?[ii]

Social responsibility operates at the level of the universities themselves and the level of those who engage with them. Social responsibility is crucially dependent at the macro, societal level on just and equitable material support that allows

- universities themselves to reassert their historically significant roles – which extend beyond relationships with businesses and the economy to the unique responsibilities for critical engagement with multiple communities and
- actors in changing social landscapes to assert their social as well as individual responsibilities to engage in their communities, as learners as well as active citizens.

3.8 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has explored perspectives on learning work and social responsibility that are important in the terrain of higher education. Profound relationships exist between higher education, work and life chances. Higher education continues to carry a high proportion of its participants into primary segments of the labour market (jobs marked by careers and high degrees of stability and remuneration) almost as predictably as truncated educational trajectories lead into secondary labour markets even though the process of getting a foothold in primary segment jobs now takes longer and the monetary returns have decreased.

To unravel some of these complexities, there is a need to distinguish between increasing access for disadvantaged groups competing within the same peer age cohort and a life-course approach that acknowledges the complexity and fluidity of adult lives and the latent, often undervalued, potential in all sections of the population.

English higher education students share an almost universalised belief that 'competence' and good 'performance' will be rewarded in the labour market. German students are more sceptical and clearly of the opinion that people who are successful in work do not necessarily deserve their success. English higher education students in the 'first generation' to attend university often show more initiative or 'proactivity' in their decision-making than those who are carried along on the middle-class escalator of parental expectations. The personal accounts of all students show how family relationships and expectations are deeply embedded in the higher education experience. Actual and potential students of higher education, moving as actors in these social landscapes, also often experience something different from that intended in institutional accounts of achievements and statements of intent about widening participation, and these gaps multiply the further the student is from the well-trodden pathways (or indeed escalators) of the middle-class 'standard' routes into higher education.

Despite the apparent belief in meritocracy, young people entering 'mass' higher education in the UK are certainly not blind to class-based inequalities and discriminatory behaviour. It takes considerable self-belief and courage for people from disadvantaged social backgrounds to make their way even in the most open of UK higher education institutions under present labour market and policy conditions.

It is undeniable that the expansion of participation in higher education is a key element in the pursuit of social justice, where it brings advanced learning and powerful knowledge within the reach of many more ordinary people than previously. This applies around the globe. Its potential is far from being fully realised.

Universities are not in themselves providers of lifelong learning, but they sit in a context of lifelong learning. They juggle the competing demands of demonstrating sensitivity and responsiveness to the diverse needs of learning individuals, while pursuing their core missions of independent knowledge creation and dissemination and preserving these when the needs of the economy start to dominate the political agenda. Expansion of the idea of 'learning regions' in ways that involve the wider population can potentially bring together the historic missions of universities with the newer visions of how they need to operate in the new economy. Both from the perspective of the learning individual and the perspective of the institution trying to widen participation, the vision will only be achieved, however, with much fairer systems of support for the diversity of learners and inter-institutional collaborations that genuinely reduce barriers and sustain wider participation in their social landscapes. Both of these require social responsibility to be brought more centrally into the equation.

Notes

i. See Edwards R. (2007), Inside and Outside the Walls. Academy Exchange, The Higher Education Academy, pp. 38–39.

ii. The latest UK intervention along these lines is the Leitch Report, which would like to see the proportion of the workforce with graduate-level qualifications rise from its current level of 29% to 40% by 2020 (Leitch, 2006: 137).

Chapter 4
Workers in Control of the Present?

Most macro-level accounts of employment look at the social regularities of inequality produced by labour markets and employment relationships. Accounts at the institutional level tend to emphasise collective social processes and features such as 'organisational learning'. What is often missing is the perspective of employees and their experiences of work in changing social and economic contexts.

How people experience and cope with work is the central theme of this chapter. It is telling that, for young people, getting any kind of foothold in the labour market is experienced as having more control over their lives, at least in the short term. This is because entering work and drawing a wage is associated with economic independence and adult status. Yet work can be alienating and disempowering. This particular feature of Fordist production regimes has given way to post-Fordist flexible labour and economic insecurity. Economic insecurity produces net gains for the highest paid, who are also most likely to be insured in various ways against uncertainties and have also gained as consumers; the gains for those who can only find casual work or are caught in the 'revolving doors' of the lower end of the labour market are less apparent. Permanent positions have tended to be displaced by jobs that are insecure and casualised. At the lower end, many people take several casualised jobs at once as the only way of supporting their families. At the macro-level, moves towards deregulated markets have produced greater inequality; they have been associated with policies undermining workers' rights and with reductions in public spending. Yet, as with the apparent contradictions between young people's feelings of control and the social regularities in what happens to them at the bottom end of the labour market, adults in work often voice feelings of control and satisfaction with work that would seem objectively to be low grade and lacking in opportunities and security. The experiences of adults in English labour markets, discussed later in this chapter, illuminate this further and correlate with those of adults in Australia, according to a parallel work carried out by Billett (2006).

The opportunity to systematically compare 18–25-year-olds already in employment with those in higher education or unemployment has yielded further insights into the effects of labour market experience. Why is the experience of having gained a foothold in the labour market associated with greater feelings of control and agency than are manifest among peers in university or unemployment settings, irrespective of cultural context? One explanation is that this is consistent with

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_4, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

the evidence that control beliefs are higher in situations of change which directly affect the lives of individuals and lower in situations in which there is more distant anticipation of that change (Bandura 1995). Those with more experience of the labour market were more measured in recognising constraints and factors beyond their control. Young people already in employment were experiencing the rights and responsibilities of adulthood and made frequent reference to the new manifestations of adulthood in what was for many a relatively exciting phase of their lives, despite setbacks and problems encountered. Feelings of stress were linked with work demands and pressures. These stresses were reported most strongly by the employed groups, but those in higher education also reported stress and pressure. Comparisons with the unemployed groups showed that stress among unemployed young people was directly linked with the difficulty of their situation and more negative anticipation of changes. Change was also affecting individual lives directly; whether this is more or less intense depends to a large extent on the extent of support and the extent to which families can tide them over difficult times. But uncertain status in the early years of adult life, when many peers are in work or establishing homes and families of their own, is reflected in frustrated agency rather than fatalism. But when asked to respond to items at the personal level, expressing their own internal feelings, young people in the most vulnerable positions were more likely to believe that their own weaknesses matter. This was not confined to unemployed groups, however. Young women, including those in employment and in higher education, felt this more strongly than their male counterparts.

Interestingly, the view previously found (Evans and Heinz 1993) in younger age groups (16–19) in England that 'unemployment was something that happened to somebody else' has disappeared as they enter their third decade of life. The majority of people, once they have direct experience of work, think it at least possible that they will face and experience employment in the future, in all groups. While much public policy literature assumes an upwardly mobile career trajectory, downwardly mobile and interrupted career trajectories are experienced by many adults, and the foundations for these lie in early experiences at the intersection of the educational system and the labour market, as well as class and gender.

4.1 Adult Workers and the Significance of Biography

Labour market experiences in the early years of adult life involve considerable learning whether marked by successes, disappointments and setbacks, or a combination of these. Striving to overcome setbacks and taking chances in trying new activities are seen as positive indicators of individual agency in young people, although as the empirical encounters reported throughout this volume have shown, the dominant pattern that emerges, whether of success and 'upward drift' or of repeated disappointment and stagnation, lays foundations that are hard to shift and often have even deeper underpinning in socially ascribed characteristics of gender, race, social class and disability.

The ways in which adults move into and through working life can potentially now be statistically tracked through cohort studies or studied through individual life

histories. Although valuable, there is a missing ingredient in what we know from these sources. Adults moving into and through work engage with a variety of workplaces. Their experiences in different workplace settings often involve significant learning of an informal kind, fundamentally influenced by the adult workers' prior learning and experience as well as the features of the specific contexts of workplace activity and culture with which they engage.

Much recent research about learning in the workplace prioritises the social dimensions of learning – communal and organisational. But workers are both part of and separate from their workplace community: they have prior experience, together with lives and identities that far extend beyond it. Analysis of data from the multiple projects carried out in European labour markets[i] suggests several overlapping and inter-linked ways in which the interplay between adult biographies and workplace contexts are relevant to learning at work. The three most significant are as follows: how workers/learners bring prior knowledge, understanding and skills (many of which are tacit in nature) with them, which can contribute to their future work and learning; how dispositions towards work, learning and their personal lives influence the ways in which they construct and take advantage of opportunities for learning at work; and how values and dispositions of individual workers involve them in personalising the work environment for themselves while contributing to the co-production and reproduction of cultures where they work. The following sections show how engagement in purposeful workplace learning, understood as learning in and through the workplace, depends on that learning being well situated not only in the context and culture of the workplace, but also in relation to the personal and work biographies of the adults involved, young and mature – their prior learning, personal and work situation, dispositions and readiness to learn at the particular time and place in question.

4.2 Work Experience in Early Adult Life

Chapter 2 started to uncover the experiences of young adults connecting with the world of work in different ways, showing how the first foothold in the labour market was most important for their feelings of control of their lives and situation, irrespective of the nature and level of that foothold at least initially.

In a Europe-wide study of attempts to help young people to 'reconnect' with learning and the labour market, one of the most striking features was the way in which the apprenticeship advocates espoused the apprenticeship model as offering some of the best solutions to the difficulties of young people labelled as being 'at risk of social exclusion'. This stemmed from the perception that 'relevance' is important for motivation and engagement of young people and that learning situated in the experiences of the workplace or workshop is likely to succeed where classroom-based learning fails.

Apprenticeships are readily analysed in terms of the main tenets of situated learning theory – including the development of communities of practice and the features of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991). Examination of the

limits and possibilities of situated learning theory in illuminating learning and practices in schemes designed to develop young people's capabilities through structured engagement in work environments (Evans and Niemeyer 2004) found that new approaches were needed to better understand how learning develops in transitional and new work situations. This work paralleled that of Eraut (2004) with young professionals, showing that the tendency of situated learning theory to focus on stable working communities and on what is common in people's learning and knowledge rather than what is different between them limits the usefulness of 'communities of practice' and 'legitimate peripheral participation' concepts for understanding how learning and knowledge develop in transitional or new work situations.

People belong to different social groups beyond the workplace, in families, community groups and peer groups. In each of these communities and groups, they both develop and contribute knowledge/experience as part of their participation in the social practices of the group. The involvement may be long term (as in family groups) or relatively transitory (as in young people's peer groups), but the learning is often intense and stems from deep-rooted personal engagement. These same people move into, through and out of workplace environments. Both Evans's and Eraut's work have shown that knowledge on all levels takes different forms, and relationships between prior and new learning and tacit and codified knowledge unfold as knowledge is changed through participation in different social practices. Evans (2002b) identifies the significance of 'knowing that, knowing how, knowing who and knowing why' and explores explicit and tacit dimensions of each in relation to adults' transitions in and out of work. When these four types of knowledge are taken into consideration, recognition of the differentiation between individual members of the same work group deepens. What they learn from their participation in any given workplace is very partial and personalised, in that it depends on biographical factors such as their own personal context, their cultural understandings and history. Understandings and perspectives have been constructed through a series of life and work experiences; there is a longitudinal dimension and biographical rootedness in all aspects of skill and knowledge. While the effects of social structures are important, adults' beliefs in their abilities to change the things that affect their lives by their own actions are shaped by past habits and routines, how future possibilities are envisaged and the contingencies of present moment (see Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Evans 2002a). How individual people will perceive and respond to 'opportunities' is very variable, even within the same contexts.

This was amply illustrated in the Evans and Niemeyer's (2004) account of research into young people's engagement in schemes designed to help smooth the transition into work, carried out in six European countries. In shifting the focus towards adults' learning and exercising responsibility in the work context, cases from ESRC projects on Workplace Learning[1] carried out between 2000 and 2006 reveal how aspects of employees' individual biographies as well as their prior experiences play an important part in facilitating the 'interrelationships' between

[1] ESRC projects – Tacit Knowledge and Skill; Adult Basic Skills.

employees and their workplace environments. Since engagement is linked to the ways in which employees personalise their work situations, the analysis concludes that learning opportunities and activities are more likely to be effective when they are responsive to the micro-conditions of specific working groups or contexts and that full engagement in those activities is more likely when their significance for the employee, whether in terms of using their prior learning, their personal goals and intentions in the present moment together with their 'readiness' to take up new opportunities, is taken into consideration.

4.3 Linking the Individual and Social Dimensions of Learning and Work

A recent paper (Hodkinson et al. 2004) argued that the emphasis on an organisational or social viewpoint in workplace research comes from the recognition of the importance of understanding workplaces as organisations where learning is not the primary activity. This emphasis sometimes obscures the need to build individual worker/learner perspectives into the central social/organisational view of learning at work.

Much recent research about learning in the workplace emphasises participation. The socio-cultural perspectives of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) are well known to stress the significance of belonging to communities of practice and of learning as a part of the process of becoming a full member of a community or a participant in an 'activity system'. These views of workplace learning prioritise the social dimensions of learning – communal and organisational, and they emphasise the learning that takes place through everyday working practices. Conceptualising the place of the individual within participatory studies of workplace learning which emphasise social processes is deceptively difficult, as Hodkinson et al. demonstrate. From such a perspective, the separation between the person learning and the context in which they learn is artificial. Each learns in a context; rather, each person is a reciprocal part of the context and vice versa. The dangers of subsuming the individual totally within context are apparent, yet there is an equal and opposite danger when we research individual actors situated in specific settings, that of exaggerating the agency and scope for action of individual employees. This can be seen in some intervention studies on aspects of workplace learning (see e.g. West and Choueke 2003) that often highlight how major changes in perspective and work attitudes can be achieved with certain kinds of workplace intervention, but seldom consider these in the context of the prior learning and characteristics of the actors. Even fewer consider the structural conditions that fundamentally affect the longer term sustainability or transferability of these 'interventions' into other contexts. In examining how workers respond to new work practices, discontinuities of change may be exaggerated ('participants became empowered and prepared to generate impressive solutions' (West and Choueke 2003: 224)), while the continuities of disadvantage are overlooked, and the question 'how, and by what processes

did this “upskilling” or “empowerment” reposition or reward people equally or differentially in terms of pay, power, prospects, influence, well-being or security in the short, medium or longer term?’ is rarely considered. Social institutions, the institutions which so fundamentally influence our experiences in education and the labour market, continue to interlock in ways which shape life courses, yet these may be rendered invisible. We need to understand much better the reflexive ways in which people’s lives are shaped or bounded or change direction as they engage with education, labour market and workplace organisations.

In earlier analyses, individual lives have been shown as embedded in the social structures they inhabit. But as far as the workplace is concerned, people are separate from their place of work, as well as being integrated into it. They have lives that predate and extend beyond and outside their present workplace. They have prior knowledge, beliefs and identities rooted in experience that can at the most be only partially shaped and reconstructed by participation in work communities.

There have been some attempts to focus on these issues in relation to workplace learning, but each is partial. While Wenger (1998) is primarily concerned with the ways in which participation in communities of practice helps construct the identity of the learners concerned, Hodkinson and Bloomer (2002) focus on the ways in which prior biography constructs dispositions that influence an individual’s learning. Billett (2004) examines the ways in which different workers react to the ‘affordances’ for learning that the workplace offers. In Scandinavia, there is a tradition of life history work in relation to workplace learning, which emphasises the ways in which individual life histories of workers illuminate and represent deeper structural issues which interpenetrate their lives (e.g. Salling 2001; Jorgenson and Warring 2002; Antikainen et al. 1996). While these and other studies have illuminated aspects of the problem, each offers only a partial response.

4.5 Bringing Prior Skills, Understanding and Abilities into the Workplace

Work performance has strong tacit dimensions. These implicit or hidden dimensions of knowledge and skill are key elements of ‘mastery’, which experienced workers draw upon in everyday activities and expand in tackling new or unexpected situations. Previous research which focuses on tacit skills and their contribution to workplace learning has tended to focus on professional learning and work process knowledge. Eraut, for example, has identified the ways in which the tacit or personal knowledge is necessary to convert codified knowledge into performance. From his perspective, new entrants to the workplace, who enter with extended periods of training and high levels of codified knowledge, need extended periods of supported practice to be able to effectively operationalise their knowledge in competent performance. Evans and Kersh (2004) focused on adults with interrupted careers whose prior experiences and tacit skills are often the most important resources they bring into tackling new situations. Adults were identified on a college course for those

aiming to return to work. Their experiences were followed through their course, in their job seeking and into the workplace. The research showed how adults are often able to use previously acquired personal competences in flexible and developmental ways as they move between roles and settings. They often highlighted the importance of such personal competences as time management, juggling different tasks or activities, handling routine work, prioritising and ability to communicate with other people. Acquired attributes such as determination and willingness to learn were also important. Other competences were more context specific. What was most important in all the cases was not the specifics of the skills and attributes themselves, but recognition by others of what they had to bring to the work situation: recognition by the learner, by the tutor or workplace supervisor and the scope to use their capabilities.

Tacit forms of personal competences are important for adults moving between roles and settings. These have been shown to be related to attitudes and values, learning competences, social/co-operative competences, content-related and practical competences, methodological competences and strategic (self-steering) competences. Systematic case comparison of learners with more continuous occupational biographies recorded higher levels of confidence in their personal competences at the outset of courses than those with substantial interruptions, except in cases whose recent work experiences had been poor (see Evans et al. 2004 for details including methodological approach).

Case analysis showed how adults' learning processes are negatively affected where recognition of and scope to use tacit skills are low. Conversely, positive use and recognition of these skills sustains learning and contributes to learning outcomes. The starting point is *development of awareness* of learners' hidden abilities or tacit skills by tutors and students themselves. Modelling of individual learning processes provided insights into adults' experiences by making the part played by tacit skills visible. Tutors and supervisors employed different methods to make learners' tacit skills more explicit: teamwork, one-to-one tutorial help and giving new tasks and responsibilities. On another level, this can be seen in the context of what Wittgenstein termed 'language games' that enable people to name, and then to claim, what they have. Often what they bring is invisible to the learner; the things that are most important to us become invisible through familiarity and routine (Wittgenstein 1953). If they are invisible to us, we are limited in the extent to which we can represent them to others. Some tutors and supervisors may be skilled in identifying strengths and capabilities brought from other contexts; many are not, particularly where those other contexts are those connected with personal lives and interests outside the workplace. The significance of tacit skills and knowledge points to the approaches which are needed in designing methods, taking into account experience, background and disposition as well as learning environments and cultures.

Adults entering new working environments (analysed as expansive-restrictive by Fuller and Unwin 2003; 2004) can under 'expansive' conditions experience their work as a continuous engagement in acquiring new skills and deploying their prior skills in new circumstances. Workers can then use their past knowledge and skills

to succeed at work and to build up new knowledge and new skills. Recognition and deployment of tacit skills in the workplace can facilitate these learning processes, together with the construction of further learning opportunities and outcomes, for the firm and for the individual worker. This 'upward spiral' does not occur smoothly or simply. In some cases, transitions into new working environments will result in disjunction, drift and stress. These are complex social processes. As shown in the latest book publication from this work, *Improving Workplace Learning* by Evans (2006), the work environment is a crucial element in these processes.

These insights into the learning and work transitions of adults have illustrated how prior skills and knowledge relevant to particular occupations may be acquired very unconventionally, by presenting the case of Anna. Anna's job placement involved work at a social service centre, assisting young people doing community work. She acquired such skills through voluntary work in which she helped mothers or fathers bring up small children, as well as by overcoming some difficult life experiences of her own involving drug and alcohol problems and involvement in petty crime as a teenager. These experiences had 'taught' her how to listen to and relate to young people, and she proved very effective in her work role (Evans et al. 2004). She was looking forward to becoming a support worker in social services. There is little attention to the relevance of such life experiences in the literature on career progression for young adults, yet these types of experiences and the skills and knowledge that stem from them are often crucially important.

Personal competences, the forms of skills and knowledge that have strong tacit dimensions, are of particular significance for workplace learning and movement between settings, but often go unrecognised. Naïve mappings of 'key skills' between environments do not work. Trainers and employers may recognise the importance of tacit dimensions of skills and knowledge, but tend to see them more narrowly than learners. Attributes of creativity, sensitivity and emotional intelligence often go unrecognised or are taken for granted.

Individuals are able both to contribute to and learn from their workplace environments, and they can do so either collectively or individually. Adults can contribute to continuous workplace development by utilising and deploying knowledge, which may have strong tacit dimensions. At the same time, various aspects of the workplace environment affect individual employees in ways that often contribute to their own progress and maturity of judgement and action. Such interactions between employees, on the one hand, and the workplace, on the other, take place in social processes in which an individual employee becomes an essential part of the workplace environment. Even if employees are not particularly active within their workplaces, they cannot avoid being influenced by various workplace interactions and activities, for example

- communicating with and/or learning from their colleagues and supervisors;
- taking part in various workplace customs and practices;
- acquiring new skills and abilities from their workplace experiences;
- deploying their own skills and abilities within their workplace environments; and
- sharing their own experiences with their colleagues.

Furthermore, employees identify personally with their workplace environments if

- they feel that they are contributing to the workplace environment and
- they also feel that they are able to learn from their workplace.

Significant aspects of employees' individual biographies as well as their prior experiences play an important part in facilitating the 'interrelationships' between employees and their workplace environment. In other words, peoples' identities and dispositions as well as their social skills, including various social attributes such as 'attitudes and norms of behaviour' (Green 1999: 128), are significant parts of their workplace settings. All employees have different life experiences, such as occupational, educational and family experiences. Their individual experiences and personal or tacit skills as well as their dispositions and attitudes make their methods and approaches to the job tasks unique within their workplace environments, yet there are broad 'social regularities' that can also be identified.

By using their personal competences or tacit skills and knowledge acquired from their previous (or current non-work) experiences, individuals influence and contribute to 'shaping' the culture of their workplace and learning environments.

4.6 How Using Tacit Skills and Knowledge in the Workplace an Change or Personalise the Environment

The findings discussed above have suggested that employees' prior experiences, dispositions as well as cultural backgrounds may influence or even shape and modify their workplace environments. Individuals tend, to a certain extent, to personalise their workplace environments, in some cases even without realising that they are doing so. A number of the 'women returners' who have recently entered new workplaces have explained how some of the skills and approaches they are using in their new jobs are similar to those they had been using in their prior experiences (e.g. educational, family or workplace). Some adults introduce at their workplaces certain traditions associated with their cultural backgrounds or previous experiences, for example the mid-day school supervisor whose own home and family experience enabled her to develop a number of valuable skills that she is using successfully in her work. While at work, she says she is trying to shape an environment for children that she describes as 'home-like', similar to that which she is creating for her own children at home. She maintains that her own biography and life experiences as a mother help her to be aware of the possible challenges of her job as well as to better understand the needs and attitudes of children depending on their age group.

Employees may often use their personal or tacit skills while they are trying to become accustomed to or adjust to their new workplaces after job or role changes. The sales assistant in the large furniture shop used his tacit interpersonal abilities, manifested in politeness, patience and affability with customers. This was to conform not only to the rules, regulations and general settings of retail environments but also to the emotional labour requirements of customer care. He gained satisfaction

in doing his job well and was positive that the skills that are useful for this type of work are personal and cannot be 'just acquired' from regular on-the-job training. As Noon and Blyton (2002) have observed, reported negative impacts of emotional labour on people at work often ignore the other side of the coin – that people whose dispositions lead them into this work often report enjoyment in dealing with people and develop identities that, over time, come to fit with the role. It is the exploitative aspects of intensified, forced emotional labour and the low wages that often accompany it that are problematic, not its inherent qualities.

Fuller and Unwin's (2003) research on apprenticeship in the steel industry also provides an illustration of how an employee's prior skills and abilities were known and encouraged by his employer, this time in relation to the worker's personal interests and longer term development. In this case, a production worker in a steel mill was engaged, outside his paid work, in voluntary work as an adult literacy tutor. When he requested financial help to pursue a formal qualification as a basic skills tutor, the personnel manager readily agreed as it was in line with company policy to support employees wishing to take courses beyond the scope of their current work. The employee was able to extend his involvement in basic skills teaching as a consequence, with the prospect of paid work and the potential for a longer term career change. The workplace as a site for *access* to learning is often overlooked. There is often potential for workplace-linked programmes to impact on people's personal lives and their communities in unexpected ways.

Factors such as people's personalities, dispositions and attitudes are significant aspects of workplace environments that affect the ways that employees perform their duties, handle difficult situations and conflicts or adjust to their new workplaces. Different configurations of employees' work and life experiences make their attitudes and dispositions distinctive and often valuable within their workplace environments. It is important to remember that this does not always work in positive directions for the employee. For example, an emphasis on interpersonal skills and empathy can reinforce gender-based assumptions and expectations. The opportunity to use experiences gained in home and family settings in their day-to-day work is most readily identified by women moving into relatively low-paid jobs that involve caring and interpersonal relationships, whether in health and social care or in 'customer care'. College-based courses can enable adult learners to draw on these kinds of personal competences in classroom and work settings, but the most effective courses use these in the learning process as a key to deepening and extending self-knowledge and unlocking new capabilities.

4.7 The Value of College-Based Elements to Workplace Learning

The ways in which employees who undertake any kind of college training connected to their work role talk about the importance of what they have gained underline the significance of their own engagement and personal agency in making the knowledge work for them in everyday work settings. For some of them, their college training

has stimulated positive changes in their dispositions, personalities and attitudes towards work and learning, enabling them to make newly acquired knowledge their own in their workplace settings. Such observations often illustrate how the 'transfer' of learning denied by many situated learning theorists can be better understood as a series of recontextualisations (Evans et al. 2008). An administrative assistant in a government department talked about the value of the part-time college course for which her employers had released her. Her account was much about knowhow as about 'knowing that', although the importance of learning new theories was also emphasised:

> I learned about quality, and customer service, and what it means to provide a good service and knowing actually how to work at improving the service, and what good service means to a customer and quality. And the quality and approach to quality, all that sort of thing. Again, managing people, I learnt about how to work as a team, a team effort. I learnt about different types of, different stages within a team. [. . .] I learnt about different theories of teamwork and information, managing information.

This set of experiences combined with the new knowledge she was able to bring to her work has facilitated positive changes in her personality, enabling her to develop her confidence and self-assurance. A nurse also explained the importance of her college-based training for her own confidence in work processes that lie at the heart of her role:

> [. . .] the other things like how to actually handle people, it's what I learned from my training because before I started [. . .] I'd be very shy, [. . .] shy is not the word to describe me, but I would be very uncomfortable to look after the person, [. . .] it's very private, you know, [. . .], but since this training I've gained more confidence in how to handle these people so I'm not uncomfortable doing it anymore [. . .].

A deputy team leader also explained that a part-time course in management had made her realise her potential as a prospective leader. Away from the day-to-day pressures of the job, she had furthered her knowledge about social interaction, teamwork and management, as well as her confidence in her abilities, and was subsequently promoted as team leader, a role in which she could put her knowledge to work in her own way. Experiences and knowledge gained outside the workplace, whether in courses or through wider experiences in the social world, have parts to play both in shaping the workplace environment and in the ways in which people develop in and through work.

4.8 Other Factors Affecting Learners at Their Workplace

A number of external factors may negatively affect employees' development and progress at work. The problems of difficult financial or family circumstances have been linked to factors that may negatively affect employees' or learners' progress. Interviews with women employees indicated the substantial barriers to undertaking additional workplace or college training because of family commitments. The problem associated with high costs of childcare has been named as one of the main reasons that prevent women from assuming a more active role in various workplace

activities, including taking on full-time positions. Another problem that has been named in this context, for both men and women, is that of health. When people have interruptions in their occupational or learning careers because of health problems, these setbacks are often hard to overcome.

Senker's research into the workplace learning of domiciliary carer support workers in the 'Careways' organisation revealed a number of examples where prior learning and experience were essential in the choice of specific work and carrying it out successfully. It is important that each worker has a set of attitudes, life experiences and skills which enable her/him to relate to the needs of the family in whose home s/he works. Barbara started working with 'Careways' after retiring (early) as a children's community sister. She trained as a children's nurse between 1965 and 1968 and took general nursing qualifications later. She had occasionally trained Careways staff, passing on some specific nursing skills. She wanted to work as a carer with children only because that is what she had done all her life and knew about. Joan, on the other hand, had only ever worked with elderly people. She was confident with them as she has learned how to cope with them over the years. She felt that caring for children would be too much of a responsibility. One worker, Denise, was willing to work with a wider range of clients. This reflected her own home background where she had cared for many years for her elderly mother, but also had a child, now adult, with Asperger's syndrome. In the cases of these individuals, their current approaches to working practice show some clear links to prior experiences.

4.9 Rethinking 'Transfer'

There are important similarities in the use of prior skills by adults with continuous professional careers and by those adults with interrupted occupational biographies. For neither group does moving into new workplaces involve simple transfer of prior skills and knowledge. Our findings resonated with those of Lobato (2003) in showing the importance of the actor's/learner's perspective, the influence of prior activity on current activity and the different ways in which actors may construe situations as being 'similar', that what experts consider to be only a 'surface feature' of a work task or problem may be structurally important for a participant, that multiple processes involved include attunement to affordances and constraints in the work environment and that 'transfer' is distributed across mental, material, social and cultural planes. Skills and knowledge have to be developed and possibly changed, as they are operationalised in the culture of new workplace. Furthermore, it is not the skills and knowledge that develop, but the whole person, as s/he adjusts, with greater or lesser success, to working in a new environment. That adjustment depends as much on the receptive or expansive nature of the new workplace as on the prior experiences that workers bring. Put differently, the processes entailed involve a series of recontextualisations (see Evans et al. 2008) that can be significantly helped or hindered by the actions and dispositions of employers and co-workers. They are also influenced by the dispositions of the workers who are moving, as the next section makes clear.

4.10 Employees' Contributions: Constructing and Personalising Workplace Learning Opportunities

The empirical encounters with adult workers have shown that the way the learners perceive and respond to the learning opportunities within their new workplaces is strongly influenced by their individual attitudes and dispositions. Adults bring to their workplaces not only their prior skills and competences but also their individual dispositions and attitudes towards learning. Their previous and parallel life experiences such as social and educational backgrounds, financial situation, family life or prior workplace practices influence and shape their outlooks and dispositions, which they bring into their new workplace environments. The workplaces themselves offer different opportunities for learning, and those opportunities differ for different workers, even in the same workplace. The differences in opportunity depend on the way in which work is organised in any particular firm and on the position and job description that a worker holds. Thus, Rainbird et al. (2005) have shown that learning opportunities for cleaners and care workers are related, amongst other things, to the relatively low status of the predominantly female, working class and often ethnic minority workers concerned. There are also significant differences, depending on the different ways in which cleaning, social care in residential homes, domiciliary social care and carer support are organised.

The concern here is to uncover how different people respond and react to these opportunities. Previous accounts (see Hodkinson et al. 2004) have shown how two adult workers brought different dispositions to their work-related learning in the shared environment of the transport company for which both worked. The first, whose long-term career with the same employer indicated acceptance and recognition of his skills within the work environment, felt very threatened by the prospect of literacy difficulties being exposed. He therefore avoided training or learning opportunities which would take him out of his work environment. The second worker also worked within the same structures, but his disposition towards learning led him to seek out opportunities to strengthen the skills he felt he lacked, in overt ways and in new environments.

Similarly, two female employees in working in big chain food superstores demonstrated different ways in which their individual attitudes and dispositions affected their workplace experiences, career development and skills acquisition. The first was a checkout controller and the second a stock controller. Both of these workers were pleased to undertake additional workplace training offered by their employers, finding this kind of training very useful for both their present and future workplace and career developments. In other respects their attitudes differed, such as in their individual dispositions influencing their perception of their duties and responsibilities as well as their involvement and independence within their workplace environments. Not only was the first enthusiastic about her workplace training, but she was also continually looking for more opportunities to undertake relevant on-the-job training in order 'to do a better job'. For example, because she often dealt with elderly customers, she found out about and put herself forward for in-service *Training in Age-related Sales* at her workplace.

Conversely, the second employee's attitude towards workplace learning opportunities was one of acceptance rather than of enthusiasm. She was happy enough to take on in-service training opportunities offered to her by her employers, because it gave her confidence in what she was doing during her working day, but she was not prepared to take her own initiative and to develop additional skills that would be useful within and beyond her workplace. She said she was content with her job as it is. In this sense, her attitudes towards her duties are quite different from those of the employee who was continually seeking to develop her skills and the scope of her work.

Through these and other cases, the research has shown that dispositions and attitudes of individual workers may play an important part in facilitating the learning environment within the workplace. Interview data have indicated that a learning workplace is *co-constructed*, involving the following:

- intermediary support provided by employers, managers and supervisors;
- elements of the expansive (stimulating) workplace environment; and
- individual worker's roles, initiative and involvement.

4.11 Employers' Perspectives on Their Employees' Abilities and Dispositions

Employers' support and encouragement can facilitate employees' positive attitudes towards work, career and learning and influence the ways in which they understand and take advantage of opportunities for learning at work. By taking into account their employees' previous/current experiences, their dispositions as well as their cultural and educational backgrounds, employers can facilitate their employees' motivation and attitudes towards work and learning.

Some employers would look for generic or 'key' skills in prospective employees' right from the job interview. One employer, working in the area of social work, stresses the importance of skills such as 'good communication skills, listening, giving feedback, building good relationships with the clients [. . .], being able to organize things, etc.'. Such skills in employees would contribute to the development of both a friendly and a well-organised workplace environment. The employer notes that she always takes into account prospective employees' dispositions and personalities when employing people who intend to work with those experiencing various kinds of mental disorders:

> [. . .] when I meet someone usually I can tell from their [. . .] personality, [. . .] [whether they are] sensitive, caring, [. . .] understanding [. . .] non-judgmental, sensitive to things like equal opportunities and issues around race, gender, people's culture. They need to be aware of those kinds of issues, if people are aware of those, they need to be aware of the impact of mental illness in people's lives. And not be judgmental. You can tell if someone is coming across if they're being judgmental and then that isn't what we're looking for. We need people who can be quite accepting and show acceptance and tolerance, who can be quite encouraging, who are themselves quite motivated because if they come across as

> quite motivated, then I know they're going to pass that on into the work they're doing. That's going to come through in their work.

Recognition of personal (often tacit) skills and competences is one of the most important factors that facilitate the motivation of employees to use and expand them within their workplace environments. If the employees believe that their skills are appreciated by their supervisors and colleagues, they feel more confident in a variety of activities. Taking into account employees' dispositions, identities and backgrounds seems to be of importance in this context, as those factors may affect their motivation and readiness to deploy and develop their personal (tacit) skills. If employers are aware of such issues and take their employees' dispositions into account, this may help them to tackle more efficiently various problems faced by their employees, such as lack of confidence or feelings of uneasiness at work. In this context, the workplace environment could contribute to 'shaping' or changing their employees' dispositions through a number of approaches that could facilitate people's confidence and self-assurance:

> Well, I'd have to find out in which area they feel low; I'd have to try and understand what basically they're not confident in and to see how they can practise and develop the skills. For me, when someone says they've not got confidence [. . .] I think [. . .] the only way you get that is by doing whatever it is you don't feel confident about and doing it over and over. . .

Employers' support and recognition of skills are significant factors that may facilitate production and re-production of expansive and stimulating learning cultures (or environments) at work. However, the extent of employers' support and involvement may vary from workplace to workplace. Employees' personalities and dispositions can enable them to contribute to a 'stimulating or *expansive* learning environment or culture' for themselves, even without active support from their employers or supervisors.

4.12 Individual Workers' Dispositions Facilitate the Workplace Environment

Employees can contribute to the development of a workplace environment which is expansive for them by taking initiative in matters such as inquiring about opportunities for their further training or career development, sharing their experiences with their colleagues, contributing to the planning and conducting of various workplace activities (see Evans et al. 2004). Employees can, under certain conditions, develop stimulating and expansive learning cultures at work for both themselves and for others. The case of the supermarket worker and her initiatives in age –related sales has provided an example. Two part-time care workers from different care felt that their workplace environments do not provide many explicit opportunities for further learning and skills development. However, they claim that they themselves can actually contribute to facilitating learning while they work. Aspects of their individual biographies as well as their dispositions influence their attitudes to their

duties and help them to facilitate learning at work. One, for example, thinks that she could learn a lot from her own experience at work with ‘difficult clients’:

> I can work with all sorts of people. I get difficult clients, [. . .] I have to work around that. And it tests my patience as well, you know, [. . .] it just helps me to stay calm and just think I’m going to come across a lot of stuff like this.

The second care worker is also taking a university course in *Nursing and Social Care*. In her case, she is attempting to transform her workplace into a positive learning environment by deploying and further developing her professional and personal skills acquired as a result of her university studies. She thinks that her studies to become a professional nurse enable her to contribute better to her workplace environment. Workers’ personalities, dispositions and attitudes play an important part in facilitating learning cultures, even at workplaces where employees do not have many opportunities to learn from their colleagues or take part in additional workplace training.

The extent to which adults may be able or willing to contribute to the production/facilitation of learning cultures at work varies according to the workers’ attitudes, dispositions or aspirations as well as aspects of their individual biographies, cultural backgrounds, previous or parallel educational or workplace experiences and family situation. In addition, the workers’ contributions to the *learning workplace* can also be facilitated by such factors as employers’ support and skills recognition as well as various elements of the expansive workplace environment, for example opportunities for career development or additional on-the-job training.

As with other possible learning opportunities at work, whether qualifications act as ‘enablers’ of further development depends on the partly pre-established dispositions of the person concerned. Where the qualification is neither a means to an end which is wanted and recognised as valuable to the learner nor experienced as important in developing wider personal competences, engagement in the learning was low, as shown by the domiciliary workers in Senker’s project where some forms of learning are currently tied to the requirement to achieve compulsory qualifications. They will be required to take National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) because of government policy for all care workers.

The qualification was not well adapted to Careways workers’ specialised roles. It covered many tasks that these workers will never be required to carry out, for example tasks associated with work in residential homes. At the same time, it required only basic levels in skills in areas where they already have far greater expertise. NVQs are improved continuously, and some, but by no means all, of the deficiencies identified by our research have been addressed since it was completed. Differing experiences and dispositions result in widely varied reactions to the work and learning entailed in acquiring this qualification. Several employees in this case were reluctant to work towards achieving the qualification, although it had effectively become a ‘licence to practice’.

In all these and other cases, the possibilities for learning at work depended on the inter-relationship between individual worker dispositions and the affordances of the workplace, rather than on either, taken in isolation.

4.13 The Workplace as a Site for Access to Learning: the Contested Domain of 'Adult Basic Skills'

The significance of the workplace as a site for access to wider learning is often overlooked or underestimated. For many adults who would not consider attending a college or adult education centre, this is their most likely route to engagement in learning.

A highly significant, and contested, area is that of government-sponsored 'basic skills' programmes for adults. The insights into how adult employees learn and use their experience at work have been expanded by further research focusing on adult basic skills in a UK context. This research, also sponsored by the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme,[2] has the objectives of identifying when and how workplace programmes are effective in improving adults' measured basic skills, as well as their effects on other life-course variables (employment stability, earnings, promotion, enrolment in further educational programmes). It also aims to examine the impact on enterprises of sponsoring such programmes, in terms of potential improvements in productivity and changed attitudes or commitment to the organisation.[3]

4.14 Participation and Motivations to Learn

Given the significance of linkages between workplace-linked courses, workplace activities and learner biographies, a key question is whether learners whose participation in workplace 'basic skills' courses was essentially work related and who have clear career objectives are different in their experiences from those whose main concerns are with family and other aspects of non-work life. There are some preliminary indications that this may be the case, and it does seem clear that respondents who saw non-work reasons as most important were also less likely to report that the course had affected their work. The different motivations people bring to similar workplace-linked literacy/'basic skills' programmes are illustrated by two examples.

Mr. A was 44 years old and left school at 15 with four CSEs including maths and English. His parents had no formal qualifications. He is a technician for a snack food company where he has no supervisory role and has one child who is 8 years old. He has taken a Greek language course within the last five years but has had

[2] Award number, to 2008 etc.

[3] Face-to-face and telephone interviews are being used in collecting longitudinal data, from a sample of 500 adult employees over a period of 5 years and from fellow employees and managers. Analyses combine quantitative analysis using a range of outcomes (measured progress in basic skills, employment, attitude inventory changes, etc.) with qualitative analyses including detailed analysis of transcribed interviews and in-depth studies of learners carried out in selected organisations.

no experience of workplace learning. He has worked for this company for 24 years and works full time in a rotating shift pattern. He rated his overall job highly but was neutral about promotion prospects and training opportunities. He felt valued to some extent by his colleagues but less so by the company. His job was well defined, and there was little opportunity for him to suggest changes or volunteer for other tasks at work. When he saw an advert for a workplace literacy course, he signed up for it. The learning hours where 20 in total, and the reasons he gave for getting involved in the course were to increase his skills at home particularly to help is 8-year-old child and also to develop general skills for himself. The former was by far his most important reason. He did not think the course would help him earn more money or help him get promoted or a better job. He did not think there would be any benefits to the company from his training. One year on, Mr. A's job is unchanged, and he feels more or less the same about the different aspects of his job though he is slightly less happy with his level of pay and a little more happy with the training received. He now feels valued a lot by his colleagues though still only a little by his employer. He still feels there is no room to make changes at work or volunteer for alternative tasks. However, he has no intentions of leaving the company nor of changing his job within the company. Mr. A received no certificate for his course and felt that the course had had no impact on the way he did his job. In fact, he felt the course had had no impact on his confidence at work in his use of computer. He did feel that it had affected his life outside work, and this was in line with what he had hoped for, that is helping his son with homework. He also felt that it had increased his confidence outside of work a little. Mr. A felt that the course had met his expectations 'to some extent'. He has now moved onto a more advanced literacy course via LearnDirect. Again, the only real reason he gave for doing the course was that it increased his skills at home.

This example contrasts with that of Ms. E, who is 49 years old, white with English as a first language. She left school at 15 with no qualifications. Since then, however, she has obtained an NVQ Level 2 in care through workplace training. She has also done a computing course at work. Her mother was a qualified nurse and her father a qualified electrician. She is not looking after any children under 16 and has no other caring responsibilities. Ms. E worked full time as a health-care assistant at an NHS hospital, where she had no supervisory role. She had worked for the trust for 8 years at first interview, and her job involved rotating shifts. She gave a very high rating for her job overall, but was least happy with her pay and the amount of work. She worked with a relative small group of people, and she felt part of a team. She felt valued a lot by her colleagues but only a little by her employer. She felt that it is easy to volunteer for extra tasks at work and to make suggestions for changes, and she had volunteered to do something extra in the last few weeks. Ms. E attended a basic skills (literacy and numeracy) course at work for which she signed up voluntarily. She was quite happy to be able to do the course, and her reason for doing it was to improve her skills in general. She expected that the course would enable her to do her current job better and to learn new skills. She considered that the benefits to her employer would also be a 'more knowledgeable employee'. She expected to gain certificates in adult literacy and numeracy at the end of the course and stated that she would like to do another course at work when the current one was

finished. However, she thought that it was unlikely that she would do another course outside of work in the future. One year on, Ms. E is still working as a health-care assistant for the trust, but she has been promoted. She gives a slightly lower rating for her job overall, but rates her pay a bit higher. On the other hand, she is now unhappier with promotion prospects. She still feels valued a lot by her colleagues but not at all by her employer and states that it is hard to volunteer to do extra tasks at work. However, she has no intentions of leaving her current employer and intends to stay in the same job in the foreseeable future. Ms. E saw the main benefits she gained from the course were to learn new skills and to meet new people. She rates the course overall very highly. She thought that the course had totally met her expectations and that it was pitched at the right level. She obtained an L1 numeracy and an L2 literacy certificate and then went on to an NVQ Level 3 in care. The latter is compulsory (as in the cases of care workers reported in an earlier example), but she is very happy to be doing it, as she expects that it will improve further the skills she needs for her current job. She is also currently doing a 'Back to learning' course with the open university. She reported feeling different about education in general and intended to go on to further learning with the Open College Network.

Cases of this kind lead us to propose that readiness and motivation to learn can have many origins. In the context of literacy learning, longitudinal tracking and in-depth interviews have provided an important channel for exploring individuals' experience with, and strategies for coping with, literacy in the workplace and in their personal lives. These individuals' own perceptions of whether they are coping with their existing levels of skills within or outside work challenge straightforward assumptions, underpinning the UK government's 'Skills for Life' agenda, about the existence of large-scale skills deficiencies and their direct impact on productivity with a more nuanced approach that emphasises individual strategies for coping with literacy practices and their own literacy needs whilst highlighting those cases where skills gaps exist and where individuals have indeed been positively affected by workplace courses. In both examples, the creation of better opportunities for the use of increased skill and confidence by the introduction of some changes at work could have rewards for the employer as well as the employee. In the first case, the limited 'affordances' in the workplace combined with a perception that there is little room for action to change that on the part of the employee appear to ensure that, in the first case, the benefits of the employees' learning gains are mainly confined to his personal life and his ability to help his children, although he does feel more valued by his colleagues at work. In the second case, skills development at work has been paralleled by promotion, while the employee now appears to derive more satisfaction from learning than she does from her job. She expresses future goals and aspirations in the area of further learning, but few for moving beyond her present job.

4.15 Employees and Environments: Reciprocal Relationships

The ways in which employees' prior skills and knowledge, dispositions and personal backgrounds may affect their attitudes towards work and learning contribute to their success in their workplace and facilitate their participation in various workplace

activities and tasks. Employees' personal and educational backgrounds as well as skills they have learned from a variety of experiences influence the ways in which they carry out their duties and responsibilities, deal with various workplace situations, make decisions or solve problems. All employees bring their prior skills and understanding to their workplaces, and this affects the ways they perceive and perform their duties and responsibilities.

Employers' support and recognition of their staff's skills and competences are important factors that may facilitate their employees' confidence and self-assurance as well as their attitudes towards further training, skills deployment and acquisition. If the employees believe that their skills and competences as well as their individual backgrounds are recognised, they feel motivated both to contribute to and to learn from their workplace environment. This can encourage continuous positive interactions between employees and their workplace environments where employees' dispositions and personal backgrounds contribute to the shaping and reshaping of their workplace environments. At the same time, while taking on their duties and responsibilities as well as participating in workplace training, employees may undergo some changes in their dispositions, personalities and attitudes. Although employers' support could be an important factor in this context, the research has shown that employees' personal initiative can enable them to create a micro-culture of learning at work, even without their employers' active support and involvement.

Our findings suggest that a stimulating and expansive learning environment or a learning culture at work allows the employees to perceive themselves as part of their workplace, encouraging them to take advantage of further opportunities for learning at work. At the same time, all employees have lives outside their workplace environments, and this broadens their outlook and gives them many (or at least some) opportunities to acquire and develop a number of additional skills in an 'out-work-environment'. Various configurations of their everyday lives and experiences (e.g. family, education or travel) facilitate the development of their personal skills and competences that potentially may be used for the benefit of their workplaces.

In *Improving Workplace Learning*, Evans (2006) have pointed to the understandable tendency of policy makers and of workplace managers to see workplace learning as the controlled acquisition of predetermined skills, knowledge and working practices. Managers or government policy makers decide what learning should be done, how the success of such learning can be measured and how it will be developed. The risk with such approaches is the assumption of predictability about the impact of pedagogical interventions, across all relevant workers, in any targeted context. A different approach is needed – one in which employees'/workers' 'positions and dispositions' should be taken seriously. Engagement in learning activities is more likely when their significance for the learner, whether in terms of using their prior learning or in terms of 'readiness' to take up new opportunities, is taken into consideration, for example by providing some of the learning opportunities which they value, rather than those which managers assume they either need or should want. This means that much planning and activity should be responsive to the micro-conditions of specific working groups or contexts, as well as more macro-influences.

To be successful, it will need to pay attention to power differentials and workplace inequalities, as well as individual wants or needs. In short, the approach should be to encourage and facilitate learning through work, not directly impose it.

4.16 Towards a Social Ecology of Learning

Adult employees' experience of learning is rooted as much in biographical experience as in the contexts of workplace activity and culture. Many of basic-level employees' experiences of workplace learning can be described as 'compensatory' in nature in so far as they are frequently seeking to 'make up' for negative educational experiences in the past. Case studies provide differing examples of how workplace courses can respond to employees' shifting attitudes to learning:

- Workplace programmes are successful in enrolling adults with very little or no previous experience of formal post-school learning.
- The most important general outcome of course participation, a year on, is an increase in learners' confidence: most noticeably in work, but also outside work.
- The outcomes which learners expect from courses are, more often than not, different from the outcomes they actually report afterwards.

Exploring employees' perceptions of whether they are coping or struggling with their 'basic skills' in the workplace benefits from two different perspectives on the literacy levels of employees: the assessment scores which offer an independent measure of literacy as a set of skills and the learners' own perceptions of whether they are coping or struggling with their existing skills. Indeed, some employees indicate they have struggled to carry out aspects of their job as a result of poor literacy skills. Yet there are also many identified examples of employees who have coped sufficiently in the workplace with their existing skills, in which case the literacy component of the course is often viewed as a chance to 'brush up' on their skills (Evans et al. 2008).

Workplace courses can play an important part in engaging individuals who would otherwise be intimidated by studying in a college. Various advantages and disadvantages of undertaking a course in the workplace as opposed to a college become apparent as the overriding majority of learners have emphasised such factors as accessibility, familiarity and convenience as being key advantages of workplace learning. Other factors of major significance include the differing environments for learning in different organisations (including diverse strategies for promotion).

4.17 Formal and Informal Workplace Learning

Reflexive and interdependent forms of self-directed learning, going beyond simplistic versions that emphasise independent mastery of work tasks, may play an

important role as workers engage in and shape everyday workplace practices. Anglo-Canadian comparisons have focused on the ways in which small, medium and larger companies offer a variety of formal workplace education programmes. A common feature across all of the Canadian companies is the use of the term essential skills programming. Workers, instructors and employers all use this same term to describe a full range of content and curriculum. One of the key reasons for the inception of these formal programmes was that the company was in a period of growth or downsizing or technological change. These circumstances triggered the employer to offer the training programme or in some cases a worker group to request the training from the company.

In the larger and medium-sized companies, a much wider range of formal training programmes were provided to employees, which ranged from upgrading of high-school (school-leaving) credentials to public relations, teamwork and leadership courses. Some of these programmes were offered in a learning centre at the worksite. Not all were taught courses following a particular curriculum. Some were based on participation in work-related tasks leading to recognition of mastery in that task. For example, participants such as sewers, framers, fork lift operators and fish plant processors were enrolled in the GED upgrading classes at the worksite in preparation for the grade 12 equivalency examination (see Taylor et al. 2007). One particular company developed a provincially recognised Mature Student Diploma, with at least half of the actual material used coming from the organisation in question. In the smaller-type companies, training opportunities with instructors tended to be shorter types of learning experiences such as report writing, document reading, conflict resolution workshops and numeracy instruction.

In the UK cases, 'basic skills' provision often had to relate to large, multi-site organisation. Although the classes have been carried out at a wide range of sites, they are mainly held in various centres or 'Learning Zones'. Equipped with computers and training rooms, they aim to provide an inviting and non-threatening space for learning, which includes literacy, numeracy, GCSE English, IT alongside other courses. In one case, a training facility initially consisting of a small room with five computers expanded to a learning centre became a 'LearnDirect' (mediated computer-based training) Centre in 2002 and then moved to a large purpose-built building in 2004. The centre is also open to the local community. In addition to computer and skills for life courses and job-specific training, the centre also offers adult education courses which have been very important in attracting individuals from the company and community at large. In another food-processing company, literacy and language courses were union negotiated and offered as part of a company to upskill their existing workforce in order to fill promoted positions internally such as team leader.

One of the key findings was that employee participation in a formal programme acted as the catalyst for the various informal training activities that occurred back on the shop floor. Participating in an organised class or in a tutorial session heightened employee awareness of the importance to learn. This interplay between formal and informal training was synergetic, with instructors drawing attention to ways in which employees were re-awakened to their own learning capabilities, a process

which provided a different viewpoint about their workplace and their jobs. Greater assuredness in literacy skills can bring employees to the point of approaching job tasks in different ways.

Workers began to realise that they were on a pathway of learning. As Taylor et al.'s findings have shown, for some employees, the driving force for participation in the formal programme was the credential or chances of career advancement, but this external motivation shifted once they become engaged in the more informal learning. What fuelled this desire to learn without the structures of the formal programme was a viewpoint that the day-to-day work requirements could be done differently or better through self-initiated or team-initiated learning.

There was also evidence of an interplay between formal learning and informal learning, with both external and internal motivations combining in highly context-specific ways. An example is a UK employee in a food-processing plant, where she saw a very direct and tangible link between the formal course and the skills used day to day at work. The process of a 'flattening out' of management structures meant that she was increasingly required to take on more responsibility that also entailed increased paperwork. Her case also underlined some of the advantages and disadvantages of workplace-based formal courses: such training offers accessibility but can also be potentially negatively affected by pressure from managers/supervisors on employees to miss learning sessions in order to fulfil their duties in the workplace. This appears to have occurred to several employees in this particular organisation. Greater day-to-day job satisfaction was apparent in many of the UK employees who had participated in formal workplace courses and had developed a greater awareness of the learning potential in their jobs as well as their own abilities to learn. Longer term follow-up is indicating, though, that without advancement or some kind of external recognition stemming from the employee's engagement with a combination of formal and informal workplace learning, this satisfaction can be eroded over time.

4.18 Informal Learning

Five types of workplace informal learning emerged from these case studies. These are more fully discussed in Taylor et al. (2008). For the purposes of this chapter, these types are outlined for their significance in shedding light on the co-operative and mutually responsible activities that are engaged in within the workplaces of everyday life. The first type 'Observing from Knowledgeables' included learning a new task or the same job task in a different way from a more proficient co-worker or supervisor. This often meant that the worker self-identified a mistake or error in a job task and searched for an expert to observe doing the same task.

In one particular worksite, an employee mentioned that 'seeking advice from experienced co-workers on inspection quality standards, conformance with blueprints and drawing up of specs' was his preferred method of informal learning. On the assembly line, another worker described how he asked more experienced co-worker for his technical knowhow and advice for operating the machinery.

> 'Practicing without Supervision' was a second type. For the most part, workers sought after new experiences where they could practice a skill, like problem solving, or participate in the company in a new way such as joining a union or health safety committee.

A third type is 'Searching Independently for Information'. Workers often used their reading and computer-based skills to search for new kinds of information to help in meeting challenges presented in the routines of the work day. 'Focused Workplace Discussions' with peers and supervisors was another main type of informal learning. Employees used questioning and summarising skills to engage in workplace updates. This is closely related to 'Mentoring and Coaching', another type of informal learning. Most workers who taught a co-worker how to perform a job-related task reported that this was an important way of informal learning. They realised that they first had to talk through the steps of the job task and understand the sequencing before coaching another worker. Many employees said that they were aware of an increased ability to marshall and organise information mentally when demonstrating a task to another worker. Teaching someone else helped to develop 'a different perspective on how to do something and how to do it better'.

As an informal learning process, three patterns emerged: trigger events, attitudes towards lifelong learning and inner recognition which had parallels in the UK cases and are features that transcend national and cultural differences. The trigger events that prompted the informal learning were mainly related to a company ethos of quality performance and safety concerns within the work environment. Employees who belonged to companies that had a well-defined and visible learning culture wanted to perform better for the organisation or the customer. Most often, workers who had completed a formal workplace education programme returned to the factory floor with a heightened awareness that some work responsibilities could be done differently. Taylor et al.'s study drew examples from fish plant processors who became aware of another method for packaging a product or the leather cutters who realised that there was a more efficient way of communicating measurements with its satellite company in Mexico. These events triggered independent learning by and within the work group. Coupled with this was a certain attitude held by the workers about lifelong learning. Some employees had a curiosity about wanting to learn new things at the workplace. These workers believed they possessed the creativity and imagination to learn. Other workers 'exhibited an uncertain and tentative attitude toward learning. They felt more dependent on others for help and guidance and less prone to pose questions'. A third part of the process may be related to an inner recognition that the informal learning activity has personal and work benefits. This is supported by evidence on the enhanced self-confidence that workplace learning can bring. It is interesting to note that most employees were not motivated to learn informally for monetary rewards or the possibility of upward mobility. They were 'spurred on by the need for a challenge or variety in the everyday work routine'.

Particular to the UK database, employees' personal and educational backgrounds as well as skills they had learned from a variety of experiences in and out of paid employment influenced the ways in which they carried out their duties and responsibilities and dealt with various workplace situations. Yet this was not a deterministic

process. Formal workplace programmes had the potential to compensate for previously negative educational experiences and to raise awareness of the opportunities (or 'affordances') for further learning through everyday work practices, as discussed previously. Formal workplace programmes have the potential to compensate for previously negative educational experiences and to respond to individuals' shifting attitudes to learning, with spin-offs for engagement in informal learning. There is a need to consider how the wider organisational environment itself needs development if it is to support rather than undermine investment in learning. Workplace learning programmes need to be supported by working environments that are 'expansive' if they are to be successfully sustained. Promotion prospects and strategies seem to be important in sustaining employee motivation to take up formal courses in the longer term (although there are some notable exceptions to this among the UK cases); this is less so for engagement in informal learning, where the focus is on current job satisfaction. The extent to which these gains were sustained over time and were translated into gains for the employer was much more mixed.

4.19 Theory and Practice

Boud and Middleton (2003) indicate that workplace informal learning was traditionally regarded as being 'part of the job'. However, viewing workplace informal learning as part of the job masks the origins of an entire set of workplace skills and knowledge as well as the importance of the workplace environment. Due to rapid workplace changes, researchers are looking more and more into conceptualisations of workplace knowledge base that resulted from alternate, more continuous forms of learning. For example, Ellinger (2004) examines the concept of self-directed learning and its implication for human resource development. She acknowledges the benefits of self-directed learning in the workplace as relevant to both organisations and individual workers. Yet the contextually embedded nature of workplace informal learning is not captured by simplistic understandings of self-directed learning such as independent mastery of work procedures, but encompasses the inter-relationships between employees (as learners as well as workers), context and opportunities.

This workplace learning is a complex process that involves the interplay of employee agency, workplace relationships and interdependencies and the affordances of the wider environment. These variables in some cases promote rich informal learning, for example where 'doors are opened' to opportunities to expand and share knowledge and skills in supportive workgroups. In other cases, workplace discussions and mentoring/coaching can have unintended negative influences on learning, for example where the interdependencies of the workplace are undermined by feelings of lack of trust. Socio-cultural understandings of ways in which knowledge and learning are constructed from social interactions in the workplace (Taylor et al. 2007a,b; Billett 2006) problematise simplistic versions of self-directed learning and point to reconceptualisations that can embrace the interdependencies inherent in workplace practices.

Workers in this study clearly stated the importance of their newly acquired confidence in seeking out informal learning after participating in a formal programme. This confidence may be linked to what Bandura (1998) calls agency. A worker's agency changes as he or she successfully meets challenges in everyday work routines that require learning. At the same time, as Billett (2006) and Evans (2006) have shown, the exercise of agency personalises work by changing and shaping work practices. However, this confidence to take on new challenges is dependent on the extent to which workers felt supported in that endeavour. This support is provided not only by a superior but also through supportive co-worker relationships that are perceived to be important. As Eraut (2004) points out, 'if there is neither a challenge nor sufficient support to encourage a person to seek out or respond to a challenge, then confidence declines and with it the motivation to learn' (p. 269). As opposed to identifying productivity gains relating to both formal and informal training, it may be more advantageous to better understand employee job satisfaction and engagement with the workplace.

A wider framework for understanding the organisational context recognises that the involvement of employee representatives contributes to the expression of employees' interests and can reassure them that gains in productivity will not have a negative impact on jobs and conditions of employment, where this is genuinely the case (Rainbird et al. 2003). While learning needs to be seen as an integral part of practice rather than as a bolt-on, attention needs to be paid to the environment as a whole. Work environment as well as formal learning affects how far formal learning can be a positive trigger for further learning. A short-term timeframe and a narrow view of learning, dominated by measurable changes in performance, will not enhance the learning environment and can stifle innovation. The concept of a continuum of expansive and restrictive learning environments can be used as a tool to analyse and improve opportunities for learning, using a five-stage process as described by Evans (2006).

In the UK, the evidence to date suggests considerable diversity reflective of the complexities of the workplace context, variations in the quality of working environments and the differential positions of employees within workplace hierarchies. More fundamentally, from a theoretical standpoint, more reflexive and interdependent understandings of self-directed learning, going beyond simplistic versions that emphasise independent mastery of work tasks, are needed to make sense of the ways in which employees take engage in and shape everyday workplace learning.

Literacy, in many government initiatives, is perceived as clearly defined set of technical skills, the absence of which can impact negatively on an individual's economic and social opportunities. Research findings take issue with assumptions underpinning governmental discourses (found in most advanced economies) about the existence of large-scale deficiencies in literacy and numeracy that inevitably impact negatively on performance at work and suggest a more nuanced approach that illustrates the diverse range of techniques that are employed in literacy practices whilst highlighting those cases where skills deficiencies exist.

It may be more productive to think beyond the polarised conceptualisations of literacy and numeracy learning as either technical skills development or the expansion

of social practices, towards a more ecological understanding of the phenomena observed. A ‘social ecology’ of learning in the field of adult basic skills leads us to consider the relationships between the affordances of the workplace (or those features of the workplace environment that invite us to engage and learn), the types of knowledge afforded by workplace practices (including knowing how and ‘knowing that you can’) and the agency or the intention to act of the individual employee, reflected in their diverse motivations.

These are triangular relationships and mutually interdependent sets of interactions. There are affordances for learning in all workplace environments. Some are more accessible and visible than others. The intention of employees to act in particular ways in pursuit of their goals and interests, whether in their jobs or personal lives, makes the affordances for learning more visible to them. The knowhow associated with literacy practices such as report writing or finding better ways of expressing oneself and the confidence of ‘knowing that you can’ often develop as the person engages with the opportunity. The process of making the affordances for learning more visible itself can generate some employees’ will to act and use those affordances, and new knowledge results. In the shifting attitudes to learning, the changing levels of knowhow and the confidence that comes from ‘knowing that you can’ both stimulate action and the seeking out of affordances within and beyond the workplace in the form of further opportunities.

These reflexive relationships, as the cases considered in this chapter illustrate, point the way forward in developing a better understanding of literacy learning as part of a wider social ecology of adult learning in workplace environments.

4.20 What About Flexibility and Mobility of Labour?

This chapter began with the reminder that, despite the sense of control that workers may derive from holding positions in the labour force, work under Fordist production regimes was often alienating and disempowering. As Fordist production regimes has given way to post-Fordist flexible labour and economic insecurity, alienation and disempowerment take on different forms. Questions of individual responsibility often revolve around the flexibility, initiative and agency of workers linked to ‘flexibility’ portrayed as a positive virtue or set of attributes. Workers who have ‘flexibility’ in the labour market are seen to be mobile or potentially mobile in different ways. A European-wide typology of workers that are involved in job change via education and training showed that there is considerable variation in mobility experiences, positive and negative, according to how people are positioned in the labour market and in the social structure.

The types identified were broadly as follows:

Advancement-oriented, work-centred individuals: Predominantly males, ‘labour force entrepreneur’; frequent job moves geared to advancement; high awareness of key competences and knowhow

Precarious occupational biography in low-graded jobs: Awareness of social competences for adaptation to new work situations; little confidence in ability to

draw on other experiences or skills in new work situations, or recognition of their relevance, both males and females

Return to the labour market after occupational break for personal/family reasons: Predominantly stability-oriented females; awareness of competences gained outside work, but also knowledge that these are seen as equipping them for helping/caring occupations or low-graded jobs (women's work!); for males, awareness of wider life competences, but these are seen as irrelevant for work re-entry – in a different dimension

In or aiming for self-employment: Both males and females: high awareness of wide range of competences gained and exercised through experience, used to pursue business opportunities, in ways that do not rely on accreditation by others.

High-skilled professional career job changes: Usually entails moves to different roles, for example advisory or consulting, or resuming a professional career after a career break, with a focus on updating and regaining confidence and networks. Wider competencies gained outside work are valued retrospectively (understanding others' experiences) but irrelevant to work re-entry processes.

Most of this chapter has focused, purposefully, on lower grade workers, many of whom manifest higher levels of skill in their day-to-day work than are attributed to them in their job gradings. Added to these are the invisible workers of home and community, the millions of adults who carry out unpaid work of caring or community work which involves skill and knowledge that often goes unrecognised (see also Livingstone 1999). These are the workers for whom flexibility and mobility is often enforced, as they attempt to move between home and work environments or experience the harshest effects of downsizing. While labour market entrepreneurs style themselves as knowledge workers and add to their portfolio through mobility, their relatively insecure labour market position is often offset by their ability to command high pay and package and sell their experience in different ways. Such benefits are unusual for lower grade workers or those whose skills have been gained in settings that are disregarded by virtue of being outside the economic sphere.

Yet there are dangers in generalising here. Even though lower grade workers' jobs may have superficial resemblances, there are other important differences that arise from the social world they encounter in their day-to-day work lives. As Billett shows, these vary within occupations as well as between them, contrasting for example the experiences of the road-side mechanic with those of the co-workers in garage automotive workshops. The experiences of workers vary not only according to the distinctive features of roles but also according to the ways in which they are construed. These 'ways of construing' are unique to individuals as they are rooted in their personal histories. Prior experiences shape construal of the present activities (as shown in the definition of agency used here). This applies particularly to how and whether people view tasks as being above or beneath them and how they view opportunities for job or role change.

So far I have shown that the relationships between individual workers/learners and workplace and organisational practices and cultures are complex and significant. Individuals bring prior abilities and experiences to the workplace; individual dispositions influence the use of workplace learning affordances, and individuals

personalise their workplace environments and thus contribute to workplace cultures and practices which influence learning.

Workplace environments are as important as training methods and supervisory practices in developing adults' skills and knowledge, including their tacit skills. Labour market training agencies, employers and trades unions need to be better informed about the importance of learning of employee dispositions and workplace environments and the opportunities that remain untapped when they are neglected. Most of all, purposeful learning depends on the individual's readiness to engage and learn. This is often as strongly influenced by biographical and out-of-work factors as it is by workplace environments. Although workplace learning may have immediate or obvious relevance to job skills, the long-term impact of learning on adults' capabilities – and thus on productivity as well as on life satisfaction – will depend on out-of-work activities as much as on workplace participation.

There is a relational interaction between individual and social agency that mirrors the relationship between individual responsibility and social responsibility in work. Both agency and responsibility are personal engagements with particular forms of social practice, focused in different ways and engaged in with different intentionality. Views of shared social practices that assume that they are experienced in the same way and shape identities uniformly are not borne out by the empirical encounters reported here. As Billett (2006) has said, an individual's personal history provides a platform for their coming to know and making sense of what is encountered in workplaces. This sense-making process fundamentally shapes and reflects the person's intentionality and agency in ways in which they engage with work roles and the wider social environment.

Analyses of how individuals engage with the affordances of work – what work offers them and can do for them – shows that the distribution of affordances is, however, far from benign and is associated with the occupational hierarchies that operate with different degrees of visibility in organisations.

Work and learning are constructed in dynamics that operate in and through three overlapping scales of activity. As Lave (2009) has observed, whenever you encounter practice you also identify learning. The individual workers' activities and interactions that do much to change and to remake the practices (Billett 2006) are also fundamentally influenced by the conflicts in the wage relationship. Writers in the field of industrial relations distinguish between the unitary views of the employment relationship that see employees and employers as having an identity of interests (Fox 1966) and those that see conflict as inherent since workers and managers have different interests and power bases. According to Edwards, managers and workers are 'locked into a relationship that is contradictory . . . because managements have to pursue the objectives of control and releasing creativity, which call for different approaches'. So workplace learning (Evans 2006) is constituted in sites in which antagonistic relationships are expressed, but may also involve a degree of co-operation and the establishment of consensus.

The worth of work and their occupations to individuals has often been overlooked in sociological analyses that have focused on the conflict inherent in the employer–employee relationship. Noon and Blyton (2002) have shown that the majority of

people in most categories of jobs would continue to work even if there was no financial need. Work has a salience for individuals in affording opportunities to use their 'capacities as humans and contributors to workplaces and communities' (p. 87). In paid employment, how individuals direct their energies and capacities in their conduct of paid work is central to workplace performance. This is not the unthinking and disengaged deployment of skills, as the examples have shown.

People forge identities within and through their practices. The cases outlined in this chapter radiate different senses of themselves as particular kinds of worker as well as people with particular personal interests and commitments. These senses of self are thus many dimensional and represent the variety of ways in which people position themselves in relation to their employment and other purposeful activities that constitute work. Sense of self is realised through unpaid as well as paid work, whether in home family or community. All forms of work contribute to identities.

As Sennett (1998) has shown, the wider societal factors that drive the employer–employee relationship are oblivious to the personal goals of workers. The differential ways in which work of various kinds is valued in society reflects wider power relations. The processes of disempowering and deskilling in some large corporations have been facilitated by a dominant logic that emphasises the 'I' while losing sight of the 'we', leading people to blame themselves for their own dispensability They assume individual responsibility for situations beyond their control while remaining blind to the social regularities of their and others' situations. The potential for the exercise of social rights and responsibilities in and through work is a theme that can be expanded in relation to the livelihoods of communities adversely affected by social and economic changes. This includes redefining the roles of trades unions as bodies representative of workers' interests operating far beyond the confines of particular industries or workplaces.

The logic of social responsibility necessitates the humanising of social relations in the social practices and structures of work. These reflexive changes in the environments and practices of work demand new ways of thinking that go beyond preoccupations with the direct managerial surveillance and manipulation of work 'performances' towards better understandings of the ways in which people direct their energies and capacities in the social relations of workplace environments.

4.21 Summary and Conclusion

The worth of works and their occupations to individuals has often been overlooked in sociological analyses that have focused on the conflict inherent in the employer–employee relationship. Noon and Blyton (2002) have shown that the majority of people in most categories of jobs would continue to work even if there was no financial need. The significance of work for people is that they look to work to provide them with opportunities to use their capacities and to contribute to something beyond themselves as well as providing them with a livelihood. In paid employment, the ways in which people direct their energies and capacities in carrying out their day-to-day work lie at the heart of workplace performance and productivity. People

forge identities within and through their practices and experiences in and out of work. The cases outlined in this chapter radiate the different senses people have of themselves as particular kinds of worker as well as people with particular personal interests and commitments. These senses of self represent the variety of ways in which people position themselves in relation to their employment and other forms of purposeful activity that constitute work. Sense of self is realised through unpaid as well as paid work, whether in home family or community. All forms of work contribute to identities.

This is not to deny that many experiences of work and workplaces seriously disappoint and that in the longer term, repeated exposure to peer work environments can close down people's horizons and beliefs in themselves. Recognition of personal investments in work must not lose sight of the wider societal factors that drive the employer–employee relationship, which as Sennett 1998 argues are 'oblivious to the personal goals of workers'. The ways in which work of various kinds is valued in society reflect wider power relations. A dominant logic has also taken hold that emphasises employees' individual responsibility for their own performance over the inherent interdependencies of work – leading people to blame themselves for shortcomings and often, ultimately, their own dispensability. Through these processes, people come to assume individual responsibility for situations beyond their control while remaining blind to the patterns that keep repeating themselves, the social regularities of their and others' situations. Social rights and responsibilities have to be re-examined in the light of these well-documented patterns of vulnerability. This includes rethinking the roles of trades unions as bodies representative of workers' interests operating far beyond the confines of particular industries or workplaces.

Replacing the logic of individual responsibility with the logic of social responsibility points the way towards humanising social relations in the social practices and structures of work. The direct managerial surveillance and manipulations of work 'performances' that new technologies have made ever more possible are also generating resistance that promises to intensify further. The way forward, for companies that need the commitment and motivation as well as the skills and capacities of their employees, is towards better understandings the ways in which people direct their energies and capacities in the social relations of workplace environments.

Note

i. It is based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, including more than 100 case studies, from a series of projects led by the authors, including two UK Economic and Social Research Council projects on adult learning in work environments, and builds on analyses carried out in European projects involving partners in Belgium, Finland, Germany, Portugal and Greece (see Evans and Niemeyer (2004); Evans et al. (2004); Kersh and Evans (2005); Evans (2006)).

Chapter 5
Living at the Margins and Finding Ways to Work

How do people get marginalised by the broad sweep of social and economic change fare in the present dominant version of the meritocratic society? How can they be 'reconnected' and share in society's resources? If this has become a question of empowerment and responsibility rather than an issue of collective security, how is this empowerment and responsibility to be achieved by and for young people and adults?

These questions have a new intensity in the first decade of the 21st century. They are linked with identification of 'social exclusion' as a real and present danger and recognition of the importance of skills as 'protection' against it:

> People without skills are five times more likely to become unemployed than those with higher educational level qualifications; in the end employment goes to the employable.
> (Commission on Social Justice 1993, p. 175)

OECD documents emphasise the risks (and threats) of being among the 'knowledge poor':

> For those who have successful experience of education, and who see themselves as capable learners, continuing learning is an enriching experience, which increases their sense of control over their own lives and their society. For those who are excluded from this process or choose not to participate, the generalisation of lifelong learning may only have the effect of increasing their isolation from the world of the knowledge rich.
> (OECD 1997, p. 101)

In all European countries, the educational system is supposed to gradually lead people from school to a long-term paid occupation through planned measures of vocational education and training. This process is often a source of stability or instability experienced in adult life. Young people for whom this is a series of experiences marked by disappointment and failure consequently face reduced chances in the labour market and are at higher risk of dropping out of the social 'mainstream'. Individual risks and personal disadvantages are reflected in difficulties in finding a job or apprenticeship placement in the 'normal' way. Personal characteristics; gender; intellectual abilities; interests; school career together with social and environmental factors; financial, social and cultural resources and the economic structure of the area in which a person lives in are all factors influencing the process of transition from school to the adult world of gainful employment.

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_5, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

In the early years of adult life, trajectories have already been established for many. Some are in progressive careers, others in upward drift, stagnant or downward drift patterns. In Evans and Heinz (1994), the comparative evidence showed that these patterns have structural foundations in social class, gender and ethnicity. For others, unforeseen events interrupt the expected direction of travel. In these cases too, class, gender and ethnicity often dictate how vulnerable the person is to interruptions which may occur through life events such as sickness, relationship break-up or redundancy. Those with the most resources are able to insulate and protect themselves against the worst consequences of unforeseen interruptions. Poverty is closely associated with the risk of social exclusion. Adults are also beyond the reach of the educational systems that guide people into the labour market unless they voluntarily engage in them.

The questions about ‘barriers to participation’, therefore, need to be set in the context of a much wider analysis of the position of people in changing social landscapes.

5.1 Being Unemployed in Changing Social Landscapes

In the work arena, transitions to worker status are defined by institutionalised rules concerning recognised qualifications and credentials. Successful negotiation of these is heavily influenced by cultural and social ‘capital’, the resources which come from family background and social networks and are important in access to information, advice, social, financial and career support. People bring different approaches to life and work situations, as Chapter 4 showed, and success in negotiating these structures and networks can bring stability or instability to the life course. For those who are unsuccessful in gaining entry to jobs, long-term unemployment cuts young adults off from the opportunities of the market, from access to work-based qualification systems and from the exercise of citizenship in any significant sense (Evans and Heinz 1994). Even successful entry to the labour market can bring another set of limitations and instabilities. Early work entry can create premature foreclosure of options and stereotyped work identities. In England in the 1950s, workplaces were described in the Crowther Report (Ministry of Education 1959) as deadening to the minds of young school leavers. Lifelong learning policies of the late 1990s now talk of learning organisations. These are claimed to provide the model for the future, providing new opportunities for democratic access to knowledge. But only a small minority of enterprises match up to the model, while for those in the increasing ranks of casualised labour, training in narrowly based competences is unlikely to be of any use over time. Members of casualised pools of labour kept in ongoing insecurity and instability are also unlikely to be able to engage in full participation in society.

How did the changing employment situations of the late 20th century affect young people’s attitudes to work? For some time, there was a version of the ‘moral panic’ over the effects of unemployment of young people’s motivations to work. Although Britain was at that time the ‘unemployment centre’ of Europe, these fears

extended widely across Europe as youth unemployment increased everywhere with fears that a generation would be raised lacking the 'work-ethic'. In fact, the decline of employment opportunities for young people 'tightened the bonds' between education and employment in a host of ways. The expansion of post-compulsory education has produced new sets of structures and experiences between the end of the compulsory phase of schooling and first entry to the labour market, at ages up to the mid-20s.

Increasingly, these transitions are non-linear. They involve a range of temporary and transitional statuses, and experiences in one domain can fundamentally change or disrupt passages in the others. Many factors can combine to marginalise and exclude young people. While those without skills are most at risk, their 'social capital' is also a very significant factor. Those without skills but high social capital are helped and supported through transitions in ways which are not available to those lacking such capital. Previous research (Evans and Heinz 1994; Evans et al. 2000a; Evans and Niemeyer 2004) has also shown that the 'active behaviours' promoted for young people can be important in finding new possibilities for young people who are most vulnerable, while those in the most advantaged trajectories are often carried into jobs in the primary segments of the labour market almost without regard to their specific behaviours or personal initiative.

5.2 Social Exclusion and Lifelong Learning – New Policy Discourses

Patterns established in earlier life are carried through into the adult years, where they develop in more or less predictable upwardly or downwardly mobile spirals in relation to the labour market unless interrupted or redirected by life events or by transformative interventions.

Policies which aim to help people to raise their level of basic skills, develop new skills and renew their levels of confidence after periods out of the labour market or 'social mainstream' are based on evidence of the protective and 'risk-reducing effects' of skills, but it is a one-sided social analysis which looks only at the assumed deficits of individuals. This one-sided analysis asks 'what skills do people need to re-enter the standard routes into and through the labour market?' A more balanced analysis of social dynamics asks, whose problem is it to tackle the mechanisms which are 'detaching people from the social mainstream'? Increasing individual skills tends to 'change the order of the queues at the factory gates', but it does not materially affect the overall balance of inclusion and exclusion – in this respect, it is another zero-sum game. Individual problems require individual solutions; structural problems require structural solutions. Raising skills levels is important, but this alone will not tackle the mechanisms which are locking people out and detaching them.

'Lifelong learning' solutions are proposed in many countries. These recognise that formal educational systems are themselves part of the mechanisms that can

detach and exclude, and they aim to provide alternative educational routes or 'second chances'. These are the institutionalised, system-world versions of lifelong learning, sometimes seen as the 'sticking plaster' responses to more deep-seated structural problems. A second version of lifelong learning which has been gaining ground is that of learning as a biographical or lifeworld process, which involves negotiation of institutional settings for formalised learning but also recognises the power of experiential everyday learning which forms a 'biographical stock of knowledge' and dispositions towards the world.

What do these versions mean for the design of interventions for people who have become disengaged from the standard pathways into labour markets and are at risk of longer term detachment from the social mainstream?

5.3 Educational Interventions and Responses

Some interventions do not look to 'lifelong learning' as policy solutions. Interventions based on standard human capital approaches see strengthening of traditional forms of front-ended education and training as providing the best returns on investment (Type I below) or bringing 'drop-outs' back in (Type II). Interventions which draw on lifelong learning ideas (explicitly or tacitly) are Types III and IV.

Type I: expanded standard routes
These aim to improve foundations and remediate deficits in earlier schooling in order to hold young people in the mainstream system and enable them to 're-enter' the standard institutional tracks for initial vocational education and training. The emphasis is on 'retention'.

Type II: re-entry for those 'dropping out'
These are programmes specifically designed for drop-outs from the regular systems in order to bring them back in.

Type III: alternative institutional pathways
Pathways with an institutional emphasis which attempt to broaden and bring into the 'mainstream' alternative routes and pathways to achievement of qualifications – supporting re-entry by providing multiple doors and pathways to skills and qualifications for further training and work.

Type IV: holistic 'lifeworld' and community-based interventions
Approaches with a biographical emphasis, which aim to work with people's 'lifeworlds', promoting informal learning as well as skills development – involves broader processes of reconnection into the social life through multiple agencies and social support

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Examples of these approaches can be found in different shapes and forms. For example, within the western states of Europe, Belgium, Finland, Germany, England, Portugal and Greece, there are examples of these approaches, although their prominence varies considerably. Type I approaches aim for extension of the period of initial compulsory education and increased 'retention' in the standard routes. All of the northern European countries have adopted Type I approaches to some degree, although Belgium appears to have been more successful in securing an effective extension of the period of compulsory schooling than the other countries. Type

II approaches apply where there are highly structured transition systems with qualification hurdles which explicitly determine labour market entry or exclusion from it (e.g. Germany). Fitting more people into the existing front-loaded systems has been complemented in most countries by Type III alternative routes. This then presents the challenges of expanding the mainstream to incorporate the new routes, to counter the negative effects of ‘second class’ labelling and ensure their recognition. The English approaches to ‘foundation modern apprenticeships’ was an attempt to rebrand youth training programmes and establish them as part of a progression routes into the higher level ‘advanced (modern) apprenticeships’ and part of wider plans to expand educational participation in the 14–19 age band.

Type IV approaches are found principally in the voluntary and community organisations, third-sector non-profit organisations which play important roles in supporting disadvantaged adults in many countries. These organisations may be the lead provider of Type III programmes or may work in partnership with other providers in any or all of the types of provision.

The key questions that underpin these approaches are similar: what approaches can re-motivate people for training and education, to qualify them for the labour market and to enable them to participate as citizens? In general, programmes that aim to do this are designed as bridges between education and labour market entry.

5.4 Exclusion – Becoming Detached from The ‘Social Mainstream’

The problems of teenage mothers, street children and immigrant workers finding a place in vocational education and training in a risky European labour market are evident, but there are many more young people who are tired of school and averse to learning or training (see Evans and Niemeyer 2004). Many people who have lost the track of mainstream vocational education and training often lack the motivation for learning and look back on unrewarding, and sometimes humiliating, learning experiences at school. Working-class males face the most obstacles, because they are oriented towards early entry to paid work; females are more prepared to stay in further education. This is supported by the more or less dominant cultural expectations of the male breadwinner and the perception of adult status as linked to paid work. The attitude of young people in Europe towards VET depends on the attractiveness and availability of unskilled jobs as well as availability of skilled work in their region, but their motivation for learning and training is a crucial point everywhere.

Ethnic origin also is an important factor influencing social integration through the educational pathway followed. Inner European migration of ‘foreign workers’ in the 1960s and 1970s from the south of Europe to the north and now back after their retirement or recent migration movements from the eastern European countries or Africa to Europe produce special problems for young people. These have created particular forms of youth unemployment in most countries of western Europe. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that young persons who are going through these transitions are, at the same time, living through a biographical stage

of change and orientation in relation to the opportunities and expectations of the adult world. They have learning experiences but few working experiences. They share with others the aspirations to become legitimate participants in the worlds of adult relationships and employment. Finally, the geographical area shapes their access to the labour market: where there is a strong need for unskilled work, the importance of VET is reduced – young people can enter the labour market without special training. Countries with formalised VET systems hold up the importance of certificates for entering VET; those with rather informal training systems seem to be more flexible and open for less qualified young persons. Irrespective of the system, many young adults do not feel sufficiently equipped for the decisions they have to make about their futures. Lack of education and training also limits their possibilities to participate in social life in an enriching way. Yet young people marginalised by unemployment are often urged to take control of their lives in ways that are more challenging than those expected of students in higher education, who are offered ready access to guidance and support of all kinds.

5.5 Unemployed Young Adults: Empirical Encounters

One aim of the centre-left governments elected in both Britain and Germany in the late 1990s (Blair and Schröder 1999) was to 'interrupt' the revolving doors of training and short-term labour experience in which many young people entering training schemes were caught. In 1997 Tony Blair introduced 'New Deal' as part of the new social policy modelled on 'Welfare to Work', and this programme was the model on which the German counterpart programme 'JUMP' was moulded and brought into action in 1998 (Table 5.1).

Both schemes included measures for young adults in their transition to first vocational qualifications and employment and then for second transitions from training into the labour market. In contrast to former measures in both countries, 'New Deal'

Table 5.1 Options in Unemployment Programmes[i]

New Deal
Gateway followed by options

1. Education and Training
2. (subsidised) Jobs
3. Environmental Task Force
4. Voluntary Sector

JUMP

1. qualified vocational training
2. further qualifications for those without or with vocational certificate
3. subsidised employment for those with vocational qualifications
4. qualifying ABM (job-creation measure)
5. schemes for training and employment for young persons with special needs

and 'JUMP' – at least at first sight – attempted to tackle problems at different stages in the transitions of young people and recognised the variability of situations and requirements within the extended age range up to 25. The ways in which these were engaged in and experienced by the Anglo-German research participants were summarised in Chapter 2.

Although the outlines and rhetoric of the two schemes were similar, the structural features of the landscapes in which they were propagated differed substantially. In Germany the regulated and institutionalised dual system was still held to be 'outstanding in Europe' (Schröder 1998) despite an already long-standing crisis of the training system arising from changes in commerce and industry in the western and eastern parts of Germany. From the start of the JUMP programme, the German government made it quite clear that it would be an immediate and temporary programme to reduce youth unemployment 'for the time being'. Although faced with large numbers of unemployed young persons searching for initial vocational training at the time, Behrens (2003[ii]) showed how the German government believed that the situation in the youth labour market would benefit from impending demographic changes. Participation in the German programme was built on voluntary enrolment, but the ties of entering into some kind of training were linked to the highly institutionalised German system of vocational training and benefit regulations, which in practice minimised the scope for choice.

The British scheme 'New Deal' was introduced as a 'step-up' from the previous youth training schemes that had come to be regarded as offering little more than warehousing or poor-quality training. The New Deal has itself been reshaped several times in the light of new evidence about unemployment patterns and the employment barriers among young people and adults. The proportion of 16-year-olds entering the regular labour market at the end of compulsory schooling had fallen significantly in England. Improved levels of educational attainment at age 16, changes in employers' recruitment practices and the occupational structure of employment play important roles in the ways in which young people approach the end of their formal schooling and first work entry. Continuing concerns about the proportion of young adults who remain outside the post-compulsory education system and are also less likely to receive work-based training has led to various versions of the 'New Deal', calling for more responsibility from the state, employers, the training institutions and the young people themselves. The analysis of the problem for these young people has focused on their skills rather than on the lack of entry-level jobs, and the programmes have thus set out to motivate and prepare them for first labour market contacts or to update and continue the training of those who already have experiences in the labour market. In contrast to the German programme, the assumption in New Deal is that the process of breaking up 'old routines and cycles', by which many young people were affected by unemployment, have been 'churned' in and out of schemes and short-term work over periods of several years. According to the rubrics, young people in England have a 'choice' as to whether they want to participate in the programme. In practice, threat of losing benefits if they decline participation leaves most young adults without alternative but to enrol with the 'Gateway' or one of the options.

Chapter 2 introduced the key finding that young adults affected by unemployment in the English context also generally believed in the idea of a 'meritocracy' and that if you 'failed' in life, this was probably your own fault and down to a lack of effort and determination. The effects of social characteristics such as gender, race and social class were less visible to the groups surveyed in the English city. This is not explained by greater social equality in England, but by differences in perceptions of constraints in these contrasting socio-economic landscapes. This stage of the research showed, as expected, the unemployed groups scoring lower on the 'positive' self, control, agency and 'views of the future' indices and higher on the 'negative' dimensions compared with their peers in higher education and in employment. Nearly all in the unemployed groups scored low on the factor which reflected the extent to which career relies on interest, long-term goals, choice and planning, and all reported feelings of little control over their present career situation. The least sense of control was manifested by the young people in the eastern state, in the city of Leipzig. The young adults from Leipzig and from Derby attributed lack of achievement to their own perceived lack of skills and to their own weaknesses, to a greater extent than those in the Hanover group. Derby respondents recorded lower assessments of themselves compared with their counterparts in the two German cities. They felt less often confident, their personal lives were less positive and they doubted more often having good social skills. As noted previously, in the English city, the young adults felt that their own weaknesses mattered and that chance played the major part in their present situation. The uncertain status of people who were unemployed in the early stages of their adult life and unable to keep abreast of their peers who are in work or establishing homes and families of their own is reflected in a sense of frustration and in a readiness to buy the message that 'better qualifications' may provide a way out of such predicaments. Overall, the findings supported the thesis that highly structured environments are associated in people's minds with the idea of reduced scope for individual, proactive effort. In highly structured environments, opportunities are perceived to be open only for those following clearly defined routes. Consequently, it is those same structural opportunities or barriers that are held responsible by individuals for any failure. The English findings suggest that one consequence of an environment that fosters a belief that 'opportunities are open to all' is that people blame themselves for their failures in education and the labour market. In the highly structured western German system, external factors can more easily be held responsible for failure, giving people greater scope to develop a positive sense of self in early adult life.

The young people from the eastern states of Germany, despite placing great weight on external factors which influence people's opportunities in the labour market, often ascribed failure to themselves as individuals. While this finding may be regarded as contradictory and unexpected from the perspective of reference group and attribution theory, the fact that this generation suddenly had to invent new 'scripts and routines' for themselves after the political changes and had to evaluate themselves in relation to western norms and expectations may explain these patterns. With their feelings of lack of control and disbelief in equality of opportunities, it is

not surprising that this group had the most negative view of what the future held for them.

The finding that young adults' attitudes rarely reflect fatalism is reflected in their strivings to find ways to cope and to overcome difficulties, often short-term survival ones.[iii] Looking at the phenomena from a perspective which starts with agency, without losing sight of structuration as it operates in the changing socio-economic environments of the three cities, the possible explanations appear more multifaceted than those suggested by studies which focus on structural influences *or* on individual action, as alternatives.

'Choice biographies' and life project construction were not in evidence for most of the young adults in the unemployment settings covered by this research. Their progress may be seen as 'aimless' or 'drifting' from the outside, but the evidence showed that personal struggle was an expression of agency at a day-to-day level. Furthermore, the personal histories showed how social institutions and structures tended to work 'for' young people on the established routes into primary labour markets, whether they exercised active behaviours 'proactively', while working 'against' those in the grey areas of the secondary labour markets and underemployment. In Germany, the research of Konietzka (2001), Lauterbach and Sacher (2001) and Büchel et al. (2000) in other contexts support these findings, which are further elaborated by Behrens (2003) and Behrens et al. (2008). Exercising proactive behaviours against the odds is one way for young people in precarious positions to break through the multiple barriers that face them, but policies based on this often amount to making the strongest demands for self-responsibility and initiative on those who are in the positions of least power, with unemployment problems often compounded by poverty, health issues, family relationships and other circumstances. For the policy communities, the most significant challenge is to move away from 'deficit' approaches which start with an assumption that motivation and aspiration are lacking and therefore need to be developed. Policies need to recognise the evidence that motivation and aspiration are often already present in the lifeworlds of young people but will be channelled in ways including those regarded as socially undesirable if they are frustrated, denigrated and 'passed over' in the official system world. How different these so-called special measures would look if this were the starting point for the formulation of future policy.

Young people's experiences and viewpoints are important for all relevant users and practitioners in this field. In particular, these and similar findings can inform strategies for supporting young adults in 'pushing the barriers back' further, providing advocacy for and with them while strengthening independence, self-confidence and citizenship.

5.6 Unemployed and Underemployed Adults: The UK Context[iv]

Many adults are casualties of the downsizing and organisational 'restructurings' and closures that are by now familiar features of the social landscapes in the western economies if not worldwide. Some of these adults participate in vocational training

(outside higher education), when finding themselves unemployed or underemployed and seeking employment or change in employment. The increased amount of attention now being paid to non-formal learning has led to a number of evaluations and studies of initiatives for adults who are non-formal or part of a continuing vocational training curriculum that draws on prior learning and experience in both paid and unpaid works.

The UK government projected a commitment to lifelong learning in the 1999 White Paper, *Learning to Succeed*, which foregrounded opportunities to learn throughout life. These were portrayed as enabling people to play a full part in developing their talent, the potential of their family and the capacity of the community in which they live and work. Everyone, it was argued, no matter what their age or employment status, should have the opportunity to learn throughout life. In practice, national governments' lifelong learning policies have tended to focus on workforce development, wider participation in formal learning (particularly certain groups who have traditionally not participated in post-compulsory education and training) and raising the proportion of adults who have basic skills and qualifications.

Yet there has also been increasing attention to non-formal learning, although it is usually perceived to be the 'first step' on an educational ladder leading to formal, accredited education. In governmental agendas, supports for non-formal learning are often viewed as means to the end of 'progression' in levels of certificated skills rather than as necessarily valuable in their own right. These initiatives are to be found mainly in community-based education, often organised through further education colleges and local voluntary organisations.

The lifelong learning policy stances of the early 21st century are underpinned by a number of presumptions. Dominant amongst these is the presumption that a lack of qualifications or basic skills (rather than a lack of decent jobs) is often associated with social problems such as poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. In this context, there has been a tendency to separate the 'non-learners' from the 'learners', with the former tending to be positioned as having negative attitudes or lacking in motivation to improve their labour market position by their own efforts. At the same time, policies highlight the need to raise the qualifications levels for adults in the workforce, within a logic that links this to the nation's economic competitiveness. Several economic 'realities' are linked to this logic, although these are themselves widely contested: that 'jobs for life' no longer exist, and people are likely to change employment many times throughout their working lives and will need to learn new skills; qualifications are increasingly in demand and the proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs is decreasing; the rapid pace of change in information and communications technologies requires people to update their skills; and employers increasingly value employees with the 'right' skills.

Within the UK, these features of the labour market are reflected unevenly in particular employment sectors:

- The decline in employment in the manufacturing industries, mining, the utilities and agriculture is expected to continue.

- Employment in the engineering sector will reduce by nearly 25% between 1997 and 2007.
- The fastest growing employment areas are those concerned with public services such as health and education, personal and protective services and business services including advertising, consultancy, accountancy and law.
- An increasing proportion of jobs is part time.
- Self-employment accounted for an increasing proportion of total employment by 2007.

The argument that an increasingly well-qualified workforce is needed as a response to these trends was translated in England into National Learning Targets set by the Skills Task Force. These lay out the system world expectations that individuals should become more adaptable and flexible, as well as responsible for their own learning and career development. The emphasis on individual responsibility has been one of the key, underpinning themes of these governmental policies.

5.7 Lifelong Learning and Unemployed Adults

Recent initiatives in encouraging ‘non-formal’ learning opportunities and forms of provision for adults have become part of the educational landscape in the United Kingdom, as part of this current emphasis on lifelong learning. Promotion of ‘new pathways of learning’, particularly in the further and vocational education sector, aims to widen participation in education and to attract groups of learners who have not traditionally participated in post-compulsory education. The rhetoric of widening participation and lifelong learning had become more pronounced throughout the 1990s and influenced non-advanced further/vocational education much more pervasively than the universities, where its impact is uneven. Prior to these trends, non-formal learning was associated with adult and community education, a sector that was more associated with radical and progressive education initiatives.

The (recent) history of adult education within the UK has left a legacy for current adult educational initiatives and non-formal learning in particular. Adult education grew in popularity from the 1960s, and courses for adults were offered through the Local Education Authorities, ‘extra-mural’ departments of universities (see Chapter 3) and the Workers Educational Association (WEA), a trade-union-affiliated organisation that ran local courses in a range of popular subjects. Adults who took these courses were either pursuing personal interests or embarking on ‘access’ courses that could offer accreditation recognised as entry to degree-level studies in universities. There were a large range of non-accredited courses on offer, through the WEA in particular.

The legacy for today’s adult education sector stems from its progressive stances associated with radical educational theories, such as those of Paulo Freire. Adult educators were often left wing and/or politically active: feminist activists and academics, for example, helped establish women’s studies courses in the WEA and extra-mural departments in the early 1970s (see Thompson 1983; Williamson 2001).

So although the philosophy of adult education had, at the time, some similar aims to those espoused by lifelong learning activists of the present time, it was much more politically motivated at the grass roots. Partly in response to this, the adult education sector came under scrutiny when a Conservative government was elected in the 1980s. The Thatcherite policies of that period effectively undermined progressive adult education through reduced funding of public sector services. This corresponded with the recognition that a more highly skilled workforce would benefit the economy, and the government began to suggest that the education system was failing in this respect. Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, the numbers of adult education courses decreased, and the types of courses on offer changed. Employment-related and vocational courses increased, such as access courses in business studies or IT skills. The WEA could no longer afford to offer as many non-accredited courses, locally, to relatively small numbers of adults.

The government's steer was to tie funding to 'relevant' courses that could lead to employment or further education for adults. As John Field has suggested (1995), this is an example of the 'focused purchasing power of the state', which has effectively ensured that the model of contemporary adult education is at least employment focused if not 'employer-led'. Current education policies are often a response to what the government considers to be (directly or indirectly) in the interests of employment and employers.

However, many adult educators and researchers are highly critical of government policies in post-compulsory and adult education, particularly in relation to the market-based and target-driven approaches to learning that are being encouraged. Williamson (2001) has argued that the discourse and commitments of lifelong learning that are now dominant are both wider and narrower than those that have preceded it through the 'Great Traditions' of adult education and riddled with contradictions as the aims of 'personal growth and the development of a decent, fair, cultured and democratic society' compete with the employability of people in labour markets whose structures and opportunities are designed to meet the needs of employers for employees equipped with the skills and competences they require (pp. 19–20).

By the late 1990s, two strands of argument in the lifelong learning literature had developed (see Coate and Evans 2002). One strand of the literature promotes lifelong learning as a key instrument in developing a competitive workforce and emphasises the economic benefits of the development of a multi-skilled workforce. The other strand promotes personal development and growth through learning throughout life and enabling everyone to have the opportunity to learn. There are tensions between the emphasis on the individual as responsible for meeting their own learning needs and the recognition that social networks and community groups can play an important role in facilitating learning, personal growth and social contribution.

Both strands of the literature are concerned with social exclusion to some extent, but from different perspectives. In economic arguments, social exclusion is a problem because it is associated with poverty, low skills and unemployment. From the perspective of lifelong learning for personal development, social exclusion is an indication that not everyone has equal access to educational opportunities and the personal benefits that accrue from them. The UK government has continued

mainly to encourage a market-based model of provision for increasing participation in education, even though the evidence suggests that established patterns of non-participation are difficult to interrupt.

5.8 Non-formal Learning and Widening Participation

Non-formal learning initiatives are increasingly seen as providing ways into raising the 'employability' skills of the adult workforce, particularly those described as hard to reach by other means. Yet given the history of adult and community education described above, many educators working in the sector are more likely to value and promote personal development and growth as the key outcomes of learning rather than qualifications (although they have been encouraged to record learning outcomes, as will be discussed below). Non-formal learning thus tends to be most valued in the official 'system world' for the contribution it can make to increasing participation in formal education, although many studies have revealed a complex picture of participation that does not lend itself to simple solutions.

A large-scale survey for the UK National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (2000) found that certain groups of the population continue to have negative feelings about formal education in spite of the reforms intended to reduce barriers and to widen participation. Those who are under-represented in formal education are manual workers, adults from lower socio-economic groups and older people (Edwards et al. 1998). The National Adult Learning Survey series, commissioned by government and used to inform their adult education funding policies, has highlighted the role that community-based learning can play in raising adult participation levels. These surveys, undertaken in the early years of implementation of lifelong learning policies in the UK, found (DfES 2001a) that

- participation levels are lowest amongst certain groups: people aged 70+, respondents with no qualifications, those looking after the family, adults with a work limiting disability, those receiving government benefits, and people living in deprived areas;
- negative attitudes to learning were influencing the behaviours of some non-learners, but non-learners faced other practical difficulties such as lack of time, financial difficulties and perceived inadequacies about their reading and writing skills;
- many respondents who had taken up learning opportunities were motivated by increased confidence and self-esteem, particularly for those not in paid employment; and
- those engaged in voluntary and community activities were more likely than others to have engaged in learning.

Those groups that are not participating in formal education are becoming stigmatised as 'non-learners' within a society that places a high value on credentials (Smith et al. 2001).

Recent studies shed further light on the question of whether non-formal learning opportunities can help reach those who have been stigmatised in this way

5.9 Outcomes of Non-formal Learning

A study of informal learning (Cullen et al. 2000), commissioned by the UK government, found a variety of benefits of non-formal learning opportunities. It suggested that learning outside formal education and work could

- help increase individuals' self-confidence and improve their social skills;
- contribute to an increasing commitment to citizenship, social identity and social capital; and
- attract particular groups of people with a common need or shared expectations (such as ethnic and faith communities, disability, old age, parenting, environmental protest, community regeneration, health and leisure).

The study found that participants often did not perceive themselves to be 'learning', particularly in unstructured settings. However, such learning was found to enable people to 're-package' themselves through increased self-confidence, improved social skills and better meta-cognitive skills (learning how to learn). The researchers also suggest that barriers to continuing participation include the lack of opportunities to apply skills learned, negative attitudes of prospective employers and poor support infrastructure whilst learning. Finally, the study suggests that there is a need for more 'sophisticated' assessment methods of non-formal learning, particularly through the adoption of criteria-based approaches and the use of normative assessment measures (Cullen et al. 2000: 2).

5.10 Recognition of Non-accredited Learning Achievements

Increasing attention has been given worldwide to developing methods for recognising and validating non-accredited achievement. This has obvious advantages for policy makers – less demanding on resources and more realistic than requiring adults to 'return to school' to develop qualifications to do what they are already doing (a process for which many are unlikely to be unmotivated). When this acts as an 'enabler' rather than 'container', it also has the potential of motivating people towards up-skilling. In this sense, it is often included in the battery of measures designed to 'empower' of adults, not only in the UK but also, prominently, in countries such as France and Portugal. The Learning and Skills Development Agency in the UK has conducted a 'Learning Outcomes Project', with NIACE, based on extensive research and close working with the trainers and students in seven case studies of non-accredited learning programmes. The case studies represent a range of different learning environments for adults, including Local Authority provision, Further Education colleges and the voluntary sector (including the WEA). They were chosen

on the basis that the practitioners involved have been interested in recording the achievements of their learners and have been developing systems for doing so. This interest is not just academic: as funding is tied to whether 'learning outcomes' are being met, the practitioners must develop ways of demonstrating achievement if they are to maintain funding. The Learning Outcomes Project has closely followed these developments and has reported on the findings of their work with these case studies (Greenwood et al. 2001). The project team identified uncertainties in these processes. These include an understanding of how learners benefit from the process of recording and validating achievement and how to measure learning outcomes. They highlight one of the fundamental tensions at the heart of their project: how to negotiate the requirements of funding and quality assurance mechanisms with the needs of diverse adult learners:

> It is worth emphasizing that the sheer diversity of learners and learning programmes presents a major challenge to the development of systems intended to meet learners' needs and to reflect their responses. It cannot be assumed that men and women with unique life experiences and from differing cultural backgrounds will respond in the same way or with equal confidence to self-assessment processes and questions
>
> (Turner and Watters 2001: 103).

5.11 Community-Based Learning

Another relevant UK research study is informative for an understanding of how the premise of individual responsibility of the learner translates into policy and practices. This is an evaluation of the promotion of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) in the community, and it highlights the potential of community-based education (SQW and NOP 2002). ILAs were launched nationally in 1998, with the objective of developing a greater commitment by individuals and employers to lifelong learning by providing individuals with funds for training. After initial problems of fraud with the national scheme, in January 2001 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) provided funding to community organisations to promote the take-up of ILAs within the community and then commissioned an evaluation of their impact. This evaluation reached several key conclusions:

- The community groups felt it was important to focus efforts to promote training opportunities to those in low-paid and low-skilled work or women returning to work.
- A lack of confidence was the major barrier of those targeted, especially for those who had long been outside of formal education or who had negative past experiences of education.
- The benefits of ILA-funded learning were gains in self-esteem, confidence and communication skills.

In addition, in comparison with the national scheme, the community-based ILAs were more successful in encouraging certain groups of people to take up training opportunities. These included those over 50 years of age, those with few or no

qualifications and those from black and minority ethnic groups. This finding suggests that community organisations could make an important contribution to policy goals of widening participation, when their ability to engage adults is combined with access to additional funds through entitlements of adults to 'individual learning accounts'. What has to be avoided, however, is over-reliance on the ILAs as a source of funding, in ways which make it difficult for community organisations to preserve their infrastructure and the very features that render them able to engage these adults in the first place. If they simply become another player in a field of market forces, competing to attract the modest funds attached to adult learners in order to maintain the viability and continuity of their infrastructure from year to year, the unintended consequence is destruction of the very features that appear to offer a glimmer of hope for genuine widening of participation.

5.11.1 The Adult and Community Learning Fund

The final research study to be considered here is an evaluation of the UK Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF) (Tyers and Aston 2002)[v] which lies outside the reach of traditional educational organisations'. From 1998 to 2002, the ACLF supported 400 projects with £20 million and was then extended to fund another 187 projects with a further £10 million.

The ACLF has enabled voluntary sector and community groups to obtain funding for their provision in partnership with mainstream providers of education. The organisations that successfully bid for ACLF funding were mainly not-for-profit organisations (57%), such as charities and community-based groups. Local authorities or further education colleges were the lead institutions in less than 15% of the projects. The ACLF has therefore made a fairly substantial impact on developing adult learning in the community. Some of the key findings of the evaluation were as follows:

- All of the ACLF funded projects were successful at reaching 'hard-to-reach' learners, including people from minority groups, older people, people with learning difficulties, the unemployed and those from particular neighbourhoods.
- Half of the projects offered courses leading to a qualification.
- Sixty-six percent of the projects focused on activities concerned with basic skills needs.
- Fifty percent focused on 'building bridges' to learning.
- Around 33% worked on developing computer skills and/or work-related skills.
- The projects made a positive impact in terms of 'soft outcomes,' such as the level of confidence of learners, increased self-esteem and attitudes to learning.
- The projects that were most likely able to demonstrate harder outcomes (e.g. number of participants gaining qualifications or entering employment) were longer in duration and received larger grants.
- About 80% of projects whose ACLF funding had ceased were continuing with their activities.

With discontinuities in the funding for non-formal learning initiatives, and the rapid changes in policy in the sector, many of these programmes have proved unsustainable in the longer term.

One of the key points highlighted by these studies is that adult education in the UK has moved in the direction of individualised approaches to learning and accreditation. Whereas traditionally the adult education sector argued in favour of student-centred approaches to education on the basis that these were empowering, government policy has promoted the notion that individuals are responsible for enhancing their 'employability' through learning. Yet this individualised approach tends to position low-skilled individuals as deficient and in need of better skills and qualifications: an approach that can hardly be called empowering. Those who claim that empowerment for adults can and should be achieved by means that are closer to the traditional values and missions of adult education have been challenged to justify their existence in the current climate of credentialism.

5.12 The Potential of Situated Learning: From 'Communities of Practice' to 'Learning Communities Centred on Practice' (LCPs)

Situated learning theories offer alterative approaches. They also refocus our attention on the realities of learning in their insistence that learning cannot be separated from the social and ideological contexts in which it is embedded and constructed. Socio-anthropological perspectives came into the theoretical frame in the 1990s with Lave and Wenger's (1991) influential studies of workplace interactions and the ways in which workers' skills were constructed, recognised and ascribed value in workplace environments and communities of practice.[vi]

Evans and Niemeyer worked towards an expanded set of constructs that differ from Lave and Wenger's concepts in some significant respects, to address the particular characteristics of learning programmes designed to support the often troubled or interrupted processes of entering or moving between learning and working environments. Our constructs highlighted the following features, while recognising the socially situated nature of the learning:

- The individual biography of each person is highly significant for their engagement in the learning environments and 'communities' in question.
- The programmes' explicit goals are to foster learning, in order that people can move through the programme and move on. The communities are therefore communities of learners, and the primary goals are learning and moving on.
- The concepts of 'novice' and 'expert' do not have the same salience as in communities of practice: newcomers bring capabilities with them; they participate, move through and eventually move on with strengthened capabilities, which they share on the way. Expert status in this context comes with the responsibilities for creating and maintaining the environment for full participation.

The expanded concept of situated learning encompasses these features. Engagement in the intended learning is often the single biggest challenge, since without engagement there is no motivation and no learning. Our expanded concept thus sees learning as situated in three ways:

1) in practical activity;
2) in the culture and context of the workplace/learning environment; and
3) in the socio-biographical features of the learners' life.

The social theory of situated learning presupposes the community being ready and willing to open for newcomers/learners on the one hand and their sharing of the meaning of the common activity and the underlying values on the other. Thus, it appears to be highly idealistic and optimistic. While this idea highlights the social dimension in the process of learning, it does not sufficiently reflect

– questions of power and hierarchies;
– questions of selection and exclusion;
– structures of educational systems; and
– questions of individual abilities and limits to learning.

Situated learning, in Evans and Niemeyer's formulation, builds on a set of methods situating learning in a meaningful context and describing a process aimed at full participation of the learner. Learning is seen as a product of the activity and the context in which it takes place. It is a social process and involves participation in **learning communities centred on social practice**. For the purposes of this study, these 'LCPs' are built on expanded ideas of situated learning which are appropriate to marginalised groups and extend significantly beyond the formulations of Lave and Wenger (1991).

The concept of LCPs builds on the outstanding importance of the community for processes of situated learning, but transfers it to the specific conditions of the adult or young person on the margins of the labour market. To experience reconnection, those who have experienced marginalisation have to share in the purposes of the common activities in which they are supposed to engage. Furthermore, they want real work experiences and responsibilities. The idea of a learning community centred on practice plays an important role, because it helps to rebuild an identity in the working context. It is able to accommodate the diverse needs of people whose individual histories, abilities and aspirations for themselves and their families might not be met by the mainstream vocational education and training at offer. LCPs thus offer more holistic ways of learning that value the lifeworlds of people, aiming at a balance between the challenges of authentic work contexts and the time and space necessary for transformative learning.

5.13 Situated Learning and Competence Development

Theories of learning have been developed predominantly with the perspective on established learning settings. Still in many cases, these are exactly the settings of

learning in which people have previously experienced failure, which means that they are not the best places for positive engagement or forging new senses of themselves or their abilities. The concept of situated learning questions the classroom as unique location of learning processes and stresses the importance of other learning surroundings. It values informal ways of learning and stresses the potential of unintentional learning settings.

It is based on the importance of work experience and practical action for the enhancement of processes of learning and understanding, which are common to theories of vocational education and training, but shifts the focus from the individual to the social components of learning. The concepts of situated learning allow for an extended view on competences and competence development. Situated learning is not about specialised training of single skills, but about experience and competence in participation. This includes the process of acquiring the cultural attributes of participation: values and beliefs and common stories and collective problem-solving strategies of the LCP. It thereby offers an enhanced view of competences, integrating social, personal and vocational.

The educational biographies of 'disadvantaged' adults are usually shaped by social difficulties and barriers of various kinds. In vocational training preparation programmes, therefore, an important social purpose exists quite apart from the task of developing skills or wider vocational qualification. Here not only vocational skills are imparted, but also the promotion of social competence and personality-building activities is of just as great importance. While 'normal' vocational education and training particularly aims at the achievement of occupation-specific and technical qualifications, programmes must go above and beyond technical qualifications, to offer as broad a work re-orientation as possible and, particularly in the sense of a holistic education, enable people successfully to take up, continue with and complete a vocational training. As important as vocational skills development is the chance to grow in an LCP, a learning community centred on practice, and to support people on their way to full participation. In theory as in practice, learning and socialisation are difficult to separate. We argue that not only is learning an individual act but also learning processes are emergent from the social contexts in which they are situated. Learning therefore is not only a question of knowledge transfer but rather a question of allowing people to participate in social situations where they are accepted as members with a potential to contribute and to grow in knowledge and capability.

As argued earlier, learning processes are themselves situated in three ways:

practically

- including work practice in a meaningful context/meaningful work;
- the learning community on practice;
- the individual access to programmes;
- the time and space provided for learning; and
- power relations and hierarchical structures within the learning community.

socially

- including the LCP holding a shared responsibility for learning and personal development;
- the adjustment of the learning context to learners' world and experiences;
- the links between programmes or chains of support;
- the integration of social and vocational education; and
- the working conditions in general.

culturally

- including a shared responsibility for the engagement of people by all institutions, agencies and companies concerned;
- the established VET structures; and
- the history and culture of VET.

The concept of situated learning itself is socially situated. If applied uncritically, it can help to serve strategies of new qualification policies exclusively dominated by workplace and employers demands, neglecting any responsibility of the established agents of education. It is self-evident that the problem of social inclusion will be sharpened and then solved by such arguments and strategies.

Long-term unemployed people re-entering the labour market have continuing needs for learning support. It can be argued that trust, engagement and awareness build the foundation for the development of competences in an LCP, as explained further in Chapter 2. In the context of LCPs based on our expanded concept of situated learning, the aim is to move on and through the community, rather than from 'novice' to 'expert' status within it. Increasing engagement, gains in social confidence and a growing range of skills mark this process. Full participation would then also mean sharing in responsibility for the collective growth of the community, and a limited learning capacity should not restrict the level of participation.

Expanded concepts of situated learning have to include the question about the critical dimension of participation and the direction of a learning process. Participation thus includes the right to criticise and the ability to learn how to criticise constructively and thereby influence and shape the values and strategies of an LCP.

5.14 Improvement of the Situation of People Threatened with Social Exclusion – Limits and Possibilities

Situated forms of learning cannot on their own improve the material conditions of people. If the material and social conditions of people stretch them beyond their capacities to cope unaided, then high levels of risk continue. Interventions must therefore go hand in hand with measures designed to alter aspects of the material and social environments that keep young people at risk. These may include access

to suitable low-cost accommodation, various kinds of training allowances and social support made available in supportive and easily accessible ways.

What programmes that involve situated learning can do, under the right social and material conditions, is to help with developing more positive learner identities. As Stephen Ball and colleagues (2000) have found, many leave initial education with identities as 'non-learners', their appetite for learning at an end. As the OECD report cited earlier asserted successful learning experiences help people to see themselves as capable learners. Many of the 'choices' people make are rooted in partly formed social identities, the senses they have of who they are and what their capabilities are. Self-definition involves internalising the definitions and attributes ascribed by others. These subjective identities are associated with social class, gender and ethnicity. They also reflect educational credentials and other mediating factors associated with experiences in the labour market and the wider social context, with narrower or wider career options playing a part in shaping identities over time. While new options and pathways are increasing in relative significance as traditional transition patterns become 'fractured' and extended, disadvantage continues to be concentrated in groups defined by class, gender and ethnicity in particular localities (see Banks et al. 1992; Ball et al. 2000; Rützel 1995; Lippegaus et al. 1998).

To impact positively on people's senses of who they are and what their capabilities could be, interventions through education and social support must begin with respect for individual autonomy as well as consideration of the social aspects of the learning environment or milieu. For all age groups, subjective emotional experiences of support and satisfaction, their future perspectives of optimism or pessimism and their feelings of control in relation to norms and external expectations are all significant variables (Evans 2002a). The 'educator' may exercise *influence* through providing information, discussing courses of action and their possible consequences and creating conditions for exposure to, and engagement with, different points of view. Through all of these, the educator can create conditions for attitude change, personality development and unfolding of competences. The potential for personal and social competences to 'unfold' is also affected by the learning milieu and particular societal conditions. The interactions which are necessary to develop capacities through learning are enhanced or impeded by the social environment, and the removal or reduction of external barriers are as important as the facilitation of personal growth. Thus, person-centred approaches must be combined with altering the material and social environment so that demands do not become so great that people, whether adults or young people, cannot cope unaided. When demands exceed capacity to cope, the risk of social exclusion is heightened. While much emphasis is placed on the obligations and responsibilities of the individual, the social rights which are linked to the material and cultural conditions for social inclusion and participation must be kept in sight. These are crucial conditions for positive versions of the 'social self' to develop.

Each individual needs to be able to balance and manage 'internal and external' realities, that is their felt needs in relation to the environment in which they operate. Where there is a mismatch between felt needs and the opportunities the environment can provide, dissatisfaction results. Expectations may be 'unrealistic' because they

stem from self-concept and identity formation which is at odds with the environment, or they may be unrealistic because the environment is overly constrained or hostile and the expectations could be better met through changes to the environment. People may accommodate or resist aspects of the social world and the social and structural influences around them. They may do so individually or collectively. They need to be able to regulate their behaviour and expectations in relation to others and the environment, while maintaining and developing a values base, which gives meaning to goals and actions. They need to become 'productive processors of reality' in Hurrelmann's (1988) terms, goal directed in their behaviour, with the capacities to regulate and adjust their actions. This includes the capacities to redefine goals and boundaries, to critique aspects of the social world and to participate in change.

The downside of structured work-based learning programmes in real enterprises and businesses is that work pressures, while offering realistic experience, are less tolerant of trial-and-error learning, reflection and support. Such elements can however be provided by off-job mentors and complementary learning environments.

There is a cultural and institutional legacy of mainstreamed work-based training in countries such as Britain and Germany. In countries such as Portugal, there is a mainstreamed non-formal sector which can potentially provide such opportunities. These forms of situated learning potentially play a part in countering the social and economic exclusion of both young people and adults, providing they are responsive to the wide range of interests, prior learning experiences and desires people bring to them.

For both young people and adults, the workplace can be a creative and motivating place for learning, if an integrated and holistic approach is taken, enabling people to combine on- and off-the-job learning experiences in a way which creates an 'upward' spiral of learning through activity and perception. The concept of an LCP provides a useful model for considering how the different partners who come together in creating the work-based learning experience might complement each other. At the centre of the community are the workers who combine theoretical and practical knowledge with skills. Both workplace and off-the-job learning are organised in such a way that people can demonstrate as well as acquire new skills and knowledge and gain in confidence through demonstrating their potential as workers and learners. The 'pedagogy of work' (Fuller and Unwin 2002) may be practised in a way which develops meaningful links between learning, production and the organisation of work. This is an expansive approach to situated learning, which incorporates, but goes far beyond, the practice of key (or transferable) skills and encourages the questioning of workplace practices. The main departure from previous approaches is in the move away from predominantly individualistic conceptions which have underpinned policy development in the last decade. The new work-based learning is neither predominantly individualistic in conception nor predominantly collective, but it involves a combination of individual and mutual learning.

But the workplace or workshop activity is most significant as the source of 'new beginnings' in the biographical versions of lifelong learning, which emphasise links between skills development and transitions in different domains of life, recognises

non standard ‘patchwork’ careers and focuses on ‘being and becoming’ rather than learner deficits. Workplaces are thus significant sites of learning. They involve experience-based ‘lifeworld’ learning in context – but do they expand or constrain this lifeworld learning? Do people simply become what they already are, through social reproduction (in Bourdieu’s terms) or what they could be (through social transformation). What are the transformative possibilities of workplace learning, in reality?

In this expanded view of situated learning, learning begins with, but has to extend beyond, direct experience on which it draws. Multiple purposes are embodied within it without collapsing it wholly into the values of the particular work or community service experience which it seeks to use as a learning resource. If learning is to be transformative, not reproductive, the challenges and spaces must be present for *educated attributes to develop*. LCPs take work activity and life experiences as their starting points, with the aim of drawing intellectual resources from outside to deepen and expand that learning in ways that enable people to interpret their experiences from different perspectives and in dialogue with others who see the world in other ways. These ideas have been explored in relation to the goals and aims of programmes for marginalised young people and adults and the various shapes these take in differing national contexts.

School systems are challenged by the question of how far they prepare young persons for further learning, for training, the conditions of the labour market and a working day life – if their practices open up or rather narrow minds and expectations, if they empower persons to take the next step on a career ladder or if they rather impose hurdles and if they enable people to broaden their interests horizontally or constrain and circumscribe them. The operation of VET systems, no matter how they might be structured and organised, has also to be questioned. As well as asking how adequately people are prepared for work, we can ask how adequately VET is prepared for the changing needs of young people and adults. How flexible is what it provided respond to learners’ (not only to employers’) needs?

Programmes for both young people and adults have an inner link with the respective national VET systems, their structures being of influence on their contents and learning concepts to a large extent. Where work-based training is a central element of the VET system (e.g. Germany), programmes offer support for those unable to meet employers’ criteria to develop recognised competencies. This approach is regarded as far too narrow for young people, for whom quasi-apprenticeships provide a substitute for the training places lacking in the labour market, offer alternative routes or help to continue with VET by showing a comparably caring approach. For adults, much provision is geared to the Beruf-defined pathways leaving adults who do not have a Beruf-based training and identity at the margins and subject to provisions that are often remedial in nature. Where VET is strongly school related (e.g. Finland), another intention of programmes is to promote the work-based route as a valuable alternative, with potential for learning and the social integration of those for whom the school-based experiences have proved demotivating or alienating. But as the case of Finland shows, it is of importance to consider how programmes are

linked to the existing VET structures, if and how they can be integrated in the national system of vocational education and if and how their specific educational approaches can become part of the mainstream education. In countries where it is popular to enter the labour market directly (e.g. Greece), the idea of training and learning as a possibility to escape the trap of poverty and low-skilled, low-paid jobs is of higher importance. Still, there are very few programmes in Greece. Many small enterprises offer job opportunities without training for both adults and young people, integrating young people during a stage of career orientation rather than excluding them. In Portugal, education and training is also strongly linked to vocational schools, which shapes the approach of teachers and trainers and educational planners towards the problem of (re-)entering VET for young people. Non-formal solutions are sought for the adult population, through accreditation of existing competences of the large numbers of working adults who perform jobs but have few or no qualifications and find themselves very vulnerable to unemployment when jobs disappear. In Britain all of these forms are present to some degree. However, many options in the big variety of training programmes on offer continue to suffer from a lack of coordination and low standards of quality, despite the efforts to mainstream them through the ‘foundation apprenticeship’ model of youth training. For adults, the recognition of competences is being pursued in most countries, including France, Germany, Czech Republic and Romania, but the problems revolve around wider recognition of these by employers and a range of social institutions.

Despite their diverse and complex underlying intentions, programmes for young people and for adults usually remain at the margins of mainstream vocational education and training. The challenge for policy continues: how can the educational and training system (as a central part of society) be made sufficiently attractive for people at the fringe of society to motivate them to start and to continue a process of learning linked to the challenges of working life?

5.15 Cultural Values and the Ways in Which These Are Reflected in Policy

Analyses of programmes have to be contextualised in the wider features of their respective economic and cultural settings. In Portugal, special attention has to be paid to less industrialised rural regions where entering the labour market for the first time will play a decisive role. In Greece, the gap in industrial and social conditions between the agglomeration of population in the Athens region and the job opportunities in other areas of the country poses major problems. In Finland, the fast growth of unemployment, particularly of women, in recent years has posed particular challenges. In the UK, it has been important to see the work re-entry measures put into practice during the last years, in the context of market-driven reforms and in the context of several successive reforms of the educational system and the social security system. In Belgium, dramatic changes have occurred as a consequence of reductions in government expenditure in the course of meeting the Maastricht

criteria. In Germany, there is a special situation in the eastern states, where the percentage of women in gainful employment had been very high before the political changes and is now reduced. In the western states, there have been large-scale redundancies in the modern production and services industries. Therefore, the aim of enabling unemployed people to re-enter this specific sector of the labour market is very questionable. In all of these cases, the socio-political contexts need to be appreciated, analysing the possibilities and limits of the various programmes and practices introduced to meet the social and economic problems of unemployment among adults.

Sung (2000), in a recent article, contrasts typologies of education, training and skill formation systems emanating from educationalists with those emanating from economists and labour market/analysts. Educational approaches are portrayed as predominantly concerned with the attempt to identify models of educational provision. Labour market models, by contrast, 'start from the assumption that labour markets are structured and often highly segmented and that this will have an impact on types of VET provision'. Moreover, distinctions are drawn between occupational and internal labour markets that have importance for the different models of skill acquisition and explain some of the systemic differences in pathways for young people in vocational education and training. A weakness of labour market approaches is that they ignore or underplay cultural origins and meanings. Comparisons between European countries show that different cultural norms apply concerning dependency and age of accession to adult status. The English 'Sonderweg' (exceptional track of historical development) shows here in comparisons with most of northern continental Europe. In England, the approach of 'vocationalism' has been to surround people with a range of work-related opportunities for learning relatively early in their educational careers, but the opportunities for progressing from learning into work are haphazard and risky. There is also a prolonged dependency associated with extended post-compulsory education, which runs counter to the deeply embedded cultural values and expectations of a significant proportion of the working-class population, particularly among males.

In other parts of northern Europe, young people are not expected to be earning until their 20s; there is not the same pull of the labour market, and strong institutional structures allow for a degree of experimentation and false starts and provide 'safety net' financial support for those for whom family support is not available. In the southern countries, early work entry combined with later leaving of the parental home is more usual, with extended family networks which provide social and material support for longer periods of time.

Frameworks of welfare support are also highly significant. In most European countries, there has been a general move to 'active' employment policies which have reduced welfare support in the form of benefits for young people, who are neither in education/training nor in employment. The countries vary greatly in the extent to which they rely on 'third' sector groups (voluntary, religious bodies and non-profit or independent associations) for welfare support. In some countries, these bodies will run many of work re-entry programmes, while others will operate partnerships. For example, in Germany there are complex networks that authorities depend on

for putting welfare policies into practice, with expansion of non-profit sector, while in Sweden the non-profit organisations are hardly used. In the Nordic countries, including Finland, institutionalised egalitarianism has historical roots, but benefits system has come under stress when unemployment has risen. In Belgium, there is yet another variation – programmes are, with half of the programmes provided by the non-profit sector, with strong religious-organisation-based providers.

Participation in the labour force is rightly regarded as being of crucial significance in tackling social exclusion– it provides people with the income they need to participate more generally in society and gives purpose and direction to many. But dead-end jobs and casualised labour are hidden mechanisms of exclusion over time. Real skills and their labour market currency give access to life chances. Training in 'proper skills' can provide real social and economic returns, as evidenced by the skills and labour force surveys now conducted regularly in most states. But inequalities in access to quality education and training and in recognition given to personal competences continues to run along gender, ethnicity and class-based lines.

Social exclusion has entered the policy agendas of governments worldwide. The need to 'combat exclusion' is not framed as a debate about inequalities – it is about countering the processes and mechanisms which act to detach groups of people from the social mainstream. Social exclusion tends to be self-reproducing. Social polarisation increases faster if groups at the most advantaged end of society are allowed to self-detach from social obligations to increase their own advantages further. Involuntary exclusion at the 'bottom end of society' becomes harder to escape from as gaps widen between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. The debate about social responsibility in learning and work cannot avoid the problems inherent in the dominant approach that positions those unemployed or underemployed in low-graded jobs as 'low-skilled' individuals who are deficient and in need of better skills and qualifications. This approach can hardly be called empowering. It evacuates gender, race and ethnicity from the discussion of the sources of 'low skills' and low-graded work and fuels polarisation and increasing inequalities as those at the upper end can legitimise detaching themselves from social responsibilities in pursuit of increasing advantages for themselves and their children, in education, work and the global economy.

5.16 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has asked how people who are deemed to be most at risk of social exclusion – those affected by unemployment and underemployment – experience work and learning. What do we know about their aspirations and capacities, and what happens to these as they move in the social world? If 'reconnection' of those threatened by exclusion is simply a question of mobilising people through a combination of incentives and penalties, why have the challenges proved so difficult for successive governments to achieve? The analyses and examples in this chapter have highlighted how and why policies that focus attention on the responsibility of individuals to improve their situations through various versions of the 'welfare to work'

idea have themselves to be better reconnected to ideas of mutual responsibility and social justice if they are to have any hope of engaging people successfully.

Comparative evidence shows how perceptions of individual responsibility are fostered among young adults who have experienced spells of unemployment. One consequence of an environment that fosters a belief that 'opportunities are open to all' is that people blame themselves for their failures in education and the labour market. In the highly structured western German system, external factors can more easily be held responsible for failure, giving people greater scope to develop a positive sense of self in early adult life. When the opportunities are in fact much less open than they are made to appear and people experience the revolving doors of the labour market market, 'schemes' and the operation of the benefits system, the repeated efforts that people may make initially do portend longer term malaise and scepticism. Taking initiatives against the odds is one way for young people in precarious positions to break through the barriers, but policies that challenge the most advantaged to take control of their lives in these ways amount to making the strongest demands on those who are in the positions of least power (in comparison e.g. with the support given to already relatively advantaged students.) and who have few, if any, safety nets available should they fail.

Lifelong learning providers in many societies have moved in the direction of individualised approaches to learning and accreditation in the name of empowering adults through improved access and flexibility. This individualised approach does also tend to position low-skilled individuals as deficient and lacking in skills and qualifications in rather contradictory ways. Approaches that aim for empowerment through adult learning in forms other than those officially sanctioned and geared to accreditation have been forced to justify their existence in the current climate of credentialism.

People who end up on the margins of society actually have aspirations, desires and capacities that are very similar to those of other people. The previous chapter shows how people can make even the most unpromising work and learning environments work for them in different ways, through combinations of compliance, resistance and 'personalising' their work environment. More often than not, though, people affected by unemployment become trapped in a system world that measures and manages their supposed deficits in ways that can contribute to their further marginalisation.

Supporting the aspirations of people wanting to return to work or to work more fully at levels commensurate with their capacities does mean combining opportunities to engage in productive work activities with learning support. The exercise of social responsibility requires that these work activities meet the standards of safety and conditions of well-being that make the jobs fit for human beings to occupy in a modern democratic state. The learning that takes place in and through work activities can be expanded beyond the confines of the day-to-day experiences (which, as Chapter 4 has shown, may be experienced as rich and rewarding or as alienating) through the creation of LCPs. The idea of supporting people's learning through LCPs plays an important role, not least because it foregrounds people's capacities, not their deficits. It also refocuses attention on the importance to people of

engaging together in work activities that involve real responsibility, interdependence and Ppurpose.

At a societal, policy level, the focus on individual responsibility has become disconnected from an appreciation of the material and social conditions of people that can stretch them beyond their capacities to cope unaided – in this way, policies that are intended to support people to 'reconnect' with work can often have the unintended consequences of compounding the difficulties of their situation. A policy focus on learning skills rather than providing jobs will inevitably reproduce inequalities unless that learning also enriches people's lives in other ways, not least the lives of those most disadvantaged. Policies have to find ways of actively tackling the negative public attitudes to their predicament that many unemployed people face, often fuelled by the press. These attitudes are too often mirrored in the approaches of those who manage and implement the work and benefits programmes for 'the unemployed'.[vii] The application of penalties and compulsion to participate in conscripted learning can only fuel public disapprobation and hardly fit with the rhetoric of empowerment and aspiration. As long as these contradictory stances are pursued, little advance is likely.

Policies and interventions that genuinely recognise the aspirations and capacities of the least advantaged in society and that go hand in hand with socially responsible measures to improve their material and social conditions offer the best prospects of taking people permanently out of the revolving doors of poverty and underemployment.

Notes

i. See Behrens and Evans (2002) for a fuller discussion of this.

ii. See published PhD works, by Martina Behrens, University of Surrey, in which the author has engaged in an extended analysis of the position of young employed people in England and Germany.

iii. Extended interview extracts.

iv. A fuller account of this can be found in Coate, K. and Evans K. (2002), National Report for the Self-Evaluation Project, BIAT, Flensburg.

v. The DfES in partnership with NIACE and the Basic Skills Agency commissioned the evaluation from the Institute for Employment Studies. The aim was to evaluate the impact of the ACLF on the organisations involved, the individuals taking part in the learning activities and the communities that the ACLF served. The ACLF was initiated in 1998 and was 'designed to reach out to new sectors of the community'.

vi. This social process of learning can be considered as a gradual process of growing participation in communities of practice, which originally was seen as a group of experts collaborating to accomplish a common aim (Lave and Wenger 1991). According to this concept, learning is a simultaneous process of belonging (to a community of practice), of becoming (developing an identity as member of this community), of experiencing (the meaning of the common work task) and doing (as practical action contributing to the common work task) (Wenger 1999, 5). While this social theory of learning was developed with regard to workplace learning building on ethnographic research, it has valuable insights also for the programmes aiming to counter social and vocational disengagement, although the empirical basis on which it has been based differs considerably from the structural context shaping programmes for adults and young people at the margins of the labour market.

vii. See PhD thesis 2008, 'Work on the New Deal for Young People', by Geraldine Mitchell-Smith, London School of Economics, for further evidence.

Chapter 6
Gender, Work and Learning

Women and men are very differently situated in relation to the labour market. Women often have different domestic and personal situations, marry earlier than males and carry a disproportionate responsibility for household chores in all societies. There are commonalities in women's experiences that transcend cultural differences, many of these related to caring roles and societal expectations. These factors influence identity formation and life chances in fundamental ways. When the responsibilities of the individual (and indeed their rights) are constructed around direct economic contribution through paid work, inequities between men and women are compounded.

As in previous chapters, this chapter builds on and expands the evidence on how gender differences are experienced by young adults trying to take control of their lives in the contrasting labour markets of English and German cities: men's advantages in the labour market despite high educational performance of young women, the continuing pressures on women to prove themselves and the challenges of tackling non-traditional roles. The chapter extends beyond these general views to a more detailed exploration of the vocational education and training (VET) experiences of young people and adults, drawing on research conducted in a wider European landscape. This leads to an elaborated concept of gender autonomy that encourages rethinking of the relative responsibilities of individuals, institutions and governments in advancing gender equity.

There are significant differences between German and British society in the ways in which gender and social class interact and combine to impact significantly on life chances and the life course. The emergence of post-industrial society and associated educational developments brought many changes for women's lives and those of men too. In the first part of this chapter, patterns of gendered experience are viewed within the social landscape of each city-region area, and then compared to draw out differences that are attributable to the social landscape and its underlying structures. Gendered patterns of experiences revolve around opportunities and discrimination, career orientation, future prospects and plans and political activity (an extended discussion of these relationships can be found in Woolley 2005).

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_6, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

6.1 Young Adults' Awareness of the Influence of Gender on Life Chances

Gender issues tend to arouse lively discussions among young adults although the advantages and disadvantages associated with gender were also considered a non-issue for some, particularly those in higher education. These discussions give some important insights into the ways young people at pivotal stages in their lives become aware of the impact of structural factors on their chances and choices.

In both Hanover and Leipzig, the discussions in all groups emphasised the limitations that childbearing and childrearing place on women. The German employed groups also concentrated on the advantages and disadvantages of different professions and occupations. Many mentioned the advantages for women in gaining employment in typical female occupations, but there was an overall awareness that there are enduring inequalities in the levels and status achieved by females and males in employment and the economy, despite equal or superior performance of women in educational qualifications.

The extracts in the next section illustrate the complex interplay of these perspectives.

6.1.1 Leipzig: Men Have the Upper Hand

A group of employed young adults in Leipzig discussed the impact of gender on the workplace and seemed to agree that men have more advantages. They believed that people should receive jobs on the basis of merit rather than gender, but acknowledged that gender can make a difference.

Q: Do you believe you are privileged or disadvantaged in the apprenticeship and labour market because of your gender?

Young man, Leipzig:

> I hope that I have better chances because men don't bear children, and if there is a child then a mother stays at home when it's ill. Don't get me wrong, I don't believe a woman's place is in the home, but I hope that I have better chances than a woman. I know it's not fair to say that so openly here as there are so many women present. But in the end, it is individual performance that counts.

Q: Do you think that being a man gives you better chances in your profession?

Young man, Leipzig:

> There aren't many men in the bank where I work, but the higher you go up the organisation, the more men there are. That's almost a rule in a bank and I don't think it will change much in the near future. It should be the case that you get a job because you deliver an excellent performance. Gender shouldn't play a part in it. But in a bank – and in other areas too – it's important to have social contacts to get somewhere. And even a woman will reach a high position if she has social contacts she can make use of. But to my mind its individual performance that counts. I haven't seen women treated unfairly because of their gender.

Young woman, Leipzig:

In my experience there are differences. In my job, we've been working on building sites with industrial painters and floor covering workers, but we also need some needlework done. Men don't want to sit down at a sewing machine and do that kind of work. Of all the male apprentices, not one likes that kind of work. On the other hand there are girls who like to work on building sites and do men's work, and it may be that there aren't disadvantages. But there are some types of work that only men can do, like heavy lifting, so men have an advantage there. Women do the easier work and that's when I notice the difference that gender can create.

6.1.2 Women Have to Prove Themselves

In the Derby groups, there was a lively and extended debate about how being female affects women's lives. The participants acknowledged that being one of a few females in a male-dominated workplace can be advantageous: you stand out, are noticed and are looked after to an extent. Nevertheless, it is their view that in order to gain respect, women need to prove themselves.

Young woman, Derby:

I'm the only female among probably 200 guys and the female/male bit is not a problem at all. In one way it's slightly more difficult for me because I almost have to prove myself. But in another way I get quite a lot of attention because everybody knows who I am, and because I'm the only female in that group. But it's difficult because you feel like you have to prove yourself to be accepted.

Another woman added that she felt women had to prove themselves twice as much as men. This theme also came up in the German interviews.

Men have a big, fat advantage

Young man, Hanover:

I strongly believe that men have a big, fat advantage in the labour market. I've experienced it myself many times and I don't think we've got very far with equality of the sexes. I would go so far as to claim that this applies to all sectors of professional life. There is no equality of the sexes. In the area where I intend to work in the future (mechanical engineering), it's always said that women have to work twice as hard as men to be respected to the same degree. And they earn less than men for double the work.

In the mixed group, both males and females asserted that they had experienced no disadvantages due to their gender, and on the contrary, one of the females felt being female in the largely male-dominated company she worked for was an advantage.

No, I've found that being a female in the company that I work for is actually an advantage. . .in the company I work for there's about 1000 men and about 30 women and you just stand out and so you are more likely to get picked on for certain things Id say. I got picked on by the managing director because I was on a course and there were only 40 people and I was the only girl, so you sort of get to know people more because they remember you because you were the one girl in the group.

6.1.3 Prejudice and Stereotypes

Two of the women from Derby said they had experienced one-off incidents of overt sexism and prejudice in the workplace. In one person's case, her company had taken action. More generally, people said that stereotypes came into play in the way they were treated by others.

Young woman, Derby:

> The amount of times I've walked into an office and asked to speak to someone and they ask: Are you the new temp? and I say: No, and she says: Oh, what's it about? And I say: I'm the engineer in charge of the engine or whatever, and she's like: Oh, I'm sorry, and she scurries off. I've had that three or four times now and they immediately presume you're the new secretary.

One woman expressed the view that much of the disparity between the career choices of males and females can be explained by their own expectations.

Young woman, Derby:

> It drives me insane the amount of girls who say they want to work in childcare because they think that's the only thing they can do. Maybe it's because their mums got a young kid and they say: Oh, I like babies, and I think, Oh, please. I think you get to a certain age where you think to yourself, hang on a minute, there's lots of other things that I can do. And that's why it's refreshing to hear someone like you who's an engineer. Personally when I go to Rolls Royce I think, my God, if I had my time again I'd be an engineer.

6.1.4 Tackling Non-traditional Roles

In all three cities, people discussed the difficulties they encountered when trying to gain work in areas traditionally dominated by the other sex.

Young woman:

> I'm doing a construction course at college. I do bricklaying, plumbing, joinery, I do it all at college and I get the piss took out of me. All the lads there just do not accept us. There's one tutor there, his names Fred, and he doesn't accept us and he told us what he thought of us. There's 13 of us women, we've been in the paper and that. So, from my point of view they are sexist in some things because if I went to get a job on a building site, and a man did, and we both had exactly the same papers, they're gonna give that job to a man. I know they are.

Young woman:

> Well, working with wood is traditionally a man's trade isn't it? So, French polishing, you know, restoration, is traditionally a man's trade. I was fortunate to find a female employer. Because if I'd had a bloke employer then it would have been slightly different, definitely.

Young man:

> Last year I was doing a course at college, childcare, and I was OK, I was doing the course work OK. But when the placements came up I was sent to a place where I was supposed to do evaluations on the kids and things like that and the teacher there didn't give me enough

> time to – well didn't give me any time at all – to do the course work and the placement. But I had to leave college eventually because I was two months behind on work and I didn't have any time in the placement to do any of the work.

Young man:

> I used to want to work with kids. And I went to one job and they gave the job to a girl who had just left school with a GCSE, yet I had proper qualifications from college. So where does that come into it? She's got that basic GCSE and that's it, yet I've spent two years at college, got the proper qualification, know exactly what I'm doing, I've first aid and all sorts. So there was no reason why I couldn't do the job, it's just that they didn't want you to do it.

6.1.5 Gender Issues Come to the Fore in Employment

The main response from both young women and young men in the Derby higher education group was that their gender had affected their lives neither adversely nor positively. A different view came from a 24-year-old single mother who entered higher education via one of the 'access' courses associated with widening participation (see Chapter 3):

> . . . . when I was at school it was like we went to do the business studies and the typing and the needlework and stuff, didn't we? and the boys went off to do whatever they did. And it went on from college as well, when you left college you were expected to go and do a business admin course. . .which everybody did. Do you know what I mean? Everybody hated it, everyone dropped out half way through, and then ended up working in wherever for a few months and then deciding on this is what I really want to do and going and doing it. And I mean that's because that's, I don't know really, its just what you're expected to be doing being a female. It's certainly what I thought.

The responses from the two employment groups differed in tone, and this may have been a result of their different compositions: one was mixed and the other female only. The feelings of the group were summed up by a 19-year-old modern apprentice: 'things are changing and everything's equalling out now if you know what I mean'.

The consequences of parenthood were raised in only one Derby groups, and this was an unemployed group with several young mothers in it. To these young people, a key issue affecting their lives was that of the cost of childcare, which they saw as a significant barrier to further education and training. Their collective view was typified by the following comment:

Young woman, Derby:

> Because its, its I'm gonna say it, its nearly, it is normally, the **norm** is that the woman is the one that stays at home with the kids so what I'm saying to go out and try and get training when you've got kids and you're a woman. But apart, if you went for a job and there's a man stood there and woman stood there I don't think its like that anymore now, I think they just go for the one that's most appropriate for the job. I wouldn't say it's like sexist like that, I don't think it's like that anymore.

In both Hanover and Leipzig, the discussions in all groups emphasised the limitations childbearing and childrearing place on women, as well as what they saw as the inevitability of the choice between family and career for women.

I: Do you believe you are privileged because of your gender in the labour market? Or do you believe you are disadvantaged because of your gender?

Young man, Leipzig:

> I hope that I have better chances because I am always told that a man can roll up his sleeves and cannot bear children and if there is child then a mother stays at home when it has fallen ill. Do not get me wrong – I am not of the opinion that a woman belongs behind the hearth, I can cook myself, you know, but I hope that I have better chances than a woman. I know it is not fair to say that so openly here as there are so many women, I mean, ladies present now but in the end it is individual performance that counts anyway.

6.2 Patterns of Experience in the English City Region

These qualitative insights need to be better understood in the context of the gendered patterns and regularities that are found in the ways in which young adults see themselves, their future possibilities and their ability to influence their life chances by their own actions.

Young women in the English city region were found to regard their futures more positively than males (making more plans and having higher expectations) and also to attribute their present circumstances more to their own planning than to chance. Young men had the greater experience of unemployment and expectation of facing it again in the future. Overall, it appeared to be the case that males were having the tougher time and that such differences were most pronounced within the employed group.

The most striking difference in males' and females' backgrounds was that regardless of their current circumstances (unemployed, employed or in higher education), females were generally first to leave their parental homes. Just over half of the young men were still living at home, compared with 36% of the young women. Only 34% of the men had left home before the age of 19 compare to 56% of the women. Additionally, a greater percentage of females who were already living away from parents thought this would be permanent (76% of females and 58% of males). More unemployed females than males had moved into local authority accommodation (40% compared to 6%), more employed females had become homeowners (31% compared to 15%) and more female students had moved into student residences or private rented accommodation (65% compared to 54%).

More females were encouraged by their parents to stay on in education when they reached minimum school-leaving age (52% of females compared to 42%), and this was most evident in the employed group (62% of females and 40% of males). Across all settings, more males than females had experienced multiple spells of unemployment, and in both the unemployed and employed groups, males had re-taken examinations more often.

6.2.1 Career Orientation

Young women in the English city were more likely than males to attribute their current circumstances to their own plans. This was shown by comparisons of their scores on the 'planned not chance' factor.[i] They also scored rather more highly than men on the factor fulfilled at work (often feel sense of achievement, use initiative, make own decisions, feel stretched and challenged, set own goals and given responsibility).[ii] Taken together, these results suggested that the young women in Derby were thinking ahead and achieving more satisfying results for themselves.

Young women who had entered higher education scored more highly on the 'planned not chance' factor, were more active in seeking career and had previously searched for full-time employment. They also scored more highly on the factor 'believes own weaknesses matter'. This factor combined responses on items asking whether individuals attributed failures in their work and personal lives to lack of skills, lack of qualifications and/or their own weaknesses. In the employed group, this pattern was reversed with men scoring more highly than women on their activity in career seeking and their beliefs that their own weaknesses matter in work and life chances. There were no such differences within the unemployed group.

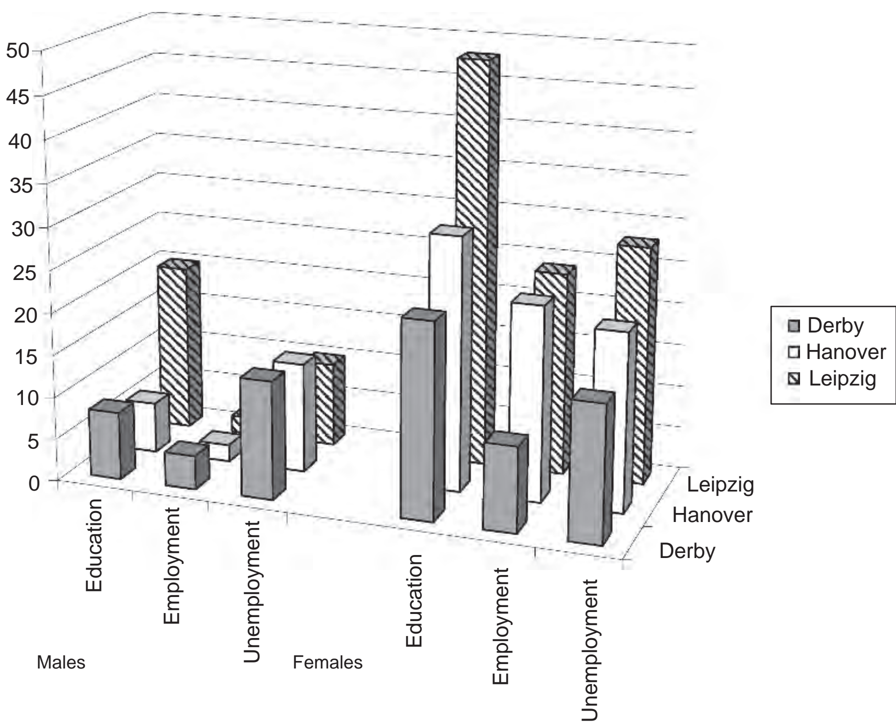

Fig. 6.1 Percentages of males and females seeing it a important to combine career with child-rearing

When these young people were asked what three things they most wanted from work, the responses most frequently chosen, by both males and females, were good pay and good job security, followed by prospects, challenges and a friendly atmosphere. The option 'possibility to combine a satisfactory career with child-rearing' was not chosen by many people but, a similar proportion of males and females who were currently unemployed placed this childrearing possibility in their top three priorities for work. This contrasted with the education group, where three times more females than males chose this priority (see Fig. 6.1).

Young women in Derby were more positive about their futures. Males scored more highly on the factor 'negative view of future prospects'. A higher score on this factor was a result of feeling that it was unlikely they would secure the kind of job they wanted, having no plans for the future, being more unlikely to seek further qualifications and feeling more that future unemployment is likely. This was also found to be the case within the employed group.[iii]

6.3 The City Region in Western Germany

There appeared to be less diversity in the experiences reported in the western German city of Hanover than in Leipzig or Derby. While young men also appeared to be searching for work more actively than young women, more of them had experienced unemployment. In both the education and employed groups, about 90% of females reported having no experience of unemployment, compared with 74% of males. In the unemployed group, more males had been unemployed on two or more occasions (35% of males compared with 23% of females).

Around 10% more young women than men had previously left their parents' home, largely a result of young females in employment leaving earlier than their male counterparts. Of those in education, more females felt their parents encouraged them to remain in education when they reached minimum school-leaving age, whereas more males felt the decision had been left up to them. Males had first left education at age 18 or younger more often than females (38% of males and 23% of females). In the unemployed group, females first left education at younger ages than males (73% of females left aged 18 or younger, compared to 58% of males) and fewer had been encouraged to stay on by their parents.

6.3.1 Career Orientation

Activity in career seeking was the most important difference identified between the young women and young men of Hanover. Men were found to be more active in searching for work, and this gender difference was most marked within the employed group. Interest in following a helping/people-orientated career also differentiated between young men and young women. Females were more likely to want a job which enabled them to contribute to society and meet lots of people, but it should

be noted that these work values were not rated highly by large numbers. As in the English city, most preferred to aim for work that provides good job security, good pay, a friendly atmosphere, prospects and challenges. Three times more females than males considered the possibility to combine a satisfactory career with childrearing as important. Differences between the responses of men and women were greatest in the employed group and least in the unemployed group.

6.3.2 Future Prospects and Plans

More young men than women thought it is at least possible that they would become unemployed sometime in the future (42% compared to 27%). This difference in expectations is particularly apparent in the unemployed group (54% compared to 27%) and the education group (43% compared to 28%). The men in education appeared much less likely to consider moving from the area or from the country of Germany.

6.4 The City Region in Eastern Germany

Very clear differences were found between the attitudes and expectations of young women and young men in the eastern German city of Leipzig. Women's lower scores on the factor 'believes opportunities open to all' and higher scores on 'believes ability is not rewarded' appear to suggest they are less inclined to believe that meritocracy operates in society after the political changes. This finding was accompanied by young women showing a greater openness to the possibility of moving away from the area and being more politically active.

As in the English city, females tended to leave their parental homes at younger ages than their male peers. This was found to be the case across all settings but was most pronounced in the employed group, where 63% of males had never left compared with 29% of females. This is consistent with the finding that 69% of females in employment and 51% of males felt themselves to be financially independent of their parents However, around 22% more females felt at least partly dependent on their parents for practical advice and emotional support.

Also in common with the English city, young men reported more experience of unemployment. Within the unemployed group 74% of males compared with 50% of females had experienced unemployment on a multitude of occasions. More females than males stayed in full-time education until they were aged 18 or older (44% of females, 26% of males).

6.4.1 Opportunities and Discrimination

A pronounced difference between young East German men and women was found in their beliefs on whether opportunities are open to everyone and whether ability

is rewarded. Women believed less that opportunities are open to all and believed more that ability is not rewarded. Unemployed young women scored more highly than their male peers on sociability, confidence and fulfilled personal life. This last factor comprised the following items: well equipped on social skills/relating and confidence/decision-making skills and, in personal life, often feel sense of achievement, use own initiative, make own decisions, feel challenged, set own goals and given responsibility.

6.4.2 Career Orientation

Males in the employment setting were shown to attribute their current situations to planning more than females by their higher scores on the factor 'planned not chance'. As in the English and western German cities, young men most frequently named their work priorities as good pay, job security, friendly atmosphere, prospects and challenges. However, young women chose the possibility to combine career and childrearing third most frequently. As in western Germany, the disparity in proportions of males and females rating this as an important factor is greatest amongst those already working, while the gap among those in higher education is not so great (see Fig. 6.1).

6.5 Comparison Across Areas

Young women from all three cities, Derby, Hanover and Leipzig, were more likely to leave their parental homes at younger age than males. This trend was most noticeable in the employed groups, which would presumably have the greatest numbers with the financial means to live independently of their parents. Where there was an imbalance in proportions of males and females feeling financially better off and worse off than in the previous year, it was the females who were suffering more. Why is it that females appear more inclined to set up with lives lived away from their parents and to do this despite the greater financial pressures which this will normally bring? This raises questions of whether young women value their independence more than males, since it is unlikely that they are encouraged to leave earlier by their parents.

The greater incidence of spells of unemployment among young men is another noticeable trend. In Derby, multivariate analyses found that multiple spells of unemployment related to being male and being from Derby, as well as to being currently unemployed, believing your present circumstances are related more to chance than planning, having had more than one type of setback and being older. When area and setting were removed from the set of possible explanatory variables, multiple spells of unemployment continued to show an association with being male. It is by no means a new finding that repeated experience of unemployment is suffered by males more than females, but this does confirm that opportunity for secure employment

Table 6.1 Percentages stating social characteristics have 'considerable' effect, by gender

	Derby		Hanover		Leipzig	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Gender	20	20	33	30	34	46
Race	25	20	57	50	69	78
Social class	30	30	43	48	46	67
Family background	23	26	33	30	28	34

continues to be lacking for at least a minority of males. The effect is particularly strong in Derby where greater deregulation of the market, as well as the lack of an apprenticeship structure, creates a less secure pathway from school into working life. It seems that this leaves a greater problem for young males than it does for females.

A striking gender difference in degrees of belief in opportunities and rewards being available for all emerged across the areas. Table 6.1 depicts the findings and shows similar levels of belief in males and females in Derby and Hanover but a gender difference emerging in Leipzig. It is interesting that it is in Leipzig, where social characteristics are most visible to the respondents, that young women were significantly less likely than young men to believe in the existence of meritocracy. The table gives percentages of males and females in each area ascribing differences in life chances to social characteristics. It appears that the young women in Leipzig perceived the effects of social characteristics on opportunities in life more clearly than their male peers.

Across all areas, young men in employment were found to have been more active in searching for work than females (see Fig. 6.1). This is most evident in the Derby and Hanover areas, adding further weight to the idea that males were faced with a tougher time in negotiating the labour market than females. This raises the question of whether this is a result of difficulties with finding themselves work per se or a result of being more demanding about the work which they are prepared to consider?

Young women more often included consideration of childrearing as one of their top work priorities, and this was true in all settings and areas. It can be seen from Fig. 6.1 that this consideration was felt most keenly by females in Leipzig and least so in Derby. Only small numbers of males chose this option as a priority, with the exception of male students in Leipzig. Across settings, young women in higher education included the item 'combine career with child-rearing' in the highest proportions. This suggests that young women are aware of the realities of society and therefore set out considering the effects childbearing and childrearing will have on their lives. Some choose to minimise these effects from the beginning by choosing a career which need not be prioritised over a family.

Young women were also significantly more positive in their views of their future prospects than males in the Derby samples, but not in the other areas. This is consistent with findings given in Table 6.2.

More young women than men from Derby thought it likely they would gain more qualifications, train for another occupation and get the job they desired and thought

Table 6.2 Expectations of further training, qualifications, employment by sex (percentages)

	Derby		Hanover		Leipzig	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Very likely to obtain additional qualifications	29.5	40.9	40.3	36.6	31.5	35.1
Unlikely or no chance of becoming unemployed	29.5	38.3	23.7	31.1	21.5	23.2
Very or quite likely to train for another occupation	15.7	24.6	8.6	10	12.1	13.9
Very unlikely or no chance of training for another occupation	9.6	3.9	29.5	28	28.2	19.9
Very/quite likely to get desired job	32.3	44.1	29.7	30.5	20.1	13.9

it unlikely they would become unemployed. Their expectations of these situations were at a higher level than their counterparts in the Hanover and Leipzig samples and higher than those for males in all cases, except expectation of gaining further qualifications, where the Derby females equalled the Hanover males in proportions seeing this as very likely. More females in the Leipzig sample thought it possible that they would train for another occupation, though fewer expected to get their desired job, than their male counterparts, and more females in Hanover thought it unlikely that they would become unemployed, but generally the female and male levels of expectation were closer in the German samples. In all areas, there had been a decline in traditional (mainly male) manufacturing jobs and in traditional apprenticeship schemes. Where the numbers of jobs had expanded, this was usually in the service sector, in the kinds of areas where females were more likely to be employed, such as catering, leisure and office work, though it should be stressed that all cities still had a sizeable manufacturing sector.

Comparison across all 900 young adults on the mean scores for males and females on the factor politically active has shown that it is the female population which is the more politically active. This was found to be a significant difference both within the Derby and Leipzig areas as well as within particular settings within these areas. Furthermore, this greater political activity on the part of females was found despite lower levels of expressed interest in politics than their male peers (see Chapter 7).

In summary, the underlying patterns in engagement with the labour market have shown young men to display greater activity and also experience greater challenges in obtaining the employment they want. Young women were more fulfilled at work, believed own weakness matters, planned for the future, were more likely to move and were more politically active.

Juxtaposing their own accounts of how gender impacts on their everyday lives with these social regularities provides some further unique insights into how

position in the gendered social landscape affects the ways in which the person interprets his or her experiences and perceives relative advantages or advantages. These have to be seen in relation to personal goals and horizons, which have some shared, gendered characteristics. In the next part, the ways in which experiences of gender are mediated in and through VET are considered further.

6.6 'Gender Autonomy' and Social Responsibility: Challenges for Work and Vocational Learning

Underlying the surface terrain are the structural features of social landscapes that are slow to change. Educational and labour market institutions reproduce the features that underlie the visible landscape in many respects. Accepting this as inevitable and as 'always the case' misses the spaces for action that open up as people act in and through intermediary organisations. For example, in the public sphere of VET, individual strivings and practitioner commitments to gender equity can combine in ways that can reduce barriers and open up new horizons.

A wider international perspective on vocational learning and preparation for work has been provided by participation in the EU Fifth Framework Project on Gender and Qualification.[iv] Research partners from five European countries (Finland, Germany, Greece, Portugal and the United Kingdom) investigated the impact of gender segregation in European labour markets on VET, with particular regard to key competences and qualifications. This research explored the part played by gender in the VET experiences of (i) young adults entering specific occupations in childcare, electrical engineering and food preparation/service and (ii) adults changing occupations. The international research was conducted using hermeneutical and empirical methods.[v]

Empirical data from 244 interviews, observations in VET institutes and at workplaces and content analyses of job advertisements, curricula, brochures and other sources confirmed that 'gender still matters', from the viewpoint of the individual, in their experiences of skill formation and attribution, occupational choice and personal development. But empirical data also revealed 'gender blindness' in VET institutes and at workplaces when it comes to considering, positively and constructively, the continuing significance of gender differences in VET and in work. In this chapter, a secondary analysis of key findings (see Evans 2006) identifies the need to create the conditions for strengthening gender autonomy as a conclusion of most relevance to the UK VET and lifelong learning policy context. The significance of this idea extends to other societies which face the same challenges, although the dynamics differ. The concept of gender autonomy offers ways of understanding how individual responsibility entails social responsibility, with scope for reflexive shaping of social processes and practices.

As well as working cross-culturally, a particular challenge of the European project on gender in VET and work was the attempt to bring together two segregated perspectives – gender studies have tended to treat concepts of competence

and qualification as relatively marginal when compared to other issues of gender inequality in the labour market, while there has been a tendency to ignore gender studies in VET.

Key competences have become part of the language of policy throughout the EU. While these labels and the ideas they encapsulate are highly contested, and ascribed many different meanings, they are linked by the argument that these embody capabilities that can and should be deployed by everybody in or seeking to enter the labour market. Yet there is a gendered discourse in these areas. For example, the interpersonal competences that are often cited as key in this sense are also often held to be 'female skills'. The origins of these attributions are varied. Personality and actions of the individuals, the cultural background, the structure of VET and the structure of the labour market are all important, but above all gender stereotypes, part of the day-to-day lived experiences of individuals has a more determining influence on ways in which the relative competences and skills of men and women are recognised and ascribed.

Men and women often choose gender-typical occupations because of social expectations or social 'normalcy' and consequently develop or are trained in gender-typical competences. Thus, gendered key competences become intensified by gender-typical occupations, and gender segregation is reconstructed, because occupational tasks and requirements influence ways in which key competences are recognised and deployed. The findings that led to this conclusion are reviewed and exemplified in the following sections, with a view to elaborating the concept of gender autonomy as a useful means for understanding, and then intervening in, the macro-, meso- and micro factors that shape gendered experience.

6.6.1 Rethinking Key Competences

Nijhof and Struemer (1998) have attempted to review the multiple definitions and concepts circulating in national and international discourses. They conclude that key competences are designed to help prepare young persons for life, for an occupation, for employability and for citizenship (Nijhof 1998) based on the affirmative assumption that they are necessary and useful (p. 20). Uncritical use of the concept ignores, or treats as unproblematic, the differences in access to the informal contexts and everyday situations that shape many versions of key competences. These differences in access and experience can further reinforce the social inequalities of existing gender regimes, themselves rooted in network of norms, regulations and principles in the structure of social practices (Connell 1987 p. 139). This applies particularly in the differential values ascribed to competences gained through paid and unpaid forms of work and different types of occupation.

The concept employed in the research emphasised the compound mix of inner abilities of the person which are not clearly visible but can be made effective when the situations within which the person is expected, or has an opportunity, to perform are favourable (see also Evans et al. 2004). Key competences, understood as inner capabilities, are developed reflexively through experiences in a range of life and

work environments, and there is potential to support people towards the achievement of critical insight (see Roth 1971) into the limits and possibilities afforded by their everyday situations in paid and unpaid forms of work.

6.6.2 *The Typical Cases*

Occupational choices of people in gender-typical occupations were influenced by social and cultural contexts of the partner countries but also demonstrated gendered features that transcend national boundaries. The majority of people interviewed said they had chosen their occupation largely through the influence of family and relatives, yet those choices were very different for men and women. There was evidence of characteristics and competence being ascribed to gender in all three areas. In children's nurseries, female workers were ascribed characteristics of greater tenderness and patience, better able to help children with basic hygiene, feeding and clothing. Trainers and female nursery nurses in all countries themselves considered males less sensitive and to have less aptitude in connecting socially with the children and parents. Often such skills are deemed to come more naturally to women. This is consistent with the observation of Noon and Blyton (2002) that so-called female skills are viewed as natural – leading to a further view that they are not deserving of the same level of reward as skills that have to be acquired and learnt, such as technical skills.

While these patterns of attribution were very visible in the work environments of electrical engineering and nurseries, divisions of labour according to ascribed characteristics was also apparent in the gender-mixed environments of food preparation and restaurants. Men were give the heavier tasks of arranging chairs and tables, while the decorative, ornamental tasks tended to fall to the women – although this division of labour was certainly not always in line with personal preferences. In our analysis, then, gendered key competences are regarded as typical for men or women because they are more often performed by, ascribed to or expected from men rather than women or vice versa.

Despite this, in response to questions such as do men make better electricians than women and can men be good children's nursery workers, two-thirds of interviewees considered that there are no inherent differences between the sexes in abilities to work successfully in any given occupation. One-third of interviewees perceived clear differences between the sexes in their occupational abilities. However, within this second group, most also held the view that things were changing, with only 3% thinking that *only* men or women can do certain occupations successfully.

The findings showed that the pervasiveness of gender in everyday work relations contributed, paradoxically, to its invisibility to the eyes of many VET practitioners, most of whom claimed that they treated everyone as an individual irrespective of gender (see Hoffmann 2004). In many cases, they regarded gender as no longer an issue.

Two ways of uncovering the effects of gender were employed. The first was to investigate the experiences of the exceptional cases – people who have made

atypical career choices of children's nursery work (for men) and electrical engineering (for women). The second was to examine the experiences of adults moving into the labour market after periods of interruption in their occupational life.

6.6.3 The Exceptional Cases

Finding male nursery workers and female engineers proved more difficult in some countries than in others. For example in Portugal, Greece and the UK, very few men choose to become nursery workers or childcare assistants, where pay and social status is very low, while increasing (although still small) numbers of women are entering engineering. In Germany, the reverse is found: there are more male children's nursery workers than female electricians. Kampmeier (2004) argues that low pay and status is not such a disincentive in the German context, and most men entering this area aim for career development through training. Engineering, however, is a very high status job in Germany with a high competition for training places and jobs, and very few women put themselves forward for this area of work.

The views from people working in gender-typical occupations could be compared with those from the 'exceptional' cases, that is men working or being trained as children's nursery workers or nursery nurses and women whose occupational choice is to become an electrician. This provided very valuable insights since these people have a 'near image' of the situation, and they know about gender differences from their own experiences: they can therefore compare these with the 'far images', the public opinion held with respect to gendered key competencies. They are aware of the parts played by gender in the social practices of VET institutions and at the workplace. They also recognise, to a much greater extent than the 'typical cases', the variety of ways in which gender-'typical' behaviour and gender-'typical' personal competencies can be observed during training and at the workplace. It was found that these 'exceptional' cases, indeed, manifested different configurations of prior experience as well as personal competence, compared to the 'typical' cases.

Most research cases who had made exceptional career choices had developed non-typical interests during their childhood and had developed particular patterns of key competences through this process. These were further developed during their training as female electricians and male nursery nurses. For example, in the UK study, [vi] the two female electricians had both been encouraged by their fathers earlier in life. The first, for example, had been encouraged by her father, who was a construction engineer. Within the family, she helped her father with the D-I-Y and fixing the family car. She and her sister were also interested in Formula 1 racing, and they would go as a family to watch it. Similarly, another female electrician, when asked why she had chosen electronics, said that it was related to the interest she had from childhood in how things worked:

> I had always been interested in puzzles, making things fit and work ... From when I was a child, I was always involved with PCs because my father built them when they were first brought out, and I knew how to programme them, no problem. My friends were into radios and we used to take them apart and change the frequencies ... I looked back and thought

> I did get enjoyment from building and making things and proving why things work; the logic. It's like a challenge to me . . . That's why I thought it was something to try.

These two exceptional cases are consistent with the findings of Newton (1987: 195), whose research on women engineers showed that they were quite likely to be the daughters of engineers and that the fathers' attitudes were important influences in the occupational choice process. Women who chose engineering as a career were also significantly more likely to have had 'unconventional' interests (i.e. those normally associated with boys) in their childhood.

Family members had also been involved in the choices of the male nursery nurses. The father of one, for example, had helped by obtaining information about the course, knowing his son's interest in working with children, and had supported and encouraged his son in the choice he had made. For this young man, working with children had been a long-standing interest. During his teens, he would help out on play schemes during holidays. When he was 18, he was offered a job helping to run a play scheme and then enrolled on the course. For another young man on the course, though, this was a second choice of occupational field. He would have preferred a job with power and status, but illness and disability had made it difficult for him to pursue what he had initially wanted. His parents had been supportive but worried about the demands of children's work on their son, and he had become enthusiastic about and highly committed to the work.

The exceptional cases reported a variety of ways in which they were treated differently as compared to their gender counterparts, in their worksites and training programmes. These reports could then be compared with the attitudes and views of their trainers. Trainers thought that female electrician trainees were tidier and more industrious than men, but they also sometimes thought them to be not so strong with respect to logical thinking and technological creativity. Yet this was something one of the female electrical engineers identified as her particular strength:

> Being able to work on your own; if something isn't working properly, to be able to fault find . . . The equipment in my eyes is very easy to use. It's all very logical. Somebody would need to have a logical mind to work the equipment, but really it just like learning to type. Maths is important, as there are a lot of formulas involved. The main thing is that you need to very precise.

She explained that it was not necessary to be strong because the engineers are not expected to carry the instruments themselves. When asked whether she thought the problem-solving skills that she had emphasised were more associated with males or females, she seemed puzzled by the question and said, 'I don't think that gender has anything to do with it'.

Male nursery workers were often expected to concentrate on playing with the children, particularly during outdoor activities, and were often called on for everyday practical tasks of a physical or technical kind. Their female counterparts more often chose – or were urged – to do the basic caring. The ways in which they reacted to these expectations varied. One male nursery worker reported how he would question why he should be asked to carry heavy boxes while his female colleagues stood and watched. His female colleagues had notions of what tasks were appropriate

for males, but he challenged these notions and resisted the pressure to behave in accordance with gender stereotypes.

The part played by gender in the experiences of the exceptional cases contrasted starkly with the significant number of people interviewed who felt that gender was no longer an issue. The exceptional cases felt that they had to overcome rather strong reservations and sometimes prejudices on the part of employers and colleagues, but also of family and friends. One of the young women engineers, for example, had to withstand stupid remarks from boys and their disbelief that she was studying engineering. Her strategy for managing this is to demonstrate that she is interested in the same things as they are – cars for example. In this way, she felt that she gained acceptance. Her female friends thought that she was brave. They did not understand her interest in technical things, but there is no evidence in her comments that she experienced any discouragement from them.

A young male nursery worker talked about how the attitudes of the children's parents towards men caring for their young children caused him difficulties. In his social life, he and the other exceptional cases would find different ways of presenting what they were doing, for example nursery officer or professional training in childcare, to avoid mockery and disbelief. This illustrates a particular problem experienced by all the exceptional cases that they have to struggle to assert their gender identity in the face of the prejudices they encounter. They wished to assert their gender identity as well as an occupational identity, and the older ones had already achieved that. One nursery worker said that the VET course had affected his identity as a male. He said that his female peers regarded him as 'one of the girls'. He often felt isolated and had experienced problems with finding a girlfriend. The female engineer who felt that there was no difference between males and females in terms of performance on the engineering course did try to preserve her female identity. She said that she wears make-up, perfume and jewellery, and her hair is always tidy. In contrast to the boys, her boiler suit is much cleaner, her writing is neater and her car is tidier. In her words, she does not want to turn into a bloke. Interestingly, she also said that she could never go out with a boy who was a nursery nurse.

The evidence showed that overcoming prejudices in atypical training and employment requires particular resilience and much determination. Another young woman talked of some of the pressures of being the only female in the training programme. While she believed that there is not really a difference between male and female trainees, she felt that she continually had to prove herself. She said that she had to work very hard and everyone noticed when she did something wrong. Yet the tutors felt that there was no differentiation according to gender – males and females were treated equally and any differences stemmed from individual abilities and personalities.

In discussion of their ambitions and longer term view of their prospects, gender influences surfaced even more strongly for the exceptional cases. For females, any difficulties faced were seen as part of a process of buying into the better pay and prospects of an engineering career. Yet the interviews with male engineering trainers showed the further gender segregation they would encounter. One said that he thought women had more of a chance of finding work in digital electronic

engineering and programming because of skill shortages in these areas. Computer-aided design (CAD) was also identified as an area where women are more likely to be employed. One of the young women engineers talked of female friends who worked in CAD companies but only doing 'simple designs'; nevertheless, she had in her sights an occupational future as a design engineer.

For the male nursery workers, who were buying into a low-status, low-paid occupational area, the difficulties they faced in acceptance of their chosen roles were compounded by the potentially disempowering and limiting nature of the work. Recurrent complaints are that nursery nurses 'are treated like skivvies by the parents' and the job is low paid. 'They don't treat us with the actual knowledge we have got. We are just playing with the children . . . They don't see the background work'. With few opportunities for promotion, many men decide not to stay as nursery workers, a finding also highlighted by Cameron et al. (1999). The desire to work with young children is combined with aspirations and plans to move as quickly as possible into a professional job within the field. For example, one had the ambition to be a head of unit and had applied for two posts without success. To him, the absence of male heads of units in his present company was indicative of gender discrimination. These ambitions contrasted with the aspirations of the female students who said that they wanted to become nannies and nursery nurses.

The personal accounts of the male nursery workers showed them to be resilient and highly committed, with a sense of purpose and vocation. They also revealed how far their experiences of becoming nursery and childcare workers were being negatively affected by gendered attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, it is little surprise to find it reported in the colleges that a lot of young people leave an atypical training at an early stage. The evidence that many find learning and working environments difficult and sometimes unpleasant, through a mixture of attitudes and conditions encountered, undoubtedly contributes to this. Those people, however, who break through these difficulties appear to be more conscious about their occupational choice and thus sometimes more engaged. They demonstrate 'gender autonomy', and recommendations should aim at supporting them, while creating the conditions to enable more people to stay the course without having to display the exceptional resilience of the survivors.

The UK cases used illustratively here were paralleled in the other country studies, showing shared features of experiences of exceptional cases that transcend national boundaries, although it should be noted, following Heikkinen (1996), that the cultural embeddedness of expectations does vary considerably between settings and cultural groups at a more detailed level.

6.6.4 Gender Autonomy

So far, these encounters point to the need to strengthen and support *gender autonomy*. Gender autonomy means that everybody, regardless of gender, should be given the opportunity to develop their chosen career path (whether in paid or unpaid

occupations or a mixture of the two) according to individual predilections, *without gender-related penalty or disadvantage accruing from that choice*.

Supporting *gender autonomy* could be at the centre of improvements regarding gender segregation in the labour market, as an alternative (or at least complementary) strategy to seeking ways of equalising the numbers of people from each sex in each occupation. This does not lead to a deficit model conclusion that people should become more resilient and determined to succeed, while the barriers they face remain untackled. It leads, instead, to some insights into the kinds of support needed for people who want to exercise their gender autonomy by going into atypical fields, while enabling the many women and men who want to do so to exercise gendered preferences with neither penalties nor unfair advantages.

As far as key competences are concerned, the accumulated evidence on gendered perceptions of competences enables us to link the previously segregated discourses of gender studies and VET to ask to what extent they can be part of the solution as well as part of the problem. A further test for these ideas of supporting gender autonomy can be made in relation to men and women changing direction in occupation and spending time out of the labour market. The data from the 127 interviews conducted in the five European countries confirmed that in almost all cases there was a clear division of labour within the home and that the women's occupational choices were circumscribed by the need to fit their occupational roles around their domestic responsibilities.

In the UK study 20 biographical interviews were carried out, 15 with men and women who had returned to the labour market after taking time out of work for family reasons or a period of unemployment and five with people whose change in occupational direction arose primarily from a wish to change direction while in work.[vii] Most expressed satisfaction with their area of work. In the UK cases, the only person interviewed who had held a professional job continued with her commitment to teaching. Another was reasonably happy with her work as a bookkeeper in her husband's company. Another two women wanted to work with children, and in addition to being a part-time school road-crossing attendant, one of them was also involved in a range of voluntary work, including special needs teaching. This was also the case for another who was also working as a school meals assistant and was also involved with helping with toddler groups and on a Night Shelter management committee. It was evident that these women possessed a wide range of skills that were being deployed in areas outside their paid employment, which was in most cases classified as low skill and low status.

The five who had returned to the same field of employment also expressed satisfaction with their jobs. These three women, all of whom were involved in office work, appeared very clear about their occupational choices, and all said that they had wished to return to full-time office work as soon as possible. The two men, who were both in traditionally male jobs, plumbing and metal machining, had both got their jobs through friends. One was working part time because he had childcare responsibilities as a single parent.

An analysis of the abilities that these women said they had developed and mastered whilst being out of the labour market revealed a mix of methodological

and social competences, together with personal attributes that they felt had been acquired or strengthened. From the viewpoint of those returning to work from family breaks, competences acquired outside paid employment are not seen as having much relevance or importance to the workplace apart from jobs which encompassed caring and domestic roles. The women who were working with children could see the value of their skills in terms of their transferability although this term was not explicitly used by them. Those who were engaged in work unrelated to caring, particularly the males, could not see their relevance at all.

Taken together, these encounters raise questions as to whether these kinds of competences are themselves gendered and seems to lend some support to the issues raised by Hoffmann (2001 pp. 40–41) in relation to the persistent and notorious term, female skills, citing popular media sources that assert that female skills including empathy, caring, listening and time management are becoming increasingly essential in the workplace, with men exhorted to get in touch with their feminine side (see e.g. The Future is Female, BBC Panorama).

If the premise is accepted that these types of competences are generic, and valuable to the process of transfer between different types of occupations, then these competences need to be seen as gender neutral. Ascribing gendered features to these competences contributes to the maintenance of gender segregation in the labour market. The idea that the recognition of key competences could be used to strengthen and support gender autonomy therefore has to be seen in the wider context of the social processes, often linked to social stereotypes, that influence the ways in which the relative competences and skills of men and women are recognised, ascribed and valued.

6.6.5 Furthering Gender Autonomy

The furthering of gender autonomy then has to be considered at three levels:

- the individual level;
- the level of VET systems and recruitment practices in the labour market; and
- the macro-level of socio-political features of the society.

On **the individual level, people** can be supported in developing relevant attributes and competences connected to self-assurance; that is

- to try to become aware of ones own attributes and competences beyond usual prejudices;
- to call in question the conventional perceptions of what is a male or female occupation;
- to dare to make 'atypical' occupational choices; and
- to develop perseverance in order not to give up at an early stage of an atypical career.

On **the level of VET systems and recruitment practices**, it is important to provide this encouragement for all people. In addition, it is of particular importance to support people who intend or have decided to choose an occupation which is atypical for their sex, using pedagogical approaches to support the development of competences in the direction of the critical insights and critical engagement in their VET and work environments, as part of dialectical, or shaping processes.

In VET (including training in companies) this means actions

– to counteract the processes which render gender invisible to practitioners, including tiredness with gender issues and conceptions, at least in the UK, that the problem has already been solved;
– to give opportunities for people to work in gender-mixed classes;
– to provide mentoring by people who have themselves made an atypical choice; and
– to be more aware of prejudices regarding gender-typical key competences.

These actions can be taken by VET practitioners and personnel managers responsible for recruitment. As far as policy-making on a meso-level is concerned, this has to provide the framework conditions for these practices to be successful. This includes training for teachers, trainers and personnel managers. In addition, the macro-societal conditions are of utmost importance, for example setting wages according to gender equity and making provisions for childcare, parental leave and part-time work.

If gender autonomy is aimed for at a societal level, how far advanced a society is in relation to the goal of gender autonomy is measured by the extent to which people can choose to follow typical or atypical paths without penalty or disadvantage. This applies both to material disadvantage and to social approval or disapproval. If the aim is to counter gender stereotyping, it is also important not to stereotype societies when undertaking cross-national analyses. The research study 'Gender Autonomy in Europe – An Imprecise Revolution' by Singh (1998) showed that Nordic countries can be classified as advanced despite a high level of gender segregation, as policies and practices are in place, which enable both women and men to exercise gendered preferences without penalties or unfair advantages.

> The Nordic countries unequivocally provide the most sound basis for gender autonomy, . . . although Nordic women experience above- average segregation in the labour market, any disadvantages accruing to such work are more mitigated than elsewhere by protection afforded by the high unionisation of part-time work and the public sector, as well as through generous social benefits. (Singh 1998, p. 150)

Running against the normal stereotypes, southern countries, particularly Greece and Portugal, were classified as having high progressive potential, in the sense that they have potential to progress by virtue of their present modernising process rather then by their actual performance. Recent laws have yet to be fully enacted but are generally in line with the latest European guidelines. Both countries also have strong

non-formal sectors which potentially allow for high levels of role sharing between men and women:

> ... since these countries simultaneously support the family and favour the concept of the welfare state ..., the combination works well for women's abilities to balance the private and public spheres. (p. 154)

Germany and England were both classified as conservative, with change taking place slowly:

> because of the belief either that it is not the states role to provide redistributive services (the UK) or that egalitarianism is at best of secondary interest to stability (Germany), the conservative mode tends not to minimise the structured inequalities between the public and private spheres

Impediments and entrenched barriers (such as lack of adequate affordable pre-school childcare in England and relatively weak legal bases for equal opportunities in UK and Germany) have slowed the pace of change in women's experiences in the labour market despite the strong rises in female educational participation and achievements.

Switzerland and Ireland were classed separately as underdeveloped, with major barriers in the fields of reproductive and legal rights, and rankings near the bottom in all of the indicators of reconciliation between the private and public spheres of activity-maternity leave benefits, childcare policies and gender role-sharing initiatives. Resistance towards state intervention and change also characterised these societies in the field of gender relations.

If the aim is to move towards greater gender autonomy, there is a need to reduce the gender-related penalties and barriers for those who make particular occupational choices, within our respective societies. These may be the gender-related penalties of low pay for caring occupations or the penalties/barriers of hostile working environments for people entering gender-atypical occupations. The systemic features discussed above can change but are slow to do so; the conservative forces are great and the state of social development uneven. Yet as Connell (1987 p. 139) argues, gender regimes can be seen not as static but reflexive, with the relations of power subject to conflicting social interests, formation and dissolving of accepted categories and the re-structuring of institutionalised relations.

6.7 What Is Possible to Change Through Vocational Education and Training?

The question here is deliberately focused at the level of VET practices, asking what can be achieved in VET to encourage and support change, while also recognising that what VET can do will always be very partial. Social structures take much longer to change, but what influences can be exerted by VET practitioners to support change in the desired direction? The accumulated evidence has pointed to the relevance of considering, through the concept of 'gender autonomy', how

highlighting of key competences and improving learning environments can contribute to improving options for career choice and enhancing human potential. The evidence shows that

- overcoming barriers in atypical training and employment requires particular resilience and much determination;
- the exceptional cases who survived the challenges are the tip of the iceberg; dropout in the early stages occurs quite frequently for people who are less resilient or who find particular situations and attitudes intolerable;
- this does not lead to a deficit conclusion that people should become more resilient and determined to succeed without tackling barriers; it leads instead to insights into the kinds of support needed for individuals who want to exercise their gender autonomy by going into atypical fields;
- people who survived in atypical occupational situations found different ways to assert their gender identity; and
- their experiences also reflect the power and social position of the gendered occupation they are entering, a process that experiences as doubly disempowering for males entering low-status female-typical occupations.

These insights lead to the following recommendations:

- Use of key competences as tools for policy and practice cannot advance the cause of gender autonomy alone, without building gender issues into vocational pedagogy – doing gender.
- This requires much more mixed-gender teaching across occupational areas to explore and challenge assumptions about skills, to consider gender identity issues and to provide identity support.
- Create supportive networks of practitioners who are gender sensitive and committed to change. For example, in the same way that colleges would not dream of sending a trainee to a placement that had poor health and safety practices, VET institutions could take steps to ensure that only those placements are used which can demonstrate good gender practices. This can be done in a non-bureaucratic way by establishing networks of practitioners with common aims and goals.
- Take steps to counter the gender tiredness of teacher and trainers who are not already committed to change in this field, with approaches that are fresh (e.g. based on identity and work and evidence-informed practice) and feasible (e.g. networks based).
- Recognise that working for policy change in the framework conditions at a societal level takes longer, but should take place alongside and in parallel with creation of such networks.

VET can only exercise partial influence on the forces and factors that restrict gender autonomy. It cannot by itself change macro-social forces or the early experiences of individuals. But is the space that VET does have being used fully? Expanding awareness of the spaces which can be used by VET practitioners to advance the

cause of gender autonomy can, in time, make the exceptional less exceptional. But macro-level changes in the framework conditions have to be worked for collectively, to reduce the penalties (social, economic and emotional) for those who exercise their gender autonomy in new directions.

6.8 Summary and Conclusions

The ways in which people experience the effects of gender in their personal lives depends to a large extent on their position in the gendered social landscape. Yet young adults trying to exercise control over their lives in the contrasting labour markets of English and German cities have important experiences in common: men's advantages in the labour market despite high educational performance of young women and the continuing pressures on women to prove themselves and the challenges of tackling 'non-traditional' roles typically dominated by men or women. The pursuit of gender autonomy means that everybody, regardless of gender, should be given the opportunity to develop their chosen career path (whether in paid or unpaid occupations or a mixture of the two) according to individual predilections, *without gender-related penalty or disadvantage accruing from that choice.*

The evidence shows that overcoming barriers in atypical training and employment requires particular resilience and much determination; people who survived in atypical occupational situations found different ways to assert their gender identity. Supporting *gender autonomy* is an alternative (or at least complementary) strategy to seeking ways of equalising the numbers of people from each sex in each occupation. This does not lead to a deficit model conclusion that people should become more resilient and determined to succeed, while the barriers they face remain untackled. It leads instead to some insights into the kinds of support needed for people who want to exercise their gender autonomy by going into atypical fields, while enabling the many women and men who want to do so to exercise gendered preferences with neither penalties nor unfair advantages.

Social forces that impede this take much longer to change, but influences can be exerted by practitioners in gendered occupational and career arenas and by the large numbers of adults and young people whose learning they facilitate. The spaces for challenging and changing practices at the level of intermediary organisations, particularly those providing VET, are often underestimated. Practitioners need support in understanding better how the practices facilitate or impede learning and the confidence to change them. Breaking out of the straightjacket of managed approaches of the present system world will not be achieved quickly, but it is at this level that individual strivings and practitioner commitment can combine. Changes can be achieved in the practices of VET institutions to accommodate people's preferences and counter the barriers and penalties they face in taking paths that are atypical for their sex.

This exercise of social responsibility by those who participate in VET, whether as students, teachers, trainers or supervisors, will not have immediate influences on the

social forces and factors that produce gender-based disadvantages. It will however promote awareness, co-operation and action that can feed into the longer term pursuit of macro-level changes in the 'framework conditions' of society. These can be worked for collectively through social movements which, in the cause of gender relations and gender equity, have proved particularly effective and sustainable over time. Where individual strivings, practitioner responses and social action combine, the exercise of social responsibilities at these different levels of society promises to reduce, incrementally, the penalties (social, economic and emotional) for those who choose to exercise their gender autonomy in new directions.

The first part of this chapter showed how the ways in which people experience the effects of gender in their personal lives depends to a large extent on their position in the gendered social landscape. Their gendered locations affect the ways in which people interpret their experiences and perceive relative advantages or advantages in education and the labour market. The idea of gender autonomy shows how the responsibility of the individuals to strive for their chosen and desired futures entails wider social responsibilities, exercised at the macro-, institutional and individual levels. The actors themselves have the social responsibility to assert their gender identity and preferences, individually, on their own account, and collectively, for themselves and others. The spaces for change that open up at the level of intermediary organisations are often underestimated. Here individual strivings and practitioner responses combine. Changes can be achieved that accommodate individuals' preferences and reduce the barriers they face. This equates to the exercise of social responsibility at the meso-level, setting up interdependencies that can feed into the macro-level changes in the framework conditions that have to be worked for collectively. These levels of social responsibility can combine to reduce, incrementally, the penalties (social, economic and emotional) for those who exercise their gender autonomy in new directions.

Notes

i. This was found within the education setting also (mean scores: males $= -0.03$, females $= 0.36$, $p = 0.01$). The 'planned not chance' factor combined responses on whether long-term goals, interest and didn't choose it – had no choice were reasons for their current situation arising, as well as responses to the statements 'Getting a job is just a matter of chance' and 'Being successful at work is just a matter of luck'.

ii. ($p = 0.08$).

iii. For a full account of these findings, see the doctoral thesis by Claire Woolley (June 2005), '*Shaping Lives: Agency in Young Adult Transitions*', University of Surrey.

iv. Gender and qualification was a project of the Fifth European Framework Programme, subtitled *Transcending Gendering Features of Key Qualifications for Improving Options for Career Choice and Enhancing Human Resource Potential*, the project aimed to investigate the impact of gender segregation of European labour markets on vocational education and training, with special regard to key competences. The project, coordinated by Heidegger and Kampmeier (Germany), was undertaken by a partnership of teams from England (Evans, Hoffmann, Saxby-Smith), Finland (led by Heikkinen), Greece (led by Patiniotis) and Portugal (led by Figuera).

v. Documentary and literature analysis covered

- gendered structures of respective national VET systems and labour markets, together with a synthesis of commonalities and structural differences of the participating countries;
- VET-related gender studies including historical, cultural and economic conditions and research on career orientation and gender; and
- the state-of-the art of national discourses on key qualifications

For the empirical part of the investigation, the following were carried out:

- observation of classes in 10 vocational schools (Further Education Colleges in England) in child-care/nursery nursing (female typical), electrical engineering (male typical) and food service (mixed gender) and in work sites;
- interviews with 100 participants in the above-mentioned programmes, including trainers and employers;
- studies of 17 exceptional cases (male nursery workers, female electricians);
- 127 interviews with adult occupational changers; and
- content analyses of advertisements, brochures and information materials.

vi. See Evans and Saxby-Smith (2003) for fuller accounts of the UK cases.
vii. A fuller account of cases is given in Evans and Saxby-Smith (2003).

Chapter 7
Participation, Social Life and Politics

How do the politics of individual responsibility and the centrality of work in people's lives play out in the domains of citizenship, social life and the politics of social participation? This chapter argues that not only people have to learn to be good citizens, but the structures also have to be there, in social institutions of all kinds, for them to exercise citizenship rights and responsibilities actively and fully and in ways which make sense for the lifeworlds they inhabit. This applies throughout the life course and through work as well as in social and community life. Engaged social participation that gives access to powerful knowledge creates the conditions for people to find new ways of solving problems and working together to influence decisions that affect their lives.

Three commonly held misconceptions impede a mature understanding of what citizenship entails:

1) the view that citizenship is a status acquired at the age of majority (people do not therefore have to learn it or need only preparatory education while at school);
2) the view that the exercise of citizenship is an adjunct to the main business of earning a living; and
3) the view that most people still have standardised biography, in which status as an adult means being economically active for a period of 40 years before a retirement supported by benefits accrued during more or less continuous working life.

The idea that people gain and exercise rights and responsibilities sequentially and cumulatively is no longer the normal experience any more than the nuclear family. Changes in status are often provisional, sometimes reversible.

At the start of the 21st century, citizenship is more usefully conceptualised as a process through which people exercise responsibility and social contribution while having entitlements to forms of social support which enable them to manage their own life and work situations and pursue their own projects. This approach to citizenship recognises that institutional and social structures constrain or empower people in acquiring the various forms of knowledge and competence which are necessary to independent existence and social contribution. In spanning the public and private domains of existence, it recognises social inequalities and status inconsistency at

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_7, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

various stages of the life course. Adults may, for example, be supporting a family while on a grant or still in training. Or they may hold responsible positions in work while remaining in their family of origin, still the child in the household, but supporting other members financially. In this way, individual roles and status become differentiated across the different domains of life and experience, and defining an individual as an adult and citizen may hinge on multiple roles performed. People may be caught in disjunctions and contradictions of policies which do not recognise the interplay of the private and public domains and are based on invalid assumptions about common characteristics and needs of age ranges or social groups. To understand transitions to adult, worker and citizen status, we also have to understand the private world of family life.

In public policy debates about preparing people for the demands of 'adult and working life', the exercise of citizenship has tended to be treated as though it were an adjunct to the main business of working for a living. The rather lukewarm reception given to proposals to strengthen citizenship education in schools turned stone cold in Britain when proposals from citizenship advocates started to point towards the need to extend the entitlements to provide continuing citizenship education beyond the age of 16. Preparation for 'real world' of employment starts to dominate in post-compulsory curriculum which readily accommodates 'key skills' yet struggles with citizenship issues when these extend beyond voluntary activities and club-based interests. This position has been consistently challenged by writers such as Crick who argues preparation for citizenship clearly cannot end at age 16 just as young people begin to have more access to the opportunities, rights and responsibilities of adult citizenship and the world of work. The need for an exploration of the ideas and practices of citizenship is evident whether young people are in education or in work-based training (2001, p. 27). I argue that this extends into and through adult life. These ideas are impeded by the concept of citizenship as a status acquired at a fixed point. They are facilitated when we approach citizenship as a lifelong process of engagement with the ideas and practices of democracy, in a developmental way.

How citizenship is conceptualised plays an important role in shaping perceptions and beliefs about the 'right' domains for the exercise of citizenship. I argue that citizenship, when viewed as a process, overarches work and economic contribution to society and encourages us to see the workplace as important an environment for the exercise of citizenship as the community and neighbourhood.

7.1 Social Dynamics, Experience and Participation

Any analysis of how citizenship culture can be advanced has to take account of the changing nature of work and the effects on people's lives of the changing social landscape. What are the conditions under which learning for adult life takes place? Which versions of citizenship are required? How can they best be achieved?

In all European countries, young adults are experiencing uncertain status and are dependent on state and parental support for longer periods than would have

been the case a generation ago (Chisholm and Bergeret 1991). Faced with changing opportunity structures, people have to find their own ways of reconciling personal aspirations with available opportunities and their own values in the domains of education, consumption, politics, work and family life.

In the work arena, transitions to worker status are defined by institutionalised rules concerning recognised qualifications and credentials. These credentials testify to the knowledge, competence and experience of the holder, and their acquisition and application depend on the way in which the various credentials and selection systems are negotiated (Ainley 1994; Raffe 1991). This in turn is heavily influenced by cultural and social 'capital', the resources which come from family background and social networks and are important in access to information, advice and social, financial and career support. Adults bring different behaviours to life situations, and success in negotiating these structures and networks can bring stability or instability to the life course. For those who are unsuccessful in gaining entry to jobs, long-term unemployment cuts young adults off from the opportunities of the market, from access to work-based credentialling systems and from the exercise of citizenship in any significant sense (Evans and Heinz 1994). Even successful entry to the labour market can bring another set of limitations and instabilities. Early work entry can create premature foreclosure of options and stereotyped work identities. In the 1950s, workplaces were described in the Crowther Report (Ministry of Education 1959) as deadening to the minds of young school leavers. Lifelong learning policies of the late 1990s now talk of learning organisations. These are claimed to provide the model for the future, providing new opportunities for democratic access to knowledge. But only a small minority of enterprises match up to the model, while for those in the increasing ranks of casualised labour, training in narrowly based competences is unlikely to be of any use over time. Members of casualised pools of labour kept in ongoing insecurity and instability are also unlikely to be able to engage in full participation in society.

I also argue, with reference to Morell (1991) and Dahrendorf (1997), that citizenship rights should not become a quid pro quo, a social contract in which rights are tied to employment status. However, it can be argued that social rights should be re-examined in the light of increased demands for people to be 'flexible' and 'adaptable' in relation to the labour market, with the high insecurity that entails. When people become more flexible to employers needs, this can often mean reduced scope for flexibility in other aspects of their lives. 'Hidden' works in the home, in caring for family members and in contributing to the community go unrecognised. Seeing citizenship as a process has implications for rights as well as responsibilities. Expanded social rights can include, for example, the right to choose more family friendly patterns of living and working. Expanding the conception of social rights in this way could go some way to stabilising the high-insecurity society and countering some of its most damaging features, while providing a strengthened base for a citizen culture.

How have the changing employment situations of the 1980s and 1990s affected people's attitudes to work? For some time, there was a version of the 'moral panic' over the effects of unemployment on people's motivations to work. The traditional

incentives of ‘get good qualifications and get a good job’ could not be invoked by teachers, and fears that a generation would be raised lacking the ‘work-ethic’ were pronounced in the early 1980s.

The expansion of post-compulsory education has produced a new set of structures and experiences between the end of the compulsory phase of schooling at 16 and first entry to the labour market, at ages up to the mid-20s. In England, the approach underlying ‘vocationalism’ has been to surround young people with a range of work-related opportunities for learning relatively early in their educational careers, but the opportunities for progressing from learning into work are haphazard and risky. There is also a prolonged dependency associated with extended post-compulsory education, which runs counter to the deeply embedded cultural values and expectations of a significant proportion of the working-class population, particularly among males. While access to education is a right of social citizenship, in the post-compulsory phase this has become associated with decreased social citizenship rights in other areas, associated with increased dependency and expectations of family support. In fact, the decline of employment opportunities ‘tightened the bonds’ between education and employment in a host of ways. High levels of work motivation and beliefs in personal responsibility for employment success were sustained

7.2 Self-Confidence, Independence and Responsibility

Levels of self-confidence felt in relation to employment issues are often linked to the extent to which people feel that they have been able to take important decisions independently. In the Anglo-German surveys, approximately half the young people felt that their present position was a result of their own plans, with chance being the second biggest perceived influence, followed by social connections.

In a Hanover discussion group, the following comments were made about self-confidence:

> I think I can claim to be quite self-confident. Nonetheless, I always try to keep it at a moderate level. It would be wrong to seem arrogant to people. I want to find my strengths, which I do – especially in my studies – and let them grow. But on the other hand, I feel the need to scrutinise myself closely, that is, either doing it by myself or letting others do it. That is my aim.
>
> I just thought about something you mentioned: reflection. I’m not very self-confident in some situations, especially when they are new and unknown to me. However, I know a lot of my strengths and weaknesses. I can assess myself well. I love to reflect on things. And that is how I would define ‘self-confidence’. When I find myself in a situation where I feel insecure, then it is easier for me to understand myself.

These young adults were also asked how often they experienced a range of different types of responsibility at work, in their training schemes or in college and in their lives outside these settings and whether they felt able to set their own goals, felt stretched, felt able to make decisions, felt able to use their own initiative and felt a sense of achievement. The findings are set out in Fig. 7.1.

	Higher Education			Employment			Unemployment		
	Derby	Hanover	Leipzig	Derby	Hanover	Leipzig	Derby	Hanover	Leipzig
	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W	OW/W
Feel given responsibility	31/57	65/47	62/37	31/59	71/57	65/57	22/35	59/39	66/33
Set own goals	48/48	82/50	86/59	63/50	85/50	84/42	43/33	63/35	69/18
Feel stretched	27/49	54/54	54/74	26/44	55/62	56/53	27/23	47/35	52/29
Make decisions	78/68	45/56	93/50	93/67	92/47	92/42	70/45	75/29	79/26
Have chance to use initiative	52/52	65/39	70/42	66/64	68/45	64/48	47/28	62/35	59/33
Feel sense of achievement	31/29	72/47	76/79	31/42	77/57	78/80	64/39	64/39	66/45

OW = outside work, study or training; W = in work, study or training

Fig. 7.1 Types of responsibility experienced 'often' in different settings (%)

These findings on responsibility and achievement are dramatically different from those obtained with a younger sample of 16–19-year-olds in an earlier study: *Youth and Work in England and Germany* (Evans and Heinz 1994). This found that young people in England felt more stretched and challenged and had more exposure to work-related responsibilities than their German counterparts at that age. We suggested that this was a reflection of the accelerated transitions into the labour market which were still common in the UK at that time, bringing earlier exposure to the challenges and responsibilities of the workplace. We anticipated that young Germans, with longer periods of work preparation with trainee/student status, would experience these responsibilities later and possibly at a higher level.

The more recent study revealed a complex picture among our older age group, which was affected by their experiences in education and the labour market. Among those in higher education in the English city, young people were more likely to report taking the initiative and being able to take their own decisions, but German higher education respondents were more likely to report feeling stretched and to experience a sense of achievement, particularly in the Leipzig groups. Initiative and decision-making also appear to be frequently experienced by more employed young people in Derby than their German counterparts, who, like their counterparts in higher education, were more likely to report a sense of achievement and feelings of being stretched. But all the unemployed groups were less likely to report experiences of responsibility and achievement than the employed and higher education groups. The English system does seem to foster characteristics that indicate a greater sense of agency and control, even though the demands made are similar. However, experience of unemployment produces a sense of powerlessness and lack of achievement which overrides national experiences.

Comparison of young people's experiences of responsibility and achievement *outside* the work or training environment showed that higher education students in all three cities reported feeling stretched more by their studies than by their life

outside, but the other groups felt that their life outside training gave more scope for the exercise of responsibility and initiative. Among employed young people in Germany, the picture is one of lives outside work offering at least as much, if not more, experience of responsibility and challenge than life at work. In contrast, young people from Derby reported that most experiences of responsibility arise in the work setting. The unemployed young people, both English and German, reported much richer experiences outside their training schemes than elsewhere. Again, both current experience of education, work or unemployment and cultural background seemed to affect young people's sense of agency and control outside the work setting.

7.3 'Flexibility' and Critical Engagement

While motivations can be sustained in education, preparation for what may be the harsh realities of the labour market requires development of strong learner identities with an orientation towards lifelong learning and continuous development of knowledge-based skill for 'flexibility'. Policies that emphasise people taking more control of their lives also link this to the suggestion that 'flexibility' to meet shifting labour market demands is the way to achieve this. More radical versions would emphasise ways of increasing people's capacities for critical engagement in the social practices of their workplaces and neighbourhoods. While participation in work has been a pre-occupation for policy makers, learning for citizenship must also relate to the ways in which people participate in their local communities. As well as being producers at work, they are also consumers, and they have a right to participate in the life of their local communities as citizens and voters.

The democratic citizen is a politically informed and active citizen. How far do our adult populations in Europe meet these criteria? It is instructive to ask whether political engagement is increasing or decreasing in Europe. Is it confined to well-educated minorities? Eurobarometer surveys and the European Values surveys indicate an increase in political participation since the 1950s, as a general trend in all countries. They also indicate that highly active forms of participation in politics are practised by a growing, but small, minority (increased from 4 to 10% between 1974 and 1990) with some engagement in political activity increasing from 27 to 46% over the same period. When the figures are broken down by country, they confirm a trend towards higher levels of political activity across all countries.

The majority of European citizens now have some form of engagement and participation in political activity, with an overall increase 56% by the turn of the 21st century (Budge and Newton 1997). These figures include all forms of political participation, including a rise in direct action. Identification with political parties has grown in Greece, Portugal and Spain in contrast with the decline in Sweden, Ireland, Italy and France. The decline in Britain and West Germany of the 1970s has been reversed in the 1980s and 1990s (Schmitt and Holmberg 1998). The Eurobarometer surveys show that 93% of western Europeans believed in the legitimacy

of democracy as the way to govern, and a stable 50–60% said that they were 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with the way in which democracy operated in their own country between 1976 and 1991 (Budge and Newton 1997). These were the critical years for political change in eastern Europe.

In Europe, general support for Western forms of democracy is stable and has continued at a high level. Governments often lose support, but active political engagement is generally low, and lack of support for particular governments has not presented a challenge to the general political system. In the post-communist states, however, the political culture (attitudes towards government and political authorities) necessary for the stability of the political system has been slow to develop. When access to hoped-for affluence is postponed, expectations are unfulfilled and disillusion sets in. There are differences between the post-communist world and Western democracies in the importance attached to voluntary organisations and interest groups reflecting the degree of former reliance on state-directed strategies. Civil society – in the form of interest groups independent of the state – has considerable political potential. It is argued that having groups able to organise themselves and act independently of the state is important for the viability of democracy, and the extent and form of interest group organisation within European countries is an important indicator of democracy and stability. However, in a 'high insecurity' society, the self-protective features of interest groups may have increasingly negative implications for stability. Civil society without civic virtues may be dangerous for the future of democracy.

Surveys in post-communist states also show that parliamentary trust and confidence decreased in the mid-1990s. Despite this, political engagement in the form of subjective interest in politics and future voting intentions is comparable with levels in western European countries and the principles of parliamentary democracy appear broadly accepted. These trends form the backcloth for research into the views, values and experiences of younger adults in changing socio-economic environments in western Europe.

Globalisation processes are often associated with people increasingly become disassociated from their 'traditional' contexts. This means that the search for identity or sense of wholeness and continuity as a person gains a new intensity (Baethge 1989). Intergenerational transmission of 'virtues' is reduced, and the channels to participation in political and social structures may become obscured. Engagement in citizenship in its maximal sense is thus made more difficult, and there have been signs that the pursuit of 'ego-driven' projects could become paramount (characterised as the 'me' generation), as people act to maximise personal opportunity and reduce risk. Yet, as noted in Chapter 1, over time this amounts to a zero-sum game.

Many of these 'choices' are rooted in partly formed social identities, the senses people have of who they are and what their capabilities are. Self-definition involves internalising the definitions and attributes ascribed by others. These subjective identities are associated with social class, gender and ethnicity. They also reflect educational credentials and other mediating factors associated with experiences in the labour market and wider social context, with narrowing career options playing

a part in shaping identities over time. While the latter are increasing in relative significance as traditional transition patterns become 'fractured' and extended, disadvantage continues to be concentrated in groups defined by class, gender and ethnicity in particular localities, as the 16–19 initiative demonstrated (Banks et al. 1992). Social identities are reflected in social attitudes. Changes in political involvements between 16 and 20 were incremental, with 'only a tiny minority (developing) any serious involvement in politics of the conventional kind' (Banks et al. p. 176). Their attitudes were not organised around political positions but around the politics of the personal. Changes in early adult life involved gradual increases in interest in political issues.

Post-school learning environments may be pivotal for future patterns of learning, social participation and the exercise of citizenship in later adult life, yet most attention, in the European context, is given to preparation for work and careers.

Do we know to what extent are 18–25-year-olds active agents in their lives outside work? How does this compare with their agency inside work and their work values?

Findings from the Anglo-German research played an important part in the ESRC Youth Citizenship and Social Change Programme in showing the ways in which individualised market-oriented behaviours appear most strongly in the setting in which markets have been deregulated and individualised behaviours have been most strongly encouraged or enforced – that of the English labour market. In all groups, the German respondents, both from the western and the eastern states of Germany, were less proactive in relation to the labour market (e.g. in job seeking) than their English counterparts. They also showed more politically active group behaviour in terms of participation in political events and engagement in political discussions (Fig. 7.2).

The juxtaposition of these two findings, which show market-orientated and politically active behaviours to be inversely related, suggests that concerns about the erosion of citizenship in consumer- and market-oriented socio-economic environments may be well founded. This is underlined when voting intentions and levels of political interest declared by respondents are examined. Answers to the 'would you vote . . .?' question suggest quite an important international difference. Seventy-three percent in east German sample and 78% in the west German sample said yes, compared to a considerably lower 61% in England. There were also important differences between groups, with more in the unemployed groups stating that they would not vote.

This wasn't just apathy on the part of English respondents because 37% did answer the question, but said 'no', they wouldn't vote. There were also important differences between groups, with more in the unemployed groups stating that they would not vote.

They seem to be making a conscious decision *not* to do something. Are the German political parties better at appealing to or representing this age group? The German interviews suggest a stronger interest and critical engagement in formal politics and political issues than is found in the English groups, although both are highly critical of politics and politicians. It should also be noted that political activity

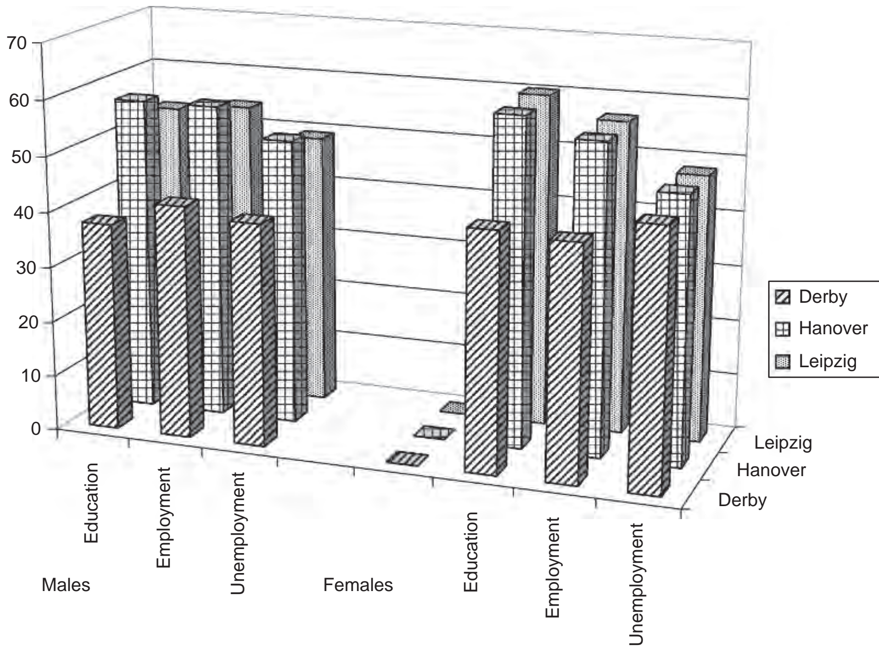

Fig. 7.2 Politically active group behaviours

and interest increases with age (in all groups), a finding which reinforces those of previous studies and confirms that this is not a phenomenon of young Germans retaining ‘student’ identities longer in the more highly institutionalised German environment. There were important differences when different types of activity or behaviour are examined. Involvement in political organisations was also compared with involvement in religious and sports organisations, for relative importance with other aspects of personal and social life.

The table gives percentages of respondents ($n = 300$ in each city) who have engaged in the listed activity once or more (Table 7.1):

Table 7.1 Participation in activities and organisations

	Activities/organisations	Derby	Leipzig	Hanover
1.	Attended a political meeting/rally	32	71	72
2.	Given views to a politician	21	17	16
3.	Handed out leaflets	25	9	11
4.	Helped organise public meetings	32	37	47
5.	Discussed political views with family/friends	74	90	91
6.	Joined a trade union	16	15	13
7.	Joined a political party	1	4	8
8.	Joined a religious organisation	23	21	58
9.	Joined a sports organisation	74	60	62

Activities 2 and 3, where the English outscore the Germans, are 'individual' political activities; the other items are arguably more social/communal. The behaviours among English 18–25-year-olds did not reflect a high degree of collective agency. The German/English difference on item 5 is noticeable, but not large. It is possible that more politics/citizenship education in schools and in post-school learning environments in England could lead to an increase in this kind of behaviour. The difference in item 1 also suggests more overt political activity on the part of the German respondents. Are the Germans more comfortable with day-to-day personal political interactions? Does their cultural context encourage this? The low numbers joining political organisations can be contrasted with the high levels of affiliation to sports organisations and the proportions who join religious organisations. (The high figure for religious affiliations in Hanover is typical for the area.)

Turning to the interview transcripts, the following extracts typify the range of German and English comments on politics. They reflect a mix of passive, resigned and resistant and proactive stances:

Derby Higher Education Group

It's hard for us to be interested really. I mean Labour got in and one of the first things they did was to cut student grants, wasn't it? So we can't really be happy about that.

We were all rooting for them and then they did that, and now it's like 'go away!'.

That's right. I think, well, I just can't be bothered anymore with any of it.

Hanover Employed Group

I do not know a thing about politics. I am not interested in it very much.

We cannot influence them anyway. Once they are the leaders they want to lead all alone. I believe that there is no use getting involved in it at all, that is, that there is anything I can do about it.

Leipzig Employed Group

I am not interested in politics, you know. These people who rule are of no use anyway. I can vote for a party but nothing will improve. I am fed up with politics when I look at the situation on the apprenticeship market.

Derby Higher Education Group

I do think it is important to some extent to understand the politics that affect you, not necessarily politics full stop. But, I'm not very up to date with it all myself.

Derby Employment Group

Politics, I think is quite important with the job I do, because with the benefits system, if they change it, I've got to be up to date on it because of the advice that I give people and if I give them the wrong advice then . . . .

But I don't really care for it myself. It's only when it's relevant to my job that I take any notice.

Hanover Higher Education Group

You are not serious, asking me this question are you? Of course, to me politics is very important, very, very important.

Table 7.2 Percentages 'very or quite interested' in politics, by education/employment setting

	Unemployed	Employed	Education	Total
Males	77	91	94	87
Females	57	65	81	68

Table 7.3 Interested in politics, by city

	Derby	Hanover	Leipzig
Interested	41	87	92
not interested	58	13	8
no answer	1	–	–

Hanover Unemployment Group

I think politics is very important. Politics creates the framework for our lives. It influences our lives in all spheres, work but also leisure too.

Leipzig Higher Education Group

Politics begins in your residential district. There you can change something. Big politics however . . ..

Yes, sure you can. For example, by organising a demo.

The strongest expressions of political and activism came from a minority of research participants in the German groups. Interest in the Derby group appeared to be more motivated by individual self-interest. But many in both countries take a negative view, along the lines of 'they're all the same' or 'you can't change anything'?

All the things they tell you at election time sound so good but when the election is over they do not remember what they promised to the people. I do not think that I can influence politics.

Although the English were often negative, it could be argued that this is more a case of rejection than apathy – they have usually 'made a choice' to be negative – again suggesting that the English parties have done too little to appeal to this age group.

The following picture, shown in Table 7.2, emerged of the young adults' interest in politics by collapsing together the categories of responses 'very interested' and 'quite interested' into 'interested' as well as 'not very interested' and 'not at all interested' into 'not interested' (Table 7.3).

Students in higher education exhibit the highest levels of interest and activity, when compared with those already in employment or experiencing periods of unemployment. Active engagement is strongest amongst German students.

7.4 Students' Participation in Politics

In Germany, students show a high level of interest in politics. This is reflected in the students' readiness to vote if an election would take place next week. In Hanover,

88% of the students would vote, in Leipzig 89% and in Derby 67%. In Derby, one-third (32%) of the students would not take part in an election.

The absolute majority in Hanover and Leipzig (95% and 92%, respectively) report regular discussions of political topics in the family or with friends. (In Derby, the number of those who never discusses political topics with the family or friends is considerably high (21)). Undoubtedly, political issues are important topics for German students as the following two young women indicate:

> Young woman 1, Leipzig: I had to be blind and deaf to ignore politics completely. I do think that it is of importance to know about it but it is a matter of how close you let it near you. You are confronted with politics every day but it is up to you what you make of it.
>
> Young woman 2, Leipzig: Our lives depend on politics. In order to reach something you need to be involved in politics, that is, to become a professional politician. Usually, you read and hear about politics. You can discuss about it but the interest will not go any further.

These opinions typify German students' views on politics. Furthermore, they differentiate between local government politics, country and federal politics, and higher education policy can also be picked out as a central theme. Some see political engagement as having its roots in one's local community. One student, for example, thought the offer for 'conversation' with inhabitants by the Leipzig mayor to be a good idea and pleaded for people to go there and make known their opinions. Other strongly held views include that of the young man who was horrified at the high percentage of votes of a right-wing extremist party in Saxony-Anhalt in the last regional election. He said he would like to give a good piece of his mind to every voter. A young woman was upset about the absolute majority of the CDU in the Saxon parliament and felt that she had not been represented as a citizen for years. In contrast, another student's attitude towards politics seemed atypical in Leipzig student circles:

> I do not think about politics. Maybe that is wrong. In elections I follow my parents. May be that will change in the future when I live my life independently.

Derby students expressed a lot of scepticism about the political process. This was generally the case regardless of their level of interest in politics. Many of the students claimed to be uninterested in politics. There appeared to be a general feeling that their concerns were not heard, and this explained why many of them had turned their backs on politics.

> Young man 4, Derby: I think I did take an interest in it, but then sort of you vote for things, I don't know, on promises and stuff and then they don't seem to do it anyway. So I think, so well, why bother?
>
> Young man 8, Derby: It's hard for us to be interested really 'cos I mean labour got in and one of the first things they did was to cut student grants, wasn't it. So we can't really be happy about that, being a student.
>
> Young woman 3, Derby: We were all rooting for them and then they did that and now it's like go away. I think we don't have any belief in the system at all really, 'cause....'

Young man 4, Derby:	No, the politicians. It's all mouth really isn't it. I mean they, they oh family values and everything and yet they're the ones like having affairs left, right and centre.
Young man 9, Derby:	I think we take them with a pinch of salt. They say one thing and you know full well, alright they're saying it but it's not going to happen. So even if you vote for them it's not going to happen.

Despite the distance the students feel to politics at the macro-level (great politics), in their personal dispositions they see ways how they could become engaged in politics. (In the group interviews, the political section was discussed very emotionally.) The majority of the German research participants (Hanover 86, Leipzig 78) had taken part in a public meeting or demonstration 'once' or 'more often'. This applied to 31 of the Derby respondents. The experience of helping to organise any public meeting or event was shared by 28% of the Derby students, 45% in Leipzig and 59% in Hanover. For the students speaking in the extract below, their experience of political action had diminished their belief in its efficacy.

Young woman 6, Derby:	We can really and we can campaign all we like, like we did for not paying fees and such like, it's not going to work is it.
Young woman 7:	It isn't no.
Interviewer:	**So you did that?**
Young woman 6:	Yeah. We did it. I'm a subject rep and I took part in the, you know in rallies and stuff and err filled in lots of post cards and posted them off and wrote letters to people and got nowhere.
Young man 9:	Like beating your head against a brick wall.
Young woman 6:	Yes, there's only so many times you do it before you give up.

Not all students in Derby were wholly dismissive of politics. There were people in both groups who saw it as having some relevance to their lives, although this acknowledgement was usually qualified with the admission that they did not know or understand as much as they might.

Young woman 11, Derby:	A lot of it affects your future though doesn't it, like policies that are brought in.
Young man 10:	Socially, as well, when you're working you go out and people start talking about you know things that are going on in the news and on telly and stuff and if you don't know, it doesn't matter how good you are at your job, if you don't know you know what's, you don't know what's going on, you're just going to look stupid really. You have to have quite a broad background so, to get on in anything really, I don't know.
Young woman 5:	I'm quite interested in it but I mean you don't get the information about it around nowadays, I don't think. I mean they tried to, but where I live and the, the majority of the people don't really know what's going on. What they're voting for. They know they've got to vote, but they don't know what it's for, or what the arguments are for and against it and stuff like that. I mean it's just not well, I mean, we should all really know what the principles are behind it. I mean it involves all of us, but people don't. . .

Young woman 6: I think you need to know a certain amount so that you can see why decisions are made affecting you are made. Whether they're actually made because of a valid reason or whether they're simply just the politics of it, you know. Erm, one. . .

Interviewer: So you want to understand why it is they are done?

Young man 4: Yeah, why things are done.

Young woman 6: I do think it is important to some extent to understand the politics that affect you, not necessarily politics you know full stop.

Erm, but I'm not, I'm not very up to date with it myself. I'm not, you know stuff that affects me I maybe know a little bit about but not a great deal. I don't take a huge interest in it. Although I do believe that you should know something about it.

In the student groups, few of these self-reported views are associated with differences in self-initiative or participation in other areas of political participation. The results for 'never' are very high (between 77 and 99) in all three towns when asked if they had given views to an MP or local government or had handed out leaflets whether one had joined a political party or the trade union. Responses to the question of whether they belong to a church or religious organisation show that Hanover differed strongly from the two other localities (this is not often the case). This applies to 67 in Hanover, 36 in Leipzig and for only 22 in Derby.

Students' party preferences in the case of parliamentary elections lie within the usual trends. While students in Leipzig have no sympathy for liberal or the extreme right-wing parties and – in contrast to Hanover – the Green Party attracts hardly any response, the number of PDS voters was, at the time of the survey, in line with the last elections in Leipzig.[i]

7.4.1 Work Values and Activities Outside Work

How far is the scope for responsibility and achievement reflected in work values, when considered alongside features such as wages, job security, atmosphere and collective contribution? The chart for the groups in employment settings is given in Fig. 7.3. The charts broadly followed similar patterns in the higher education and employment groups, the most important differences being the national ones.

In all settings, job security continued to be highly valued by the German research participants. A good salary or wage was most highly valued by the English but less so by the German respondents. 'Affiliation' factors to do with the people you meet and work with are important for a friendly atmosphere, but not for relationships. Collective and 'service to society' values were rated as important by only a few respondents in each setting and area. The previous socialisation of the Leipzig group into collective values and the subordination of the individual to the collective good have disappeared in the values expressed in this survey.

In 1997, in the second survey of the DJI (German Youth Institute), 7000 young people in east and west Germany were asked about their relationship towards politics. The findings of that study are consistent with the author's present study. Work

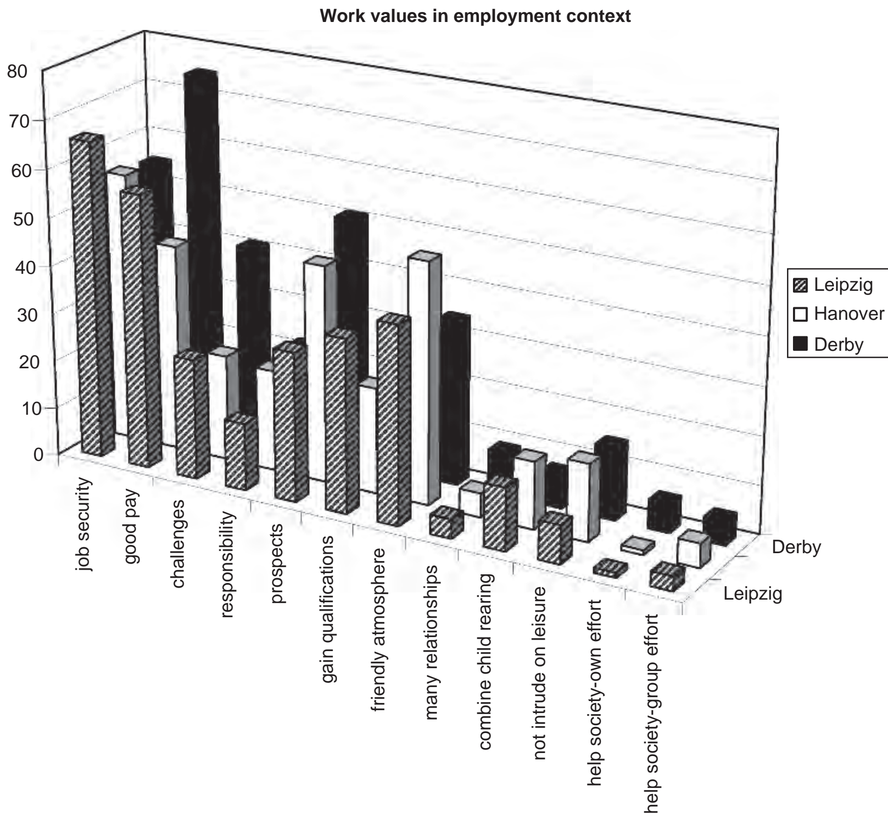

Fig. 7.3 Work values in employment (N = 900, n = 100 in each setting in each city)

and profession are still central elements in the life planning of younger people. 'The risks of unemployment and uncertainties in professional biographies seem dangerous to them'. The first demand German young adults place on politics is to secure and enlarge opportunities for qualifications and rewarding workplaces. 'Work shall be more than earning money and citizenship more than voting' for German youth. The ideal of democracy is estimated highly including participation in school, university and public in general. The study showed that there was dissatisfaction with the 'realities' of the state, the parties and politicians and little confidence in the institutions.

In the eastern states, the majority of students show some dissatisfaction with the political realities of the Federal Republic. The gap between the support of the idea of democracy and the satisfaction with the democratic everyday reality is marked in the eastern states and consistent with the wider trends in post-communist societies. It has been suggested that the feelings of young east Germans reflect their belief that they are disadvantaged because they do not get their just share of the wealth – the subjective balance sheets turns out to be more often negative for the east Germans,

as Gille and Kruger (2000) have argued. The Anglo-German comparative findings show that eastern German respondents do not believe opportunities are given to all, while more of their western German counterparts do believe this.

East Germans perceive the influences of structurally based ‘acquired’ attributes are more important in affecting people’s opportunities in life than their west German counterparts, while English respondents perceive these influences as least important.

7.5 Education for Citizenship in Adult Life

In England, government policy has tended to emphasise the need for a strong civil society combined with citizenship, and the question of citizenship education in adult life is periodically addressed. This needs to recognise that interest in politics increases with age and to understand better the ways in which biographical events occur, which make civic and political engagement more immediately relevant.

In Germany, where citizenship and value education has been enshrined in the curriculum not only at school but also in the Berufsschulen, the citizenship education debate has been centred on the ‘integration’ of the eastern states after the political upheavals and on the appropriate aims of citizenship education after 16. Questions of nationality and access to citizenship rights have also dominated the national agenda, with obvious implications for citizenship education. In eastern Germany, expectations of state-driven responses to social issues appear to remain quite high. For adult educators, the transformation process of adult education in the new federal states was presented as an opportunity to reconsider positions and prejudices in an uncritical manner (Kuchler 1993; Kade 1993) and to reflect on the impact the changes in structures of adult education had on the wider federal republic. In practice, the market forces which, according to Spöring (1995), ‘swept a wave’ of new market providers into the eastern states also deepened the mistrust of citizens.

Views, values and experiences of people differ according to their position in the social landscape, in the various settings of education, unemployment and employment. In all three cities, most recognise the structural constraints on their aspirations and scope for action. Citizenship education has high potential to engage with the multi-dimensional nature of people’s lives and to expand awareness of the avenues for political, civic and social engagement. Yet this is undermined by the disengagement from collective activities that can stem from the pursuit of an ‘individualised’ life. The lack of connection into democratic structures in communities and workplaces appears to be the most pressing problem to be addressed (Fig. 7.4).

The metaphor for human agency which sees people as ‘actors in the social landscape’ carries implications for the ‘curriculum’ for citizenship. This must relate, at any age or stage, to a framework for interpreting the world as a ‘social whole’, to use Sedunary’s (1996) expression, while understanding the sources of diversity and differentiation within it. In conjunction with this, inclusive policies, strategies

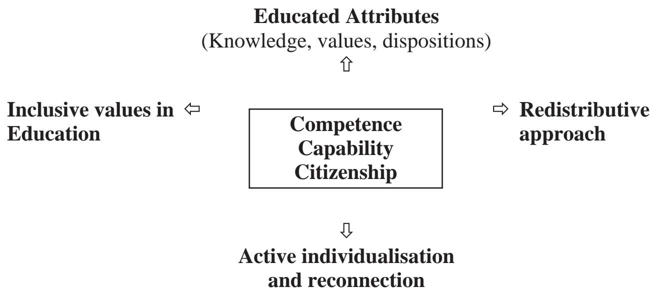

Fig. 7.4 Bringing the elements together: education for citizenship

and forms of educational support are needed which value and recognise the capabilities of all, policies which recognise diversity and move away from normative assumptions abut the condition of particular age groups as a whole. Values and attitudes formed through learning are likely to have important effects in adult life across all social domains including health, crime, parenting as well as civic participation. What counts as positive civic participation varies according to social, religious groups. Processes of socialisation into work roles also shape attitudes and values salient on non-work contexts.

Research evidence on active social participation and citizenship throughout the life course shows that education can be significant in several ways. One perspective is to see education as an asset that individuals may draw on for political or civic knowledge and behaviours. According to this resource model of learning and citizenship, people develop a repertoire of civic and political responses and use rational choice to select which to use in any given situation, according to their own perception of benefits to be gained. In this perspective, knowledge mediates political choice and participatory citizenship. A contrasting perspective emphasises 'skills' and attitudes that can be fostered to enhance citizenship behaviours, including organisational and communication skills and attitudes such as a sense of civic duty. Democratic styles of teaching and free expression of opinion are associated with civic and political participation. Some jobs develop capabilities that are highly relevant to politics and many forms of social participation. While attributes may be developed through educational activities in schools, they are just as likely to be developed through work, community and interest-based activities of particular kinds. But only certain kinds of learning produce the meta-level competences necessary for active citizenship – critical and reflective abilities and capacities for self-determination and shared autonomy. These tend to be associated with higher educational levels. In 'public good' models of the relationships between education and citizenship, the argument is made that cumulative level of societal education may enhance tolerance and trust even if attitude change is not sufficient to prompt changes in behaviour (Puttman 1993).

The 'relative effects' model of education and citizenship (Emler and Fraser 1999) problematises this by recognising education as a positional good (Hirsch 1977). As argued in Chapter 1, access to the advantages of extended education such as

influential social networks and experiences relevant to active civic participation depends on relative rather than actual level of education. Differential access becomes another source of inequality. As Schuller et al. (2001) show, drawing on Dalton (1988) and Marsh (1990), individuals who are disaffected, often through lack of educational qualifications and poor employment prospects, 'respond to their situation through rejection of the conventional routes of political expression' (p. 44). Democratic enlightenment, according to Nie et al. (1996), involves adherence to norms of tolerance and acceptance of democracy. This should be distinguished from political and civic engagements that revolve around depth of awareness of the current political landscape, practical knowledge and direct involvement in political campaigns. The impact of education on democratic enlightenment, particularly in respect of support for democracy and tolerant attitudes with respect to ethnic minorities, is a well-established research finding. This impact is associated with absolute rather than relative education levels in the population according to Schuller et al. (2001). But the effects of education are much more bounded in their impact on the engagement attributes of citizenship. In this context, social networks are important and education becomes a positional good. The absolute levels that people have are not reflected in their social and political influence. It is relative educational levels, associated with social and cultural capital, that tend to give people added influence. This is as often expressed through political engagement in respect of local issues, children's schooling and health matters as through 'big' politics.

Empirical studies have attempted to answer the question 'what forms of learning lead to civic behaviours?' Socialisation practices begin early in family history and develop through school and other mediating institutions. Family achievement rather then personal achievement has been shown to be important (Hashway 1996), since this is most associated with long-term engagement in social networks and socialising experiences. For example, Preece et al. showed how people who exercise active citizenship in adult life often report having learned this through long-term family engagement in civic activities, although for women, adult participation in higher education sometimes prompted profound changes in social, civic and political engagement. Older people socialised into the values of civic participation frequently re-engage with civic matters after retirement, finding both personal satisfaction and opportunities for social contribution after the pre-occupations of working life. The patterns of engagement again tend to be class-, ethnicity- and gender based. Expanding the spaces for social participation and reducing the barriers to engagement in civic matters go hand in hand with support for learning in the 'transitional' life phases that provide turning points in people's lives (Antikainen 1996). For older people surviving traumatic experiences such as bereavement, divorce or unemployment, compelling arguments are made by advocacy bodies for improved support services. The positives of realising untapped potential through exposure to different activities and settings are equally important for older people, as universities of the 'third age' demonstrate. Being able to articulate issues and feelings and draw on as well as respond to the experience of others provides avenues for learning that are often undervalued.

Education can potentially develop awareness of how people are differently situated in the social landscape. Understanding variations in contexts and identities is central to the democratic enlightenment mentioned earlier. Identities relevant to social, civic and political participation may be spatial (local, national, European or international), temporal (intergenerational, cultural) or associated with virtual networks. Effective education, according to Heater (1992), enables people to locate themselves better in relation to these various contexts. Relationships vary by social and ethic group and geographical location. They also vary according to the prevailing political context. For example, devolution of powers to regional assemblies creates different meanings for citizenship through changing structures and cultures for voting and political participation.

Some writers contrast 'market' models of citizenship engagement with 'moral' models, for example Carr (1991) and Schuller et al. (2001).[1] It is more helpful to move beyond these polarisations to a greater recognition that both market-related and morally based rationales for civic and political engagement co-exist and have a complex interplay in the lives of people and their communities.

To achieve a strengthened culture of citizenship needs people to learn about, for and through the exercise of citizenship in everyday lives. For adults this means

- moving beyond policy pre-occupations with key skills and narrow form of competence, towards the development of what I have termed 'educated attributes' – the combination in adult life of values, knowledge skills and dispositions of Crick et al.;
- approaches which are both inclusive *and* redistributive; and
- improved connection into democratic structures where skills and dispositions of active citizenship can be exercised.

Where are these structures for those moving through and out of various forms of post-school education and training and trying to gain a foothold in the institutions of work and adult life? Where are they for those adults in insecure positions and caught in the revolving doors of the labour market? In local communities, democratic structures are there, but they are often not representative and do not attract broad-based community involvement and engagement. Industrial democratic structures such as work councils are generally not in existence in UK companies, and employee voice is often confined to 'consultation' of weak forms (cf. Works Councils in Germany). Even this is further weakened by conditions of globalisation and incorporation of 'employee voice' into dominant corporate cultures. This all adds to conception that citizenship, if exercised at all in its critical and active sense, is something that is exercised outside workplaces. Ascherson argues that these values and practices distinguish the UK (in all its constituent countries) from western European 'partners' in the European Union. Asking how European can or will we be, and suggesting that Britain is on a different 'Sonderweg' from the rest of Europe, Ascherson (2001) comments:

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[1] Report of the Centre for the Wider Benefits of Learning, 2000.

> Worse than the archaism of Britain's institutions, this autocracy in the workplace is the tallest barrier across the way to a more participative democracy. The thought that active participation in management and planning by the workforce could actually increase profitability is rarely encountered in Britain. So great was the bellow of disbelieving horror which went up in 1991, when it seemed that Maastricht might introduce a mild form of worker-participation into British boardrooms that the United Kingdom opted out of the whole Social Chapter. (pp. 62, 63)

Has democracy in the workplace reached a dead end, not only in Britain but also more widely, as countries worldwide accommodate global multinationals and embrace neo-liberal reforms? Cohen and Arato point out that while the point of production is not the prime locus of democratisation, 'receptors' exist within the workplace domains for challenges to anti-democratic practices. The potential is there to expand, in a democratic way, the structures for discussion and compromise. As Welton (2000) argues, projects of self-limiting democratic institutional reform can realistically be aimed for

- broadening and democratising the structures of discussion and compromise which already exist;
- enabling the exercise of expanded forms of social rights, through negotiation and agreement; and
- enabling worker representative bodies to play expanded roles in, for example, development of collective frameworks for learning and employee development.

Individual responsibilities to work have to be linked to individual rights at work and beyond the workplace. They derive their meanings from the context of employment and the social rights and responsibilities embedded in the wider society. Cases in earlier chapters show how employees personalise their workplaces through their values and interests, co-constructing environments and working together. Citizenship as a process can be strengthened through support for informal learning and wider workplace participation as well as entitlements for 'time off work for learning' at all levels of the workforce.

The exercise of citizenship as a process, in relation to changing structures of work and community, requires a more highly mobilised civil society, accompanied by 'civic virtues' and structures for democratic participation. Can an 'upward spiral' process be created with increased democratisation of structures strengthening civic virtues, expectations of participation and political knowledge in the population. Reflexively, how far can strengthening of civic virtues, political knowledge and expectations of participation through education and lifelong learning challenge anti-democratic practices and promote democratisation. (The spiral can also work in a downward direction, with erosion of citizenship.)

Policies need to be based on more holistic analyses of social dynamics and an understanding of ways in which experiences early in adult life can give stability or instability to the life course. This transcends national or even European boundaries, as earlier studies have demonstrated (Evans and Haffenden 1991). Effective education for the future depends on the extent of free and equal access and the 'redistributive' mechanisms for resources and social support which are employed;

the ways in which provision is linked structurally and methodologically, and relates to the life course; and the ways in which education links and draws with different domains of experience in work, community and family and promote reconnection into collective activity and democratic structures, creating the latter where they do not exist. This argument reflects a neo-Republican view in many respects. It is concerned about low engagements in politics, and it advocates support for community education to stimulate political participation and for direct democracy through creation of structures such as neighbourhood and modern versions of workplace councils. It also recognises that people learn to participate first in the collective 'free spaces' of life and argues that the non-commercialised free spaces of collective life have to be protected and expanded. Minimally they have to be protected from further erosion. Citizenship means engagement in both the institutionalised and informal discourses of political, civic and social lives. At the level of the individual citizen, it involves a complex interplay of rationality and subjectivity. Reconciliation between rationality and subjectivity comes when social actors can play a part in shaping their social environments. This means not only the competence to 'read the world' and reflect critically on it, as Welton (2000) argue, but also the dispositions to act in the world. Creation and recreation of the democratic structures that allow the disposition to act to be translated into effective action are essential to the safeguarding of democracy.

This is a radical perspective which envisages sustained educational engagement with the social reality of people's lives as actors in the social landscape of society and in their communities and challenges dominant assumptions about 'front-end' schooling. It also has implications for the form and content of the educational engagement.

The upsurge of interest in lifelong learning could, with political will behind it, accelerate the development of expanded approaches to citizenship education, but the latter requires much more emphasis on citizenship as a process. It also needs to recognise that citizenship is a larger category than work in people's lives. Citizenship is a lifelong process, which links rather than separates generations. It incorporates working lives. It is not an adjunct to the business of working for a living. It not only requires expanded conceptualisations of what constitutes learning about, for and through citizenship, but also depends on strengthening the support and development of the democratic structures and viable means of social/educational redistribution which can make the real exercise of citizenship possible for many more people.

7.6 Summary and Conclusions

On the face of it, the findings and analyses presented in this chapter offer few grounds for expecting widespread re-engagement in citizenship and social life in societies that have gone far down the road in enacting market liberalism. There is little evidence of engagement among young adults that extends beyond individual

strivings either in work or in social context. In social democratic structures that also regulate the training and employment relationships through strong social partnership, the new generation of adults are more socially engaged, although work values show some strong similarities across cultures, particularly in the erosion of a sense of service. A deeper analysis of these phenomena and their contexts shows the potentiality for change. We have seen individual strivings also show an awareness of social context and that engagement increases with age. There is little or no fatalism, and there is evidence that young people do question the dominant rationalities. At the same time, wider and longer term social trends in Europe are moving towards increased engagement in the adult populations

Education has a key role to play. The decline of employment opportunities throughout Europe 'tightened the bonds' between education and employment from 1970s onwards. Within the UK, fears of erosion of the work ethic were not widely realised as policies appeared successfully to propagate beliefs in personal responsibility for gaining and maintaining a place in the labour force, although emergence of intergenerational 'under-employment' in particular neighbourhoods has been an enduring reminder of the ways in which the logic of the market plays out in deprived communities.

Education has long been recognised as a key influence in social participation as well as 'employability'. When engagement in citizenship and related activities is seen as an outcome of education and is distinguished from other outcomes such as political awareness and tolerance, the effects of education are shown to be relative rather than absolute in their impact. The absolute levels of educational qualifications that people acquire are not reflected in the social and political influence they can command, but they are reflected in their political awareness. It is relative educational levels, associated with advantageous social and cultural capital, that tend to give people added influence. This is as often expressed through political engagement in respect of local issues, children's schooling and health matters as through 'big' politics. As argued in Chapter 1, when the tangible gains from investment in education are increasingly confined to a decreasing 'highly privileged' elite, discontent of the 'ordinary' but politically aware middle classes potentially contributes to creating the conditions for restoration of greater fairness in society, if not social justice.

The English socio-economic framework does seem to foster people's beliefs in the capacity (and responsibility) of individuals to take action to improve their situation despite the constraints on them. Despite this, substantial periods of unemployment do produce feelings of powerlessness and lack of control irrespective of the dominant societal framework. Available resources (in the form of purchasing power) are by no means the only determinants patterns of social and political participation, inside or outside the work setting. Life experiences including those in the labour market as well as those stemming from cultural background fundamentally affect people's engagements in social and political life.

The lack of connection into democratic structures for the expression of these strivings and insights appears to be the most pressing problem to be addressed. Cultures supportive of engaged citizenship have to extend to the workplace, which has to be seen as important an environment for the exercise of citizenship as are

communities and neighbourhoods. In both communities and workplaces, there is scope for broadening and democratising the structures of discussion and compromise which already exist. Expanding the conception of social rights at work to accommodate people's desires to engage in socially responsible ways with family and community is part of generating a culture of citizenship and stabilising the high-insecurity society and has been proceeding incrementally if very slowly. Citizenship as a process can be strengthened through support for informal learning and wider workplace participation as well as entitlements for 'time off work for learning' at all levels of the workforce. Expanding the spaces for social participation and reducing the barriers to engagement in civic matters go hand in hand with support for learning in the context of the life experiences in work, parenthood, health and ageing that can provide turning points in people's lives.

Finally, the chapter has put forward the challenge of creating an 'upward spiral' process in which increased democratisation of the channels of influence sustains the aspirations of ordinary people, strengthens civic virtues and expectations of participation and promotes political knowledge in the population. A more radical vision of lifelong learning could, with political will behind it, rise to this challenge.

Note

i. Since the survey was conducted before the financial scandal in the CDU, it remains open whether and how this would have had an effect on the voting behaviour of the student electorate in Leipzig.

Chapter 8
Beyond Individualisation: Human Strivings for Control of Their Lives

Throughout this volume, personal accounts offered by different social actors have shown how past habits and routines are brought into the present and how future possibilities are envisaged, all within the contingencies of the present moment as events unfold day by day in people's lives. Personal accounts show how people's priorities, pre-occupations and beliefs play out in the shifting social landscapes of real life.

This penultimate chapter shows how 'social regularities', the patterns of engagement in work and learning revealed by large-scale survey research become much more difficult to interpret when they are connected to the voices and purposeful activities of people moving in their various, highly differentiated social landscapes. This is because survey or observatory research at national and trans-national levels rarely offers convincing accounts of localised social and cultural variations or recognises how changes in the social landscape trends can be linked to the contextualised exercise of human agency. The analysis of empirical encounters in a range of settings can shed new light on questions about human agency, the beliefs people have about their abilities to control their lives and the extent of individualisation in the modern lives. This process leads to an elaboration of the concept of 'bounded agency' as an alternative to 'structured individualisation' as way of understanding the experiences of people in changing social landscapes. How does what people believe is possible for them (their personal horizons developed within cultural and structural influences) determine their behaviours and what they perceive to be 'choices'? Accounts of the ways in which individualisation processes have deep structural foundations in gender, social class and ethnicity have an important role in illuminating the power relations that exist in the wider society. These accounts, however, by focusing on factors that reflect and reproduce the underlying structural features and regularities of the social world, tend to downplay the everyday dynamics of the social landscapes in which people move. In these landscapes, spaces open up at the 'meso'-level for variation and incremental change over time through the exercise of human agency.

The chapter is in two parts. The first part looks back over the comparative exploration of the life and work transitions of youth and early adulthood up to the mid-20s in contrasting socio-economic contexts. The second part focuses on adults. While earlier life experiences can bring stability or instability to the adult life course,

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_8, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

trajectories diversify and branch out in so many directions that typologies or pathways become crude or meaningless. Systematic comparisons of adult populations of the kind carried out in the Anglo-German studies do not exist, although work value studies of Super and Sverko (1995) do give some sense of the social regularities in adults' perspectives and how these relate to their socio-economic context and past experiences. There is much evidence on adults' experiences of working life and their engagement with the social practices of work. Some aspects of adults' experiences, particularly those least powerfully placed in the social landscape, transcend national and cultural differences despite substantial variations in regulation and custom. Yet agency in adult life also operates through meso-level engagements in and through the social world, the environments and institutional practices of everyday life in changing social landscapes. The second part of this chapter shows how this evidence too points towards bounded agency as a lens through which the dynamics of work, learning and social responsibility can be viewed.

8.1 Exploring Human Agency: Comparative Life Transitions Approach

Looking at the phenomena from a perspective which starts with agency, without losing sight of structuration, the possible explanations appear more multifaceted. Agency is 'bounded' in different ways. Some of the empirical encounters with young adults certainly show patterns of belief, behaviour and action in the social world that lend support to Goldthorpe's (1998) thesis that a subjective process of weighing up situations leading to 'rational action' is taking place. The seeking of routes back to 'standardised careers' among the young Germans contrasted with the trial and error in seeking labour market openings in the English groups, and both make sense when set in their respective cultural and socio-economic contexts. Both also explain how 'social regularities' occur in outcomes. For these young adults and their peers in employment and in higher education, the labour markets and other features of the social landscapes in the three cities displayed different pathways and openings which offered apparently 'rational' options. But these were differently framed and perceived according to the position and orientation of the viewer. Options visible to some were invisible to others. Decision-making was also subject to all of the complex 'contingencies of the present moment' that occur in the lives of young people. These, from time to time, can have critical and life-changing effects particularly in the lives of those in the most precarious and vulnerable positions, who are the least cushioned from negative consequences as our research into individual personal histories showed (Evans et al. 2000a). In this respect, Bourdieu's accounts of how horizons are shaped are powerful in understanding how structures are represented and reproduced in the socially positioned lives that people lead (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). What they miss, however, is an analysis of the dynamics how horizons change over time.

A perspective on agency which includes but is not defined by 'rational action' and which views people as social actors interacting within and moving through a social

landscape suggests that exploration (a) of differences in orientations to life project planning within and between generations and (b) the effect of cultures operating in the different institutional settings of higher education, employment and unemployment schemes may offer further explanations of the social regularities apparent in the evidence.

The Anglo-German survey evidence that I have drawn on throughout this book had some of its foundations in the earlier comparative studies that focused on the shaping of careers and initial 'routes' into the labour market in the 'twinned' labour markets of Bremen and Paderborn in Germany and Swindon and Liverpool in England. Through this earlier research, contrasts were first drawn between the 'accelerated' transitions of England when compared with the 'extended' transition experiences by young people in west Germany (see Evans and Heinz 1991).

Analyses in these original Anglo-German studies generated theoretical constructions concerning the relationship between transition behaviours, as important elements of the young people's personal histories, and career outcomes. This became a particular focus for further analysis and a core theme in the *Becoming Adults in England and Germany* (Evans and Heinz 1994). 'Transition behaviours' referred to the patterns of activity people adopt in attempting to realise their personal interests and occupational goals within social requirements and structural opportunities. They were 'a more or less adequate set of solutions to problems that started with education achievement, vocational choice, looking for a training place, applying for jobs and qualifying for promotion'. Transition behaviour may change in the case of failing to achieve the intended result at any stage of the process and can be linked with career trajectories.

Four broad trajectories satisfied the conditions of comparability between the countries: (1) the academic mainstream leading towards higher education, (2) training and education leading to skilled employment,[i] (3) other forms of education and training leading typically to semi-skilled employment and (4) early labour market experience of unskilled jobs, unemployment and 'remedial' training schemes. Four transition behaviours were labelled *strategic, step-by-step, taking chances* and *wait and see* behaviours. These were activity patterns that young people tended to adopt when moving along trajectories into the labour markets.

The extent to which young people succeeded in developing longer term occupational goals depended not only on their past socialisation in family and school, but also to a large degree on the way their identity formation had been linked to challenge and rewarding experience in the passage to employment itself. If a young person embarks on this risky voyage in a clearly defined progression of qualifications, based on his or her decisions, this tends to bring stability to the unfolding life course. If a diffuse, short-term sequence of activities is embarked on in a way which is reactive to immediate job demands and upheavals, the risks are far greater. Self-confidence both in youth seems to arise out of success in completion of tasks, from vocational choice to labour market entry. As youth shades into adult life, confidence continues to stem from cumulative experiences of success in roles, from feelings of control in personal decision-making about jobs and job changes as employment structures and work contexts change. The development of

so-called action competences appears important here. ‘Strategic’ and the ‘taking chances’ behaviours can be interpreted as expressions of an active kind of individualisation. There is a more passive kind of individualisation in which the person is carried along in socially accepted transition patterns, without a sense of ultimate goal or overall direction. Lack of material and social resources can act against both strategic and risk-taking behaviours. Transition behaviours that are characterised by ‘step-by-step’ or ‘wait and see’ patterns are linked to a passive kind of individualisation.

As shown in Evans and Heinz (1994), individualised career paths and life plans do, to some extent, cut across trajectories and do not necessarily comply with the expectations of parents or employers. The timing of transition is dependent on the available jobs and the cultural norms about transitions, which influence the decisions of young people. For example, in England, parents and young adults often see early transition to an independent employment status as most desirable. Extended vocational training and academic education are also seen in terms of quick accession to the desired occupational status and the economic independence that goes with it.

Many young people, especially from working-class backgrounds, meet training schemes which are in ‘lieu of work’ with reluctance or even distrust, because they are afraid that their expected independence will be curtailed. Furthermore, they look for other sources of identity stabilisation – that may be decoupled from the transition to employment – when they fail to achieve entry to work status. This may be achieved, for instance, by setting up a household, getting married or parenthood.

In Germany, the process of becoming an adult was shown to be more protracted, with the duration of vocational education training (VET) and higher education defining the timing of this transition. The cultural expectations mean that the majority of the young generation serve an apprenticeship or pursue academic studies without the feeling of being socially dependent. They have a socially recognised role as an apprentice or as a student. The minority of young people who are channelled into schemes or casual jobs after having left school have the difficult problem of legitimising their social status, because they cannot rely on an institutionalised ‘pacing’ of their transitions. Thus, they are in a situation where transition behaviour may be reduced to ‘wait and see’. By contrast, young people in England are treated as adults at 16, whether in post-16 educational institutions, training schemes or the labour market.

The suggestion put forward, on the basis of the initial Anglo-German research, that the less institutional English framework might encourage reactive transition behaviour eventually proved to be an over-simplification. ‘step-by-step’ emerged as a common transition behaviour in both countries. In England, ‘step-by-step’ was encouraged by the fluid nature of the opportunities available. In Germany ‘step-by-step’ was encouraged by the highly structured system which offered alternatives in a longer timeframe for decision-making. In both countries, relatively few young people had crystallised their occupational goals. Where they had, proactive strategies were encouraged by the German arrangements which set out clear and regulated pathways and criteria for achieving them. For those with clear occupational goals in England, the ways of achieving them were often less transparent, and

'step-by-step' was often, but not always, the response. Risk-taking was also encouraged in both countries, in different ways. Experimentation was possible within the institutionally supported transitions of Germany. In England the 'taking of chances' tended to be confined to the buoyant labour market. In both cases, recovery would be possible, by virtue of institutional support in Germany and the operation of strong local labour markets in England. The risks were, therefore, calculated ones, unlikely to be fatal if things went wrong.

The interplay of the person's initial trajectory (through education and into the labour market) with the behaviours adopted during transition produces career patterns. These can be progressive, stagnant or interrupted. They may involve upward or downward drift. Career outcomes depend not only on the transition behaviours of young people but also on the institutional and labour market settings and social support available. Transition behaviours are influenced by labour market conditions, institutional structures and the operation of social networks.

As Roberts (2000) has argued, Britain and Germany (despite being untypical within the wider Union) have come to represent the main socio-economic alternatives 'on the agenda' for the current and prospective member states of the European Union. The contrast between the regulated German and unregulated British approaches to young adult transitions found in the 1991 and 1994 studies was maintained and, in some respects, has become more sharply drawn through much of the 1990s. The 'reunification' of Germany from 1990 involved economic and political transformations whose effects will shape the future development of Germany and its place in the European Union for years to come. A new study of Eastern Germany first became possible in the mid-1990s, enabling comparisons to be made with Western Germany and England.

The eastern and western parts of Germany shared a common culture but operated in totally different socio-economic systems. West Germany and Britain had different versions of the same socio-economic system, but different cultural histories. Britain and Eastern Germany have experienced, from different starting points, strong effects of market forces and deregulation of previous systems. The research team started by investigating young adults' experiences of both smooth and broken transitions in the new *Länder*. Continuities and discontinuities were seen through the eyes of key players, including vocational trainers, and placed in context through structural data and reports.

When, in the early 1990s, the economy of the new *Länder* underwent radical structural changes, the workforce was substantially reduced, and in parallel, the western 'dual system' was implemented. The research in Eastern Germany, started in 1997, shows that although labour market conditions require 'flexibility' and 'new ways of thinking' from the young people and traditional routes can be transcended successfully, the rules of the game are still set by the dual system. Taking this into account, the studies focused on (1) the effects of the weakness of the dual system under the existing financial and economic conditions, (2) directions young people in the new *Länder* took in order to navigate through new education, training and employment structures and (3) new transition behaviours into and out of employment with regard to career outcomes.

Through 24 case studies, backed by survey and structural data, it was possible to extend the previous Evans and Heinz analyses.

Where Eastern German young people had experienced most or all of their training since 1990, after the political changes, they showed few differences of perspective from their West German counterparts. In the old *Länder* of Western Germany, the labour market is itself changing. Uncertain transitions and 'transitional' status were also increasing. These forms of transition, as they increased, were also gradually becoming less stigmatised. Previously they were taken as indications of failure and lack of achievement and served to trap young people into vicious circles and downward spirals from which it was difficult to escape. The transitions were now becoming closer to their English counterparts, experienced as interim states from which upward or downward chances could flow. 'Taking of chances' was more likely to produce upward movement where safety nets were in place and mistakes were therefore not fatal to career prospects or where occupational markets were particularly buoyant (e.g. in some growth areas such as insurance). As with their English counterparts, risks taken were usually calculated ones, unlikely to be irrevocable if things went wrong.

If the 'taking of chances' was likely to produce a worsened situation through lack of social support or depressed labour market conditions, would the 'wait and see' behaviours which lead to downward drift emerge in young East Germans in ways comparable to those first identified in our original Liverpool samples in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

8.2 Effects of Increased Perceptions of Risk on Transition Behaviours

The research in the eastern states of Germany posed the question, 'To what extent do more open conditions created by social and economic transformations encourage greater personal agency?' The findings added support to the earlier findings (Evans and Heinz 1994) which showed that those in 'transitional' positions (which could go upwards or downwards) were more likely to improve their position through active transition behaviours, particularly where backed by family support or personal connections. The combination of 'step-by-step' or 'wait and see' behaviour with the 'taking of chances' occurred frequently, as the person weighed up the unfamiliar situation before taking the chance or proceeded cautiously and step by step having made the first, more risky leap into a more promising position.

Overall, the results supported the hypothesis that the conditions after the political changes in the east of Germany encouraged personal agency among young people whose intended career paths had been diverted or terminated. Some young people were quick to pick up the 'signals' from the system and market that active transition behaviours and 'going for it' are the best ways to maximise opportunity and reduce risks for young people in already precarious positions, particularly where social support means that mistakes are unlikely to be irrevocable. The results also

suggested, however, that the 'open' labour market conditions were not as open as might be expected.[ii] The young people who had experienced 'broken transitions' into the labour market (often through closing down of opportunities in their chosen occupational pathway or state industry) remained cautious about their future prospects, even where they had gained entry to the labour market, reflecting the unstable features of the secondary sector jobs that were most readily available to them.

8.3 Perceptions of Individual Responsibility and Reactions to Systemic and Political Changes

Young people who were in their teens at the time of the political changes had become focused on coping with the here and now in very practical and concrete ways (cp. Leggewie 1998: 25–26). Generally speaking, the views reflected individuals' present experiences of success, failure, setback and unexpected turnings rather than ideological commitment or particular value positions. The perception of some trainers that young people had become alienated from the new system was not strongly apparent, although there was some sense of despondency in the group with broken transitions. Success was often ascribed by young people to luck as well as their own personal characteristics, and failure ascribed both to personal 'weaknesses' and to the problems of being 'only an average person' in a highly competitive economic setting.

The findings drawn on throughout this volume have filled in the theoretical sketch of individualisation processes started in our earlier work, with reference to the work of social theorists such as Ulrich Beck, Martin Baethge and Anthony Giddens. This research has gone further than previous studies in extending the age range up to 25, investigating new labour markets and, most importantly, focusing on the how young adults experience control and exercise personal agency in the extended and multiple transitions experienced between the ages of 18 and 25.

As discussed in previous chapters, the research findings showed how those who are unemployed experience little sense of control over their own situation. Young people from Leipzig and Derby attributed lack of achievement to their own perceived lack of skills in their private and working life and to their own weaknesses, to a greater extent than those in the Hanover group. In Hanover, individualisation of failure was less manifest compared with the two other localities. Young people focused much more on ways in which external factors beyond their control were of importance for an individual's opportunities. They had more critical views of the equality of opportunities and that ability will be rewarded. They score low on agency factors and have a fairly negative view about their futures.

Labour market conditions and socialisation affect the assessment young adults make as to what extent structural or individual factors influence life opportunities. The belief in how open opportunities are for everybody plays an important role for the young adults' assessment for opportunities and control of their lives.

Young people in Germany were increasingly caught in a double bind: a hostile labour market which effectively excludes unqualified young people but which can no longer sustain the training routes and social support previously provided for the large majority. The striving for work identities, so strongly fostered by German culture and tradition, does not diminish, and there is evidence of growing frustration among marginalised and excluded youth. There is, at the same time, a growth in casualised work opportunities available for unqualified adults, producing a situation which begins to mirror the British. Ways into the labour market are becoming diversified and more dependent on displaying the characteristics employers want, as well as qualifications. These trends are most marked in the former east, but signal wider trends throughout the FRG.

The evidence from the Anglo-German studies taken together, shows that active transition behaviours are important in overcoming setbacks for those already in precarious situations. The active transition behaviours most likely to overcome setbacks are those associated with taking chances in fluid and changing labour market conditions. Structural factors, however, remain highly significant in the shaping of life chances, and we find with Martin Diewald (2000) that the transformations are not such that release of new forms of individual competence leads to major reallocations of social position.

When they are unsuccessful, the outcomes of ‘taking chances’ are likely to be downward movements from already precarious situations. Young people take calculated risks, but under very different individual pressures and circumstances. Decision-making is relative to their personal horizons and the subjectively perceived range of education and employment options available to them. While these decisions are not *determined* by social class or by the dynamics of the labour market, they have *structural foundations* which are manifested in life experiences and destinations in primary and secondary labour markets. Policies which promote action competences and active behaviours have to recognise the ‘risk’ side of the equation and ensure adequate support if young people are not to be further disadvantaged by accepting the message that their own shortcomings are to blame for predicaments which are beyond their individual control.

However, institutional and material resources to cope with everyday life and to prepare for the world of work are far less available for the young in eastern Germany. The transition to work and family life used to be much more continuous than in the west. They took the normative steps faster than their contemporaries in the old federal states: VET, employment, marriage and parenthood were coordinated in such a way that adulthood was reached in the work-conscious German Democratic Republic several years earlier than in West Germany. The age of achieving adult status was closer to British than to West German norms, at the time of the reunification. Today the young generation, after socialism, has had to shift to what Heinz called the ‘transition rhythm’ of West Germany. This requires many individual decisions in a much less transparent social environment. Moreover, the extension of the transition to adulthood has to be subsidised by the institutional help of the welfare state for quite a number of young people who are not yet in the employment system.

Many young people who have responded quickly to systemic and market changes have taken chances, in individualised ways. They need to have non-stigmatising forms of material support readily available, to ensure that they are not stretched beyond their capacities to deal with difficult life situations unaided.

In short, an unreformed dual system cannot be made to work in labour market conditions such as those emerging in Eastern Germany. Stop-gap measures may fuel the polarisation into primary and secondary segments of the labour market, thus heightening social inequalities.

8.4 Individualisation Revisited

Policy implications are immediately apparent, but what of the contributions to social theory?

Pathways to work have become more socially segmented and the risks of under-employment and joblessness have increased and widened in scope, to touch the lives of vocationally and academically qualified young people and adults (Heinz 1999; Cote 2003). Only at the extreme ends of the spectrum of advantage and disadvantage are pathways and destinations relatively unaffected by the social changes of the time. For many, social and gender inequalities restrict the possibilities to take advantage of career options, even where these are apparently available.

These and other comparative analyses showed that more differentiated accounts of 'individualisation' are needed, which do not fall into the trap of assuming uni-linear modernisation in the developed world and uncritical application of the *Beck's* version of reflexive modernisation in other societies.

The research drawn on throughout this volume has revisited and sought to elaborate the theoretical sketches of human agency offered by *Beck* through exploration of the different dimensions of agency and control in human lives and through a range of 'empirical encounters'

8.5 Adults' Experiences of Working Life and Learning

At the outset of this chapter, I pointed to the ways in which 'social regularities' revealed by survey research become much more difficult to interpret when they are connected to the voices and purposeful activities of the social actors moving in highly differentiated social landscapes. This applies particularly in the domain of research into work, where the human agency of employees is sometimes acknowledged but rarely explored or well understood. Business and management texts often ignore the experiences of the employee. Research carried out in the broad field of industrial relations focuses increasingly on the tensions involved in controlling and disciplining a workforce while releasing its creativity. These tensions are manifestations of the conflicts inherent in the wage relationship. The interests of employees are fundamentally different from those of their managers and employers, and their

power is much more limited. There are also at least three distinct rationalities operating at work (Noon and Blyton 2002). These often compete, and none is dominant. For example, different rationalities at work are reflected in perceptions of time and space. Employees personalise their working environments and shape the timing and phasing of their work in ways that are shaped by rationalities profoundly different from those of their managers, for example. This reflects the complex demands that capital has from wage labour:

> the need for consent as well as control, for cooperation as well as compliance leads to relationship based on negotiation and tension between different groups and rationalities, rather than imposition of a dominant rationality (Noon and Blyton, p. 338).

Management often has difficulty in accepting the existence of multiple realities at work. Approaches that emphasise common interests and pay lip service to employee consultation while downplaying or ignoring power differentials invariably end in contradictions. Industrial sociology focuses on the exploitation inherent in capitalism. Survey findings that reveal employee experiences of satisfaction and fulfillment through their work are explained away as expressions of false consciousness. This also leads to contradictions of another kind, as those held to be so easily duped are also those on whose empowerment and radical action the future is argued to rest. These are oversimplifications, but serve to underline the point that employee voice and worker agency need to be attended to more seriously.

In line with the thesis of this volume, employees' experiences have to be understood in the context of their immediate social landscape, including the dynamics of the employing organisations and the communities in which they operate. This level is most germane for understanding how human agency can be exercised, while recognising that macro changes in the organisation of work are themselves part of the wider social context and sources of at least some of the social dynamics at work.

8.6 Changes in the Experience of Work

Much attention has been paid to ways in which competition has led to changes in the way work is organised. Less attention has been paid to how these changes at work are experienced, although the two are, of course, inextricably linked. Continuous pursuit of performance improvement and reduction of unit costs have far-reaching consequences for employees' experiences of work. They are reflected in management strategies at company level, in changes in regulatory frameworks that govern the employer–employee relationship and in priorities in education and training systems.

Work has become more precarious in the high-insecurity societies of the west. Although the degree of heightened insecurity varies substantially between USA and European countries, the trend is broadly recognised as welfare systems are 'reformed'. Work becomes intermittent for some, intensified for others. Move towards new forms of work is associated with fragmented, smaller, high-tech

organisations with decreasing regulation, offering part-time short-term employment contracts – making insecurity and vulnerability one of the dominant realities of the work of the future.

Earlier chapters have shown that work is not wholly undertaken to fulfil economic needs. The majority of people say that they would work even if there was no economic need. There is a moral dimension to work that is reflected in intrinsic needs and motivations, and the universal need for the social interactions afforded by work is an important element of this Jahoda (1979: 77).

The concept of 'skill' is also changing as the organisation of work changes. The ways in which skills are recognised or overlooked have important effects on the ways people move in social landscapes. There is much controversy about what skills are and how they should be measured.

Perspectives (of economists) that see skills as residing in the job, and those (stemming from psychology) that equate skills with individual attributes, are often criticised for ignoring the social and historical development of the different conceptions of skill (Rainbird 1997). Skill is a powerful concept since it implies a measure of the worth. The skills that are recognised and rewarded reflect the power and influence of social groupings. They are used by different interest groups to claim status, preferential treatment and higher rewards. This is illustrated, for example, in the valuing of cognitive attainment over practical and vocational abilities, in restrictions in entry to occupational and professional groups and in the attribution and reward of skills according to gender. Gender has been critically important in defining skill, which has often been determined by the sex of those who do the work rather than its content. This impacts particularly on the gendered division of labour, as discussed in Chapter 6. 'Emotional labour' has entered the vocabulary of work research. Perspectives on the role of emotion in work that focus exclusively on the exploitative nature of emotional labour can potentially be illuminated by reference to employees' experience of work. Evidence from empirical encounters including some of those outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 have shown that emotional labour can be can be seen as a source of satisfaction for some while course of dissatisfaction and alienation for others (Hochschild 1983; Wouters 1989). Noon and Blyton argue that the evidence on the extent to which emotional labour is particularly exploitative and damaging to psychological well-being in the workplace is inconclusive. For some individuals who strongly identify with their work role and for whom the emotional display rules entailed in that job are fully consistent with their personal values and identity, emotional labour is part of job satisfaction and may have attracted them to apply for the job in the first place. In these cases, Noon and Blyton argue, the performance of such tasks is likely to enhance rather than reduce psychological well-being. As with counselling occupations, however, this does rely on appropriate regulation of the job demands and employee entitlement such that psychological and physical demands do not over-burden the individual or team involved. Given appropriate regulation of these roles and tasks, the major issue that has to be resolved is that of equity in recognition and reward. Emotional labour plays an increasingly important role in service occupations but has not been accorded prestige or skilled status. What counts as skill is defined by social relations and power structures. In

this context, emotional labour is often portrayed as something women are naturally good at, an innate ability rather than an acquired skill to be rewarded.

As knowledge has become commodified, the tacit dimensions of knowledge present in all kinds of work are increasingly seen as having the potential for commodification. This means different things to different social actors. For employees as holders of the tacit knowledge, does this mean they can claim a commodified exchange value for their knowledge through accreditation? For managers and employers, the issue is whether and how such knowledge can be appropriated. Knowledgeability, when seen as a resource to be exploited, is only part of the long-term relations of exploitation in capitalism. When knowledge workers assume increasingly important, pivotal positions in workplaces and organisational environments, the control and manipulation of information becomes a critical factor.

Employees navigate the conflicts inherent in the employment relationship, surviving by consent and resistance. Resistance and strategic compliance can take many forms, and the ways in which they are acted out in different social landscapes involve layers of meaning and the different rationalities described earlier in the chapter. Behaviours such as joking, gossiping and rule bending are not always problematic for management – each can be interpreted as complex forms of compliance or resistance according to the work context.

A more significant challenge in many workplaces is that the way in which celebration of 'diversity' has been embraced has fuelled the wider shift of focus from the collective workgroup to the individual employee. It shifts attention from shared disadvantages in the workplace to differentiation of individual attributes and 'needs'. When difference is celebrated, the imperatives of fairness and equity of treatment may be downplayed and obscured. The significance of shared knowledge and interdependencies of role are understated. It is in this context that 'self-directed' learning has sometimes been uncritically adopted (see Chapter 4). Plurality is a better aim than diversity (Noon and Blyton 2000), because plurality encourages a focus on commonalities that cluster people by shared experiences and goals as well as by positive recognition of difference.

At least as much work activity takes place outside paid employment as within it. Activities and experiences that constitute hidden work include domestic work, caring for young, elderly or disabled relatives, voluntary and community activities. Hidden work and visible work spheres are inter-related, in that work in the visible work sphere impacts on work in the home and vice versa. There is a substantial impact on those who carry out caring responsibilities on their paid employment in the 'visible' work sector, as cases in Chapter 4 showed.

8.7 The Individualisation Thesis Revisited

The research findings drawn on throughout the earlier chapters enable comparisons to be made of the experiences and orientations of people in a matrix of institutional settings and localities which structure experience and action in different ways,

focusing on the 'social regularities'. This helps to generate insights into relationships between people's feelings of control in their own lives and the underlying structural features of their social landscapes. Gender and social class differences in feelings of control and other indicators of agency become apparent and contribute to improved understandings of the factors involved in becoming socially defined as independent and personally effective or (conversely) marginalised in different settings.

8.8 Agency and Feelings of Control

Agency is often understood rather simplistically as input from individuals to various social processes, emphasising those aspects of social engagement which are predominantly individual, creative, proactive and involve resisting external pressures. The expanded concept, of agency as 'a temporally embedded process of social engagement' (Emirbayer and Mische 1998) in which past habits and routines are contextualised and future possibilities envisaged within the contingencies of the present moment, leads to a socially situated understanding of human agency. Agency is influenced but not determined by structures; it involves internalised understandings and ways of interpreting the world as well as external actions. These are developed in and through social practices in multiple environments and social settings as people move in social landscapes. The dynamics of social landscapes thus both generate and encapsulate the limits and the possibilities of human agency.

The concept of 'control' is closely related to conceptualisations of human agency. Control beliefs as can be understood as subjective representations of [the person's] capabilities to exercise control (Flammer 1997). This is distinct from the actual exercise of control, which can be considered as the regulation of process. According to Flammer, control beliefs can be conceptualised as a composite of contingency and competence beliefs. Contingency beliefs are beliefs in the probability that certain actions will affect outcomes in particular ways. Competence beliefs are the beliefs people have about their capabilities to act in ways which will produce the probable outcomes. The distinctions between contingency and competence in Flammer's work are paralleled by the identification of two components in the work of Bandura (1995). Bandura has characterised control beliefs as a combination of expectations: 'response-outcome' expectations plus efficacy expectation. Flammer's work concentrated on the development of three dimensions of control beliefs: the ontogenic development of the structure of control beliefs, individual differences in the strength of control beliefs and the 'micro-genesis' of a given control belief. A fourth dimension is discussed only briefly: variations in the strength and domains of control beliefs for different age groups and cultures. The present research is centrally concerned with this 'fourth dimension' in ways which are informed in part by the prior work on the structural composition of control beliefs. The composite 'control belief' is a personal construct which is linked to environmental influences in complex ways and is differentially constructed throughout the life course and in different domains of experience.

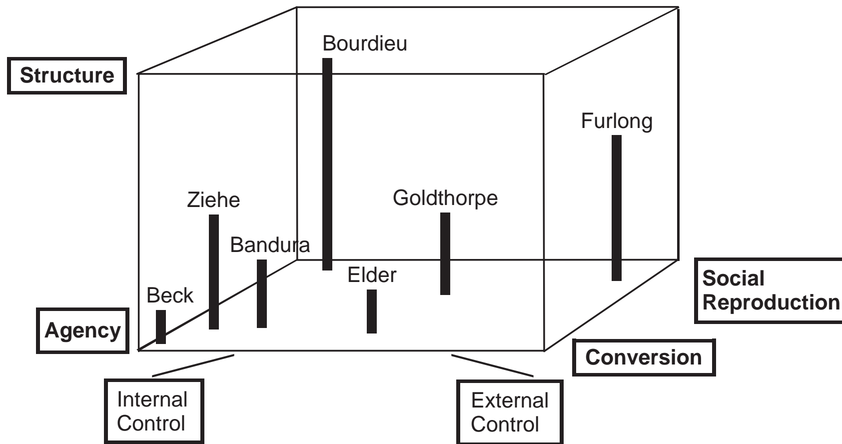

Fig. 8.1 Conceptual schema for structure-agency

Throughout this volume I have focused on control beliefs, agency and those attributes and behaviours which imply agency and feelings of control. This enables interdisciplinary exploration of theoretical standpoints through empirical encounters. A conceptual schema for investigation of the individualisation 'thesis' can be represented as a cube. This representation attempts to captures and locate theories which explain structure and agency in different ways and allows the individualisation theses of Beck (1992; 1998) and Baethge (1989) to be viewed as theoretical sketches to be explored and contested. These and other theoretical stances within the dimensions of structure–agency, internal–external control and social reproduction–conversion are shown in Fig. 8.1.

8.8.1 Conceptual Schema for Structure–Agency

Theoretical perspectives which consider the inter-relationships between society and human agency can be located in relation to these three dimensions.

The first dimension is that of social/structural determinism versus individualisation and reflexivity in social biographies. As explained in Chapters 1 and 2, the development of the individualisation thesis is accredited to a number of German sociologists, and the usual starting point is Beck's outline of a new type of society based on 'reflexive modernization', which he called a Risk Society (Beck 1992; 1999). The notion of a 'risk society' has been applied to increasing uncertainty and fragmentation experienced by many people in the unfolding of the life course. Individualisation is part of the dissolution of the traditional parameters of industrial society, including class culture and consciousness, gender and family roles: 'These de-traditionalisations happen in a social surge of individualization' (Beck 1992: 87). Within the 'individualized society', the individual must learn 'to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own

biography' (p. 135). Baethge (1989) took this thesis further by applying it to the situation of youth in industrialised societies. He made reference to 'the disappearance of class-specific socialization structures' and to a new trend towards 'double individualization' (Baethge 1989: 28–31). The latter trend involved, first, the structural disintegration of social classes or strata into 'individualized' sub-groups and, second, the formation of individualistic identities at the expense of collective identity. These perspectives stress the need for new categories because the old labels or descriptions of youth transitions simply no longer fit and have lost their explanatory power. There may well be an acknowledgement within this perspective that inequalities remain – indeed very few writers in the field would argue that *inequality* has disappeared – but social classes are now diffused and have disappeared. As proponents of the idea that people are agents actively and individually engaged in the construction of their own biographies, Beck and Baethge are thus positioned close to the base of the cube.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) have argued that these accounts of individualisation are based on an epistemological fallacy. The social world has come to be *regarded* as unpredictable and filled with risks that can only be negotiated on an individual level, while structural forces operate as powerfully as ever, while the chains of human interdependence remain intact. Furlong and Cartmel are thus positioned high on the structure/agency dimension. Billett (2006) also contests the individualisation thesis but offers a more reflexive account and less deterministic account of the ways in which these human interdependences shape and remake aspects of the social world.

An underlying aim of the research woven into this volume has been to explore how people who are positioned differently in relation to the demands of working life experience control and exercise personal agency, exploring the subjectivities associated with choice and determination under differing structural and cultural conditions. What kinds of beliefs and perspectives do people have on their future possibilities? How far do they feel in control of their lives? What is the interplay between these subjectivities and social characteristics of age, gender and social class? How does what people believe is possible for them (their personal horizons developed within cultural and structural influences) determine their behaviours and what they perceive to be 'choices'.

The second dimension emphasises internal versus external control processes. Bandura, Elder, Flammer and other 'efficacy' researchers have emphasised internal processes of the 'acting individual' in relation to the external environment. There are limitations to personal control in all domains of life. There are some aspects of environment and personal circumstance that are extremely difficult to change. Others can be overcome by the exercise of initiative and learning. Rothbaum et al. (1982) distinguished between primary and secondary modes of control. People exercising primary control try to change their environment in ways which they feel will better fit their aspirations. Or they try to change their environment to fit with their subjective perceptions. Secondary control operates in reverse, by changing subjective perceptions, aspirations and interpretations to match the environment. When primary control fails or is expected to fail because of the obstacles the individual

perceives to be operating, secondary control comes into play more strongly. Flammer hypothesises that a gradual shift from primary to secondary control can be expected over the life course. It can also be expected that there are large individual differences in the limits which are encountered early in adult life and that these also very between different socio-economic and cultural environments. Human development in the first three decades of life involves increasing individual control and beliefs. Beliefs in a certain amount of control become important for well-being (see e.g. Connolly 1989). Studies of over-estimation of control beliefs have shown the developmental value of high-control beliefs (p. 85). Over-estimation of control increases scope for further development in children. It has been argued that schooling fails to maximise human potential by reducing control beliefs for significant numbers of children. Heikhausen and Krüger (1993) and Heikhausen and Schultz (1997) have also shown that desired attributes are seen as more controllable than undesired ones among younger, middle-aged and older adults. People who are directly affected by important changes hold higher control beliefs in relation to these changes than people who are not yet directly concerned with them. This applies particularly to life course transitions. People also have illusions about control, which go beyond simple over-estimation. People sometimes believe they are exerting control even over clearly random events. Taylor and Brown (1988) have reviewed evidence of control illusion as it relates to judgement of the future. Most people believe that things will improve for them in the future, that their own future will improve more than that of others and that there is a lower likelihood that undesirable events will happen to them. It is held that control illusions are important for personal well-being as well as the ‘capacity for creative and productive work’ and the ability to care for others. What are the conditions under which individuals develop beliefs in high or low control? Flammer comments that research has mainly centred on educational environments and has not examined what he terms the ‘broader ecology of socialisation’. Whether a person underestimates or overestimates their extent of control is very consequential on their experiences and socialisation. For young people, how far they succeed in developing longer term occupational goals depends not only on their past socialisation in family and school, but also to a large degree on the way their identity formation is linked to challenge and rewarding experience in the passage to employment itself (Evans and Heinz 1994)

Social biographies of individuals are linked to social structures, the environments and institutions of education, the labour market and civic society and the changing conditions they encounter in their day-to-day lives. They are also linked to cultural norms and expectations and how these intersect with institutional structures. Sociologists who emphasise internal processes of the acting individual alongside reflexivity and individualisation are positioned at the intersection of agency and internal processes. Those who place emphasis the external limits on internal processes are placed at the intersection of structure and external processes.

The third dimension places the focus on social reproduction versus conversion, exploring the degree to which social mobility and transformation can be attributed to individual and collective scope for action. The original position of rational choice or rational action theorists was that people tend to act in ways which are rational in

the situation in which they find themselves. In arguing for a 'privileged' theory of action, development of this theoretical line has had to accommodate the numerous cases of action which are apparently not rational by objective criteria. The arguments that such actions are always subjectively rational, that is that they appear rational from the actors' point of view, weakens the theory as a sociological theory of action unless the systematic tendencies are investigated and explained. Based on law of large numbers, Goldthorpe (1998) has emphasised the overriding importance of analysing the conditions under which actors come to act, from the sociological perspective. He argues that people act systematically, rather than just idiosyncratically, in a way that is subjectively rational. He argues that sociologists should 'concentrate their explanatory efforts on the situation of action rather than on the psychology of the acting individual', aiming to show how social, structural and processional features of a situation may cause the actor to make choices which are not objectively rational, but are rational from the actor's point of view (i.e. subjectively).

Rationality in action is seen as situationally rather than procedurally determined:

> it is far more illuminating to investigate empirically, across societies and cultures, those more particular structures and processes – at the level of social networks, group affiliations and institutions – by which patterns of action are guided into conformity with specified standards of rationality or are deflected from them
>
> (Goldthorpe, p. 189 [Footnote 15])

Furlong and Cartmel's emphasis on structural determinants, external processes and social reproduction places the 'epistemological fallacy' argument towards the back right hand intersection. While Bourdieu's (1993) emphasis on social reproduction is also high but emphasises subjectivities of the acting individual and explores agency in relation to 'habitus' and 'field'.

8.9 Understanding Social Regularities and Individual Action

A better understanding is needed of the relationships between social regularities that are apparent in the broad landscape and the individual and collective action of the social actors as they move in that landscape. In looking at individuals, within the perspective of structuration, it is possible to develop hypotheses about the structuring effects of contexts while focusing on personal and collective experiences of agency. The integrative concepts are those of control and agency. As Elder has observed, all social transitions entail some risk of losing personal control. How this is experienced and acted upon depends on biography to date and on material and social situation. Our expanded concept of agency sees the actors as having a past and imagined future possibilities, both of which guide and shape actions in the present. Actors also have subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, which affect how they act. Their agency is 'socially situated'. This has placed the spotlight on the experiences people have of exercising control and agency in chosen cities and work settings and how this links with the ways in which they are socially positioned as employees, learners and citizens.[iii]

8.10 Shared Experiences of Gender

Chapter 6 shows how many people, particularly young men, believe the effects of gender in life chances are outweighed in importance by the effects of educational qualifications, effort and performance. There was awareness that particular sectors of the labour market remain biased towards one or other sex. Beyond this, more subtle forms of sexism were seen to be operating, such as people being stereotyped by the way they look and women having to perform better than men in order to gain an equal degree of respect. There were frequent references to ‘competence’ overriding other factors, but within an overall awareness that there are differentials in the levels and status achieved by females and males in employment and the economy.

More generally, there was awareness of gender alongside the individual attribution of success, with a sense of acceptance by both young women and adults that a reality of working life is the need to prove oneself more as a female. While quite powerful discourses around gender emerged in many of the empirical encounters, there were differences in emphasis in the perceptions of scope and limits for choice and equality of treatment between individuals.

The demands of childbearing and childrearing were at the forefront of the thoughts of the German young women. In the German interviews, although women were generally seen as having the same chances as men at work, the view was often expressed that women must at some point ‘choose between work and family’. Many more women than men gave priority to ‘child-rearing possibilities’ as something they wanted from work in all areas, but more in Germany than in England. However, the largest proportion in any group who considered this a priority was 50% (Leipzig females in higher education). There was little evidence of the emergence of the ‘new man’ who pays close attention to family considerations.

Men who experienced long-term unemployment found it harder to get into the labour market and find stable employment, and this is the case particularly for males of working-class origin. In some areas in England, women view their futures significantly more positively than males. There was evidence of women behaving with a higher degree of agency than males, at least in some respects. For example, young women tended to leave the parental home earlier than males and were more open to the possibility of moving away from the area they currently lived in. These are examples of agency at an individual level. Young women also exhibited higher levels of collective agency in that they were found to be more politically active. This difference was apparent in the most difficult environments. A possible explanation is that women are more resilient, becoming disengaged less easily than males. Remarkably consistent differences emerged across the three areas between men and women in higher education which appeared to reflect greater agency on the part of female students.

8.11 Shared Perspectives on ‘Race’ Ethnicity and Nationality

The findings shown in Fig. 2.2 (introduced in Chapter 2), while they are illuminating in general terms, mask the fact that 53% of ethnic minority respondents in

the English city thought that race had a considerable effect in shaping life chances (compared to 17% non-minority) and 30% thought that gender had a considerable effect (compared to 18%). Young people participating in the research had rather less to say on the topic of race than gender and gave fewer examples, except in the East German city, where responses reflected the high proportions who perceived ‘race’ as important in life chances. Issues of ‘nationality’ aroused strong feelings and reflected concerns about the ‘xenophobia’ reported in recent press coverage of developments in the eastern part of Germany. That is not to say that the attitudes were themselves primarily xenophobic. The attitudes expressed recognised that non-Germans suffer particular forms of overt discrimination and that this fundamentally affects life chances. Similarly, discussion of social background is influenced by different meanings in Germany, particularly in Leipzig where class pride (for manual workers and farmers) in the GDR was replaced by class-based disadvantage for the former at least. Insights into this were gained through the questions which asked about influences of family background and obstacles, both material and social, and through open questions about the factors which affect and influence occupational destinations and ‘career’.[iv, v]

Social class awareness is shown to be mixed in with family and gender dimensions in complex ways, with much reference to the importance of ‘social connections’ and the invisible social factors, beyond qualification and competence, which affect success. English research participants were more likely than their German peers to change their job expectations, usually (but not always) in an upward direction. They were also more independent of their parents in all groups. Social class was perceived to be more important in Germany. A minority of participants were willing to talk about their life experiences directly within a social class perspective, but many respondents, especially students in Germany, were aware of the influences and benefits of their parents’ occupational background. The effects of ‘framing’ in limiting what might be seen as possible from any particular social position (Bloomer 1999) came through strongly, but equally there were many indicators that forms of social capital were seen as being convertible and expandable through qualifications, making new connections and taking chances. This came through in the views, expectations and experiences expressed, but class-based limits were widely recognised, with disbelief that ‘talent always rises to the top’. One quarter of the young research participants in the English city felt that social class/status ‘does not affect your chances in life’ although this is higher than the very small minorities of the Germans who were prepared to agree with this statement.

Relatively few of the items and measures designed to identify the dimensions of agency and control in their lives were significantly associated with social class, where this was measured by father’s occupation.[vi] There were many more significant associations with the young adults’ present career position. Orientations towards long-term planning,[vii] as well as being an indicator of proactivity and of some forms of agency and control are of great interest, given the central place given by Beck and other individualisation theorists to people becoming the ‘planning office for their biographies’. These are the theoretical constructs that emphasise human agency most strongly.[viii] A long-term planning orientation was one of the few variables which was significantly associated with the social class origins of the research

participants. Life chances may have become more determined by people's abilities to be strategic in pursuing careers, but this finding has suggested that this is the very characteristic which has structural foundations in social class.

8.12 Agency and Performance in Working Lives

The evidence discussed so far suggests that reflexive processes operate in differentiated and complex ways in relation to the individual's subjectively perceived frame for action and decision. Thus, a person's frame has boundaries and limits which change over time, but which have structural foundations in ascribed characteristics such as gender and social or educational inheritance and in acquired characteristics of education and qualification.

As Roberts (2000) has also shown, adults in market economies, particularly those with broken or 'downward drift' occupational biographies, are unlikely to be able to identify with any stable group which can provide a voice or platform for action. In this and other respects, the hypothesis that a *structured individualisation process is apparent in the experience, values and behaviour of young people* is supported.

I have, periodically, used metaphors to portray and understand shifts in the processes of transitions and the part played by human agency in the course of lives. I have characterised these as 'niches, pathways, trajectories and navigations' (Evans and Furlong 1997).[ix]

The metaphor of 'navigation' was the metaphor which emerged from my work with Walter Heinz and which I extended to 'shooting the rapids' in trying to explain some of the tensions in the ideas of manufactured uncertainty and reflexivity, in my inaugural professorial lecture in 1996. But all of these metaphors underplay lateral movements and 'border crossings' which have become uncovered in the latest research – the importance of the different domains of life, horizons and group affiliations. People as social actors moving in a social landscape is my latest metaphor where internalisation of horizons and possibilities matters as much as external action and change over time.

As social actors in changing social landscapes, people perceive the horizons not only from where they initially stand in the landscape but also according to where their journey takes them. Where they go depends on the pathways they perceive, choose, stumble across or clear for themselves and the terrain and elements they encounter. Their progress depends on how well they are equipped, the resources and help they can call on and those with whom they associate themselves.

The analysis of the research findings has demonstrated the interfusion of agency and structural influences and that contradictions are sometimes apparent in the people's positions, views and beliefs. Dualistic treatments of structure and agency quickly become problematic. In a short report, it has been possible only to convey some themes or 'motifs' emerging from the group interviews. It has not been

possible in an article of this length to do justice to the rich engagements which illuminated many aspects of the analysis. The combined data showed that, despite feelings of lack of control in the least advantaged groups and disbelief in some of the principles of individualism and meritocracy, most research participants attached considerable importance to individual effort and expressed the belief that if people worked hard and achieved suitable qualifications then they should be able to follow their own independent pathway in adult life. Social connections, forging them and 'making them work for you' as well as the importance of image and self-presentation were much emphasised. They are certainly not blind to the influences of economic and social structures, but the least advantaged emphasised that they have to be 'realistic' in their individual aspirations and goals. It was striking that there was little sense of fatalism in any of the interview encounters, with only three interactions out of hundreds coded as displaying fatalistic attitudes. Frustrated agency and struggle characterised the day-to-day experiences of many of the young people who were in disadvantaged situations. In explaining the individual attributions of success and failure within socially structured environments and the almost universal recognition of the importance of 'qualifications', there is a need to look through the lens of agency as a socially situated process, shaped by the experiences of the past, the chances present in the current moment and the perceptions of possible futures, to find the concept of *bounded agency*. These young adults are undoubtedly manifesting a sense of agency, but there are a number of boundaries or barriers which circumscribe and sometimes prevent the expression of agency. The findings also further challenge the simplistic application of the concept of 'individualisation' in differing socio-economic and cultural environments, in ways which imply or assume uni-linear trends within undifferentiated contexts of 'modernisation'.

One of our starting points (Rudd and Evans 1998) was to argue that many studies of youth transitions have underestimated the degree of choice or agency evident in transitional processes. While the 'individualisation' thesis places agency at centre stage, accounts of individualisation and structuration, as Gudmundsson (2000) has pointed out, are no more than theoretical sketches, which can be developed and contested in 'empirical encounters'. This has allowed for the emergence of a range of 'middle ground' theoretical positions (Fig. 8.2).

The accumulated evidence suggests that agency operates in differentiated and complex ways in relation to the individual's subjectively perceived frames for action and decision. Thus, a person's frame has boundaries and limits which can change over time, but which have structural foundations in ascribed characteristics such as gender and social/educational inheritance, in acquired characteristics of education and qualification and in the segments of the labour market into which these lead. In this and other respects, the hypothesis that a 'structured individualisation' process[x] is apparent in the experience, values and behaviour of young people is supported. While structured individualisation accounts for the variety of experiences and incidences of interrupted or broken transitions in all social groups as well as for the class-based and gender-based linkages in planning orientations and horizons,

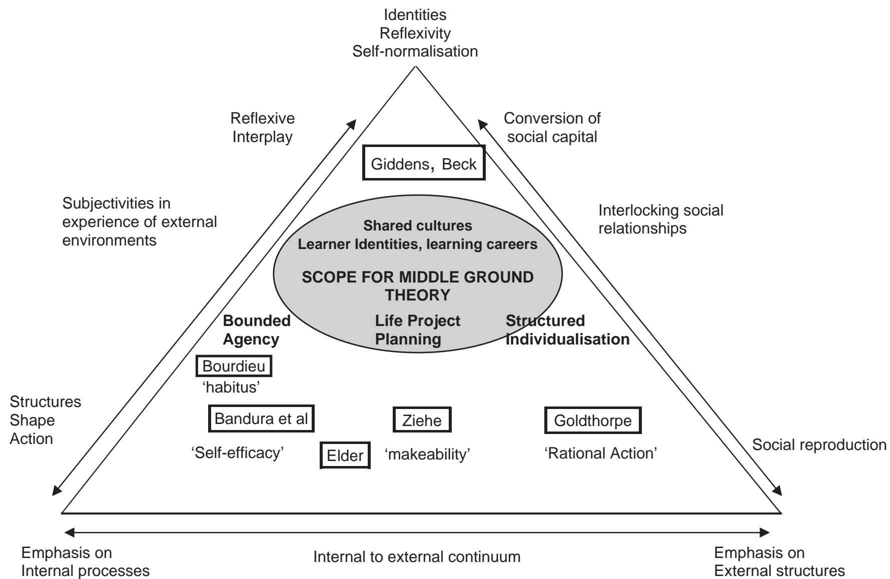

Fig. 8.2 Theoretical location of bounded agency

it shifts the attention back onto the operation of structures rather than focusing attention on how the dynamics of agency and the agency–structure interfusion work in the social world. The expanded notion of bounded agency recognises that the acting individual or group is socially situated, but not socially determined. Agency understood in this way is bounded agency that expresses itself in the social landscape through the dynamics of multiple, interlocking socio-biographical journeys in a social terrain. This makes a conceptual advance in linking social change and individual lives. It goes beyond the 'core assumption of the life course paradigm which asserts that developmental processes and outcomes are shaped by the life trajectories people follow, whether reflective of good or bad times' by examining the possibility that the flows of influence are multiple, sometimes mutually reinforcing and reciprocal. For example, ambitious goals and endeavours are likely to appeal to people who have strong control beliefs and not to those lacking self-confidence. In turn, the progress in working towards goals of this kind tends to further enhance a sense of personal agency. Beyond this, social relationships also structure experience and interlock with personal constraints in complex ways, while external influences and constraints can turn into modes of agency through a process of internalisation. An understanding of how human agency is exercised in working lives requires insights into the realities of work: how employees understand and make sense of their work, how they respond to the structures imposed on them, how they use their skills knowledge and emotions and how they cope with pressure and monotony. It also requires insights into how and why employees suffer injustice and how they represent themselves (Noon and Blyton 2000).

8.13 Evolving Approaches to Understanding People as Agents in Life and Work

Research on structure and agency had already been forced to move in a number of new directions, using new frameworks, terminologies and methods. A number of metaphors have been used to describe such transitions, including niches, pathways, trajectories and navigations (Evans and Furlong 1997). The later studies moved from a concentration on trajectories towards personal biographies, introducing conceptions of individualisation which suggest that progress through the school to work phase is based on more complex reflexive interactions of individual agency and structural influences than are acknowledged in much of the previous work in this field.

Billett (2006) offers a more relational account, arguing that we need to release understandings of work from captivity within either individual or social views by exploring, through empirical encounters as well as theorising, the relational interdependence between the two. Individual constructions of the experience of working life and how people actively engage with work intertwine individual and social contributions as people act, think and feel their way into and through work activities and relationships.

Processes of negotiation between individuals and the social world shape people's experiences of work and working lives from initial entry to experienced worker to the anticipation and actualities of retirement. These processes involve contributions to the reshaping of work practices that occurs as people personalise their workplaces and work together to find new solutions to everyday challenges. These are fundamental learning processes, as people, both young and mature, experienced and inexperienced, increase their human capacities by contributing to evolving work practice. Active engagement remakes practices, and that engagement itself stems from biographical sources as well as situational contexts (see Evans and Kersh 2006).

Different versions of human agency are associated with the different rationalities that operate in and through the workplace. Conflicting interests are played out in the reshaping of work and working life. These are unpredictable in some respects, even though distinct rationalities can be observed. The needs of workers are heterogeneous and so too are the ways in which they negotiate the social worlds of work. Theorists' generalised descriptions of how social circumstances play out for workers require differentiation and elaboration through consideration of the realities as experienced in the social world of particular workplaces.

It is not weakening the social-cultural account to say that understanding the uniqueness of individual engagement is necessary to understand the ways in which (and the extent to which) the wider social world contributes to the reshaping of work and its practices. This takes place interdependently through the highly variable social engagement of individuals. Workers engage in order to stay effective as well as to remake their work practices. The interdependence of workers in achieving effectiveness and in co-constructing work practices reflects both personal and situational inter-relationships.

This interdependence rests at least in part on the worth of the work engaged in, to individuals. This worth is not well reflected in indicators such as hierarchies and rewards. As Billett puts it, ‘If only those engaged in work at the top of the hierarchies were accepted as identifying with worthwhile work and the vast majority of workers would be rendered as engaged in worthless pursuits for only material gains – this is clearly not the case’ (Billett 2006: 263).

Individuals’ sense of self-worth and their own goals are most likely to be key drivers for their engagement in work. People find meaning and purpose and exercise their agency within forms of work which are not highly regarded in terms of their social standing. Different rationalities operate for them, and many people find spaces and means for self-fulfilment within jobs that would be experienced by others as demeaning. Opportunities for individuals to engage in work and ways of working which suit their purposes are relational depending on individual’s circumstances, age, skills, capacities and social circumstances. Yet social regularities do have to be critically examined, to reveal how security of tenure and types of skill that are recognised and attract high pay are distributed by age, ethnicity and social class background. Inequalities according to social positioning are very evident in workplace participatory practices (as Billett terms them). The distribution of invitations, opportunities and support for participation in various workplace practices often reveals insider and excluded groups. This is the dark side of the way in relations between the individual and social play out in particular organisational contexts.

The improvement of performance is a key driver in most contemporary work organisations, with measurement of performance by KPIs (key performance indicators) playing a central part in management strategies. This is part of a distinctive organisational rationality which tends to ignore the significance of employees’ experience of work, has a narrow view of what constitutes the appropriate exercise of human agency (or ‘initiative’ at work) and is often at odds with the rationalities operating in their day-to-day work activities. Foregrounding individuals’ agency and intentionality more will not only humanise, but also lead to, richer learning and less counterproductive effects that stem from imposition of dominant rationality. A desire to ‘perform’ is present in individual’s agency and intentionality. Creating the conditions for performance through engagement is the challenge faced by middle managers, caught in the interfaces of the different rationalities at work. Intentionality, experience and human agency are all present in the work of employees and need to be taken into account by planners and policy makers if they want to optimise engagement of employees in effective work practices. In the social world, people are not compliant to abstract societal goals (Edwards and Boreham 2003). Localised experiences and subjectively defined purposes, individual and collective, lie behind motivation and directed efforts in the workplace and beyond.

There is a need to side see through and beyond blanket assumptions about the disempowering effects of work changes that permeate some aspects of the literature. Work changes are often assumed to have effects that are destabilising and that increase insecurity, but the variety of ways in which work changes are subjectively

experienced is also of interest. Many variables are involved. There is a significant personal dimension that is often biographically rooted. Exploration of the criteria by which individuals come to value their work is instructive. Personal accounts often reveal positive evaluations where one would expect to find the negative. While it is important not to over-emphasise positive accounts, it is equally important also not to dismiss these as false consciousness of the easily duped, but to recognise that the accounts people give of their work represent ways in which different rationalities are negotiated in the social world.

Goldthorpe's (1998) answer to the agency problem is that a calculation of costs and benefit is involved, while accepting that rationality operates within individuals' horizons and social norms and calling for more cross-cultural studies to illuminate this. The studies drawn on in this volume have not set out to study the rationality, objective or subjective of people's respondents' decision-making, but they revealed the apparent rationality of perceptions and actions in relation to the features of the labour markets involved and their positions in the 'social landscape'. However, these are as well explained by the individually perceived need to maximise their options and minimise social risk as they are by any calculation of 'cost and benefit'. Furthermore, social divisions are becoming obscured by a universalised belief in competence and that this is most advanced in market-oriented environments.[xi] Social differences are perceived and collectively experienced. In interviews and discussions, questions of 'competence, will and moral resolve' permeated and often dominated the discourse. This was particularly marked in extended discussions of gender differences.[xii]

The apparent differences in orientations to 'life project planning' may be explained in part by interactions between the generations and the extent to which parents are able to secure the prospect of 'better lives and opportunities' for their children. The changing but bounded aspirations and expressions of agency may also be explained by socio-cultural influences experienced in their peer groups and institutional settings, as well as by the contingencies inherent in life transitions. There are some important indicators of 'collectivities' in perceptions of the social landscape and common experiences which were well articulated (and may therefore be surmised to be well internalised). Socially bounded agency means that roles and social relations may be redefined as part of the strategy to 'take control of their lives', and these redefinitions may have collective and cultural features. Furthermore, social and cultural inheritance may be converted into action in new but socially differentiated and bounded ways.

The more insecure and flexible systems of advanced liberalism (represented by the English labour markets) necessitate greater proactivity and the maintenance of the positive approach to 'opportunities'. This arises out of individual attributions of success and failure, which are themselves linked with beliefs that 'opportunities are open to all'. But as actors move in these social landscapes, spaces open up for action which is not wholly reducible to the effects of social reproduction or underlying structural features. The concept of 'bounded agency' provides a focus for further consideration of policy issues. Young adults as well as mature adults

do manifest agentic beliefs in relation to work and their social environment, but many encounter frustrations in expressing or acting upon them. There are obviously constraints that affect the young particularly as they try to find and construct their place in the changing the 'social landscape'. There are other constraints that make it very difficult for mature adults who have broken 'career' histories and have spent significant amounts of time out of the labour market to re-establish themselves in occupations and gain just recognition for what they have to offer. Many of these constraints are embedded in the underlying structures and will be very difficult to influence or remove, but others might be reduced through actions of key players at local level, and new policy initiatives or foci can give legitimacy to different new ways of thinking about the predicament of those at the most vulnerable end of society. For example, policies have to ensure that the greatest demands to 'take control of their lives' do not fall on those who are the least powerfully placed in the 'landscape'. This means that agencies working both with young adults and mature adults need to emphasise brokerage and advocacy as a primary aim and function, to the extent that people perceive and experience this to be as real as the emphasis which is currently placed on their 'deficits'.

The process of tracing the pathway through empirical encounters has led from insights into the active and passive forms of 'structured individualisation' towards the concept of 'bounded agency'. It has shown how extended dialogues between ideas and evidence have identified how human aspirations and strivings express themselves in the social landscape through the dynamics of multiple, interlocking socio-biographical journeys in a social terrain. Within reflexive processes of structuration, social relationships structure experience and interlock with personal constraints in complex ways, while external influences and constraints can turn into modes of agency through a process of internalisation. An understanding of how human agency is exercised in working lives also requires insights into the realities of work: how employees understand and make sense of their work, how they respond to the structures imposed on them and how they can use their 'voice' and capacities to personalise practices and act with intentionality and purpose. All of these are rooted in the essential interdependencies of work and in human rationalities that depart markedly from those of performance and competition which permeate business management and government policies.

The responsibilities exercised by people in and through working life entail mutual responsibilities and interdependencies of purpose. Chapters in this volume have uncovered this through the tensions of gender autonomy, democratising workplace practices, widening participation, the personalisation of work and the contradictions of control being demanded of the powerless. Relationships are uncovered between workplace social relations, environments and individual disposition and action in the workplace. In these ways, the 'I' embodies the 'we', that dangerous pronoun of Sennett's. The concept of bounded agency, in moving beyond structured individualisation, also leads towards theories of social action. The interdependencies of everyday life and work provide checks and balances, accommodate difference and create spaces for action in pursuit of social improvements.

8.14 Summary and Conclusions

Previous chapters have explored aspects of individualisation through research encounters – interviews, discussions and surveys – with people different positioned in the social landscape. This chapter has linked these in an extended dialogue between ideas and evidence, to come to a view about the scope people have for fulfilling their aspirations and the ways in which they strive for this through work and learning.

A retrospective review of the life and work transitions of youth and early adulthood up to the mid-20s in contrasting socio-economic contexts has revealed how, if a young person embarks on this risky voyage in a clearly defined progression of qualifications, based on his or her decisions, this tends to bring stability to the unfolding life course. If a diffuse, short-term sequence of activities is embarked on in a way which is reactive to immediate job demands and upheavals, the risks are far greater. Self-confidence both in youth seems to arise out of success in completion of tasks, from vocational choice to labour market entry. As youth shades into adult life, confidence continues to stem from cumulative experiences of success in roles, from feelings of control in personal decision-making about jobs and experiences in job changes as employment structures and work contexts change. The converse is also true as people encounter setbacks in the labour market, which cumulatively undermine confidence as people are positioned as deficient in relation to labour market or system demands. Some aspects of adults' experiences, particularly those least powerfully placed in the social landscape, transcend national and cultural differences despite substantial variations in regulation and custom. Yet agency, the desire to change things for the better through action in the social world, also operates through the connections people forge with each other in the social world, the environments and institutional practices of everyday life in changing social landscapes. The chapter has shown that while human capacities for action are bounded and constrained in the extent to which they can affect people's lives for the better, they are also potent forces in a changing social world.

The lens of the 'risk society' offers a vision of human beings who are condemned to individualisation in order to survive in the modern world. A 'life-world' lens offers a richer vision in which the bounds on human strivings and aspirations are loosened to release creative potential and realise broader and fairer forms of meritocracy. This requires fundamental rethinking of the dynamics of work, learning, achievement and responsibility in society.

Notes

i. Dual system in Germany; work-based training and apprenticeships or further education college learning to vocational qualification in Britain.

ii. The official undertaking by the FRG, as part of the unification deal, that qualifications gained in the east would be recognised in the west, ensures that many of those who were proceeding successfully

towards 'qualified and experienced worker' status in growth areas of the primary segment of the labour market had access to additional training and maximum opportunities to continue on their existing trajectory.

iii. see Evans and Niemeyer 2004.

iv. Ethnicity of the respondents reflected the distribution in the local population in each institutional setting, as far as possible, but the differences in the nature of the population groups and the numbers were insufficient for statistical analysis to be meaningful.

v. Derby has a significant black population, Hanover a Turkish population and Leipzig an incoming population from Russia and some of the other eastern European countries.

vi. After exploring NSEC, we decided to use registrar general's scale for coding of social class, which has in-built problems of comparability because of different definitions of skill level. Because of difficulties of comparing skills level within the manual occupations (combined with a high level of non-response to this question), a fivefold classification has been used for the purpose of analysis: professional, managerial, other non-managerial, manual and never worked.

vii. Composite of items including goal orientation and alignment of career with personal interests.

viii. See Beck (1992), Bandura (1995), Ziehe (1996) and Baethge (1989).

ix. This portrayal and analysis had apparently resonated beyond the English-speaking world, given the reproduction of an edited version in the French language journal *Lien Social et Politique*.

x. see e.g. Heinz (1999a,b) and Roberts (1995).

xi. see e.g. Ball et al. (2000).

xii. Initial findings on gender were presented in American Educational Research Association Conference (2000) and have been elaborated in a chapter and journal article in preparation for publication; we produced an initial pamphlet on emerging findings and secured support for three international seminars and workshops for researchers and users. These were held in Hanover, Leipzig and Derby. Our dissemination programme linked with planned programme events to the end of the programme in 2003 as well as is engaging a wide range of users through presentations and website communications.

Chapter 9
Systems and Societies in Transition: Challenging Inequalities, Choosing Inclusion

A regime which provides human beings no deep reasons to care about one another cannot long preserve its legitimacy.
(Sennett 1998, p. 148)

The more the rationalities that drive and explain the aspirations of ordinary citizens in everyday life become distanced from the neo-liberal ideologies espoused by multinationals and governments, the more spaces open up for alternatives to be pursued. Sennett is by no means the only writer to suggest that turning points may be approaching. Even proponents of neo-liberal globalisation such as Mickelthwait and Woolridge (2000) suggest that what they term the 'successes' of economic globalisation are whipping up a backlash, and admit that what Marx (1992) would immediately recognize about this particular global era is a paradox that he spotted in the last one – 'that as each waves rushes forward it also creates its own undertow' (p. 343):

> There is even suspicion that . . . the uncertainty it creates which forces companies, governments and people to perform better – may have a natural stall point – a moment when people can take no more.

Some advocates of the global benefits of neo-liberalism even argue that increasingly the tensions need to be resolved with greater responsibility. They see this responsibility as lying with businesses and with the philanthropy of those who have gained through the operation of globalised free market capitalism, drawing parallels with the Victorian era, but fail to see that the great reforms of that era did not stem from philanthropy but from the gathering strength of cause movements that fought for and eventually spearheaded change.

The opening chapter of this book examined the proposition that silent revolutions are taking place in society. According to Habermas, the purpose of theorising about society is to better understand how the mechanisms of society and the social relations that sustain them play out in people's lives. Understanding these is the first step towards perceiving that these mechanisms and relations are not inevitable, unchangeable features of the external world. They can be altered in ways that expand (or restrict) opportunities for people to bring their potential, aspirations and creativity to fruition for themselves their families and communities. This underlines the importance of social movements in the modern world. The extended dialogue between ideas and evidence dialogue constructed in this volume goes beyond the

K. Evans, *Learning, Work and Social Responsibility*, Lifelong Learning Book Series 13,
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4020-9759-1_9, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2009

importance of social movements to show how some specific assumptions that underpin public policy in the market-led socio-economic environments of Britain are setting the system world increasingly at odds with the lifeworlds of ordinary people. In this chapter the dialogue between ideas and evidence goes a step further into the arena of policy, showing how challenges to wrong assumptions (particularly where these generate unintended consequences) can involve the policy communities in genuine debate, generating policy ideas for better connecting system worlds and lifeworlds in pursuit of broader forms of meritocracy and social justice. It will be argued that the 'culture of contentment' is disturbed by growing inequalities to the point that even the middle classes recognise that what is being created is a zero-sum chase and a context of insecurity in which inequality, in the end, is bad for everyone. Greater social responsibility exercised throughout society means *replacing individual responsibility with mutual responsibility as the core construct.* The mutuality of social responsibility requires reconnection and voice for the ordinary citizen, exercised through work and the workplace as well as in the wider social world.

Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* (1958) also used the metaphor of revolution, a turning around, for the changes of the post-war years. He saw the changes of the post-war years as part of a 'bloodless revolution' which had flattened the social landscape to a plain, but argued that attitudes take longer to change. In my chosen landscapes people still move across peaks and through valleys. As they move spaces open up which are not wholly reducible to the effects of social reproduction or underlying structural features. Before returning to the potential of human agency, and its limits, there is a need to relocate the analysis in the sociology of globalisation.

9.1 Neo-Liberalism and the Logic of Markets

At one level neo-liberalism is a philosophy in which the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself. The principles of the market can supersede all other ethical beliefs in providing the ultimate guide for all human action[i] (see Treanor, 2004). The rule of the market includes rejection of the concept of 'the public good' or 'community' in a drive to tie social values with economic values. Private interests are permitted to control as much as possible of social life in order to maximise their profits (Chomsky, 1999).

Neo-liberal economic policies are those that prioritise tax cuts, the privatisation of industry and the de-regulation of markets in ways that, *inter alia*, reduce protection for local industries and goods. This goes hand in hand with the creation of 'flexible labour markets'.

The appropriate role of governments, in the neo-liberal view, is to confine themselves to income distribution, public-good infrastructure and administration of justice. At the level of the individual, the argument is that more economic growth, specialisation and opportunity create chances for individuals to achieve more than they would or could through highly regulated structures which purport to provide

security. There is also a 'trickle down' theory that the benefits to those who gain most will eventually permeate throughout society to benefit others, including the poorest.

Sociologists whose thinking has shaped the field, such as Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Parsons, focused on the internal dynamics of the societies they studied. The significance of global changes for those internal dynamics has begun to preoccupy a new generation of social scientists. In global landscapes of uneven international development, capitalism has always reached outwards in the drive to maximise profits, as shown by Cohen and Kennedy (2000). It has thus contributed to shaping of the world order by creating an increasingly integrated world economy dominated by the logic of profit and the market. It has also contributed to the social exclusion of marginal, dispossessed and poor people. The effects of IMF and World Bank imposition of neo-liberal 'reforms' are argued to have hit the poorest hardest with abolition of state subsidies and reduction of welfare support (Cohen and Kennedy 2000 p. 135).

Increasing polarisation is one of the phenomena contributing to the 'undertow', the 'backlash' and the 'stall point' that advocates of social justice hope for and proponents of the free market fear. As Watkins (1997) observed, Plato warned the Athenians that the income of rich should not exceed that of the poor by more than five times, as this would created conditions for economic inefficiency and the risk of civil war. In the 21st century, income differentials exceed this greatly in many societies.

The market holds out the promise of personal self-fulfilment through purchasing power in the market. This extends beyond consumer goods to the purchase of commodified education and health. Critics point out that this avenue to self-fulfilment is profoundly divisive and is no substitute for secure employment opportunities, strong community values or the ability of citizens to influence the political process through democratic institutions. It also holds out false promises. The market rationale often goes hand in hand with 'stakeholder theory' as those with purchasing power of different kinds can secure stakes in society's resources. Critics point out that the 'stakeholder' approach has inherent weaknesses, in that it draws more into an expanding middle class leaving an underclass of excluded people and no sense of collective social responsibility.

Economic globalisation and neo-liberal policies have weakened labour's bargaining power and increased insecurity through the creation of ever larger, casualised labour forces worldwide. The relentless pursuit of 'better performance', the 'lean manufacturing' approaches that drive down costs and streamline practices to the point where no margins or spaces for day-to-day human contingencies exist, also fuels hopes and fears of a possible 'stall' point.

Globalisation is often portrayed as an inanimate and inevitable force allied to neo-liberal philosophy But as Cohen and Kennedy argue, both social groups and networks can mobilise themselves globally for collective action. Leaders and followers of cause movements generally have a vision of alternative and preferred scenarios for the future. Many of these movements are linked to visions of social justice, involving emancipation and empowerment, as in the examples that started this volume – that of New Lanark and Robert Owen's legacies in the co-operative

movements, trades unionism, education and child labour reform. Others, in the contemporary world, include women's international movements that are often cited as prime examples of the ways in which networks can move to a global scale of activity, moving the cause forwards substantially throughout the world, although far short of the proponents' desired goals.

9.2 Human Capacities and Forces for Change

Creation of strong social bonds is one of the most powerful of human impulses, closely linked to the inherent desires and capacities of people to rise above the constraints of their conditions. The longstanding debates between social determinism and human agency are paralleled in the debates between utopians and Marxists, and subsequently between both of these and individualisation theorists. The impact of socio-economic frameworks on beliefs and behaviours has been evidenced in the previous chapters. When beliefs and behaviours are so profoundly shaped in and by contrasting social landscapes, how can the human desire to 'transcend and influence the organisation of society' be realised? (Quarter 2000 p. 6). Marx and Engels (1968) argued that the existing social conditions placed such major constraints on human agency that a utopian agenda was doomed to failure. Although they too had a utopian project in view, the Marx–Engels analysis focused on the ways in which contradictions within the system would bring about its own downfall. They believed in human agency, though, in their recognition that people make their own history, but not exactly as they wish or intend. We are all constrained and supported by conditions and relations with others. Moreover, the circumstances that are held to shape and form consciousness are not independent of human activity but are manifestations of the social relations that have been created by human action (see Lave, forthcoming 2009). Marx and Engels themselves put much effort into political action, and the social transformations they envisaged were wholly dependent on human agency.

Utopians such as Robert Owen, whose social experiment in New Lanark was one of the stimuli for this book, also believed and directly experienced how the existing social conditions limit the potential for change, but he also believed that by social experiments it was possible to demonstrate how fair and humane social conditions could be created and sustained. 'Utopian philosophy held that positive examples could inspire movements for social change to transcend the social conditions that shaped them' (Quarter 2000 p. 6); thus, utopianism points the way towards a social theory of action. In Owen's case, the ideas that formed the basis of the New Lanark social experiment did not stop there but were taken up in the development of co-operative movements, the early days of trade unionism and various reform movements including education and child labour legislation.

If the social experiments of utopianism lead towards theories of social action, what can these theories tell us about the scope and limits of human agency? Theories of social action try to balance the inherent desire of people to rise above the

constraints of their conditions with the manifest constraints of those conditions. They recognise that different rationalities co-exist in the social world. The fact that one rationality appears dominant at any one time does not mean that the other rationalities have lost their power to engage and persuade.

Social movements have undergone important changes since the 1960s. They can now potentially include much larger numbers of people. They challenge established interests by broadening the range of contested issues (see also Chapter 7). Cohen and Kennedy have shown how challenges to the global society are emerging 'from below'. Quarter (2000) has also shown how social movements can effect change by engaging business leaders and governments as well as grass roots support. Social movements gain from the sponsorship of socially innovative business owners and also put themselves in a prime position to further influence their views through a combination of persuasion and evidence, as in the case of the relationship between various environmental movements, international campaigns and The Body Shop's Anita Roddick. In the case of governments, in advanced liberal democracies, governments can further social movements by giving legitimacy to particular innovations. These relationships can, again, be reflexive.

Most of the social movements that have burgeoned in the late 20th and early 21st centuries involve people fighting for causes other than their class, contradicting aspects of the false consciousness thesis, which is anyway diluted by the overlapping of interests and evidence of the awareness that ordinary people have of different rationalities operating at work and in the wider social world. Moreover, 'people do not live by interests alone, but by emotions' (Quarter 2000) and their emotions are captured by causes that are as often local in their impact as they may be global in their significance.

I argued in Chapter 8 that the concept of bounded agency and the evidence of how it operates are important in exploring these tensions in the social world. What the social movement's literature often misses, in common with the extreme structuralists and those at the extremities of individualisation theories, is the essence of human action as interdependent and purposeful in shaping social practices. The need to focus on human capacities for action while keeping structures and the processes of structuration firmly in view has become increasingly apparent.

According to Reich's thesis (1991) a nation's wealth creation and its ability to compete increasingly depends on skills and creative processes of its citizens and their capacity to understand, transfer and improve technology than on actual ownership of different kinds of tangible assets. The most important role of government is to concentrate on raising the 'knowledge airing' capacities of its people at all levels. This shift will also strengthen the development of different rationalities by which the social world can be interpreted, by producing a more educated, adaptable and reflexive citizenry, more willing and able to question authority, demand autonomy and act as agents in shaping policy agendas (Reich 1991; see also Evans 1995).

Potential gains can be realised from the processes of globalisation. Social movements networked globally become key agents for progressive and humanitarian social change, as shown by the advances of women's empowerment, popular engagement with environmental issues and the expansion of civil and human rights.

The analysis of globalisation in terms of winners and losers has long been simplistic, but how far does the perception of disproportionate gains and losses for players differently positioned in the peaks and valleys of the social landscape contribute to the 'undertow', the impending stall point of neo-liberal globalism which is now envisaged as at least within the bounds of possibility? Can they, and are they, collectively discovering the potential and the means for social change that globalising processes are generating?

I started this chapter with quotes representative of a growing view that the undertow that globalisation generates, can yet turn the neo-liberal tide. At the end of the 20th century, governments associated with 'third way' thinking opted for a continuation of the policies originating in the dominant market ideologies of the 1980s. These were seen as having the potential for refocusing and enactment in a more equitable manner for wider social benefits, as well as providing ways of harnessing the post-communist states of Europe to the developed world economy. Many proponents of centre – left thinking challenge the view that the western world is dominant by neo-liberal policies, instead seeing them as different versions of advanced democratic liberalism. Are the policies that support workers' rights in the EU really adaptations of the neo-liberal model or moves away from it? As Ascherson (2001) has noted, within Europe, there are struggles and a clash of civilisations when it comes to cultures of participation, citizenship and social rights, and the EU/Brussels stance is often distanced from the Anglo-American model.

Modernisation along neo-liberal lines is neither uni-linear nor inevitable. There are strong differences rooted in local and national cultures which engage in different ways with globalising influences (Mitchell 2006). The Anglo-German research evidence affords an opportunity to contrast the workings of the Rhine model with the Anglo-American model, with reference to education, and to explore some of the realities of post-communist transitions as experienced in the eastern states of Germany.

9.3 'Rhine Model Versus Anglo-American Model'

Richard Sennett (1998) has made much of the differences between what he terms the 'Rhine Model' as represented by Germany, the Netherlands and France and the 'Anglo-American Model'. James (2008) has more recently contrasted what he has termed the unselfish capitalism of parts of Europe with the selfish capitalism of much the English-speaking world.

The Anglo-German comparisons underpinning this volume afford insights beyond the countries themselves, since they encapsulate features of models that have much wider significance. The effects of the globalisation of the markets need to be considered in more detail in reviewing changes in education and training systems and in the ways in which they are engaged in and experienced. The argument concerning the effects of globalisation on education and training is that governments everywhere are conceding control to consumers and markets (leading to commodification of education). They are also being forced to concede control upwards to

international organisations, and downwards to regional organisations. In this process, national education systems can start to lose their distinctive features as they begin to converge on a common instrumental norm. Social pluralism generates a growing diversity of needs which are met, increasingly, in privatised and individualistic ways. The logical conclusion is that it could eventually become impossible to transmit national cultures through education. Skill formation progressively displaces citizen formation as an educational goal, and 'the collective project [of national education] is eclipsed by individualistic aspirations and norms (Green 1997, p. 4).

To what extent do changes identified in previous chapters provide evidence of these effects of globalisation processes on education? In the situation of the labour markets and the educational systems in the UK and in the eastern and western states of Germany, there is evidence that governments are finding it difficult to sustain the post-school public education systems in their 'old' forms, both in managing the costs and in coping with increasing complexity. There is also evidence of the growing instrumentalism predicted by globalisation theorists. This became more apparent more quickly in Britain, accelerated by the neo-liberal policies of the Thatcher era. There are now signs of movement towards more 'instrumental norms' in market-led skill formation policies in the new Germany, particularly in the east. The challenges to the long-espoused principles of broad-based education for citizenship, which have been incorporated as part of the German dual system since its inception, also support the globalisation hypothesis.

But this scenario needs to be worked out over a longer period of time. Glowka, writing in 1989, observed that the strong German beliefs in the regulation of educational systems for 'effectiveness and social balance' will ensure that any moves towards marketisation of the education system will encounter considerable resistance. Similarly, Green argues that the trends we have seen in Britain, and beginning in the East of Germany, are likely to come up against 'bedrock opposition' in the FRG strongholds of state regulation. The traditional regulatory frameworks may be too much under pressure to continue in their present form; the construction of new forms of social partnership and new approaches to regulation is the most likely response to globalising influences. As Sennett observed, Rhine regimes tend to put the brakes on change when their less powerful citizens suffer' (p. 53), yet they can behave as flexibly and decisively as regimes operating the Anglo-American model, in respect of markets.

In some respects, the labour markets in the eastern states of Germany have been more susceptible, more quickly, to the effects of market forces which have placed highly regulated systems under such pressure. Because of this, the labour markets in the new *Länder* have, in some respects, more features in common with Britain than they have with the old *Länder*.

The secondary segment of the labour market is growing rapidly in the east, in common with Britain, and there is growing demand for a lower level, short-term qualification as an alternative to the full German apprenticeship to enable people to get a foot on the first rung of the employment ladder. Once in the secondary labour market, further training provision is needed to provide a route into the primary

labour market for those seeking it, if polarisation of labour markets and life chances is to be avoided.

In both countries, for those who successfully enter the primary segment, progression to skilled and experienced worker status in adult life has to be supported by company training and updating. What of those who, having entered the workforce, become unemployed through redundancy and company restructuring? Programmes for those affected by unemployment have to enable them to 'keep pace' to get back into the labour market. In Britain, more effective ways of ensuring entitlement have been sought, including entitlements to basic education levels for those in work, but have also continued to encounter the culturally embedded resistance from many employers, in the absence of legislative solutions. Continuing education and training policy in Germany, particularly in the new *Länder*, has to take account of the decline of importance of the dual system, and will also have to assume a multiplicity of starting points, as in Britain, and find appropriate ways of establishing 'entitlement'. This again shows that re-establishing the relationship between education and real life presents fundamental challenges.

9.4 Risk, Social Polarisation and Personal Agency

> .... the German reunification process is far more problematic than is widely believed. The tensions between East and West are evident everywhere and while Berlin itself resembles the rebuilding and development of Docklands, there are vast tracts of former East Germany that are untouched – lettered with decaying industries and very high levels of unemployment. The problems of the German economy are far more severe and structural than the financial pages of the UK press have led us to believe. When German politicians talk of the need for the EU to look to the east, a train journey from Potsdam to Dresden illustrates all.
>
> (Walters 1997)

Inequalities are not new in the eastern states of Germany. Social inequalities have realigned with western patterns while becoming greatly heightened under conditions of high unemployment, still running at twice the levels suffered by the western *Länder*, although the rate of redundancies has reduced and some new jobs are now appearing.

Previously, trajectories were predictable in both East and West Germany, in different ways. In the east, fixed tracking into the labour market as part of the system, and how people fared was partly determined by achievement (academic and political) from an early age, as defined by the system, and partly by social connection and party membership. In the west, the structures are less transparent, but similarly powerful. The strongly institutionalised system of the western states of Germany set young people on their *trajectory* at an early stage through tripartite schooling. In spite of many advantages identified with the German system, such as the development of strong work values, the drawbacks of the system cannot be overlooked. The apprenticeship system reinforces structural inequalities, a process stated in the stratified schooling system. Gender-based inequalities are particularly marked

with males outnumbering females by significant margins in the more advantaged academic and vocational routes into the labour market (Bynner and Evans 1994). Apprenticeships for young women tend to be of poorer quality and with poorer prospects than those for boys and many young women are channelled into vocational schools full time with domestic orientation. More and more young people now try first to complete the highest school track (*Abitur*) and then start an apprenticeship. This has resulted in major problems in recruitment to the traditional lower tracks of the German school system (*Hauptschule*) because of the reduced opportunities these now provide for an apprenticeship.

There is, therefore, some displacement of trajectories, one by another, in terms of outcomes in the labour market, but social stratifications remain intact. For those at the bottom of the heap, the labour market is hostile to those without qualifications and there are few openings for flexible forms of work-based learning available in Britain. Special schemes may serve to stigmatise and disadvantage further, all too often. The difference for young people is that opportunities to change their position now appear to be there, and failure to achieve change in their position is perceived and experienced as personal failure.

Studies conducted since 1989 have observed no dramatic differences between the two young generations in eastern and western Germany concerning life conceptions (e.g. Fischer and Zennecker 1992). Values concerning autonomy, variety of life experiences and the importance of work and qualifications are shared.

However, institutional and material resources to cope with everyday life and to prepare for the world of work are far less available for the young in Eastern Germany. The transition to work and family life used to be much more continuous than in the west. They took the normative steps faster than their contemporaries in the old federal states: VET, employment, marriage and parenthood were coordinated in such a way that adulthood was reached in the work-conscious German Democratic Republic several years earlier. Today the young generation, after socialism, has to shift to another transition rhythm. This requires many individual decisions in a much less transparent social environment. Moreover, the extension of the transition to adulthood has to be subsidised by the institutional help of the welfare state for quite a number of young people who are not yet in the employment system.

The features of a society undergoing structural transformations do not necessarily affect the timing, duration and results of individual transitions negatively. They may also enhance the people's capacities for exploration and self-direction. But the experiences with VET and the labour market, with parents' unemployment and with welfare agencies will require the development of strategies which support transition by extending the period of education or generating and sustaining new training or work-creation programmes by the state. The latter, in turn, may lead to transitions with uncertain destinations and set people on life-course trajectories in which they are constantly threatened by unemployment and under-employment. Young people in the former GDR were not socialised to cope with individualised competition in school and market-based employment. They have to find out how to navigate the second and third decades of life under new social forces and their own direction. This creates the danger that some of them, those who have developed high hopes

for a quick improvement of living standards, turn their frustrated expectation into aggression against others or into resignation and distance from the political system. There is some evidence of the latter in our findings, and of the former in studies of social trends in the east (e.g. Hormuth 1998).

With constraints on public funding and diversified demands on the system, neither the stratified ‘trajectories’ of Germany nor the flexible but confused (and often foreshortened) British ‘pathways’ are working well as routes into the labour market. An unreformed dual system cannot be made to work in labour market conditions such as those emerging in Eastern Germany. Stop-gap measures may fuel the polarisation into primary and secondary segments, and heighten social inequalities. The impact of globalising forces is manifest in both England and Germany. In England, instrumental trends in education have been strongly represented in ‘vocationalism’ in schooling and a sustained thrust towards skill formation in every sector of post-school education (Avis et al. 1996). But the advance towards the logical conclusion of the globalisation theorists is countered by the governmental re-emphasis on ‘education, education, education’. Education is adopted as one of the main instruments of national social policy, in the attempt to contain increasing social inequalities and to counter their effects in social exclusion. Similar forces and reactions are appearing in Germany, albeit less markedly. The globalisation of markets goes hand in hand with the globalisation of inequalities. Education as a private good is prominent in policies which emphasise increasing ownership of certificates and credentials by an ever increasing number of people, as the opening chapter of this volume argued. But as Brine (1999) points out, the processes of converting these into ‘economic capital’ in markets continue to have structural foundations in gender, ethnicity and social class. Meanwhile, the population is tutored unremittingly into both high and low expectations about their prospects – high expectations that anything is achievable with the application of individual effort and achievement, but low expectations of employment rights and security: ‘No one can expect to have a “job for life” ’. The policies of the centre-left German government in the late 1990s had some clear resonances with those of the British ‘New Labour’ government. Both espouse the principles of redistribution of power and wealth, but through the indirect means of learning and ‘removal of barriers’ rather than through the traditional direct redistributive mechanisms. At the same time, neither country can continue to manage post-school education and training in the traditional way, and to this extent the logic of globalisation theory is supported. But England’s moves to cede control to consumers and markets have also been accompanied by rearguard actions to counteract the most negative effects on marginalised groups through the same educational system. Germany, meanwhile, is likely to concentrate more of its efforts on the search for the new forms of social partnership which can be most effective in the changed market conditions of both east and west. The Alliance for Jobs is a manifestation of this, although the difficulties in constructing these new forms of social partnership should not be underestimated. The alliance involved the divergent interests of organisations working in globalised markets, those working in regional markets within Germany or the wider Europe, and trade unions serving the interests of workers already integrated into the labour market.

Critical for any country's education and training system is a unified framework for learning and qualifying through which people in early careers can get started, can overcome setbacks and restart when necessary and can be guaranteed further progression into higher education, to more specialised vocational study or to full adult status in the labour market. For any such system to function, it must be backed by support networks that enable people to withstand the difficulties of study, that ensure that they are properly supported financially and that they have the right kind of support when they need it.

Far from 'catching up' with the rest of Germany, the Eastern German conditions of increased casualisation, employment of unqualified workers and further erosion of the dual system may portend the future of the *Länder* of the west. The issues raised have considerable resonances with those which have beset British education and training policy in the 1980s and 1990s. Comprehensive strategies which align neither with the highly regulated, segmented Germanic model of the past nor with the unregulated, inconsistently supported and short-term market-led arrangements of England are needed, if social exclusion and the destabilising effects of polarising life chances are to be countered. The development of polyvalent and more permeable structures, supported as a public responsibility and able to provide equitably for those at the margins of the labour market as well as core workers, is a challenge not only for England and Germany, but also for all who subscribe to versions of either the Rhine or the Anglo-American models.

9.5 Challenging Inequality, Choosing Inclusion

Like Robert Owen, Husen also had predictions about the millennium. Husen, architect of the idea of a learning society, predicted that society will confer status decreasingly on the basis of social background or inherited wealth. To a growing extent, educated ability will be society's replacement for passed-on social prerogatives. This idea was based on the extension of meritocracy, but Brown and Lauder have shown that the narrow forms of meritocracy operated over 50 years, together with socio-structural forces have had the unintended consequences of creating the conditions for the opportunity trap. People expect better earnings as a result of learning, and the demand for qualifications from the middle classes has fuelled the market. The demand for qualifications is becoming increasingly difficult to meet from public funds. As qualifications become private good, those without resources fall further and further behind. The opportunity trap also makes it more difficult for those who have invested in qualifications to convert these into the outcomes they want in the labour market. This is captured most graphically by the Hirsch analogy: if everyone stands on tiptoes, no one can see any better, but those who do not join in have no chance at all (Hirsch 1977).

The concept of 'skill' is also changing as the organisation of work changes. The ways in which skills are recognised or overlooked have important effects on opportunity structures and the ways people move in social landscapes. Unlike economists' and psychologists' views of skills as residing in the individual, sociologists,

anthropologists and social historians see skills as socially constructed, residing in settings, and shaped by social relations.

Approaches that view skills as individual attributes are often associated with human capital theories, which argue that in market economies a person's value as an employee is determined by their knowledge and abilities, and the extent to which their knowledge and abilities are in supply and demand in the labour market gives them value as 'skills'. There are disparities between the skills people possess as compared with skills expected to use at work. The nature of the skills gap is contested. Some surveys and analyses identify 'skill shortages' while others identify 'underemployment', by demonstrating that increases in educational qualifications and in work-related knowledge have overtaken the skills levels of the jobs available.

Skill is a powerful concept since it implies a measure of worth. The recognition and rewards associated with skill reflect the power and influence of social groupings. They are used by different interest groups to claim status, preferential treatment and higher rewards. On these points too, the principles of existing, dominant forms of meritocracy falter. All of this implies growing dysfunctionality of narrow forms of meritocracy in the distribution of life chances.

I have shown that the new generation of adults has bought, to a degree, the message that it is individual competence and performance which counts, and that 'you are the author of your own life'. They have also internalised beliefs in meritocracy, that opportunities open to all, and that qualifications shape your chances in life, but they are certainly not blind to the social forces and factors outside the control of individuals that create and sustain inequalities of treatment and outcome. Among adults, there is much evidence of the ways in which people try to increase the control they have over their lives in and outside the workplace, with widening inequalities in recognition of abilities and rewards for 'skills' between the most privileged and the least powerful. Despite this the strongest demands to take control of their own lives fall on those least powerfully placed and with fewest material resources at their disposal to effect changes in their situation. (The journalist who asked me why disadvantaged 19–25-year-olds struggling in the labour market should have access to comparable support offered to 16–19-year-olds through the 'Connections' youth work and support programme commented that 'they have to grow up sometime, don't they?' Yet the continuing support in counselling and careers services traditionally given to university students, already in a more privileged position, is rarely if ever questioned.)

What dangers are there here for social stability now that the underestimation of talent in the population has become so apparent? In the younger generation at least, hopes are high but eyes are open. Furthermore, how can the principle of seeking solutions to permanent states of risk and insecurity be reconciled with any lasting ideas of social cohesion? As Field asks, if all is in flux and everyone and everything is ready for constant change, how can any social order hold together? Surely the learning society is doomed by its own internal contradiction to tear itself apart?

The critical question remains – how will the poor, the powerless and the denigrated members of society begin to react to possible alternatives? More worrying for those in power, how will those who are more powerfully placed, who engaged in

the qualifications chase but have not achieved as much as they had hoped, begin to respond to disappointments? There are dangers of widespread malaise, but opportunities too. In a risk society, people act to minimise personal risk as well as maximise opportunities. Is there the prospect of the middle classes, running our of ways to maximise their opportunities and faced with heightened risks themselves of losing social position through the operations of the new capitalism, becoming more open to the advantages for them of supporting more secure safety nets? And what of insecurities in the wider world? Inequalities across the globe are now disturbing the 'culture of contentment' (Tawney 1982), and it is not obvious how the middle classes can insulate themselves from these risks. UN Commissioner Mary Robinson (2002) called for self-regulation in response to already increasing public scepticism about the benefits of neo-liberal versions of globalisation. The United Nations' global compact (a programme set up to help private enterprise meet its citizenship obligations locally and globally) urged that 'the business community focuses not only on policies of good corporate citizenship but also on the practical implementation of these policies':

> If it really wants to prove to an increasingly sceptical public that globalisation' can be made to work not just for the privileged but also for the powerless, the business community must ensure that it is practice that matters
>
> (Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.)

Another view is presented by Cohen et al., who argues that transnational corporations have no interest at all in improving people's real lives or encouraging the strengthening of civil society, and have no intention of promoting the kind of meaningful transnational solidarity that might empower global citizens to co-operate in overcoming common problems (p. 362.) Quarter (2000), by contrast, demonstrates that many social movements actively seek and cultivate people business support and that high-profile business owners who espouse and support social movements are embraced by social movements for the power and influence they bring. Social innovation in the workplace is deemed visionary rather than utopian, but sometimes genuinely embraces a vision of social justice. Quarter, writing about socially innovative business owners, gives a more nuanced account than the blanket dismissal that corporations do not and cannot care. But his analysis also shows that the longer term socially innovative business initiatives too often fail over the longer term because they are too tied up in the individualism of the high profile business people involved.

In the end, inequality, when it gets out of hand, is bad for everyone, including the rich. Is a window of opportunity opening for those who advocate reduction of inequalities by intelligent regulation that gives better social entitlements to all?

9.6 The Discourses of 'Uncertainty'

Uncertainty exists without any 'looming disaster' to which it can be attributed (Sennett 1998). It has become normalised as part of the fabric of a vigorous capitalism in which the expectation of instability is built into everyday life.

The lack of a long-term perspective, according to Sennett, can disorient action over the long term, loosens bonds of trust and commitment and 'divorces will from behaviour'. There were signs of this in the step-by-step and 'taking chances' behaviours of English young adults.

Many of the debates have revolved around flexibilisation as a response to the normalised view of uncertainty. There are elects within the 'Rhine' regimes that are deeply resistant to flexibilisation. There has also been a parallel debate about the effects of 'routine' in work. Routine at work has long been seen as deadening to the mind and spirit. Adam Smith's pronouncements on routine at work resonate with the concerns expressed in the 1950s in Britain in the Crowther Report about the lack of education offered to 15–18-year-olds, which argued that routine work was deadening to the minds and spirits of young school leavers. For Smith, the growth of markets and the division of labour reflect the material progress of society, but not its ethical advancement. Contrasts have been drawn (Sennett 1998) between workers who were in control of organising their own work (e.g. journeyman of the past) with the modern capitalist distinctions between the employer's time and the workers' own time, now again becoming both intensified and blurred in the 21st century with the latest so called revolution and the digital divide. But routine can also provide security. Journeyman of the past had little, if any, protection. Moreover, resistance to routine can hardly be said to create the conditions for the silent revolution introduced in Chapter 1 (with reference to Weber and Moore) as Bell has also argued in *The End of Ideology* (1960).

Giddens has identified the parts played by habit and routine in both social practices and self-understanding. These are mirrored in the understandings of human capacities as rooted in past routines and practices. We experience contingencies in the present moment and can see alternative possibilities only in relation to existing scripts and routines. To gain a critical perspective, to bring larger visions into view means that we have to expand the scripts and routines through wider knowledge and windows onto different kinds of experiences in the social world.

The assumptions that routine is deadening to the mind are inextricably linked with beliefs that people must therefore be stimulated by having more 'flexible' experiences in and out of work. Going back to the original meanings of flexibility as tensile strength and ability to adapt to changing circumstances without being broken by them, Sennett (1998) poses the question: if flexibility makes a more engaged human being – how this occur? Society is still inclined to the view of J.S. Mill that flexible behaviour in some way frees the individual, particularly the individual worker. There are positive connotations to way in which the language of flexibility is used. It implies desirable attributes of being open to change and adaptable in positive ways. But, according to Sennett, the pursuit of flexibility has produced new structures of power and control rather than creating conditions that set people free (p. 47). Flexibility also has connections with 'resilience', a concept also linked with ideas of a human kind of tensile strength widely used in ways that put the onus on the individual to withstand external pressures including social injustices. The discussion of gender autonomy in Chapter 6 shows how resilience of individuals

has to go hand in with intermediate, institutional and societal level commitments to social improvement.

The contradictions experienced by middle managers charged simultaneously both with controlling and fostering creativity in the workforce have been identified earlier. These tensions are also embedded in a wider set of management beliefs that flat or networked institutions are more open to re-invention than the hierarchically organised structures of 'old capitalism'. Sennett gives a compelling account that what is portrayed as the empowering organisation, giving people more control over the work, in fact makes more people more visible, vulnerable and potentially dispensable and overburdens small work groups with too many diverse tasks. Restructuring is more often than not symbolic, little more than a demonstration to the market that the organisation is capable of change and has a vibrant leadership. A discourse is constructed in which change itself is held to be responsible for negative consequences on people – no one, not even the middle manager already caught in the contradictions, can be held accountable. Permanent innovation makes flexibility little more that 'accommodation to ceaseless change', rather than effort to control it, so does not much have to do with engagement, according to Sennett (1998) who, citing experiences of some Boston bakers, argues that the culture of the new work order profoundly disturbs self-organisation, disconnects flexible experience from personal ethics, and (performative) labour from understanding and engagement.

Compelling as this account is, it loses sight of the human capacities for purposeful action that are shown to operate day to day in organisations and beyond them, in the empirical encounters offered here and in the work of Billett, Noon and Blyton and others. What parts do human agency, aspiration and engagement actually play, and what are the implications for the exercise of individual responsibility, mutual responsibility and social responsibility?

9.7 Individual Responsibility, Mutual Responsibility, Social Responsibility

There are problems with coherence of society in an age in which risk and responsibility are perceived to reside wholly at the individual level, in work and outside it.

The 'team work' ethos espoused by the new capitalism, which promotes collaboration and combined striving for common goals in networked work groups, is argued to be far distant from the ethics of self-responsibility which marked the old work ethic. But the old work ethic was as problematic in different ways. Structures were disempowering in different ways, as hierarchies operated to keep people in their place and to silence dissent, often with authoritarian abuses of power. A return to previous structures and work practices is the last thing that proponents of social justice would desire. Even Sennett concedes that to continue old practices, with the deadening politics of seniority and time serving would be to self-destruct in modern climate. So what are the options, if these observations are valid?

To understand individuals' engagement in work and learning requires a better understanding of what constitutes work and how individuals engage with paid work (Billett 2006). It is important to recognise the dangers of underestimating the worth of working life to individuals. The rich interplay between what the workplace and the social world afford workers and how they engage with what is afforded them extends to the leisure, family and community domains. The need to understand human experience holistically has been pointed to time and again in the empirical encounters with adults explored in this volume. Accounts of contemporary working life provided through particular theoretical lenses or survey snapshots are not providing the complete picture (see also Noon and Blyton 2002). Billett's case studies have also challenged the view that all or most workers are 'inherently captive by the press of the immediate social experience' in ways that render work alienating or at least insecure or unrewarding.

Interdependencies are at play in workplace relationships, at and between all levels of the workforce. Accounts of employees as socially subjugated people inadequately represent the ways in which people work together, and how they use knowledge and experience in pursuing their interests. These are not well accounted for by blanket arguments of class-based false consciousness.[ii]

'Improving Workplace Learning' (Evans 2006) recognised the variabilities and the uneven ways in which social relations play out in different workplace contexts. In Billett's terms, the 'social press' of the workplace on employees can be stronger or weaker; the engagement of workers with particular cultural norms, cultural practices of work can be more or less intense.

In capturing more fully the roles that people have in negotiating the changing environments of contemporary social life, I return to the post-modern life metaphor of navigating, the lone canoeist shooting the rapids, but move beyond individualised attempts to master the immediate environment to see the processes of navigating risk and challenge in its the wider social landscapes. Our capacities as humans make us strive for some sense of continuity and purpose according to the conditions we find ourselves in – according to Sennett. This means engaging, negotiating and remaking the practices of work, not just navigating and negotiating them for personal goals (Billett 2006; Lave 2009):

> Advancing individual agency as a means through which individuals can be fulfilled is not to absolve social problems such as inequity, nor is it about creating a false sense of equity, democracy and fulfilment and denying alienation, as some claim .... It is about humanising social relations and social structures and locating a legitimate and appropriate role for individuals in directing their cognition, learning and the remaking of culture
>
> (Billett 2006)

Taking mutual responsibility as the core construct offers a way forward. Billett's accent on the 'individual' translates too readily into an account of responsibility that does, unintentionally, fuel the dominant tendency to redefine social problems such as inequity as individual ones. Sennett's accent on people establishing social bonds beyond work in response to their negative experiences of work assumes a degree of commonality/uniformity of experience which is not well evidenced. Further, it can translate into a weak form of the social movements argument, focusing exclusively

on mounting resistance outside the workplace and through different roles for trade unions. This tends to sidestep the much harder questions of how people can exercise their agency to improve their own situation and that of others in the realities of work settings. In response, taking mutual responsibility and individual agency expressed through interdependencies as the core construct provides a way forward. It leads into consideration of how environments as well as work practices are shaped; it foregrounds channels for the expression of mutual responsibility in and through working life.

In this volume, for example:

- The expression of gender autonomy, in which individuals are equally free to pursue gender-typical or gender-atypical occupations without penalties accruing from that choice, centres on mutual responsibility exercised in the work and practice environments, as well as wider responsibilities to pursue the larger equity agenda through social movements and legislative changes.
- The personalisation of workplaces by workers involves interdependencies with those who share the same environments.
- The self-evaluation by workers of their own competences and capabilities, when focused solely on individual responsibility, can contribute to the disempowerment of people by positioning them as deficient. When the focus embraces mutual responsibilities and interdependencies in the social world, a different quality of engagement is experienced.
- In workplaces, receptors exist for the expressions of human agency. Expanding the scope for discussion and compromise entails, by definition, mutual responsibility and interdependencies that go well beyond shallow conceptions of ‘teamwork’.
- The evidence suggests considerable diversity reflective of the complexities of the workplace context, variations in the quality of working environments and the differential positions of employees within workplace hierarchies. Research into the experiences of basic level employees provides some partial insights into these questions.
- More fundamentally, from a theoretical standpoint, reflexive and interdependent understandings of self-directed learning, going beyond simplistic versions that emphasise independent mastery of work tasks, are needed to make sense of the ways of the ways in which employees take engage in and shape everyday workplace learning.

Bowles and Gintis (1986) characterised the healthily self-reliant person as one who is capable of depending on others when the occasion demands, and knowing on whom it is appropriate to rely. This is reflected in the Chapter 4 examples of interdependencies of adult workers. One consequence of advocacy that people ‘take control’ of their lives in individualistic ways is that the idea of dependence in any form takes on negative connotations. Yet, organisations rely for their day-to-day working on social bonds. Indeed, this is recognised in the ‘bonding sessions’ often espoused by managers struggling with the everyday tensions of combining control and discipline with the challenges of motivating people in their ‘teams’. Sennett

argues that bonds of trust develop naturally and informally as people learn on whom they can depend. Regular features in business sections of newspapers shed light on how individualistic values translate into 'advice' to people on how to survive work crises or threats of downsizing: find or create a niche that only you can fill, protect your own position by pre-emptive action, if necessary at the expense of others. Again, the zero-sum logic eventually becomes apparent, but by that time the individual actors have already accepted personal responsibility for what happens to them in work crises that are, in fact, beyond their control.

A more realistic view is needed of how work groups and other peer groups form social bonds and hold together, through conflict and negotiation as much as through generalised notions of 'common goals'. Assumptions of common motivations and shared goals that underpin much of the popular use of concept of communities of practice fail to take account of differences in privileges and power and conflicts in interests. These are acknowledged and worked through constructively in strong forms of community; ignored and unresolved in weak forms of 'teamwork'. Members rely on each other for different contributions based on recognition of different capabilities and interests. Mutual responsibility and interdependency have nationalities that depart radically from those of dominant discourses of individualisation. The rationality underlying mutual responsibility is well captured by Sennett: 'Because someone is counting on me I am responsible for my actions before another'.

The fact that these rationalities are subordinate or invisible in public policy and private business discourse does not mean that they are not alive and well in the population at large. Discourses of emancipation, and social responsibility co-exist with the dominant ideology in ways that show themselves in all aspects of social life. Articulating and acting out the principles of mutual responsibility in everyday life build character, according to Sennett with strength of character required to sustain the desire for voice.

Within a market logic, the politics of individual responsibility often achieve little more than the reconstruction of fate as illusory 'choice' for those least powerfully placed in the social landscape. Failure also becomes invades the lives of more members of the middle classes as those who have invested in qualifications and in careers achieve less than they have expected or suffer the setbacks of redundancy and periods of unemployment that become commonplace. The risk society is also the high insecurity society, for the middle classes too, although they are more insulated from its immediate effects by safety nets.

The pivotal role of 'responsibility' is highlighted by turning to Lippmann's 1914 account of 'Drift and Mastery' in the construction of life and work 'careers'. In place of the individual responsibility that lies at the heart of the 'individualisation' thesis, Lippmann has focused on the ways in which careers develop through ability, agency and the interdependencies of mutual responsibility. In this account, work is seen as a long-term narrative and the development of character is achieved through sustained, organised effort. This resonates with the German concepts of the worker – citizen and the 'Beruf' – and contrasts fundamentally with the concept of the individualised 'flexible worker' competing for positional advantage in short-term labour market manoeuvres, equipped with 'employability skills'.

Lippmann also prefigures the Bennite argument (see Chapter 1) that the proper use of scientific, technological and professional knowledge helps people to develop a 'spirit of mastery' in approaches to their careers and the social world. Change is not to be suffered passively, but mastered through knowledge and human agency. In this way the bounds of agency are pushed back. This contrasts with Sennett's approach, which focuses on 'breaking down the taboo on failure' by turning the individualistic, self-blaming, 'inward-looking' behaviours of those who have suffered losses outwards towards the sharing of experiences with peers – the first step towards restoring a larger sense of community and mutual responsibility:

> All the emotional conditions we have explored in the workplace animate that desire (for community); the uncertainties of flexibility, the absence of deeply rooted trust and commitment; the superficiality of teamwork most of all the spectre of failing to make something of oneself in the world. . . . impels people to look for some other source of attachment and depth (p. 138).

Social bonds meet these needs, according to Sennett. These arise from the sense of mutual dependency as well as mutual responsibility, reversing the sense of dependence as a shameful condition, associated with the downgrading of the value of 'service' and with the rhetoric of people taking control of their own lives in ways that ignore accountabilities to others. In this respect intensifying social bonds, whether established locally or through virtual networks, represent part of the undertow of globalisation.

If at present proponents of neo-liberalism regret some of the effects of workforce casualisation and recognise need for greater responsibility to be accepted by organisations, they also continue to celebrate the regime of flexibility – see for example '*Future Perfect*' by Mickelthwait and Wooldridge, which captures both the warning and the celebration. People have always been disposable and dispensable in capitalism .The increasing 'illegibility' of the workings of global capitalism means that a 'spirit of mastery' increasingly needs not only useful knowledge but the educated attributes of critical skills, critical thinking to read the social world, as I first argued in Evans (1996). If greater social responsibility is to be genuinely embraced, a society that learns and pursues the spirit of mastery has to establish an ideological base for itself which attaches as much importance to active and engaged citizenry as it does to economic growth and productivity.[iii]

How can these shifts be achieved? It has already been argued and shown throughout history) that social relations and institutional mechanisms can be altered in ways that expand (or restrict) opportunities for people to bring their potential, aspirations and creativity to fruition for themselves their families and communities. One way of bringing the system world closer to the lifeworld of ordinary people is to seek ways of re-establishing the relationship between education and real life, throughout the whole of life. In the social landscapes of Britain this would require four translations/transformations:

- EDUCATED ATTRIBUTES in place of KEY SKILLS;
- SOCIAL ENTITLEMENTS in place of TARGETED SUPPORT;

- QUALITY LEARNING IN AND THROUGH WORKING LIFE going beyond BROADENED ‘ACCESS’ TO DEGREES; and
- RECONNECTION in place of ACTIVE INDIVIDUALISATION.

Reflexive learning in adult life requires more than bundles of ‘key skills’. Reflexive learning requires educated attributes, the abilities to read the world and reflect critically upon it.

Learning for a living has to be connected to broader social purposes; For UK and those broadly aligning with the advanced liberal version of the ‘Anglo-American’ model this means re-working the idea of meritocracy, but not the narrow forms which over-rewarded the minority while underestimating the talent of the majority. Broader forms of meritocracy require inclusion and redistribution as key elements, levelling the landscapes in which people express their aspirations and providing support for the development of quality learning environments at work and in the community.

Narrow forms of meritocracy have over-rewarded the minority while underestimating the talent of the majority. This happened through the partial opening of restrictive pathways to elite education, carried out in ways that had some impact on social mobility but little or no impact on the underlying institutional configurations that shape life chances. These narrow forms of meritocracy have been overtaken by market forces, and now reward the affluent disproportionately with much reduced effect on social mobility. If the beliefs of the new generation of adults that meritocracy is alive and well and that opportunities are open to all are to be sustained, broader approaches to meritocratic fairness have to be pursued, in ways that can support the aspirations of ordinary people and release their capacities. This means that state intervention in the market for education has to pursue inclusive and redistributive measures based on social entitlements. Some steps are already being taken to move beyond targeted support (often short-term to pull people out of difficulties after the damage is done, with unintended stigmatising consequences) towards preventive and affirmative action.

The debates revolving around access to higher education, together with the problematics of widening participation beyond engagement of higher and higher proportions of the middle classes, have been discussed in Chapter 3. Broadening access to the ‘royal highways’ of learning is important, but securing vocational education of high and consistent quality continues to be a pressing need (see Unwin 2002). The findings of Bynner et al. (2002) also reinforced the longstanding message of the UK ‘Working to Learn’ Group[iv] that much more attention needs to be given to those people for whom the expansion of higher education is not a solution. Ways of creating regulating and supporting work-related environments that expand, rather than restrict, learning, are central recommendations in the book ‘Improving Workplace Learning’ (Evans et al. 2006). The arguments jump too quickly to connections into social movements, often at international level, to challenge inequities and injustices. This too often bypasses or downplays the scope for engagement in and through everyday working life, as precursors or complements to alignments with cause organisations. Alternatively, the Nordic model is turned to for its potential to

provide better answers to achieving successful globalisation (Green et al. 2007) – but how are such models to evolve when structures ultimately grow (historically) out of our social landscapes and through the exercise of human agency within and through them?.

The argument here is that there is a missing link, that of reconnection of people into the structures that permeate their everyday lives, through voice, critical thinking, engaged citizenry. Chapter 7 argues that in working life this is most challenging of all for those moving in social landscapes afforded by Anglo-American regimes, give the status of workers as subjects given the status of workers as subjects in the workplace rather than citizens at work.

Most of all, a real learning revolution, one with mutual responsibility as its core construct, requires our reconnection through strengthened channels and structures for the expression of aspirations and for social participation in the real, contested senses outlined earlier. It is no good at all talking about having an engaged citizenry at the heart of everything and putting it into our curricula (Morris 2002) unless there is also real connection for people into democratic structures where the ideas and practices of shared responsibility can be exercised. Reconnection is needed via the missing links of our time. Where are these structures for those moving through and out of the various forms of post-school education and training and trying to gain a foothold in the institutions of work and adult life? Where are they, for those adults in insecure positions and caught in the revolving doors of the labour market? The author, Neal Ascherson, asking how European can we/will we be (2001) finds that, for Britain, 'autocracy in the workplace is the tallest barrier across the way to a more participative citizenship, with an ignorance of the measures put in place in other parts of Europe in support of greater 'employee voice'.

As part of the same project with Bernard Crick on the relationships between work and life (2001), I have argued that social rights can be re-examined in the light of increased demands for people to be 'flexible' and 'adaptable' in their approach to work, with the high security that entails. When people become more flexible to employers needs, this can often mean reduced scope for flexibility in other aspects of their lives. Expanded social rights, to balance these new responsibilities, can include, for example, the right to choose more family friendly patterns of living and working, the right to time off work for learning, the right to be properly represented in the workplace in matters of access to education and training as well as pay and conditions. A recent British Social Attitudes survey (2002) has shown a frustrated demand for better representation in the workplace, despite the decline in membership of unions and professional associations. Expanding the conception of social rights in these ways is an approach to stabilising the high insecurity society and countering some of its most damaging features, while providing a more credible way of achieving an engaged citizenry.

Finally, re-establishing the relationship between education and real life needs a radical vision of lifelong learning which encompasses learning for a living, but is not driven by it – a triadic vision in Aspin's (2007) terms. How is this vision to be achieved? Theorising about society and the social relations of learning and work has shown how the aspirations and strivings of ordinary people can make a difference

and that turning or tipping points are always within reach, as some level. Herein lies the significance of social movements in the modern world. Furthermore, when assumptions that underpin public policy set the system worlds against the lifeworlds of large numbers of ordinary people, and when these ordinary people increasingly include large sections of the middle classes, governments put their electability at risk and rediscover the need to bring politics 'closer to the people'. Evidence, ideas and the polity can mobilise political thinking in new directions, can engage and persuade as policy makers search for the new 'big idea'. In the modern world, ideas for better connecting system worlds and lifeworlds in the pursuit of broader and more just forms of meritocracy can focus compellingly on learning as a lifelong process which links rather than separates generations. This lifelong process incorporates working lives, it is not a by-product or subordinated to the business of working for a living. It recognises that people learn mutual responsibility first in the collective 'free spaces' of life, and argues that the non-commercialised spaces of collective life have to be protected and expanded. Minimally, they have to be protected from further erosion. Most importantly, people moving in changing social landscapes have strivings, aspirations and scope for action to change lives for the better, individually and collectively. In the Teachers' Notes for the New Lanark Millennium Experience, teachers are encouraged to use Harmony's review of the passage of 400 years to develop in children a sense of connection in space and time. Speaking from the year 2200, Harmony asks whether her 21st-century peers know that in many parts of the world, in their time, children labour in conditions as poor as those of nineteenth century Britain, if not worse. She tells them that in 2200 that is all at an end, and that these social advances have been made through the long-term influence of the ideas and actions of people who, like Robert Owen, were prepared to stand up for human rights, education and freedom from oppression:

> Every day you have a chance to shape the future, . . . yes, you . . . you really can.

To the sceptics in our 'flawed learning society', I end as I began, with the words of a social activist. This time, Noam Chomsky:

> If you act like there is no possibility of change for the better, you guarantee that there will be no change for the better. The choice is ours. The choice is yours.

Notes

i. See for example, [3] http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul Treanor/neo-liberalism.html
ii. See also the work of Lefevbre, Hegel and Lave.
iii. Estelle Morris – engaged citizens are at the very centre of everything.
iv. Group of UK academics published various reports, books and articles under the title 'Working to Learn', including Evans (1997) and Evans et al. (2002); subsequently publishing 'Improving Workplace Learning' (Evans 2006) based on an ESRC Major Award.

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