# Informality and formality in learning:
a report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre
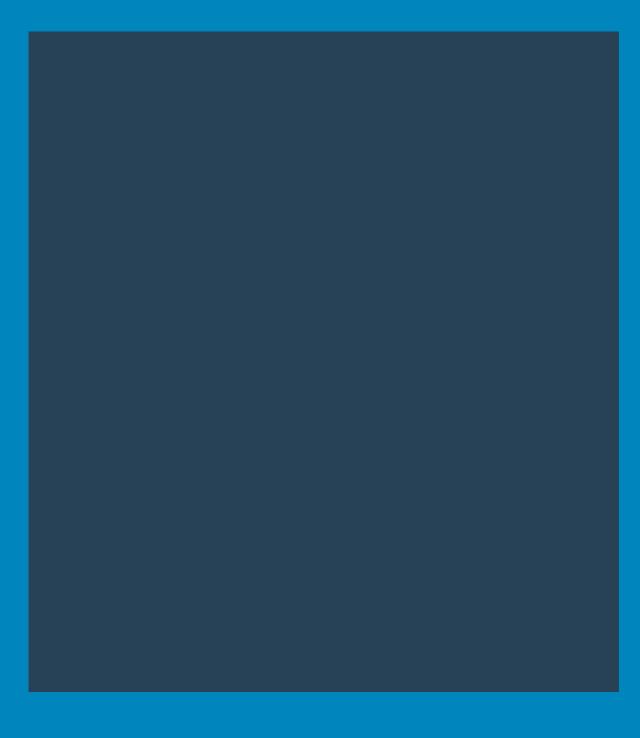
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Learning is often thought of as 'formal', 'informal' or 'non-formal'. This report suggests that these are not discrete categories, and to think that they are is to misunderstand the nature of learning. It is more accurate to conceive 'formality' and 'informality' as attributes present in all circumstances of learning. The priority for research is then to identify these attributes, explore their relationships, and identify their effects on learners, teachers and the learning environment.

# Informality and formality in learning:
a report for the Learning and Skills Research Centre

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## Acknowledgements

# Executive summary

This report was commissioned by the LSDA to map the conceptual terrain around non-formal learning. In order to do this, three research strands were combined.

■ A major literature search, from which we analysed explicit classifications of learning as informal, non-formal or formal.

■ A detailed investigation of different learning situations in the workplace, further education, adult and community education (ACE) and mentoring.

■ The historical development of ideas through the literature, identifying and analysing two overlapping dimensions of thinking, to which we give the shorthand labels of 'theoretical' and 'political'.

The research was informed by members of the advisory group, and by attendees at three major consultations about our preliminary findings.

## Major findings

1 The terms formal, non-formal and informal are attributed to learning by many writers, often linked to their interests in particular pedagogical and/or learning practices. They are mainly used to distinguish some types of learning from others, but in ways that are contradictory and contested across the literature as a whole, since different criteria are used by different writers. These criteria are related to two dimensions of learning, which we term theoretical and political. There are:

■ differing theoretical approaches to learning (theoretical dimension)

■ contrasting claims about the effectiveness of learning (theoretical dimension)

■ differing claims about the relationships between learning and knowledge (theoretical dimension)

■ attempts to empower underprivileged learners (political dimension)

■ attempts to harness learning for instrumental purposes, including social inclusion and economic competitiveness (political dimension).

There is no clear difference between informal and non-formal learning. The terms are used interchangeably, with different writers expressing preferences for each.

2 It is not possible to separate out informal/non-formal learning from formal learning in ways that have broad applicability or agreement. Seeing informal and formal learning as fundamentally separate results in stereotyping and a tendency for the advocates of one to see only the weaknesses of the other. It is more sensible to see *attributes of informality and formality* as present in all learning situations. These attributes are characteristics of learning to which writers commonly attach labels such as formal and informal. The challenge is to identify such attributes, and understand the implications of the interrelationships between them. For analytical purposes, it may be useful to group these attributes into four aspects of learning. They are: location/setting, process, purposes, and content.

3 Attributes of in/formality are interrelated differently in different learning situations. Those attributes and their interrelationships influence the nature and effectiveness of learning. Changing the balance between formal and informal attributes changes the nature of the learning. The consequences of making learning more formal or less formal can be either beneficial or harmful, depending upon the nature of the changes in relation to the context. There are different ways to change this balance, but current audit-driven policies are widely increasing formality in ways that are sometimes problematic.

4 All theories of learning may have potential relevance to any learning situation. However, if the intention is to explore issues of in/formality, theories of learning as social practice have advantages, due to the range of interrelationships they address.

5 All forms of learning have the potential to be either emancipatory or oppressive. This depends partly upon the balance and interrelationships between attributes of in/formality. However, the wider contexts in which that learning takes place are crucial in determining its emancipatory potential.

6 This way of understanding in/formality in learning has the following advantages, compared with seeing informal and formal learning as distinct types.

■ It avoids misleading claims that either formal or informal learning is inherently superior to the other.

■ It avoids unhelpful assumptions that different theories of learning apply uniquely to informal and non-formal learning.

■ It makes it easier to analyse learning in diverse situations, and to recognise changes to learning if the balance between attributes of in/formality shifts.

■ It makes transparent the fact that audit approaches to learning change its nature, and facilitates analysis of the benefits and costs of such changes.

■ It aids the understanding of inequalities in learning, provided that wider contextual issues are also carefully considered.

## Recommendations for further research

1 There should be further research into learning as social practice, addressing attributes of in/formality in relation to learning contexts, in a range of learning situations. There are two parallel priorities:

■ research to further enhance conceptual and theoretical understanding

■ research to address major gaps in empirical knowledge of learning in diverse settings. It lay beyond the scope of this study to identify such gaps precisely.

2 There should be further research into pedagogic practices in educational and non-educational settings, in relation to attributes of in/formality. Only then can sensible steps be taken to make the learning more effective.

3 There should be further research into the effects, positive or negative, of changes in the balance between formality and informality, in a range of learning situations.

4 There should be further research to improve understanding of power relations and inequalities in connection with learning, in all learning situations. There are urgent issues to be addressed around the spread of audit-dominated managerial procedures.

5 In order to address the needs identified in the previous four recommendations, there is a need for more high-quality case study research. This is particularly valuable in addressing the complex interrelationships involved in learning.

## Recommendations for policy and practice

6 It is advisable to relate policy and practice to the nature of particular learning situations.

7 Where use is made of the terms 'formal', 'non-formal' or 'informal' learning, it is important to specify the meanings, the purposes and the contexts of that use.

8 It is important to be aware of the limitations and effects of management tools such as measurement of learning outcomes, retention and achievement rates, and universal inspection criteria. They change the nature of the learning to which they are applied.

## Section 1

## Introduction

This report presents the results of a project, commissioned by the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA), to map the conceptual terrain around non-formal learning. The remit was to investigate relevant literature, and to clarify the meanings and uses of the terms informal, non-formal and formal learning. We should make clear at the outset that this is not a conventional literature review, and we have made no attempt to summarise everything written about this vast topic. In particular, we have not attempted to do justice to the vast literature on learning, but have concentrated on writing that explicitly focused on issues of formality or informality. For reasons explained in Section 2, this has drawn us closer to socio-cultural theories of learning than to the longer established approaches found in cognitive psychology. Readers wishing to engage fully with either of these broad families of learning theory should look elsewhere.

Nor did our remit focus directly upon improving current policy and practice, though we do make some broad recommendations in this arena, based upon our analysis. Rather, our role was to clear some of the undergrowth around the diverse and often conflicting uses of terms such as formal, informal and non-formal learning. In searching for patterns of meaning in the literature, we have refrained from the temptation to criticise the detail of many authors' arguments, and their inclusion should not necessarily be taken as endorsement on our part. Instead, we have focused our critical efforts on making better sense of the broader issues of formality and informality in learning, where we make radical and far-reaching proposals for new ways of thinking and writing. It is our hope that this conceptual 'ground clearing' will be valuable in orientating both future research on learning and policy in relation to learning, in a variety of contexts.

### Starting points, opportunities and limitations

The subject of this report could hardly be more topical. As we shall see (Sections 2 and 3), current European Union (EU) and UK policies in education and lifelong learning are raising the profile of informal and non-formal approaches. The recognition and enhancement of such learning is seen as vital in improving social inclusion, and in increasing economic productivity. Later in the report, we analyse some of these currently dominant approaches, and contextualise them in wider political and theoretical debates about the meaning and importance of learning outside conventional educational settings. At this point, we simply point up one problem and one possible paradox.

The problem is the complete lack of agreement about what constitutes informal, non-formal and formal learning, or what the boundaries between them might be. The paradox is that within the current 'audit society' (Power 1997), there are strong tendencies to formalise the informal – for example, through externally prescribed objectives, curriculum structures, assessment processes and funding. Yet, in the UK at least, there are parallel pressures to make formal learning less formal – through the use of less structured approaches to the support of learning, provided by a rapidly growing army of classroom assistants, learning advisers, learning mentors and the like, who lack full teaching or guidance qualifications. Though these trends are in some ways opposed, they seem to represent two arms of a concerted movement – to integrate informal and formal learning into one more widely applicable hybrid. Later in the report, we will argue that we need to view these trends, and also the relationship between formal and informal attributes of learning, rather differently.

We approached this task with considerable prior knowledge (see Appendix 2 for brief author biographies). With limited resources, we had to maximise that prior expertise to complete the task.

Helen Colley has wide experience of guidance and had just completed a PhD on mentoring prior to the commencement of this research. Mentoring seems a perfect example through which to explore the boundaries around what is termed informal learning; yet the mentoring literature curiously replicated the debates about formality and informality on which we were focusing in relation to learning. Colley also has a background in philosophy, which proved invaluable in clarifying ideas and lines of thinking.

Phil Hodkinson is a very experienced researcher on vocational education and training and on learning in the workplace. One strand of thinking about informal learning is firmly located in that workplace literature, and we have drawn extensively upon it. We have also used some of the findings of a major research network of which he was part, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of their Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP).

Janice Malcolm is a very experienced researcher and practitioner in the adult education field, whose recent work has focused on pedagogy in a variety of learning settings. This work has strongly informed the conceptualisation of pedagogy adopted in this report (Malcolm and Zukas 2003; see also eg Field 1991). She also brought valuable knowledge about the politically informed tradition of adult education, as well as detailed knowledge of a wide variety of adult education provision, often described as non-formal in the literature.

Though each of these three standpoints introduces particular values into the research, we believe that the integration of all three has given us a credible range of coverage – of practice and, more importantly for our purposes, of thinking.

The remit and our own experiences focused our attention principally on non-formal and informal learning/education. However, it rapidly became apparent that the only unifying idea in the vast literature about these two supposedly different categories is that they are not formal. Thus, to complete our task, we also had to devote attention to what many writers term formal education. The easiest way to do this, without embarking upon a second major study, was to draw upon another research project on which both Colley and Hodkinson were working. This was a major investigation into learning in further education, also funded by the ESRC as part of the TLRP.

All three authors share two intellectual positions, which have influenced our thinking and writing. First, we are all qualitative researchers by practice and inclination, more interested in the interrelationships between multiple and complex variables than in isolating and measuring the nature and impact of one. Second, we all share a deep concern about inequalities in education, work and learning, related, for example, to social class, gender and ethnicity. As our research progressed, it became apparent that these issues were highly significant in the existing literature related to non-formal learning. That being the case, it is unsurprising that we have highlighted and tried to develop further those issues in this report. Moreover, many colleagues present at our consultation meetings on this project encouraged us to do so.

Despite the many advantages conferred by our combined prior experience, it became rapidly apparent, as we began the research, that we faced a daunting task. For anything to be achieved at all, we had to bracket off large areas of literature, at least from detailed analysis. We did this by focusing initially on some bodies of literature that explicitly examined the boundaries between informal, non-formal and formal learning and/or education. Due to the small scale of the project, we were unable to engage with all such writings. Important areas, such as e-learning and others, lay beyond our expertise. However, the diverse range of experts contributing to our consultation meetings was, in general, supportive of our arguments, and some suggested that further supporting evidence might be found within their own specialist fields. Some of our omissions were also being specifically investigated by other research commissioned by the LSDA.

Nor did we have the time or expertise to begin with an analysis of the many different theoretical approaches to learning in a more general sense – found mainly, but not exclusively, in psychology and social psychology. As our work progressed, this proved to be less of an obstacle than we had at first feared, for it rapidly became apparent that there was no single agreed definition of what learning was, upon which we could ground our analysis. Rather, as will be shown later in this report, different theoretical positions assume, either implicitly or explicitly, different meanings of the term and different boundaries between learning and something else. Thus, rather than commencing this study with one fundamental definition of learning, we explored a range of different perspectives, in order to understand better the issues involved. In so doing, we have been deliberately inclusive rather than exclusive, regarding as learning anything that the authors with whom we were working included in that concept.

## Methodology

The research was conducted between February 2002 and March 2003. We did not commence with a very clear plan. Rather, we moved forward from our three complementary starting points to see where that would lead. However, with hindsight, three parallel lines of analysis can be ascertained. First, we did a major literature trawl (listed in Appendix 1), but then selected from within that trawl literature which we already knew or could easily identify, which set out to classify learning as informal, non-formal or formal. We deliberately examined a wide range of different positions, looking for factors and criteria used to identify differences. When subsequent attempts seemed to reveal no new criteria – that is, we had achieved conceptual saturation – we moved on from this approach. Also, our analysis increasingly revealed that the search for clear agreed boundary criteria was a chimera.

The second approach was to conduct a detailed investigation of a diverse range of learning situations – in work, in further education, in adult and community education (ACE) and in mentoring. Third, we researched the historical development of ideas through the literature, identifying and analysing two overlapping dimensions. This aided our understanding of the deeper issues of theory, context and purpose which underpin the range of meanings and uses of the terms formal, non-formal, and informal learning. This report is a result of the synthesis of these three approaches.

As the research progressed, we consulted widely upon our developing thinking. This was done first through the advisory group set up by the LSDA to support our work. Membership of this group is given in Appendix 3. We met with them three times in all, at each stage presenting our findings to date, in some detail. This helped to give structure to the research process, and prevented us from leaving too much of the work until close to the end. In the final third of the project, we presented a consultation report (Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm 2002) to three workshops to which we invited other experts in the field – researchers, practitioners and policy-makers. We also presented this report to the national LSRN conference at Warwick in December 2002. The feedback from the advisory group, from the consultation workshops and from some of those attending the conference was invaluable in helping us to identify new literature, overlooked issues and weaknesses in our early thinking. They also helped to confirm large parts of our analysis. Finally, they made us acutely aware of how much had to be left out, if the project was not to cost five times the budgeted amount, and take 5 years to complete. Without their constructive contributions, this would have been a much poorer piece of work.

**The structure of the report**

What follows presents the results of this process. In writing up our findings and analysis, we faced further problems. First, we had analysed some aspects of the issue in more detail than others. Second, there was a serious danger that the overall report would become either too concise to capture fully the complexities we were writing about, or too long and detailed for the central argument to emerge clearly from the text. We have gone for a compromise solution, in choosing a few areas for more detailed examination, while treating others more concisely. We are aware that this approach, together with the different writing styles of the authors, means that there is less coherence here than is sometimes the case in good academic writing, but the alternatives seemed worse. This is a confusing, complex and contested field, and we hope that this report reflects some of that complexity and contestation, while retaining clarity about our main arguments and claims, which are pulled together in Section 7.

The report is structured as follows. In Section 2, we explain the origins and development of thinking about informal and non-formal learning, through two overlapping but largely parallel dimensions: the theoretical and the political. This is followed, in Section 3, by the analysis of 10 key attempts to define the boundaries between informal or non-formal learning/education and its more dominant formal relation. These attempts are located within, and related to, the two dimensions. In Section 4, we present a critique of approaches that see informal, non-formal and formal learning as distinct types of learning, and set out our alternative view: that all learning contains attributes of what many writers label informal or formal. Rather more tentatively, we suggest that a better way of retaining the subtleties of this vast literature, from our alternative perspective, may be to group these attributes in a way that will assist further discoveries – into four broader aspects of in/formality.

In Section 5, we flesh out our thinking through the examination of a range of exemplar settings, taken from further education, the workplace, adult and community education (ACE), and mentoring for business managers and for socially excluded young people. These examples demonstrate the validity of our claim that all learning situations contain formal and informal attributes; and that the interrelationship between those attributes influences the nature of learning in any particular context. In Section 6, we address the contemporary trend towards the formalisation of 'informal' learning; or, in our terms, the imposition of certain types of more formal learning attributes in contexts where they were previously absent. We do this through an analysis of Accreditation of Prior Experience and Learning (APEL) approaches and practices. In Section 7, we present an overview of the position we have established in this report, which is followed by our recommendations, divided into two unequal sections. We begin with what was our central remit: recommendations for further research in this field. This is followed by rather briefer recommendations about the implications of our analysis for policy and practice.

**Section 2**

## Two dimensions in the evolution of informal and non-formal learning

The terms informal and non-formal learning, together with their counterparts, informal and non-formal education, have been used in parts of the education literature for a considerable time. In this section, we trace two dimensions in the evolving construction and use of these terms, broadly labelled the theoretical and the political. There are considerable overlaps between the two. The dimensions are dealt with independently as a means of clarifying complex issues which are often intertwined and entangled in much of the writing.

As we will see, what unites these two dimensions is the fact that they were constructed in opposition to the dominant constructions of learning within the literature. These constructions tended to focus almost exclusively on learning in educational settings, which was labelled by many authors either as formal education, or formal learning. The first, theoretical dimension focuses more on the nature of informal learning and its claims to relative effectiveness compared to formal education, often linked with the supposed contrasts between everyday and more objective knowledge. The second, political dimension reflects continuing tensions between different imperatives, which can be summarised as concerning the individual or collective emancipation of learners, or the advancement of more instrumental state interests, often driven by the perceived economic needs of advanced capitalism.

In both dimensions, whatever the validity of the claims made about informal learning, there is a tendency to demonise formal learning/education and, in our view, to exaggerate and mis-locate the differences between informal or non-formal learning on the one hand, and formal learning on the other. In what follows, we summarise the arguments which developed in these two dimensions, and focus explicitly upon the ways in which this distancing from formal learning/education is constructed. In Section 3, we then consider some specific exemplars of classifications of learning as informal, non-formal and formal, within these two dimensions.

### The theoretical dimension: formal and informal learning as competing paradigms

The use of the terms 'informal' and 'formal' learning has a fairly long history. At the centre of these debates lie conflicting claims about the inherent superiority of one or the other, judged primarily, but not exclusively, in terms of effectiveness. In essence, there are two overlapping strands to the thinking within this theoretical dimension: the process of learning; and the nature of the knowledge to be learned. Often, both are assumed to be closely linked, not only with each other, but with contrasting locations for learning. Within these assumptions, formal learning combines high-status, propositional knowledge with learning processes centred upon teaching or instruction, and is located within specialist educational institutions, such as schools, colleges or universities. Informal learning concerns everyday social practices and everyday knowledge, and is seen as taking place outside educational institutions. In what follows, we begin by focusing primarily upon contrasting understandings of learning, and then go on to examine more directly some of the arguments about knowledge.

According to Scribner and Cole (1973), much of the research and theorising about learning in advanced industrial societies, prior to the date when their paper was written, focused primarily upon the formal. As Enlightenment-based rationality and science were applied to learning, ways were sought and developed to improve upon the supposedly more primitive and simple everyday learning. Formal learning, when effectively provided, was assumed to have clear advantages. It opened up the accumulated wisdom of humankind, held in the universities. This sort of accumulated, recorded and propositional knowledge allowed each generation to know more and better than their predecessors, as science (or art) advanced. Furthermore, such knowledge was generalisable – it could be used or applied in a wide range of contexts and circumstances.

In contrast, everyday knowledge was believed to be context-specific. Thus, the principles of mathematics can be used in any context where numerical values are relevant, but learning to play darts only equips a person to use numbers in that very restricted setting. Finally, as Bernstein (1971) makes clear, formal learning opened up high-status knowledge. Formal learning was equated with education in schools and universities; non-institutional formal learning was overlooked or dismissed; and as Scribner and Cole point out, structured and planned apprenticeships were normally included in the informal category.

## Perspectives on learning

Scribner and Cole (1973) represents a key early moment in establishing an alternative view – from socio-cultural or situated perspectives on learning. This literature is too vast to be summarised here. The central argument countered most of the claims for the superiority of formal learning, by asserting the superiority of the informal in its place. Thus, it is claimed, many things are learned more effectively through informal processes. One clear example of this is language learning. Also, social anthropology showed that sophisticated learning took place in communities without formal learning provision (Lave and Wenger 1991). Furthermore, researchers claimed that formal learning was not context-free (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989) and took different forms in different cultural traditions (Lave 1996) – what was learned in educational settings was as much, if not more, governed by the nature of those settings as it was by content and pedagogy. Finally, researchers questioned the utility (generalisability) of much formally acquired knowledge.

For Engestrom (1984, 1991), the problem was that much school learning was actually wrong. He analysed in detail the common misunderstandings about the causes of phases of the moon, arguing that textbooks produced a view of the process that was distorted by scale, and by an inevitably two-dimensional presentation. Furthermore, he argued, school learning involved no direct observation of the phenomena in real life. The 'transfer' of such learning was therefore problematic rather than simple. Beyond that, many writers have argued that the transfer of learning from one context (eg school) to another (eg work) is difficult; or, as Lave (1996, 151) argued: 'Learning transfer is an extraordinarily narrow and barren account of how knowledgeable persons make their way among multiply interrelated settings.' Thus, informal learning is argued to be superior to the formal.

Sfard (1998) presents a critique of these debates and contests around the conceptualising of learning by contrasting two basic metaphors. For many years, she argues, almost all research and theorising about learning adopted a metaphor of learning as acquisition, either explicitly or implicitly. From this perspective, the process of learning is always subordinate to the acquisition of something (skill, knowledge, value, attitude, understanding, behaviour) achieved through that process. The roots of this form of thinking lie in psychology, in both its behaviourist and cognitive forms. This remains the dominant metaphor for learning in most contexts, and is reinforced in the current culture of measurement and assessment of outcomes.

Sfard contrasts this metaphor with another which is increasingly prominent, at least within the research literature. This alternative sees learning as participation (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989; Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Engestrom 1999, 2001). For Lave and Wenger (1991), for example, the most significant feature of learning is belonging to a community of practice. Learning, they argue, is the process of becoming a full member, which they term 'legitimate peripheral participation'. We cannot learn without belonging (to something) and we cannot belong without learning the practices, norms, values, identities and understandings of the community to which we belong. Such participatory views of learning emphasise learning outside educational institutions, and learning processes which both writers in the participation camp and others often term 'informal'. Sfard argues that neither metaphor on its own is adequate for expressing the full complexities of learning. This is partly because the different theoretical positions construct different meanings for the term learning, with different models of what it looks like and how it works.

These debates were further complicated by linked discussions about empowerment, which will be more fully addressed in the discussion of the 'political' dimension later within this section. Put simply, advocates of more formal learning argued that it had the potential to empower learners from disadvantaged or marginal groups, by giving them an access to high-status knowledge which was dependent upon their ability, rather than on their social contacts or status. In other words, what Turner (1960) famously termed 'contest mobility' would replace 'sponsored mobility' as formal learning became dominant.

The counter-argument was that formal education is dominated by the values of social elites, and that its prime purpose is to preserve and reproduce their privileges (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). However, other research shows that sites of informal learning, such as the workplace, are also deeply unequal, with those higher up the status and management hierarchy getting more, and better, opportunities for learning than those towards the bottom, who are more likely to be female, working-class or, at least in most advanced capitalist countries, of non-white descent (Hewison, Dowswell and Millar 2000; Rainbird 2000a, 2000b; Billett 2001b; Evans, Hodkinson and Unwin 2002).

Such debates about the nature of informal, formal and non-formal learning have acquired a new impetus in recent years, as both UK and EU policies focused on the need to enhance informal learning. This part of the story is picked up in discussion of the political dimension. Policy-makers may see this as holding out great promise for widening participation in learning, but it may also be interpreted by some as threatening to alter the nature of informal learning in such a way that many of its perceived benefits are undermined. Scribner and Cole (1973) predicted with some foresight the dangers as well as the benefits of trying to bring formal and informal learning closer together. Learners used to informal learning might be pathologised (disadvantaged, and categorised as inadequate, or as problems for the system) within more formal educational processes, and at the same time might become more resistant to formal aspects of learning. Yet, they argued, there was much to be gained if a 'two-way movement' could succeed in bringing formal schooling and informal learning closer together. This argument presupposes that the two types of learning are essentially separate to begin with.

One of the problems inherent in most of these debates is this implication that formal and informal learning are quite distinct from each other – that they have the character of different paradigms, each with its own inherent logic, theoretical foundations, and modes/locations of practice (reflected in separated fields of professional expertise). Yet when we examine in detail the arguments of protagonists on either side, it becomes clear that few, if any, writers fully subscribe to this view. Partly for this reason, our research suggests that it is high time to step outside the frames of this contest between formal and informal learning, in which each set of protagonists exaggerates the weaknesses of the opposing case.

This problem is exacerbated because there is a tendency to restrict certain theoretical perspectives on learning to either formal or informal settings. Thus, there has been relatively little thorough research done on learning in educational institutions from a participatory or social practice perspective; while there has been a parallel neglect of acquisitional perspectives in so-called informal settings, such as the workplace, family or local community. As will become increasingly apparent, our view is that this vision of two contrasting paradigms of formal and informal learning does not withstand serious scrutiny. We also agree with one of Sfard's (1998, 12) main conclusions, that:

*We have to accept that the metaphors we use while theorising may be good enough to fit small areas, but none of them suffice to cover the entire field. In other words, we must learn to satisfy ourselves with only local sense-making. … It seems that the sooner we accept the thought that our work is bound to produce a patchwork of metaphors, rather than a unified, homogeneous theory of learning, the better for us and for those whose lives are likely to be affected by our work.*

However, for reasons that will be progressively developed throughout this report, our analysis also suggests that views of learning from within a broadly participatory perspective are better able to incorporate the range of factors and issues which our analysis of the informal, non-formal and formal learning literature has revealed. As Billett (2002, 57) recently argued:

*Workplaces and educational institutions merely represent different instances of social practices in which learning occurs through participation. Learning in both kinds of social practice can be understood through a consideration of their respective participatory practices. Therefore, to distinguish between the two …* [so that] *one is formalised and the other informal … is not helpful.*

### Types of knowledge

Just as some writers posit fundamental differences between formal and informal learning, others argue for a parallel, linked difference between types of knowledge – the everyday and the codified; the practical and the theoretical, the propositional and the embodied. Gibbons *et al.* (1994), for example, speak of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge. Mode 1 is generated primarily through academe, Mode 2 through everyday practices. For these authors, Mode 1 is being superseded by the more recent growth of Mode 2.

However these differences are conceptualised, a key debate focuses upon whether types of knowledge are, in Muller's (2000) terms, insular – that is, consisting of different segments that cannot be generally combined; or hybrid – where there is an 'essential unity and continuity of forms and kinds of knowledge … (and) the *permeability* of classificatory boundaries' (cited, with emphasis added, by Young in press b, 2). Most of the literature on participatory learning leans towards the view of knowledge as hybrid.

Young (in press a, b), following Durkheim (1961) and Bernstein (1971), disagrees. He argues that there are two fundamentally different forms of knowledge, which are equally important, and which co-exist as a duality, rather than being in opposition to each other, but which are 'insulated' from each other, in Muller's (2000) terms. Both types of knowledge are socially constructed, being located in different forms of social relations, and both types develop and change over time – they have historical dimensions. Durkheim (1961) characterises these types as 'sacred' and 'profane'. The profane is the everyday knowledge generated through ongoing social practice, in all aspects of life. He identified the sacred through examining religious knowledge, which he argued was also socially constructed but, unlike profane knowledge, was:

*…constituted by a set of concepts shared by a community but not tied to specific objects or events,* [enabling] *people to 'make connections' between objects and events that, on the basis of their everyday experience, did not necessarily appear related. … Second, being not tied to the everyday world, the 'sacred' enables people to 'project beyond the present' to a future.*
(cited by Young in press b, 6; original emphasis)

Thus, where rationalists distinguish sharply between religion and science, Durkheim (1961) saw them as essentially similar, but with 'one kind of "sacred" or theoretical knowledge (religion) replaced by another (science)' (Young in press b, 23). Young argues that the sorts of theoretical knowledge that are developed within scholastic disciplines, over a long period of time, have many of the qualities of Durkheim's sacred knowledge, as described in the previous paragraph. Midgley's earlier explorations (1992, 1997) of the 'myth' of science and other versions of the sacred are also clearly relevant here.

Though rooted in Durkheim's work, Bernstein (2000) used the terms 'vertical' and 'horizontal discourses', instead of sacred and profane. This avoids the value-laden baggage sometimes accompanying the latter terms, while also making clear, in his use of 'discourse', that these are both forms of social practice. For further discussion of some of the ramifications of these concepts, see Young (in press a, b).

In acknowledging that all knowledge is socially constructed, Young and Bernstein are fully aware that questions about the elitist and conservative nature of vertical knowledge cannot be dismissed. Indeed, both writers (in Young 1971) were among the first to highlight concerns about whose knowledge it is that counts. In related ways, Bourdieu (1984, 1988) analyses in detail the ways in which certain types of cultural knowledge and cultural practice become signs of distinction and status in an advanced capitalist society like France, and within academe itself.

However, in their recent writings, both Bernstein (2000) and Young (in press) argue that this is not the most important, and certainly not the defining, characteristic of vertical knowledge. Its defining characteristic is, rather, its greater objectivity and detachment from the particular, the everyday, and the subjectivities of individuals. The vertical discourse provides knowledge from which other knowledge can progressively be built.

Knowledge within what Bernstein (2000) terms horizontal discourses is largely contained within the practices in which it originates, and is continually reconstructed. It is passed on; for example, through oral history, the cultural reproduction of workplaces, communities or families. It can also be transferred and transformed into new locations; for example, through the boundary crossing of people from one community or workplace to another, or by the coming together of two interacting communities or activity systems (Engestrom 2001). But it does not have an existence beyond that. On the other hand, knowledge developed in vertical discourses, though also originating in certain types of social practice, communities and/or organisations, acquires a free-standing, relatively fixed existence.

This report illustrates this issue rather well. It has been socially constructed by the three authors, as part of a wider academic community, which has its own traditions, procedures and practices. It is the result of what Beckett and Hager (2002) term 'embodied judgement making', involving complex interactions among the three authors and many others. In this sense, its production shares many of the characteristics of a horizontal discourse. But those practices are, at least for Young, of specialist types. They are underpinned by the established codes and procedures of academic social science[1], which have been developed and tested as means of establishing social science truths. Also, those practices have engaged us in the deliberate seeking out of what was known by others, over the last 50 years or so, across a range of academic communities (almost all of which are underpinned by the use of the English language).

For Young, this makes work like ours potentially more objective than 'horizontal' or 'profane' knowledge, because it stands outside the individual subjectivities of the authors, and goes beyond our everyday contexts of work. Assuming that it is not simply ignored, the arguments advanced in this report will be tested, accepted, developed, rejected or superseded, as other educational researchers and/or social scientists engage with it and any related publications. It is at this point that it can become part of vertical knowledge. Thus, this report will potentially have a life external to the practices of the authors, and will be accessible to others, who were not necessarily part of the community that created it, in its possibly various published forms.

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Central to Young's argument is the claim that academic work of this type is part of social *science*. We have some concerns with the positivist and empiricist baggage that the term 'science' carries with it in English, but are here trying to present what we take to be Young's argument in his own terms.

For Young, these characteristics separate out knowledge like this from the everyday knowledge of practitioners and even policy-makers about informal, non-formal or formal learning. Widening this discussion makes it easy to demonstrate the value of both types of knowledge within educational practices, as elsewhere. Academic and research expertise, no matter how skilled, cannot be substituted for the rich horizontal knowledge of practitioners, including policy-making practitioners. Neither can knowledge produced in such a 'vertical' discourse, to use Bernstein's (2000) term, be easily absorbed into practical knowledge through processes conventionally described as knowledge transfer or the application of theory.

Young's views about knowledge are contested, in ways that we do not have space to address in detail here. Rather, our point is to challenge assumptions of a correspondence between the claimed insularity of horizontal and vertical knowledge and a similar possible insularity of what others term informal and formal learning. It is this supposed correspondence that we address next.

**Types of knowledge and dimensions of formality in learning**

As we do not have space to directly engage with debates about the insularity of knowledge, we have asked a different question. Even if we accept that knowledge is insulated, does it follow that learning must also be divided between formal and informal types? We have addressed this question by showing that vertical knowledge can be learned in a variety of ways, some of which go way beyond conventional views of 'formal' education. Each of these ways, we argue, involves both formal and informal attributes of learning (see Section 4). Three brief examples, directly related to the ways in which people might learn of (or from) this report will illustrate the point.

First, a work such as this might be encountered as part of a structured course for educators – a Master's degree programme, for example. For those who accept the separation of learning into two paradigms, this is clearly formal. However, from a participatory learning perspective, students on such a course temporarily enter a community of academic practice. Here, not only might they be part of formally planned sessions where a tutor structures their engagement with our report, but they are also picking up, often informally, the rules of the academic game in which they are participating – how to read, debate and write about texts such as ours, within the rules and practices of that game.

Second, some practitioners may engage with our work through personal interest or even serendipity. They may turn up at an occasional lecture or seminar where the report is discussed or mentioned. They may even, as self-directed learners, acquire a copy and read it for themselves, as a number of youth workers have done since we advertised an earlier consultation report (Colley, Hodkinson and Malcolm 2002) on a website on informal learning (www.infed.org). That report then became part of a bulletin-board discussion on that website. The Lifelong Learning Institute in Leeds has many such practitioner members, as do other similar groups or organisations. If the learning paradigms are to be preserved, the internet is informal, while the open seminar falls outside most definitions of either formal or informal learning (see Section 3).

Third, a practitioner may encounter the report second-hand, as it were. That is, someone else may tell them about some aspect of it, without any direct engagement on their part at all. From a paradigmatic perspective, this is clearly informal, according to most criteria. However, the degree of formality or, as we would prefer to express it, the balance between informal and formal attributes of learning might well depend upon the nature and contexts of the 'telling'. For example, it might be a colleague or friend waxing enthusiastically/scathingly about our work, or a boss saying 'You should all take notice of this…'.

Thus, vertical knowledge can be learned informally as well as formally. Furthermore, in none of these cases can there be any certainty about the integration of anything written in this report into the everyday practices of the learner concerned. Whether this happens is a function of the nature and contexts of the learning activity and of those working practices, including the embodied (ie not just cerebral or cognitive) judgements that the learner makes about the contents of the report. In other words, neither the type of knowledge nor the form of learning experience can independently determine how or whether such integration into practice takes place.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that a judgement on what we would claim to be the interrelatedness of formal and informal learning can be made independently of a view about the insularity of knowledge. This allows us to bracket off this significant knowledge debate from our central argument, which is about the inadequacy of a view of learning predicated upon separate, or insulated, formal and informal paradigms.

We return to this issue later in the report, but first we need to examine the other, overlapping dimension, where the focus is more directly upon the political purposes of non-formal education and learning.

## The political dimension: constructions of non-formal education and learning

In this section, we trace a fairly detailed genealogy (Foucault 1972, 1991) of the term 'non-formal learning' – a history of the term that traces not only its origins, but also the defining moments at which its meanings have changed in significant ways; the covert and sometimes disciplinary effects of these discourses; and the association of particular meanings with particular groupings and interests.

The term 'non-formal learning' has only recently come into regular usage, and in much of the literature we have reviewed, it derives originally from the term 'non-formal *education*'. A genealogical approach allows us to reflect not only the temporal shifts in the meaning of 'non-formal learning', but also its spatial travels as it has shuttled from one geographical or ideological domain into another, and then rebounded again (Strathern 1997). Discussions of non-formal learning are almost entirely polarised between its manifestations in the advanced capitalist countries – 'the North'; and in the underdeveloped semi-colonial countries – 'the South'. However, a small but interesting body of literature considers it from a more global perspective, and our argument here owes much to Youngman's (2000) review. We begin with an account of the origins or 'prehistory' of non-formal learning as it developed in Britain.

## The prehistory of 'non-formal' education

Our initial focus is on the ways in which conceptualisations of non-formal education have developed in Britain over the last 200 years. This is partly because we are more familiar with developments here, but also reflects Britain's relative dominance as an imperial power exporting its own systems to other parts of the world, together with the role of the English language in shaping and reflecting contemporary educational thought. This Anglophone focus is particularly significant in some of the later 'moments' of non-formal learning, where alternative social, cultural and linguistic understandings are often subordinated to those emerging from English-speaking countries.

Pre-capitalist economies in Britain before the Industrial Revolution did not require education for the mass of the population. Non-formal education has its roots in practices which considerably pre-date state elementary education. Our current understandings of 'non-formal' learning are to a large extent shaped by major historical changes in the social life of knowledge: 'The massive institutionalisation of knowledge is one great discontinuity between the early nineteenth century and today. It is from this period that we may date the great transformation in the conditions of learning' (Johnson 1988, 6). It is arguable that the contemporary *de*-institutionalisation of knowledge marks a further transformation (Gibbons *et al.* 1994), which the commissioning of this report reflects.

Until the late 18th century, non-formal learning in relation to production was organised through the family or at a community level in farming and cottage industries, through craft guilds, and within the formalised apprenticeship system (Perry 1976). Non-formal learning for purposes other than work was more diverse and less organised, and here lie the roots of much contemporary ideology and practice in the fields of adult and community education (ACE). There are two main strands of non-formal learning discernible here.

The first is 'self-help' or 'self-directed learning', which was recognised and applauded for different reasons by Lovett (1876) and Smiles (1958), and was also promoted in the *1919 Report* (Ministry of Reconstruction 1919). This autodidactic tradition was evident among both uneducated, poor individuals and the 'gentleman scholars' on whom scientific research was often reliant in the 19th century. This tradition can be traced more recently in the work of Knowles (1980) and Brookfield (1985a), and in the popularity of 'self-help' literature promoting skills and personal development (Tennant 2002). We can also discern this self-improvement tradition in what might be termed the de-politicised strand of adult education, which prioritises the personal and social development and fulfilment of the individual adult, exemplified by 'leisure-oriented' adult education. This strand has often constructed adult learning as individual social aspiration and mobility. It shows a common way in which 'non-formal' learning has often been understood in adult education: offered through educational institutions, but dependent upon student interest and voluntary participation; often negotiated in terms of content and until recently, neither examined nor accredited.

The other strand of non-formal learning which informs adult and community education (ACE) is that of collective or political self-education, within a liberal or radical world view. The radical movements of political and religious dissent in the 19th century relied upon the dissemination and construction of ideas through activities, which were essentially and intentionally educational – such as public meetings, discussion groups, pamphlets and propaganda. As Johnson (1988, 8) observes: 'Schooling was too marginal to daily life in this period to be the central site of change.'

This historical perspective sheds important light on the categorisation of learning. 'Non-formal' as a category can only emerge in opposition to 'formal' once mass formal education becomes meaningful. Prior to the 1944 Education Act, for much of the population, most intentional learning undertaken beyond elementary schooling would be undertaken in a 'non-formal' context. This helps to explain the emergence of 'non-formal' as a category in the educational literature in the mid-20th century.

## 1947–1958: the first moment of non-formal education

Hamadache (1991) claims that the first use of the term 'non-formal' in describing approaches to learning occurred in a UNESCO report in 1947 on education in the underdeveloped world (which he does not reference). This was in the aftermath of the Second World War, with the parallel rise of anti-colonial struggles across Africa and Asia provoking concerns by the North to prevent these spilling over into anti-capitalist revolutionary movements. The concept of non-formal education was not advanced initially by educational specialists, but by workers in the field of international development (that is to say, development of the South). Youngman (2000) argues that different models of non-formal learning in the South have to be understood in relation to the different theories of development that informed them, and that these theories of development have, in turn, to be understood in relation to the ideological and economic interests that promoted them.

The first wave of efforts to develop non-formal education were underpinned by 'modernisation' theories, resting on a social-democratic, reformist ideology and Keynesian economic principles. They aspired to twin goals that were presented as complementary: to increase economic growth towards levels enjoyed by the North, and to enhance social equity and democratic participation for all. On the one hand, the new interest in non-formal learning represented a reaction against the perceived failures of formal education systems, and therefore indicated a need to restructure educational provision as a whole (Fordham 1979). On the other hand, it was also based on a version of human capital theory which emphasised the deficits of populations in the South, and saw not only their lack of skills and knowledge, but also the deep-seated attitudes and lifestyle of the peasantry as a brake on economic or social development.

In some British colonies, looming independence struggles encouraged the establishment of adult education programmes, funded by the British government but often under the management of idealistic socialists, which aimed to develop a new cadre of politically-educated politicians to govern the new states (Titmus and Steele 1995). Hamadache (1991) describes non-formal learning as a means of 'bridging the gap', to prepare people for life in an increasingly complex, industrialised world, and he expresses the radical, reformist view of its emancipatory potential:

[The concept of non-formal learning] *was based on conscious anticipation and active, voluntary participation, as opposed to the unconscious social reproduction and adaptation characteristic of conservative types of learning offered in traditional schools.*
(Hamadache 1991, 112)

Why did interest in international development become focused on non-formal learning? Above all, it was thought to offer a high degree of relevance and flexibility that formal education provision could not achieve, and to require far fewer resources. Simkins' (1977) ideal types of formal and non-formal education have provided an enduring and often cited summary of this approach. He draws key distinctions between these ideal types according to aspects of learning that he defines as purpose, timing, content, delivery and control (see Figure 3 in Section 3 for details of this model). There is a clear political dimension related to social justice and environmental issues, and the model suggests that non-formal learning is superior.

This counter-positioning of formal and non-formal education has been criticised for its separation of the two (Fordham 1979; King 1982). This was seen as obstructing strategic approaches that might more effectively promote the synthesis of the formal and non-formal, and as a threat to professional educators. The purpose was to transform formal education:

*If we succeed in building a separate non-formal system we shall have failed to exercise proper influence on the whole of education. If we succeed, the new-found emphasis on the non-formal label becomes unnecessary.*
(Fordham 1979, 8)

This may partly explain the relatively short-lived nature of this 'first moment' in non-formal education, an experiment which lasted barely 10 years (Hamadache 1991) before it was abandoned in favour of a massive expansion of formal schooling (Smith 2002).

Youngman (2000) notes a less radical assumption within this first moment, which he claims is deeply flawed: namely, the notion that all countries were once undeveloped in the same way, and that the South simply has to find ways to 'catch up' with the North. This assumption of linear progression pathologises the people of the South, because it ignores the long-term and deliberate economic and cultural *under*development of the South by the North in the latter's own interests. This modernisation theory of development and the reformist approaches to non-formal education were ultimately disappointing. They failed to spur intensive economic growth to overcome underdevelopment and, in many respects, intensified social inequalities between rich and poor, men and women, city and countryside.

## The 1970s: the second moment –
## from non-formal education to non-formal learning

The second moment of non-formal learning can be seen as a reaction to these failures. Its expression in international development is characterised by the ideological influence of a very different theory of development, that of dependency theory (Cardoso and Faletto 1979). This theory arose in reaction to the establishment of pro-capitalist, pro-Northern regimes in many countries of the South. It informed approaches to non-formal learning that were emancipatory at the individual and local level, and revolutionary at the national level.

Inspired by educators such as Fanon and Freire, these approaches sought to combat direct colonialism and indirect neo-colonialism, including the 'colonial mentality' and subservience that had been engendered among the people of the South. Freire's movement for literacy and conscientisation (a combination of consciousness raising and politicising) in the slums of Brazil is perhaps the best-known and most widely emulated example, but there are others. In Tanzania, Cuba and India, for example, there was a strong political and cultural element to non-formal education programmes that engaged learners' commitment to their newly independent nation states (Smith 2002). Not surprisingly, little funding for such programmes was made available by Northern countries and the aid agencies that they dominated.

These models of non-formal education were swimming against the economic and ideological tide. In 1973, the crisis in oil production led to a world-wide recession. The powerful economic and political interests of the North were pursued, in part, by encouraging the South to accumulate massive (and ultimately unpayable) levels of debt. Counter-insurgency measures by the US, in particular, led to the defeat of radical social-democratic and revolutionary socialist movements in a number of Latin American countries. In this respect, the Freirean model of non-formal education was limited to relatively small-scale, localised implementation. It has had a major intellectual impact on the movement for non-formal education in both the South and the North, but Youngman (2000) argues, perhaps contentiously, that it has had little influence in practice. Indeed, some authors (eg Ramdas 1999) argue that these ideas have been steadily disappearing from the literature, and so it is possible that this intellectual influence is now diminishing with the loss of radical ideology and practice.

Despite this, the 'second moment' encapsulates two highly significant shifts. One is this shift of terrain in the geographical sense, where radical social-democratic ('first moment') models of non-formal education popular in the underdeveloped world revived interest in these approaches in the North, a shift expressed through various (feminist, anti-racist, working-class) radical educational projects and activities emerging within 'new social movements' (see Fordham, Poulton and Randle 1979; Foley 1999). This movement also coincided with 'emancipatory', but institutionally-organised projects such as literacy programmes and community education work with socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

The other represents a crucial shift on the intellectual terrain, as research in the developing world combined with the socio-cultural and situated theories of learning already discussed to produce a concept of non-formal *learning*, distinct from that of non-formal *education*. An early example of this concept appears in Scribner and Cole (1973), although they use the term 'informal' learning. This shifts away from the assumption of deficit in learners that characterised earlier models of non-formal education, although it maintains and further develops the argument that formal models are inferior because they conflict with learners' experience and culture.

Scribner and Cole argue that bringing informal and formal learning closer together runs the risk of pathologising disadvantaged communities in both the North and the South, but that serious changes are needed to achieve greater integration between the two. They call for research to investigate how everyday reality could be brought into schools, and how techniques of modern schooling could be taken into everyday life and given a practical application in that context, citing Freire's work (1970, 1972) as a prime example. However, Scribner and Cole focus on the contrasting features of formal and informal (or non-formal) learning, and although they acknowledge that 'in fact, the two are constantly intermingled' (1973, 553), this aspect of the relationship between different constructions of learning remains unexplored in their paper.

King (1982) argues that it is the interaction rather than the distinction between different forms of learning that needs to be grasped. He avoids seeing non-formal and informal learning as the domain in which the working and farming classes find themselves comfortable, and which is dismissed by dominant groupings. His analysis of access to resources for all three modes of learning reveals deep social inequalities in both developed and underdeveloped countries. Formal education is not the only domain where the middle and upper classes can excel, since access to all three forms of learning depends on economic, social and cultural capital. For these groups, the integration of formal, non-formal and informal learning is rendered seamless and unproblematic through activities in the school, in the home, and in extra-curricular artistic and sporting activities. For working-class and peasant communities on the other hand, the home is not a rich source of educational toys, books and television programmes for informal learning; and access to non-formal, organised classes and leisure activities is unaffordable.

King's argument highlights a third shift that can be detected, although not always comprehensively or coherently, in the second moment. This concerns fundamental concepts of learning and the ideology that informs them. The first moment of non-formal education treats learning as a universal category, undifferentiated by space, time and social relations. Learning is seen as emancipatory, in that it is assumed to create a level playing field that can allow the disadvantaged to regain equality. In the second moment, learning itself is differentiated between the formal and non-formal/informal. Non-formal learning is seen as the emancipatory mode, since it assumes that learners exercise control over their learning when it takes place outside formal education institutions – in the home, the factory, the field or (most obviously) within the political or community group.

### The 1980s and onwards: the third moment – the formalisation of non-formal education

By the end of the 1970s, right-wing economic policies were in the ascendant as the dominant classes responded to a series of deep recessions. Intensified global competition saw both modernising and dependency theories of development swept aside by neo-liberal theories. Keynesian approaches were defeated by the free-market economics which were epitomised by the work of Milton Friedman and embraced by governments led by premiers such as Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US. Throughout the world, public spending on welfare and education was reduced in favour of privatised provision. The rhetoric of a neutral universe of learning was re-invoked.

In the South, the level of debt reached crisis proportions, and governments have been forced since then to divert spending on education to service massive interest payments to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other creditors (Smith 2002). Privatisation of learning opportunities became widespread, with a market in which learners themselves often had to pay – as in British adult education. Funded provision was often restricted to relatively low-level technical and vocational training, designed to meet the needs of multinational corporations (MNCs) (Youngman 2000). These MNCs wanted to shift production to the underdeveloped world, where they could obtain labour at much lower costs. For example, in Kenya, village polytechnic schools, which had been established to help local people develop self-employment opportunities in the countryside, were turned into low-level trade schools for industry (Fordham 1979).

The emancipatory aspirations of the 'second moment' were also suppressed. In Botswana, the national literacy programme conducted from 1978 to 1987 attracted aid through its rhetoric of promoting social equity, but it was used to legitimise the development of capitalist enterprises, and explicitly rejected approaches designed to empower learners: 'the programme in fact served to reproduce the class, gender and ethnic inequalities within society' (Youngman 2000, 135).

In the North, similar shifts could be detected in terms of privatisation, marketisation and an intensified emphasis on the instrumental subservience of education to economic interests. These shifts were closely related to changes in the world of work, and to idealised visions of post-Fordist approaches. Smith (2001, 1) therefore identifies a further key aspect of the second moment. Until that point, capital had been largely dependent on labour for the production and reproduction of craft skills, since 'access to workplace skills among men was largely controlled by working class men'. However, the 1980s saw mass unemployment and the rapid loss of traditional forms of industrial apprenticeship, bringing with it the destruction of non-formal processes of storing and transmitting skills and – through educational and employment policy – the formalisation and codification of previously non-formal learning.

This often occurred through the introduction of competency-based assessment and/or qualifications: 'within the workplace itself, the development of managerial technologies expropriate[d] workers' tacit skills and [sought] to gain exclusive control over the internal labour market of plant or corporation' (Smith 2001, 13). As Bjornavold and Brown (2002) note, this approach is often driven by human resource (HR) considerations in industrial enterprises, where the main concern may be to avoid paying the higher wages demanded by formally skilled specialist workers.

At the same time, there was a growing focus on alternative routes into formal education in the North, as the radicalised educational projects of the previous 'moment' increasingly turned their attention to 'access' for marginalised groups. The Access movement was variously conceived as an emancipatory project for individuals and groups, and as an ideological challenge to the dominance of particular epistemologies and conceptualisations of learning (Malcolm 2000). The progress of this originally radical project within educational institutions saw the establishment of new areas of study as part of formal education – for example, Women's Studies, Black Studies – and the relocation of the learning process from the non-formal to the formal.

## The 1990s: the fourth moment – a postmodern interlude of non-formal learning

Unsurprisingly, this third moment provoked some resistance and attempts at subversion. These were driven by what Youngman (2000) terms populist theories of development, based on perspectives such as feminism, environmentalism and ethno-culturalism. They were advanced primarily by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They focused on supporting and promoting 'authentic' experiences of non-formal learning, localised knowledge grounded in communities, and sustainable practices rather than economic growth. The approach was 'bottom up' rather than 'top down', and aspired to be people-centred and empowering, rather than based on instrumental state intervention in relation to economic or political imperatives. A series of case studies from the South is offered in McGivney and Murray (1991) and there are some similarities in case studies from the North described by Foley (1999), which adopt an ecological metaphor for learning, rather than the economic metaphors of human capital theory.

However, this populist movement suffered from a reversal of the problems that had afflicted previous emancipatory approaches to non-formal learning, though its initiatives were in many cases similarly short-lived. For this movement did make a significant impact on practice, particularly in the South, while its underpinning theories were only weakly developed and articulated, undermining its own sustainability (Youngman 2000; Gorman 2001). Moreover, its reliance on funding through NGOs and other non-core sources made it vulnerable to the counter-resistance of powerful political and economic interests. Increasingly, funding requirements tied to specified outcomes have also limited the models of non-formal learning that NGOs can implement in the South (Smith 2002). Thus, the dominance of the free-market, enterprise-driven models of the enduring 'third moment' have been re-asserted.

There are exceptions to this. For example, the educational movements associated with Aboriginal, First Nations, Native American, Maori and other colonised groups in the Anglophone 'North' have made explicit forms of knowledge and 'non-formal' learning which challenge dominant Northern conceptions (eg Still Smoking 1997). These originally emancipatory movements are increasingly moving into formal educational institutions or (less commonly) establishing their own official and institutional forms. As Smith (2002, 9) argues, non-formal learning has been subverted through a novel kind of colonialism in both North and South:

*The conclusion must inevitably be that while some informal, non-formal and popular education programmes have had a concern to combat colonialism and 'colonial mentalities' others have effectively worked in the opposite direction. The particular power of non-formal education (and things like community schooling) in this respect isn't just the content of the programme, but also the extent to which it draws into state and non-governmental bodies various institutions and practices that were previously separate from them; and perhaps resistant to the state and schooling … By wrapping up activities in the mantle of community there is a sleight of hand. By drawing more and more people into the professional educator's net there is the danger [of] a growing annexation of various areas of life … Under this guise concerns such as skilling and the quietening of populations can take place.*

## The turn of the millennium: the fifth moment of non-formal learning

There is arguably a 'fifth moment' to be distinguished in this genealogy of the term non-formal learning which is central to this research and the reason why it has been undertaken. It answers the question: why is there a need to clarify this concept of non-formal learning now? Until the mid-1990s, *non-formal* education and learning had predominantly been concerns in the underdeveloped or colonised world, notwithstanding a long and radical tradition of informal and adult education in the North, and some attempts to transfer emancipatory models from the South to the developed world. However, non-formal learning has now arrived centre stage in continental Europe and the UK as a key theme in lifelong learning.

In part, this may be due to concerns which lie within the theoretical dimension that we have already considered. Participatory theories of learning have become more widely discussed. Research and practitioner interest in 'non-formal learning' as a category may, in some cases at least, reflect dissatisfaction with the separation of formal and informal categories for learning, and a desire to grasp their actual interpenetration (cf Eraut 2000; Schugurensky 2000; Billett 2002).

But this moment also encompasses a change within the political dimension, representing a significant deepening of economic instrumentalism. In the context of globalisation at the turn of the millennium, this moment is part of, and deeply penetrated by, what Power (1997) terms the 'audit society'. By this he means the growing domination of a culture of measured and tracked (audited) accountability, which stresses the need to identify clear objectives or targets, measure the extent to which they have been achieved, and link funding directly to such achievements as far as possible. This audit culture is typified by Colardyn's (2002) argument that current policies represent a major advance in that they no longer privilege or suppress particular settings for learning, but seek to ensure that all are 'better managed' and that funding is allocated in accountable ways. It is here that the political tradition of non-formal learning and the theoretical tradition of informal learning coalesce, for both have as a central concern the relative effectiveness of learning and educational processes. We shall return to this theme in Section 6. Next, we review the evolution of European policy, which has been a major driver of interest in non-formal learning in recent years.

Non-formal learning has been a central theme of EU policy since the 1995 White Paper on education and training (European Commission 1995), and the European Year of Lifelong Learning, declared in 1996. The Lisbon meeting of European Councils in March 2000 was seen as the 'decisive moment' at which lifelong learning became a clearly established priority within Europe's employment strategy (Davies 2001b). *A Memorandum on lifelong learning* was issued (European Commission 2000), on which a wide-ranging consultation took place (discussed more fully in CEDEFOP 2001), and a resulting *Communication on lifelong learning* was issued late the following year (European Commission 2001).

We summarise the classification of formal, non-formal and informal learning presented in this Communication in Section 3 (see Figure 7). Despite these apparently clear definitions, the concepts of non-formal and informal learning are almost invariably referred to 'in one breath' throughout the document. Together they are routinely counterposed to formal learning, but there is little indication outside the classification itself as to how they might be distinguished from, or interrelate with, each other. In one collection of papers documenting this process from researcher, practitioner and policy-maker perspectives, the editor (Colardyn 2002, 5) notes the almost arbitrary nature of the 'non-formal' designation:

*The terms non-formal learning and informal learning are often used as synonyms … What the present definition* [of non-formal learning] *really translates is the still limited knowledge and understanding of what exactly one is dealing with, how complex it is, how vast a territory one is moving in. For the time being, the concept is accepted as such and it can be considered that non-formal and informal are frequently interchangeable.*

Yet she states that the term 'non-formal' should henceforth be used except in special circumstances detailed by authors. This may reflect the very limited discussion of the theoretical dimension in the development of these policies. Although one of its six 'key messages' is the need for 'innovative pedagogy' in lifelong learning, the European Commission (EC) documents have little to say about theoretical perspectives on learning or pedagogy.

As Davies (2001b, 2003) points out, EU policy at the time of the Communication focused upon two major issues within the political dimension: the need for increased social cohesion and engagement; and the need to improve economic competitiveness, in part by increasing the skills and employability of workers through better education and training. Both these meta-narratives would seem to focus attention on learning outside formal educational institutions – eg families, communities and youth organisations – although the Communication contains little of substance in relation to such settings, concentrating almost exclusively on the workplace (CEDEFOP 2001). Correspondingly, little is said in the Communication about structural inequalities. Neither is there any acknowledgement of 'hidden' curricula, such as the learning of gender roles (eg Bates 1994; Paechter 1999), or of issues such as institutional racism as barriers to learning. This represents a setback for the French republican ideal of 'insertion' that introduced social exclusion into the EU policy debate. As Davies (2003, 14) says:

*One of the key elements of a widening participation policy is however absent from the EU discourse … The communications and the action programmes that follow are couched in negative terms of avoiding social fracture and promoting social cohesion rather than of a more positive philosophical and active commitment to social justice.*

These variances of policy represent different 'causal stories', underpinned by different national cultural and political traditions (Davies 2001a). The French approach, for example, is underpinned by a republican, egalitarian ideal that continues to assert the welfare role of the state and collective, rather than purely individual, responsibilities for education (see Pain 1990; Dif 2000). By contrast, UK policy-makers take a much more instrumental view related to the economic needs of dominant groupings, which, as Ecclestone (1999) argues, has an authoritarian edge.UK policy documents always describe the contextual background and aspirational goals in terms of 'the *learning* society', while other EC countries routinely translate this phrase as 'the *knowledge* society'. Gorman (2002) and Ramdas (1999) argue that a shift in policy discourse from 'education' to 'learning' implicitly individualises and de-politicises learning. But all these accounts are 'causal stories', underpinning rationales. What is the key focus for action in EU policy on non-formal learning?

Bjornavold (2000) shows that European policy attention has centred on questions of 'making learning visible'. Its main concern is to find ways of identifying, assessing and accrediting non-formal learning. Moreover, this concern is almost entirely directed towards the utilisation of such learning in the labour market once it has been rendered visible (see also Bjornavold and Brown 2002; and Section 6 below). Bjornavold argues that there are three fundamental reasons for the simultaneous 'wave of activity' on non-formal learning across most European countries. The first two are related to labour market needs: the need to re-engineer education and training and link formal and non-formal areas of learning, in order to enable individual and enterprise needs to be met; and the potential for non-formal learning to provide an avenue for the development, assessment and accreditation of so-called 'key qualifications', which have proved problematic within the formal sector.

The third reason relates to the training market itself, and suggests that the desire to make non-formal learning visible is not a 'bottom up' demand coming from employees or even employers. Rather, a whole sector of the training provision market has promoted this as 'a solution seeking a problem' and as 'a supply-driven development' (Bjornavold 2000, 22), where a range of organisations have devoted themselves to this issue as a means of chasing 'fresh money' from the EU.

Strathern (2000, 310) argues that it is this desire to render the invisible visible which is at the heart of the audit culture, but that such visibility is double-edged. It is supposed to confirm people's trust in one another, although 'the very desire to do so points to the absence of trust'. Audit may claim to promote transparency on the one hand; operate as a tool of disciplinary surveillance on the other; and, in a third turn, encourage subversive forms of concealment in which people cloud transparency, play the audit 'game', and engage in 'creative accounting' to meet targets and preserve their own interests. The outcomes of such efforts to render the invisible visible cannot be guaranteed. Stenhouse's (1975) challenge to the earlier 'aims and objectives' movement in school education suggested that 'the outcomes of education *should* be partly unpredictable, as students changed and grew as people through their experiences of learning' (Hodkinson and Bloomer 2000a, 6). Strathern's perspective on the audit culture suggests that in attempting to make visible the often invisible outcomes of non-formal learning, the measures proposed by the EU may in fact serve to distort such outcomes or drive them further from view.

This suggests the need for a linguistic analysis to illuminate this fifth moment. The meanings of words or terms contain aspects of *convention* – certain unspoken rules that define terms according to their particular context; and of *intention* – particular uses of words that may be employed to produce a reflexive effect and redefine the context itself differently (Searle 1969; Gilroy 1997). However, the intentions that underpin the use of terms can take different forms, and one of those forms is 'perlocutionary' (Austin 1962; Searle 1969). That is to say, the purpose of using the term is to convince or persuade others, and sometimes also to bring about a particular state of mind or attitude in the hearer/reader, so it is often accompanied by further actions to reinforce the effect that the writer/speaker wishes to achieve.

When we analyse the policy focus on non-formal learning, it is possible to argue that dominant discourses of non-formal learning have just such a perlocutionary or persuasive intention. They encourage learners to make their private and leisure activities public, to reinterpret their learning in terms of its commodified exchange value in the labour market, and to re-present their own attitudes and identities as compliant with employers' perceived demands associated with employability (Colley 2003; see also Section 6 of this report). Trade unions have largely welcomed these moves as a chance for workers to demand better pay on the basis of what they know, however or wherever they have learned it (CEDEFOP 2002b). Women, whose skills and knowledge have often been acquired in the home without any recognition or recompense, have also seen this as an opportunity to advance their interests (Mojab 2003). This is a terrain which is contested, since it offers opportunities for different social groups to try and take advantage of the new ground it has opened up.

### Beyond the moment: power relations and aspects of formality and informality

These 'moments' of non-formal education or learning can be seen in terms of two different views of learning itself. The dominant moments – first, third and fifth – assume a neutral learning universe with a unified epistemology and pedagogy, undifferentiated by space, time and social relations. More radical moments – the second and fourth – favour non-formal modes of learning, and assume that learners have control over their own learning in locations that are not within formal educational institutions. The fairly rapid demise of these two moments indicates the essential utopianism of this assumption.

A number of authors all point to flaws in emancipatory models of non-formal learning. Walkerdine (1992) notes that freedom from *overt* control over learning is a 'sham', since control in modern society operates through predominantly *covert* mechanisms, and the power of dominant groups is internalised by subordinate groups within the framework of bourgeois democracy. Gorman (2001, 2002) points out that the home is far from being a place where people are liberated from subordination or control and are able to learn freely. This is particularly true for women, where the home is a key site for their exclusion and oppression. She notes Foley's (1999) uncritical description of learning experiences in a home setting, where a group of male miners discuss how to resist management practices at the workplace, while their wives share a cooking recipe:

*This account of informal learning shows that it is a highly gendered process, and indicates that there is a dialectic between what things are learned, and the time and space (physical and intellectual) available to the learner. The male mineworker in the account has retreated to a safe place to reflect on his work experiences, while the women in the story are still 'at work' – they are not free for critical reflection on their own workday, instead they are learning to make cake…*
(Gorman 2001, 132–3)

She also notes that, for many people with physical disabilities, home may likewise be a place of isolation and deprivation (Gorman 2002).

This analysis shows that the political dimension is a vital part of the different meanings constructed for 'non-formal' learning, and that it is also interconnected in important ways with the theoretical dimension. At times, the term has been used with a counter-hegemonic purpose; in other circumstances – as, we might argue, in current European developments – it is imposed from above with a disciplinary intent. In whatever way individual initiatives are interpreted from different perspectives, this suggests that three questions need to be asked of any identifiable movement to redefine formal, informal, or non-formal learning: 'Why?' 'Why now?' 'In whose interests?' From this broad overview of the theoretical and political dimensions of learning, we now turn to examine in closer detail a series of specific models and definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

**Section 3**

## Models of formal, non-formal and informal learning

In selecting readings directly relevant to this report, we analysed those parts of the literature that explicitly set out to differentiate between formal, informal and (sometimes) non-formal learning. In order to illustrate the range of serious approaches to this task, we next present summaries of 10 such attempts. We cluster them here in relation to the two dimensions – theoretical and political – that underpin different interpretations of formality and informality in learning, and reflect the context in which they were originally developed.

One cluster comprises predominantly theoretical approaches, and is also focused primarily on learning in the workplace, although it takes a broad view of what constitutes learning in that context. A second cluster is predominantly political, although it contains two rather different strands. We identify a utilitarian approach common to the policy documents that we have reviewed, focused predominantly on workplace learning, but with a narrower and more instrumental view of learning than the first cluster. There is also an emancipatory political approach typified by radical traditions of adult and community education. A third cluster combines political and theoretical concerns across a range of learning contexts.

In choosing these models rather than others, we are not implying that they are inherently better or more important, although some are particularly influential, such as the EU policy model and that used by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in conducting the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS). But taken together, they illustrate the wide range of views around this issue, and point to the significance of context in influencing the form of the classification.

### Predominantly theoretical approaches

**1 Eraut's classification of learning into formal and non-formal**

This contribution from Eraut (2000) was significant in raising current awareness of what he terms 'non-formal' learning, based upon an investigation into learning in the workplace. However, in the ways the analysis is presented, it is clear that he sees his categorisation as having wider significance. He expresses a strong preference for the term non-formal rather than informal. This is because, he argues (2000, 12), most learning takes place outside formal learning contexts, and informal learning carries with it connotations of 'so many other features of a situation, such as dress, discourse, behaviour, diminution of social differences – that its colloquial application as a descriptor of learning contexts may have little to do with learning *per se*.' Not only does the term 'informal learning' carry unwanted and confusing implications, but it is too wide to be of much use. For Eraut is also clear that, to be of value, an analysis of learning must focus on activity and outcomes that contribute to significant changes in capability or understanding (see Section 5 for an alternative view).

Eraut does not define non-formal learning more clearly than this. Instead, his chapter does two things. First, he presents five features of formal learning (2000, 12). They are:

- a prescribed learning framework
- an organised learning event or package
- the presence of a designated teacher or trainer
- the award of a qualification or credit
- the external specification of outcomes.

By strong implication, any significant learning that is not of this type should be regarded as non-formal. However, Eraut does not clarify the status of learning in situations that meet some, but not all, of his 'formal' criteria.

Second, he sets out a schema for identifying different types of non-formal learning, based, for example, on the timing of the stimulus (past, current, future) and the extent to which such learning is tacit, reactive or deliberative. This latter dimension is later set against another that identifies different types of thought or action (reading of the situation, decision making, overt activity, metacognitive processes). Finally, he also classifies non-formal learning as either individual or social, and either implicit or explicit. One of many interesting facets of Eraut's work is that he effectively defines non-formal learning by what it is not (formal), despite making it the explicit focus of his chapter.

## 2 Billett: labelling learning as formal or informal is dangerously misleading

Billett (2002) sees learning as ubiquitous in human activity. That is, whatever people do will result in learning. Thus, like Eraut, he argues that much learning takes place outside formal educational settings. This means that something akin to what Eraut terms 'non-formal learning' should not be regarded as something that is left over once formal learning is accounted for. Billett focuses explicitly on learning in the workplace. He argues (2002, 56) that activities in the workplace are often goal-directed and intentional.

*Therefore, describing learning through work as being 'informal' is incorrect. Instead, the structuring of workplace activities has dimensions associated with learning directed for the continuity of the practice, which also often has inherently pedagogical qualities.*

The problem with using the term informal is that it deflects attention from the many deliberate pedagogical strategies adopted in workplaces, and the ways in which such pedagogies can be further improved; for example, through planned guidance and instruction (Billett 2001a). Furthermore, 'it is inaccurate to describe workplace learning experiences as "unstructured" or "informal". Norms, values and practices shape and sustain activities and interactions within workplaces, as in other social practices, such as homes (see Goodnow 1996) or educational institutions.' (Billett 2002, 59)

His second argument concerns attempts to attach unqualified labels of 'formal' or 'informal' to learning environments, which, he argues, implies a form of situational determinism. Thus, rather than focusing on either the contexts or processes of workplace learning as formal or informal, Billett argues that 'considerations of *learning*, learning in workplaces and the development of a workplace pedagogy need conceptualising in terms of participatory practices' (2002, 56; our emphasis). As his use of learning in an unqualified sense implies, the logic of Billett's argument can be equally applied to learning in any other context. The strong suggestion is that debates about the differences between formal and informal learning deflect our attention from more significant issues.

## 3 Beckett and Hager on informal learning

Beckett and Hager (2002) present a different argument again. First, they argue that the traditional view of learning is rapidly giving way to an alternative vision. They argue that this traditional 'standard paradigm' has dominated our thinking about learning in ways that emphasise the significance of formal education. The standard paradigm (2002, 98) has the following characteristics.

- The best learning resides in individual minds not bodies.
- The best learning is propositional (true, false; more certain, less certain).
- The best learning can be expressed verbally and written down in books, etc.
- The acquisition of the best learning alters minds not bodies.
- Such learning can be applied via bodies to alter the external world.

They argue that this standard paradigm is based upon a Cartesian dualism which construes body and mind as separate, and mind as superior to body. For Beckett and Hager, this is philosophically and empirically untenable. Rather, learning is organic or holistic, engaging the whole person, so that intellect, emotions, values and practical activities are blended. They see what they happily term informal learning as not only more common, but also more effective than formal learning. Consequently, they focus on the characteristics of this informal learning in setting up the focus of their work. However, they are wary of grandly universalist theorising, and restrict their focus to informal learning in the workplace. Practice-based informal workplace learning, they argue (2002, 115), has the following characteristics.

- It is organic/holistic.
- It is contextual.
- It is activity- and experience-based.
- It arises in situations where learning is not the main aim.
- It is activated by individual learners rather than by teachers/trainers.
- It is often collaborative/collegial.

They make no reference to a third category of 'non-formal' learning, but characterise the differences between formal learning and informal learning as shown in Figure 1 opposite.

**Figure 1**
Formal and
informal learning
(Beckett and
Hager 2002)

| Formal learning | Informal learning |
| --- | --- |
| Single capacity focus, eg cognition | Organic/holistic |
| Decontextualised | Contextualised |
| Passive spectator | Activity- and experience-based |
| An end in itself | Dependent on other activities |
| Stimulated by teachers/trainers | Activated by individual learners |
| Individualistic | Often collaborative/collegial |

**Figure 2**
Types of workplace
learning (Hodkinson
and Hodkinson 2001)

| | Intentional/planned | Unintentional/unplanned |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Learning that which is already known to others** | Planned learning of that which others know | Socialisation into an existing community of practice |
| **Development of existing capability** | Planned/intended learning to refine existing capability | Unplanned improvement of ongoing practice |
| **Learning that which is new in the workplace (or treated as such)** | Planned/intended learning to do that which has not been done before | Unplanned learning of something not previously done |

**Figure 3**
Formal and non-formal
education in international
development
(Simkins 1977)

| | Formal | Non-formal |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Purpose** | Long-term, general<br>Credential-based | Short-term, specific<br>Not credential-based |
| **Timing** | Long cycle<br>Preparatory<br>Full-time | Short cycle<br>Recurrent<br>Part-time |
| **Content** | Input focused<br>Standardised<br>Clientele determined by entry requirements | Output focused<br>Individualised<br>Entry requirements determined by clientele |
| **Delivery** | Institution-based<br>Teacher-centred<br>Isolated from social environment<br>Rigid structures<br>Resource-intensive | Environment-related<br>Learner-centred<br>Community-based and action-oriented<br>Flexible structures<br>Resource-saving |
| **Control** | External<br>Hierarchical | Self-governing<br>Democratic |

## 4 Hodkinson and Hodkinson: types of workplace learning

Like Beckett and Hager (2002), Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) base their classification of types of learning primarily upon learning in the workplace. They produce a matrix, with two intersecting dimensions. The first separates out learning that was intended and planned from that which was unintended and unplanned. The latter situation could arise either because the relevant activity was itself unintended and unplanned, or when an activity was planned/intended, but not with the explicit intention of learning. The other dimension focuses on the source of knowledge in a specific way. The authors distinguish between the learning of something already known by someone else (that is, there was an existing source of expertise to draw upon), and that which is not known by anyone, either because it is completely new (eg how to adapt to a situation never encountered before) or because the learner acts as if it were completely new (maybe because he/she is unaware that someone else has done this before). Along this second dimension they then add a middle box, covering 'development of existing capability'. There is some logical confusion here, but the authors claim that doing this better fits the data they are analysing. The result is a matrix of six types of workplace learning, as shown in Figure 2 on page 21.

Using this classification, most of what Eraut (2000) terms 'formal learning' is contained within one box – learning that is both planned and intended and also of something that is already known by experts. However, this box also contains many of the situations labelled 'non-formal' in the EC classification below. Hodkinson and Hodkinson argue that focusing on the extent to which learning is planned and intentional may be a way of bypassing the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal altogether. However, they conclude with a health warning, claiming that most of the learning they identified consisted of a blending of more than one of their six categories; though possibly distinct at the level of analysis, they were anything but distinct in practice. There are echoes of the Beckett and Hager (2002) claim about holistic learning here, expressed somewhat differently.

### Predominantly political approaches

## 5 Simkins : formal and non-formal education in international development

Simkins' (1977) classification of formal and non-formal education (see Figure 3 on page 21) has frequently been used to define different approaches to education in the field of international development in the semi-colonial world. As we noted in Section 2, however, Simkins' use of the term 'non-formal' is typical of the way in which 'non-formal' and 'informal' are used interchangeably in this substantial body of literature.

This is a different kind of focus on the political dimensions of formality and informality in learning. What is learned, who determines the content of learning, and the purposes of learning are all key issues from this perspective. They are closely but implicitly linked to a stance which is critical of the colonial and neo-colonial domination of underdeveloped countries by advanced capitalist nations and, increasingly, by multinational corporations. However, as we have seen in Section 2, this model has been criticised for its bipolar counterposing of formal and non-formal learning.

## 6 Hunt: informal and formal mentoring

Hunt (1986) examines mentoring as a form of learning in the workplace. Mentoring was first identified as a largely informal process, conducted mainly by male managers sponsoring their protégés (also usually male). Attempts had been made to formalise these processes and, in order to better understand those attempts, Hunt (1986) categorised the differences in style between formal and informal mentoring, as shown in Figure 4 opposite.

This suggests a series of factors that distinguish formal from informal mentoring:

■ the degree of external control

■ the degree of planning and institutionalisation

■ the level of intentionality

■ the nature (organisational or individual) of its goals

■ the locus of decisions about goals (internal or external to dyad)

■ the depth of the dyadic relationship

■ the degree to which participation is voluntary (by both partners)

■ the timeframe

■ the nature of its evaluation

■ the 'ecology' of its setting.

Hunt also distinguishes between their expected outcomes, as shown in Figure 5 opposite. However, he notes that these expected outcomes for formal mentoring are not necessarily guaranteed. There is both the possibility of their distortion in the process of transferring mentoring from the informal to the formal plane, and the risk of conflict with the continued functioning of informal mentoring activity.

**Figure 4**
Styles of formal and
informal mentoring
(Hunt 1986)

| Informal mentoring – styles | Formal mentoring – styles |
| --- | --- |
| Unplanned | Planned |
| Individual goals | Organisational goals |
| High social intensity | Medium social intensity |
| Voluntary friendship | Relationship mediated by matching process |
| Indefinite timespan | Limited timespan |
| Less directive | More directive |
| Difficult to track, perceptions biased | Monitored according to specified criteria |
| Suited to smaller enterprises | Suited to large organisations |
| Paternalistic | Organisationally structured |

**Figure 5**
Outcomes of formal
and informal mentoring
(Hunt 1986)

| Informal mentoring – outcomes | Formal mentoring – outcomes |
| --- | --- |
| Political awareness for privileged group | Acculturation for all new managers |
| Passing on skills to juniors | Skill training for increased productivity |
| Linking junior and senior managers | Fast-track developing of talented newcomers |
| Reflected glory for mentor | Rejuvenating older managers at 'plateau' |
| Sponsorship of the privileged | Promotion according to merit |
| Exclusivity of dominant grouping | Inclusivity for diverse groupings |

**Figure 6**
The continuous learning
continuum (Stern and
Sommerlad 1999)

**Informal**

| | |
| --- | --- |
| ↑ | Unanticipated experiences and encounters that result in learning as an incidental byproduct, which may or may not be consciously recognised |
| ↑ | New job assignments and participation in teams, or other job-related challenges that are used for learning and self-development |
| ↑ | Self-initiated and self-planned experiences – including the use of media (print, television, radio, computers), seeking out a tutor or coach or mentor, attendance at conferences, travel or consulting |
| ↑ | Total quality groups/action learning or other vehicles designed to promote continuous learning for continuous improvement |
| ↓ | Planning a framework for learning, which is often associated with career plans, training and development plans, or performance evaluations |
| ↓ | Combination of less organised experiences with structured opportunities, which may be facilitated, to examine and learn from those experiences |
| ↓ | Designed programmes of mentoring and/or coaching, or on-the-job training |
| ↓ | Just-in-time courses, whether they are delivered as classes or through self-learning packages, with or without the assistance of technology |
| ↓ | Formal training programmes |
| ↓ | Formal programmes leading to a qualification |

**Formal**

These outcomes therefore suggest other influential dimensions:

- the broader political purposes of mentoring
- the broader economic purposes of mentoring
- the association of mentoring with different types of knowledge and learning
- the degree to which it produces stasis or dynamism within organisations
- the degree to which it reproduces or redresses social inequalities within organisations.

## 7 Stern and Sommerlad: a continuous learning continuum

Following Watkins and Marsick (1993), Stern and Sommerlad (1999) present the differences between formal and informal learning opportunities at work as a continuum, as shown in Figure 6 on page 23. This distinguishes them from the others summarised here.

The way in which this continuum is presented suggests degrees of formality or informality, and the authors' further discussion also makes it clear that several of these types of learning often co-exist in the same workplaces, and for the same workers, in ways that resonate with the argument of Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001).

## 8 The European Commission (EC) Communication on lifelong learning: formal, non-formal and informal learning

It is important to remember that the EU documents are a series of policy documents, not academic analyses. Their prime purpose is to direct policy and practice within EU member states; and to provide a focal rationale for EU-funded projects and initiatives in member states, in those states in the process of becoming members, and in other states linked with the EU. They are also, inevitably, the result of political activity, including bargaining and compromises between the member states.

Whereas Eraut (2000) introduced the term 'non-formal' as a substitute for what he perceived as the less precise 'informal' learning, this EU policy document sees it as a third, intermediate category. It defines the three types (European Commission 2001, 32–33) as follows.

- **Formal learning**: learning typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and leading to certification. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.
- **Non-formal learning**: learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.
- **Informal learning**: learning resulting from daily-life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional, but in most cases it is non-intentional (or 'incidental'/random).

Some of the key characteristics of these different types of learning are summarised in Figure 7 opposite.

There are close relationships between this model and that of Eraut (2000). Though the detail differs, both see formal learning in similar ways. The EU, significantly, adds the intentionality of the learner to its classification. In effect, its category of non-formal learning combines parts of Eraut's definition of 'formal' (a prescribed learning framework and an organised event or package) with parts of what he terms non-formal (no certification, not provided by a training or educational institution). The EU definition of informal omits Eraut's emphasis on that which results in significant change, and thus is arguably wider in scope.

Davies (2001b, 113) objects that the definitions offered by EC policy, which argue for separation, may carry a cost: '…the notion of formal, non-formal and informal may become fixed as if these are three rooms with high walls around them so that the integrated holistic way in which real people learn … is lost'.

## 9 DfES National Adult Learning Survey (NALS): taught learning and self-directed learning

The DfES – formerly the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) – has been researching trends in learning and types of learning experience for almost 10 years through the development of the National Adult Learning Survey (NALS). Its most recent report (La Valle and Blake 2001) presents a rationale for a broad view of lifelong learning akin to that of the EC, headlining economic factors that have shaped the policy agenda, but also pointing to the importance of learning in creating social cohesion and combatting social exclusion.

**Figure 7**
European Commission
(EC) Communication
on lifelong learning:
formal, non-formal
and informal learning

| | Formal learning | Non-formal learning | Informal learning |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Location** | Education and training institutions | Not provided by an education or training institution. Bulk of learning occurs in the workplace. Pre-school playgroups, etc. Community groups and voluntary sector | Daily activities at work, home, leisure, in community. Youth organisations. Intergenerational learning |
| **Degree of structure** | Highly structured objectives, time and support | Structured objectives, time or support | No structure |
| **Intentionality** | Learner's perspective is intentional | Learner's perspective is intentional | Rarely intentional, typically 'incidental' |
| **Certification** | Leads to certification | Not usually certificated | Not certificated |
| **Facilitator** | Teacher/trainer | Trainer, coach, mentor, childcarer | |

**Figure 8**
National Adult Learning
Survey (La Valle
and Blake 2001):
taught learning and
self-directed learning

| Taught learning | Self-directed learning |
|---|---|
| ■ taught courses leading to qualification | ■ studying for qualifications without taking part in a particular course |
| ■ taught courses designed to develop job skills | ■ supervised training on the job |
| ■ courses, instruction or tuition in driving, playing a musical instrument, art or craft, sport or any practical skill | ■ reading books, attending seminars or similar activities to update oneself on work-related developments |
| ■ evening classes | ■ deliberately trying to improve one's knowledge about anything or teach oneself a skill without taking part in a taught course |
| ■ learning from a package of materials provided by an employer, college, commercial organisation or other training provider | |

The NALS uses two main categories of learning, but one of these categories has shifted as the survey instrument has been refined and other research on learning has been taken into account. The category of 'taught' learning has remained constant, but the second category was described in the 1997 survey as 'non-taught', in 2000 as 'self-taught' and in 2001 as 'self-directed'. These two categories are defined by the questions asked of respondents to establish the types of learning they have undertaken in the previous three years, as shown in Figure 8 on page 25.

A further distinction is made within each category between vocational and non-vocational learning, as respondents are asked to identify whether or not the learning episode related to their job, future job or voluntary work. The concept of learning appears to be treated as an entirely individual and consciously acquisitive process, ignoring some types of learning (eg collective, tacit) identified by Eraut (2000).

The NALS focuses only on intentional learning, and presents a counter-intuitive typology which challenges the assumption that the 'taught' might be associated with formality and the 'self-directed' with informality. 'Taught' learning includes elements of all three EU types – formal, non-formal and informal – while 'self-directed' learning rules out much learning encompassed by the EU definition of informal learning. This has led to criticisms from Livingstone (2001), on both political and theoretical grounds, that the methodology of the NALS, and of similar large-scale surveys in Finland and Canada, is flawed. He argues that it restricts enquiry to the 'tip of the learning iceberg', and therefore seriously underestimates both the significance and the quantity of informal learning that takes place.

## Combined political and theoretical approaches

### 10 Livingstone's review of literature on adults' formal, non-formal and informal learning

While the work of Eraut (2000), Billett (2002), Beckett and Hager (2002) and Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001) is firmly located in the workplace, and that of the EU and the NALS in a lifelong learning policy context, Livingstone (2001) draws upon the traditions of adult education and a wide range of literature from that field, much of it North American. His analysis produces a classification of types of learning that differs in significant detail from those we have identified as representing theoretical or political dimensions.

- **Formal education** occurs 'when a teacher has the authority to determine that people designated as requiring knowledge effectively learn a curriculum taken from a pre-established body of knowledge … whether in the form of age-graded and bureaucratic modern school systems or elders initiating youths into traditional bodies of knowledge' (2001, 2).

- **Non-formal education** or further education occurs 'when learners opt to acquire further knowledge or skill[s] by studying voluntarily with a teacher who assists their self-determined interests, by using an organised curriculum, as is the case in many adult education courses and workshops' (2001, 2).

- **Informal education** or training occurs 'when teachers or mentors take responsibility for instructing others without sustained reference to an intentionally-organised body of knowledge in more incidental and spontaneous learning situations, such as guiding them in acquiring job skills or in community development activities' (2001, 2).

- **Informal learning** is 'any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria … in any context outside the pre-established curricula of educative institutions' (2001, 4).

The characteristics that Livingstone (2001) ascribes to these types of learning are summarised in Figure 9 opposite, revealing that both political and theoretical concerns inform his analysis.

This is a particularly interesting classification. Not only is it based upon a much wider literature range than many of the others presented here, but it also has a different organising principle – the relationship between teacher/mentor and learner. All forms of learning are seen as intentional and – like the EU, but unlike Eraut – all learning is assumed to be individual, rather than social. Thus, the boundary separating formal from non-formal learning becomes whether or not the learner undertakes the learning voluntarily, as in the adult education tradition of negotiated programmes of learning, for example. Implicitly, this second category appears to be the fundamental one for Livingstone. The others are defined according to the ways in which they deviate from it. It is noticeable that the definition of formal education has a critical, negative edge to it, and this links with his criticism of the British NALS for its focus on more formal experiences of learning.

**Figure 9**
Livingstone's (2001)
review of literature on
adults' formal, non-formal
and informal learning

| | Formal education | Non-formal education | Informal education/training | Informal learning |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge structure** | Curriculum – pre-established body of knowledge | Organised curriculum | No sustained reference to curriculum | No externally organised curriculum |
| **Knowledge status** | Rational cognitive | Partly pre-established, partly practical | Situational and practical – eg job skills, community development activities | Situational and practical |
| **Mediation of learning** | Teacher/elder | Teacher | Teacher, trainer, coach, mentor, often experienced co-worker – 'showing how' | No direct reliance on teacher |
| **Location** | Schools, etc  Indigenous communities | Adult education courses/ workshops  Employer training programmes | Incidental and spontaneous situations, often at work | Anywhere – but often in employed, voluntary and unpaid work as well as leisure activities |
| **Primary agency** | Teacher/elder | Learner | Teacher | Learner |
| **Learner voluntarism** | May be low – teachers designate learners as requiring knowledge | High – self-determined interests | Usually high | High when intentional |

## Conclusion

When these different ways of classifying learning
are placed side by side like this, some serious issues
become apparent. We would argue that all of these
examples are strongly influenced by:

- the context within which and/or for which the
definitions or typology were developed, even if
some author(s) saw their versions as having wider
significance and applicability

- the purpose the author had in mind, either implicitly
or explicitly, in developing the definitions or typology

- the deeper theoretical and political values and
orientation of the writer when developing the definitions
or typology, to the extent that this is discernible in
their writing.

In the next section, we examine the possibilities
of somehow integrating the key features from
these 10 classifications into one all-encompassing
model. Given the huge difficulties entailed in such
a task, we then move on to suggest a radically
alternative way of thinking about formal, non-formal
and informal learning.

**Section 4**

**Attributes and aspects of formality and informality in learning**

## Attributes of formality and informality in learning

McGivney (1999, 1) argues that 'It is difficult to make a clear distinction between formal and informal learning as there is often a crossover between the two'. Despite this reservation, most writers who address the differences between informal, non-formal and formal learning are doing so in an attempt to establish boundaries around one of these concepts, or to classify differences between them. In particular, as we have seen, there have been repeated attempts to see informal and non-formal learning as distinct from formal education. There is far less work that addresses the boundaries between informal and non-formal, though we have included several examples in Section 3. For such writers, there is a sense in which non-formal either lies between formal and informal; or – implicitly or explicitly – where non-formal and informal are seen as interchangeable, a preference is expressed for one term over the other. The boundary between informal and non-formal is much less secure or clear than that between informal/non-formal and formal. Consequently, we turn next to this latter boundary, and to avoid confusion, use the term informal to cover non-formal as well. Later, we return to discuss explicitly boundaries between informal and non-formal.

Within the literature we have analysed, it is possible to abstract a list of 20 main criteria that different writers have used to distinguish the boundaries between formal and informal learning. These are crudely summarised in Figure 10 opposite. This list is based upon our assessment of the similarities between criteria used in different publications, many of which are expressed in slightly different ways by different authors, and some of which are implicit. We drew up the list from a much wider range of sources than those presented in Section 3, but readers should be able to identify where each of the 10 analyses featured there fits within our overarching list. The order in which these criteria or factors are presented is not intended to signify either the frequency with which a criterion is used, or the relative significance of those criteria included. Some criteria may be mutually contradictory in some respects. For the sake of continuity, we begin the list with those criteria drawn mainly from the theoretical dimension of the literature, but the items on the list overlap, some are used within both dimensions, and what are listed as separate criteria are often interrelated.

**Figure 10**
Distinguishing criteria

1   Education or non-education
2   Location (eg educational or community premises)
3   Learner/teacher intentionality/activity (voluntarism)
4   Extent of planning or intentional structuring
5   Nature and extent of assessment and accreditation
6   The timeframes of learning
7   The extent to which learning is tacit or explicit
8   The extent to which learning is context-specific or generalisable/transferable; external determination or not
9   Whether learning is seen as embodied or just 'head stuff'
10  Part of a course or not
11  Whether outcomes are measured
12  Whether learning is collective/collaborative or individual
13  The status of the knowledge and learning
14  The nature of knowledge
15  Teacher–learner relations
16  Pedagogical approaches
17  The mediation of learning – by whom and how
18  Purposes and interests to meet needs of dominant or marginalised groups
19  Location within wider power relations
20  The locus of control

The extent and diversity of this list illustrates some of the central problems in this area. One of these is that everyone writing about this issue agrees that several criteria must be applied simultaneously to determine the extent to which learning is formal or informal. Often, this is done within a specific context and/or for a specific purpose. In conducting this research, we had to ask whether this was all that could ever be done, or whether it was even remotely feasible to construct a classification that was context- and purpose-free. One way to do that might be to combine many or all of these varied criteria into ideal types. Thus, to begin with the most extreme example, perhaps to count as purely formal, any particular manifestation of learning had to meet the definition of formal against all the criteria listed above; while to count as purely informal, it would have to meet the definition of informal against all the criteria listed. Non-formal might then be some specified form(s) of combination, lying, as it were, between the other two.

There are some obvious but daunting problems, were such an approach intended to produce an accurate means of classifying actual learning activities and situations as either formal or informal. These are as follows.

- Many of the criteria used to draw up the ideal types are contested.

- Many of the criteria are imprecise.

- Some of the 'polar opposites' might actually co-exist.

- At least one possible criterion is read in diametrically opposite ways by different writers.

- How many of the criteria should count – are some inappropriate?

- Should all criteria be equally important, as this approach would imply?

- How can criteria be labelled in ways that avoid ideological implications of inherent virtue or blame? (formal = bad, informal = good; or vice versa).

Each of these problems would have to be solved, if such an approach were to be seriously pursued, and many of them would lead inevitably into areas of complex and partly subjective value judgements.

But there is another, more serious problem. Even if only a majority of these criteria were rigorously applied, very little learning would fit completely into either ideal type. In practice, elements of both formality and informality can be discerned in most, if not all, actual learning situations (see Section 5 for some examples). In other words, formality and informality are not discrete types of learning, but represent attributes of it. Thus, we should see the items in Figure 10 as some of the possible attributes of formality and informality in learning.

Seeing in/formality in this way is a radical shift from most existing writing and thinking, though it is clearly rooted in some of Billett's more recent work (2002), which was summarised in Section 3. Most of the literature summarised in Sections 2 and 3 takes either an explicit or implicit position that, at root, formal and informal learning are fundamentally different. They are described as having different characteristics and, as we have also seen, each has its bevy of writers and thinkers arguing that it is in some ways superior to the other. Many words are devoted to analysing the dangers and possibilities of integrating and combining the two, from either a more instrumental or emancipatory perspective, as Section 2 makes clear. McGivney (1999) writes about 'crossover' between formal and informal learning, thus accepting their fundamental difference, while Stern and Sommerlad (1999) see a continuum between the two, with greater purity at either end.

In other ways, however, this conceptual shift is merely a recognition of something that many earlier writers have always recognised – that learning is complex, and that differences between learning settings cannot be boiled down into two or even three major types. We first reached the then tentative conclusion that all learning includes diverse attributes of formality and informality part of the way through the research process. Our view was reinforced as the research progressed. Not only were we increasingly able to blend in new reading and thinking to this central idea, but no one in the advisory group or in any of the consultation meetings suggested that this conclusion was wrong or inappropriate. Indeed, our further research suggested that this way of understanding learning brings several significant advantages over the more common alternative of seeing formal and informal as fundamentally different, provided we can overcome some problems.

The root of the advantages can be summed up fairly succinctly. Seeing informality and formality as ever present and as attributes of any learning situation allows us to sidestep predominantly paradigmatic approaches to this issue. That is to say, within the theoretical dimension, we need no longer see participatory, socio-cultural theories of learning as predominantly located outside 'formal' education, addressing only everyday learning.

Similarly, though we do not have the space to argue the point here, more cognitive, psychological approaches to learning are no more or less valid outside schooling than they are within it. Our suggested stance also makes it easier to avoid the common practice of belittling the use and effectiveness of learning in formal settings as opposed to informal ones, and vice versa. From within the political dimension, we have already made the point that it is a mistake to see either formal or informal learning as inherently more or less emancipatory – a common but flawed view that becomes redundant from the stance advocated here. Also, this stance makes it easy, rather than difficult, to examine similarities and differences between different settings for learning, which would previously have been lumped together as either all formal, or all informal.

Furthermore, such a stance permits us to ask more searching questions about the nature of learning, its emancipatory or oppressive tendencies, and its effectiveness for learners, in a wide variety of different learning situations: universities, schools, workplaces, communities, families, etc. We will argue in Sections 5 and 6 that it is such detailed analyses that are most likely to prove of value, and most likely to result eventually in means of further improving learning provision. Finally, our use of the term 'attribute' of in/formality is deliberate. This term draws attention not only to the ways in which learning can have multiple attributes or characteristics, but also to the fact that when we describe learning in this way, we as writers or speakers are attributing labels like formal and informal to it, and in doing so we may be representing particular professional interests. The learning itself is not inherently formal, non-formal or informal. However, in some circumstances, and for some purposes, there may be value in attributing such labels to aspects of it.

This proposed change of stance raises some problems, and they are broadly of two types. The first is that there may be other issues that are broadly correlated with the formal/informal divide. One of these, the nature of knowledge, has been briefly explored in Section 2. The other, in our view, more serious problem, is that in abandoning the idea that formal, informal and non-formal learning are different, we may also lose many valuable insights into our understanding of learning that have been developed in the vast literature which has adopted this dualist approach. In our view, such losses are not inevitable, and we next present one possible way of retaining many such insights as part of our new approach.

## Aspects of in/formality in learning

One way of addressing this problem is to search for ways to group what we would now term attributes of formality and informality in learning, and to identify deeper underlying organising concepts. For example, most of the 'criteria' or, as we would now term them, attributes listed in Figure 10 on page 29 can be fitted into four clusters, or aspects, as follows.

### Process

Many writers on learning attribute formality or informality to what might be considered learning processes. Thus, where learning processes are incidental to everyday activity, many writers would term them 'informal', whereas engagement in tasks structured by a teacher is often regarded as more formal. Similarly, this 'process' aspect includes matters of pedagogy, which figure prominently in many accounts. Thus, more didactic, teacher-controlled pedagogic approaches tend to be labelled formal, while more democratic, negotiated or student-led pedagogies are often described as more informal.

For some, there is also an issue about who provides pedagogic support. Is it a teacher (formal), a trained mentor or guidance counsellor (less formal), or a friend or work colleague (informal)? Another process issue is assessment. Is there none (informal), is it predominantly formative and negotiated (more formal) or mainly summative (formal)? These process issues have an impact across both dimensions. Thus, some of those with more theoretical concerns focus upon the authentic (or inauthentic!) nature of learning activities and practices, with everyday learning signifying true informality. On the other hand, radicals within the politics dimension will be much more concerned about the pedagogic power relations between teacher and taught.

### Location and setting

Another set of attributes of in/formality focuses upon issues of location and setting. An obvious starting point here is the physical location of the learning. Is it in an educational institution, such as a school or college (formal), or the workplace, local community or family (informal)? But the literature looks at the setting for learning in other ways too. For example, informal learning is often described as open-ended, with no or few time restrictions, no specified curriculum, no predetermined learning objectives, no external certification, etc. By contrast, formal learning is often described as being the opposite of all these things. Once more, these issues are seen differently within the two dimensions.

For those with a radical political perspective, most of the things that characterise formal learning within this category are seen as repressive. For others, more instrumental governmental approaches are searching for ways of introducing those very features to the informal or non-formal learning which they want to enhance and support – a paradox that will be returned to in Section 6. From the theoretical perspective, location and setting are key parts of what some term 'authentic practice' (see under Process above). From this perspective, it is the synergy between practices and setting that ensures successful learning. The assumption is that such synergies are almost always attained in informal settings using informal processes. However, the approaches advocated here raise the possibility of searching for such synergies in more formal learning settings as well (see Section 5). Furthermore, Billett's (2002) work, among others, reminds us that non-educational settings also have strongly formalised dimensions, which should not be overlooked.

## Purposes

The extent to which learning has formal or informal attributes related to purposes depends upon the dimension concerned. Within the theoretical dimension, one concern relates to the extent to which learning is the prime and deliberate focus of activity, as in schools; or whether the activity has another prime purpose, and learning is a largely unintended outcome, as in the workplace or local community. Within the political dimension, the concern is much more with whose purposes lie behind the learning. Is it learner-determined and initiated (informal) or is the learning designed to meet the externally determined needs of others with more power – a dominant teacher, an examination board, an employer, the government, etc?

## Content

This covers issues about the nature of what is being learned and the outcomes expected. Is the focus on the acquisition of established expert knowledge/ understanding/practices (more likely to be called formal), or the development or uncovering of knowledge derived from experience? Is the emphasis on propositional knowledge (formal), everyday practice (informal), or workplace competence (informal)? Is the focus on 'high-status' knowledge or not? Are the outcomes rigidly specified (formal), flexible and negotiable (less formal), or serendipitous (informal)? Within the political dimension, content is inextricably linked with questions of power and purpose.

It should be stressed that this grouping of attributes of in/formality into four aspects is tentative and illustrative. We are not claiming that all attributes fall naturally into these four categories, or that this is necessarily the best or most appropriate way of thinking about formality and informality of learning. Rather, we present it as a possible device to help uncover the complex ramifications of in/formality in different learning settings, and we will illustrate its usefulness in Section 5. More important than the particular grouping into four aspects is the range of different attributes of in/formality that is covered by the four taken together. We need sophisticated ways of identifying and describing the complexities of formality and informality in learning, the interrelationships between different attributes in a particular setting, and the significance of all this for the learning that takes place and for its potential improvement. We think that the four aspects described here may be one way of starting to do this, though we are sure that there are many others.

### Is there a place for non-formal learning?

In this section, we have concentrated on the differences between informal and formal learning, and have concluded that there is no safe way to establish these as fundamentally different types of learning. If this is the case, it follows that there is no place for an intermediate category termed 'non-formal'. Furthermore, as we saw in Section 2, writers often use 'informal' and 'non-formal' to mean very similar things, though they may express a clear, if unexplained, preference for one or the other. Thus, those writing about learning in the workplace and drawing upon a theoretical dimension are more likely to use 'informal' (but see Eraut 2000), while political adult educators are more likely to use 'non-formal'. In our view, therefore, these terms should be seen as largely interchangeable. In the remainder of the report, we use the term 'informal' unless there are specific reasons to do otherwise, such as the way terms were used in a source we are citing, or the location of an argument firmly in the adult education tradition. We now pursue the idea of formality and informality as 'attributes' of learning in practice, through an exploratory analysis of a range of different learning settings and processes.

**Section 5**

**Examples of learning: relationships between formality and informality**

In this section we offer several examples of the ways in which different learning settings can all be seen to encompass attributes of in/formality. These exemplars cannot be, and are not intended to be, either broadly representative or exhaustive. However, they offer insight into the ways in which aspects of in/formality can be seen to interpenetrate in a very wide range of contexts. The main purposes of this section are as follows.

■ To provide evidence to support our claim that attributes of in/formality are present in most, if not all, learning situations.

■ To explore the interrelationships between those attributes in different specific contexts and settings.

■ To explore ways of writing about these interrelationships, including, where appropriate, our tentative four aspects.

■ To begin an exploration of the significance of the interrelationships between different attributes of in/formality for understanding learning in such contexts.

■ To establish that we cannot ignore – in considering the balance between formal and informal attributes of learning – the wider contexts within which that learning takes place.

The exemplars are arranged in four sections. The first presents three short case studies of how informal learning occurs within notionally formal educational contexts – in this case, further education. The second section looks at the balance between formal and informal attributes of learning in two different workplaces. The third section is concerned with adult and community education (ACE), and considers the interplay of formality and informality in what are often assumed to be informal contexts. The final section looks at the formalisation of 'informal' mentoring practices, again in two different contexts.

### Informal learning within 'formal' education

As Engestrom (1991) points out, applying Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretical perspective to school learning makes it clear that much learning by pupils is concerned with how to participate in school or college, rather than with the acquisition of the knowledge, understanding and skills that are the more explicit objectives of the teachers and the curriculum. Of course, this was not a new observation. There was an important body of earlier literature about the hidden curriculum, focusing on what Jackson (1968) memorably termed 'life in classrooms'. By 'hidden curriculum', authors meant highly significant learning in school that was never made explicit.

Many writers were critical of the effects of the hidden curriculum. Holt (1964) saw such practices and the learning associated with them as underpinning many of the reasons why many pupils failed. Other writers focused on the ways in which mechanisms of grouping in schools, within and between classes, labelled certain pupils as failures, even when the rhetoric of teachers and schools was of inclusion and access to all (Sharp and Green 1975; Ball 1981). Willis (1977) focused upon the ways in which the informal learning in school contributed to the reproduction of male working-class identity, through alienation from school values and procedures; while Steedman (1982) and Bates (1994) considered how the hidden curriculum produced and reproduced gender oppression for girls and women. Other literature shows the other side of the coin, as it were, where middle-class values reinforce and are reinforced by the informal learning in grammar and independent schools, in ways that converge with and enhance the explicit curricular objectives of pupils and teachers alike (Lacey 1970; Ball 2003).

Here, we reinforce these reminders from the past through three short portraits of learning sites in FE colleges. These portraits are based upon research conducted within the Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education (TLC) project. This project is part of the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP).

### The CACHE Diploma

One site involved students studying for the CACHE Diploma in nursery nursing. All except one are female, and almost all are school-leavers. This is a 2-year full-time course: successful completion of it gives students the necessary qualification to work in the rapidly growing UK provision of childcare for children under eight years of age. Many of the attributes of formal learning are clearly visible in this site. The course takes place partly on educational premises, there is an external syllabus, summative coursework assessment and an examination, all focused on a qualification. The tutor is charismatic and forceful, and dominates the teaching and learning. Student choice is largely restricted to joining or not joining. Thus, students work to complete assignments and undertake various activities at the direction of the tutor. The course is planned, structured and geared to the demands of external bodies: the examining board, the college, the childcare profession, and the government, which legislates for and funds much of the activity.

However, the course also has clear informal attributes. To begin with, much of the learning takes place within actual nurseries – a workplace context that would normally be described as informal, and where the prime purpose of the organisation is not the learning of the students. The learning on college premises is also partly informal. On this particular course, the college-based and workplace components are closely integrated. What counts as knowledge on the course is not only the requirements of the external syllabus and examinations, but also much more generic and partly tacit judgements about what qualities, knowledge, attitudes, dress and behaviour are required for membership of the nursery nursing profession.

Much of this broader learning is planned and initiated by the tutor, through the ways in which she conducts and presents herself as an expert practitioner, and constantly guides the students into the desired practices. But the details are often unplanned, and lie beyond the normal scope of what some writers term formal learning. Thus, the tutor will react to the ways in which students dress – not to enforce a previously determined dress code, but to give impromptu advice about why a particular item of clothing would be unsuitable when working in a nursery. We have observed, over the course of the first year, how one cohort began by wearing a wide range of different styles of apparel, including the highly fashionable, but finished with what looked like an informal sombre or pastel-coloured uniform of loose sweatshirts, tracksuit bottoms and trainers. This contrasts markedly with the flamboyant and often revealing clothing worn by young women students on non-vocational courses. For Eraut (2000, 12), as we have seen, such things 'have little to do with learning, *per se*', yet here they clearly result in significant changes of understanding and capability, when integrated with other aspects of students' experiences of the course. Although this powerful but informal dress code is sometimes explained on the grounds of 'health and safety' and practicality, the prevailing occupational culture also suggests that demure dress indicates the moral propriety of the nursery nurses, who are expected to be 'nice girls'.

In other ways, much of what takes place in this learning site is initiated by the students themselves, either individually or collectively. The case study documents complex negotiations, alliances and conflicts as the course progressed. The tutor often had to react to student activity, just as they had to react to activities initiated by her. Some students learned to adopt particular roles in the group, as they negotiated the forms of their membership. The only male student developed several strategies to sustain his identity as different from the others, but part of the group. For example, he presented a very camp persona, leaving at least some group members, and the researchers, guessing as to whether or not he was gay, and he became the person most likely to disrupt playfully the tutor's planned approaches, in ways that she sometimes found difficult to deal with.

In this group, some people learned that they did not fit, and either left or were expelled. Sometimes this was a subtle process of cooling out – a sort of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) in reverse. Sometimes it was much more explicit, as when one student was expelled, because it was discovered that she had got into a fight with another teenager, in her own time, away from college. She had been given a police caution, thus rendering herself unsuitable for the version of nursery nurse that the course and profession promoted.

Institutional context and social structure, in the wider sense that Billett (2002) describes, had an impact upon the process of learning. A clear example of this lies in the ways that a particular view of female identity and roles dominated the constructed version of nursery nurse professionalism. This included the uncritical acceptance of a combination of professional attitudes and responsibilities with low pay and low status, in contrast to more male-dominated professions. Also, that professionalism was centred on an implicit acceptance of emotional labour, a common pitfall for many caring and therefore stereotypically female occupations. In this respect, much of the learning that students described was clearly embodied, along the lines that Beckett and Hager (2002) suggest. Further details of this case study can be found in Colley (2002a, 2002b).

**Entry-level drama**

Similar combinations of formal and informal attributes of learning could be found in the entry-level drama site. Here, a small group of students, many with severe learning difficulties, were studying for a qualification in drama. As with the CACHE group, all the key identifiers of formal learning were there. Indeed, this time there was no escape into non-educational premises. The students spent their whole week in one mobile classroom, on the edge of a suburban college campus. They used the canteen and toilet facilities in the main building, but that was the sum total of their experience of the college. While the CACHE course has been aimed at a particular occupation, this course, at least in theory, was more generally aimed at developing basic employability skills and attributes. To this end, students studied drama, but also key skills, especially in literacy and numeracy.

The learning in this site had two parallel foci, one explicit, the other implicit. The explicit focus was on the eventual performance of a dramatic production. All the teaching and activities were geared to, or at least related to, that prime purpose. Like the CACHE course previously described, this can easily be seen as the sort of embodied, practice-based 'informal' learning that Beckett and Hager (2002) extol. However, this was forcefully led and structured by the team of tutors, in classic formal learning mode.

But the parallel focus was informal and officially unacknowledged. For the students, this drama course became another surrogate family and they learned, informally, how to live in that family (cf Caddick 1999; and Fenwick's (2001) 'psychoanalytic' perspective on experiential learning in Section 6). Their growing self-confidence and ability in areas such as interpersonal communication were bounded by this family context. They learned how to behave here, with these fellow students (siblings) and these particular tutors (parents). In their actions, many of which were unintentional in any strategic sense, they pressured the tutors to adopt parental roles; for example, in sorting out minor arguments, or what the students often preferred to call 'bullying'. One tutor talked about having to know when they had had enough, and when the planned lesson had to be slowed down, adapted or even abandoned, if they were not able to cope. Thus, like the CACHE students, these young people partly initiated and constructed their learning, in ways often associated with the informal.

Again, there are broader contextual and structural issues that interpenetrate both the formal and informal elements. For example, behind the rhetoric of learning for employability and independent adult life lies the reality that these students are actually on a carousel, circulating from one entry-level course to another. Also important is the low status of all entry-level provision, graphically illustrated by the marginal location of the course, cut off both from the wider college and the wider world (Scaife 2002).

**Quick Skills by distance learning**

Quick Skills is the name used in one college for a distance-learning package that they had produced themselves, teaching the basic skills of computer and internet use, almost entirely online. In a fairly extreme way, this site replicates in its practices two major strands in the dominant discourse about teaching and learning in UK further education around the turn of the millennium. First, there is a growing emphasis on the application of standardised approaches to teaching. This can be seen in nationally prescribed standards for teaching, which strongly influence training programmes for new and experienced teachers (FENTO 1999), and also in the formalised external inspection process. In the Quick Skills site, this formalisation takes a slightly non-standard form. The emphasis here is on a particular view of pedagogy, based upon standardised activities, assessment procedures and record-keeping, dominated by the pre-prepared distance-learning materials that students work through.

The second strand is the virtually unchallenged assertion that all students can and should be treated as individuals. It is mainly in relation to this second feature that the interrelationship between formal and informal approaches can be seen. Formally, and officially, individual needs on this course are met through the flexibilities of the distance-learning approach. Students can enrol at any time, and can work at their own pace. Each submits an assignment when s/he is ready, and it is individually marked and returned. This assessment is simultaneously summative and formative, and there is no limit to the number of times work can be re-submitted before a pass standard is finally achieved. In practice, these formalised systems are underpinned by equally significant informal learning activities, through which the tutor concerned builds personal relationships with each student, through an exchange of pleasantries and personal ephemera over the telephone and via e-mails which might best be characterised as chat. This balance between formal and informal attributes can be further examined by taking each of our suggested four aspects separately.

**Process**

Ostensibly, the processes of teaching and learning could not be more formal. All activities are pre-specified, with little or no flexibility. Students work through each task in a fixed order. Assessments are similarly rigid. Even the tutor has little opportunity to change things. Also, student identities are reified into carefully updated and filed formal records – where every contact is logged. Yet in other ways, tutor–student relationships are very informal. The tutor prides himself upon his skill in engaging with each student as an individual person, whether by e-mail or on the phone. He chats about the view from his window, flirts with some of the women, whom he has never seen or met, in ways that might well be judged to be inappropriate in face-to-face relationships. In one unusual case, he has built up a relationship with the father of a young woman who has a fairly extreme type of agoraphobia, and who will not speak to the tutor herself. He also searches for ways to help students with problems not adequately dealt with in the packages. Students to whom we have spoken greatly value these informal relationships, which far exceed the tutor's formal job description.

### Location and setting

As we have already seen, there are tightly formalised constraints on curriculum and assessment. Also, the location of the tutor, in an open-plan office rather than a classroom, and with timesheets used to log his every activity for managerial and accountability purposes, could hardly be more formalised. Yet the students are learning in their own homes, at their own pace, in their own time.

### Purposes

Ostensibly, the purposes of this course are externally prescribed. Its aim is to raise the employability skills of so-called non-learners, and is free for adults who are unemployed; but the students to whom we have spoken present a different story. None were 'non-learners' when they started the course. Their reasons for studying are varied, but a direct link with future employment figured rarely. They were able to expropriate the course for their own purposes, in a highly self-directed manner. Attitudes to assessment further illustrate this complexity. Officially, assessment is the essential measure of learner success and the passport to other courses or eventual employment. Student reactions were much more varied. For one, getting the certificate was a major boost to self-esteem. For another, it was a significant addition to an existing collection of certificates – like adding another stamp or cigarette card. For others, the learning was what mattered, and the certificate was largely an irrelevance.

### Content

This is the only unequivocally formal part of the programme. The content consists of specified skills that students have to master. These are pre-existing skills that are learned from those who already possess the desired knowledge. However, the low-level nature of the skills involved, focusing upon the basic operation of particular software configurations on the computer, falls way short of Bernstein's (2000) vertical knowledge. In this sense, at least for some authors, this course falls clearly into the informal side of the divide identified by Scribner and Cole (1973).

As with the CACHE Diploma site, the strength of learning on this Quick Skills course comes from the ways in which formal and informal attributes of learning, though superficially in tension, are actually mutually reinforcing. Unlike the case of mentoring, which is discussed below, the rigidities of the course structure and procedures do not appear to undermine student learning. This is in large part due to the ways in which the tutor himself blends, for example, formal record-keeping with informal tutor–student relations, but also takes upon himself the combined pressures of the increasingly bureaucratic procedures and the diverse personal needs of his students (Scaife 2003).

### Conclusion

In this section, we have used some early literature about the hidden curriculum and some recent case studies of learning in further education to demonstrate that there are significant informal attributes to 'formal' educational provision. However, our analysis goes beyond that. For the character of each of these sites, the nature of the learning that takes place, and the success or otherwise of that learning are all strongly influenced by the complex interrelationships between formal and informal attributes. Thus, in the CACHE site, it is the ways in which formal and informal approaches are mutually reinforcing that results in a highly successful learning experience, when learning is judged against the prime objective of course, tutor, students and profession – namely the preparation of skilled and qualified nursery nurses. But this particular, highly positive synergy also has a down side: the low status of the profession and its stereotyping of female emotional labour are also reinforced, and students who do not fit the vocational habitus of the site are eventually excluded.

In the drama site, there is a different sort of synergy. Here, the sense of belonging to a family is reinforced by the common goal of a dramatic production, to which shared end most of the teaching is explicitly related. But again there is a price to be paid, for this synergy reduces the likelihood that the personal and social skills learned and confidence gained will be transferred to other parts of the students' lives. In the Quick Skills site, it is the combination of some essentially formal structures and largely informal processes that ensure high levels of student satisfaction, and also good results against external performance indicators like retention and achievement levels.

While endeavouring to make clear some negative aspects of two of these sites, we have concentrated in this section on examining sites where there is synergy between formal and informal attributes. This was done deliberately, to counteract the dominant view in the literature, be it about the hidden curriculum or participatory learning, that within formal education settings the informal will always dominate and undermine the formal. However, we should not be understood to be claiming that such synergies are more common than the sorts of dissonance others have written about. Often, the balance between informal and formal attributes of learning can be counterproductive, and we will examine this issue more closely when we examine the case of mentoring later in this section. Next, however, we briefly explore the relationships between formal and informal learning in the workplace.

### Informal and formal attributes of workplace learning

Many of the texts analysing workplace learning either describe it as predominantly informal (Beckett and Hager 2002) or non-formal (Eraut 2000). There are very good reasons for this focus. There are some fundamental differences between workplaces and schools or colleges as sites for learning. Beckett and Hager (2002) highlight, for example, the fact that learning is not the prime objective of workplace activity; whereas in school or college, the learning of students is the main purpose of the organisation (or in higher education, one of the main purposes). This means that schools and colleges are structured in ways that are supposed to manage and promote learning. Workplaces are not. In consequence, workplace learning is often not even recognised as learning by managers or workers.

In industrialised countries at least, there has always been an element of more formal training and, to simplify, two main variants can be identified. First, many workers do attend off-the-job courses; for example, in FE colleges or, for senior managers, HE premises. However, in line with the arguments about knowledge advanced by Muller (2000), Bernstein (2000) and Young (in press a, b), there is a common tendency to see these two parts of learning, on- and off-the-job, as completely different and separated. Thus, when Hodkinson and Hodkinson (1997, 1999) studied an initial teacher education scheme, they found, like others, a sharp separation between the college-based elements and the workplace learning in schools as students undertook teaching practice. In the school workplace context, the values and |culture of teachers' working practices undermined the more student-focused learning activities that college tutors planned.

The second form which planned workplace training takes is the structured on-the-job or near-job training activity – sometimes arranged for newcomers or apprentices, sometimes for more experienced workers; for example, when a new job challenge is faced. Here, the boundaries between formal and informal learning are very blurred. We have already demonstrated some of the ways in which education courses themselves contain elements of formal and informal learning, and off-the-job training is much the same. Here, therefore, we focus primarily upon learning in the workplace, while also devoting a little attention to the interrelationships between on-the-job and off-the-job learning. We do that by drawing upon two further research projects within the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). The first, by Fuller and Unwin (2001b, in press), examined apprenticeship learning in three different steel-working organisations. The second, by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001), examined the learning of experienced schoolteachers. Both projects were part of the activities of a research network examining incentives and barriers to workplace learning. Both studies also illustrate one of the further claims of this report – that in considering the balance between formal and informal attributes of learning, the contexts within which that learning takes place cannot be ignored.

### Expansive and restrictive learning environments in the steel industry

In their ground-breaking study, Fuller and Unwin (2001a, 2001b, in press) examined the similarities and differences between the learning experiences of Modern Apprentices in three different organisations within the UK steel industry. They showed how differences, related to participation, personal development and institutional arrangements, contributed to the extent to which the learning environment in each workplace was either expansive or restrictive. They further argued that a more expansive learning environment was likely to lead to deeper learning, partly through the sorts of process Wenger (1998, 185; cited in Fuller and Unwin in press, 10) included as part of learning using the imagination:

- the ability to imagine or to be in someone else's shoes
- the defining of trajectories which connect what participants are doing with an extended identity
- the location of participation in broader systems of time and space
- opening access to distant practices; for example, through excursions and fleeting contacts.

In essence, Fuller and Unwin argue that the three steelworks they studied lay on a continuum between more expansive and more restrictive environments. Key determinants of the difference were located in the institutional traditions and working practices of the three organisations, including their attitudes towards the work and learning of the apprentices.

Though Fuller and Unwin (2001a, 2001b, in press) do not explicitly address these issues in this way, one possible way of understanding part of these differences is through the different patterns of formal and informal learning that are present in those different workplaces. In their most expansive workplace, for example, an explicit focus on all aspects of apprentice learning runs throughout the organisation. Through that recognition, the learning, in some senses, has become more formalised. For example, there is a deliberate pattern of moving apprentices from one part of the firm to another, precisely in order to widen and enhance their learning. This process is supported by a formal learning plan, which sets out the expected learning goals in each section of the firm that is visited.

Similarly, more like the CACHE Diploma site than the example of initial teacher training mentioned above, within this workplace there is significant synergy between on-the-job and off-the-job learning. This has developed over a long period of time, and is based upon the mutual understanding and respect between this firm and staff at one FE college. This is reinforced by the fact that many senior managers in the firm also began their careers as apprentices. This means that workers informally reinforce the value to apprentices of off-the-job learning in ways not found in the other two companies studied by Fuller and Unwin. In this firm, then, the off-the-job learning of apprentices was a fully integrated part of normal working practices, supported by the informal working relationships at all stages.

In the firm with the most restrictive environment, the situation was very different. Here, a combination of formal and informal learning attributes worked together to narrow down and impoverish the learning of the two apprentices present when the fieldwork was conducted. For example, the apprentices stayed in the same part of the workplace, focused upon the operation of steel-polishing machines. They learned informally to become full participants in that process, but there were no opportunities, formal or informal, to widen their learning in other parts of the factory. However, even these apprentices experienced some more formalised off-the-job training, in the form of half-day courses on steel industry awareness. There were also brief visits from an external tutor, to check that the apprentices met the formal requirements of the state-controlled Modern Apprenticeship (MA) scheme, including the completion of the relevant National Vocational Qualification (NVQ).

However, these were the first apprentices the company had had, and they were taken on primarily as a recruitment strategy for machine operators. Consequently, 'from the company's perspective, the apprentices' attainment of the Modern Apprenticeship and its specified qualifications has low priority.' (Fuller and Unwin in press, 17). Put differently, the informal attributes of learning and working practices in the firm undermined the explicit intentions and objectives of the designers of the MA scheme. Neither the minimal off-the-job training, nor the systematic and thorough completion of the MA requirements were supported by what might be termed the 'hidden curriculum' of the factory.

In both workplaces, at all levels, informal and formal attributes of learning were present and interrelated with each other. But it was the ways in which they were interrelated within the specific organisational cultures and practices of the two firms that determined the nature and quality of learning experienced. Thus, it could be argued that the extended formal components of learning in the first firm, such as the learning logs, the planned moving of apprentices and the relatively high level of off-the-job training, were integral to the more expansive learning environment. However, it was the particular nature of these more formal attributes, and the ways in which they supported – and were supported by – the other aspects of the expansive culture which produced this effect.

**The learning of experienced schoolteachers**

When Hodkinson and Hodkinson studied the workplace learning of experienced schoolteachers, large parts of the teachers' learning process were informal; large parts of the content were informal; the purposes were at least partly informal – insofar as the teachers learned for voluntary reasons, often largely unaware that they were actually learning; and the location/setting was partly informal, to the extent that any workplace setting ever can be. But there were clearly more formal attributes of that learning also. To take the most obvious example, planned and externally-led courses, short and long, played significant, if relatively minor, roles in the learning of most of the teachers observed in the research. But this learning was not somehow separate from their everyday learning. Rather, the two were interrelated, as when one teacher took ideas from a short course and integrated them not only into his own teaching, but also into the discussions and practices of his departmental colleagues. It was then, as he himself claimed, that the learning really happened.

On other occasions, this sort of synergy was absent. During the fieldwork phase, all English secondary school teachers had to undergo training in the use of computers in the classroom. For many, this was counterproductive. Not only did they not have access to the equipment necessary to implement these approaches; but, for some at least, the content and mode of training provided clashed with their customary ways of teaching and learning through practice.

Beyond that, the more obviously informal attributes of learning were strongly interpenetrated by more formal attributes. A prime trigger was an externally imposed curriculum and assessment change, which influenced the content, timing and processes of learning undertaken. Also, there were strong external pressures to increase the formalisation of the teachers' learning; for example, through a performance management scheme, where each teacher had to identify learning targets for the year that fitted in with the school strategic plan and government policy priorities, and where the outcomes could be at least clearly identified, even if not measured.

Finally, the predominantly informal learning in which they engaged was deeply structured by the ways that the schools were organised. For example, teaching staff were located in separate subject departments. These formal structures of work organisation were not primarily designed to foster teachers' learning, but they strongly facilitated certain types of that learning – for example, sharing with others in the department; while impeding others – working with teachers outside that department, for example, on pastoral or whole-school issues. Also, perhaps the largest single impediment to the teachers' learning was the pattern of daily working practices, which meant that it was very difficult to get time out of the classroom. This restricted the range of other learning opportunities available to them. We can now examine these interrelationships against our four aspects of in/formality.

### Process

Most of the learning processes were informal, in that most learning resulted from everyday working practices. Teachers changed and improved their ways of working, and learning was part of that ongoing process. In two of the departments, this was supplemented by continuous sharing of ideas and approaches, through discussion and through watching what colleagues did; or, for example, looking at the artwork someone else's class had produced. But there were more formal processes too, as when teachers had to agree objectives with a line manager, and later demonstrate their achievement, as part of a performance management scheme.

### Location and setting

Most learning took place in the teachers' own workplace, but with occasional short courses elsewhere. There was no external qualification structure, but a combination of government directives and school development plans provided a tight frame into which any learning that required external support (such as finance, or time off work) was regulated. Some learning, such as that prescribed through the performance management scheme, or forming the focus of a school staff-development day, had specified timeframes around its completion. Other learning was much less controlled or constrained by formal structures or procedures.

### Purposes

Much of the learning, being an ongoing part of teachers' practice, was either unintentional, in the sense that learning arose incidentally, or focused primarily on their personal interests. However, the constraints of teaching timetables, limited resources and government and school development priorities meant that much professionally relevant learning that teachers wanted for their own personal development proved impossible to provide. As schools and government exerted greater controls over learning, their purposes, rather than those of the teachers, were increasingly dominant. For example, teachers were often forced to learn how to do things that the government required them to: teach numeracy and literacy through art lessons, use computers in the classroom, or meet the needs of a completely new curriculum and assessment structure for many post-16 students.

### Content

The main emphasis here was on the improvement of teaching skills and abilities and/or the acquisition of new ones. There was a limited engagement with propositional knowledge. There was some learning from experts, either in short formal courses or informally from more experienced colleagues. Interestingly, with regard to computer skills, often the new teacher or student teacher was the expert. Also, such learning was often much more a matter of sharing and exchanging ideas than one-way transmission. There was also much learning of completely new things – such as ways of coping with new curricula or assessment procedures.

Taken overall, there are deliberate efforts being made to formalise schoolteachers' learning. These efforts are being pushed by the government, and are increasingly linked to performance-related pay increases and some types of promotion. Unlike the best of Fuller and Unwin's (2001a, 2001b, in press) apprenticeship firms, there was evidence that some of this formality risked undermining the strengths of more informal, well-established learning practices. At the very least, these approaches tended to emphasise a rather narrow, short-term and deficit view of teacher learning, very unlike the expansive apprenticeship model that Fuller and Unwin described.

However, this study did confirm one of Fuller and Unwin's other observations – that the organisational context is very important. Two brief examples can be given. The teachers in the art department were adept at taking every government or school initiative and turning it to their own advantage. They colonised and eventually owned these various impositions, without subverting them. The music teachers were even more proactive. Under the strong leadership of the head of department, they made teacher learning a major focus of all their activity. Any new initiative or opportunity, formal or informal, imposed or self-initiated, was deliberately used to maximise the learning for all department members. However, both departments were limited in what they could achieve by ever-present restrictions on time and resources, and by imposed priorities which they had to accommodate.

### Conclusion

Based upon these two studies, we can see that both novice learning within an apprenticeship scheme and the ongoing learning of experienced workers involves formal and informal attributes. As with the college courses described in the previous sub-section, the interrelationship between these attributes is important in determining the nature of any learning that takes place, and its success. Furthermore, the wider organisational and political contexts for learning were highly significant in both cases. In the next sub-section, we take our analysis of these issues further, through an examination of adult and community education.

### Formality and informality in adult and community education (ACE)

The history of this branch of educational thought and practice, discussed briefly in Section 2, helps to explain the common assumption that much adult learning activity is largely 'non-formal'. Adult and community education in the UK has never had any overarching formal structure to it. Until quite recently, there was very little use of externally imposed syllabuses, and content was often open to negotiation: students have traditionally been volunteers who could leave if they did not like the provision for any reason. In addition, there are elements of adult learning activity which do not conform to any definition of 'provision', in that they were and are self-organised activities undertaken by individuals, groups and communities for their own, self-defined purposes. However, these learning activities are as subject as any other to the 'in/formalisation' paradox explored briefly in the Introduction.

Given the huge diversity of approaches to ACE over time and in different geographical and cultural contexts, it is difficult to generalise as to how the field conceives of formality and informality in learning. However, it is probably true to say that in the UK at least, the field of practice has shared some basic assumptions, as follows.

- Learning occurs both inside and outside formal education, for good or ill.

- People do not only learn that which they are taught (even when they are in a formal educational setting); structures and social processes actively teach just as much as (or more than) the content of a curriculum.

- Learning is a social and relational process which is shaped by the social context in which it occurs – thus the importance of recognising students as adults (Merriam and Cafarella 1999; Rogers 2002).

For the politicised or collectivist arm of adult education thought, we can add the following assumptions.

- The process of learning, in turn, shapes the social context in which it occurs.

- Because of all of this, learning and teaching are profoundly political processes.

For many adult educators, the perceived centrality and autonomy of the student within their practice means that 'formality' has often been seen as an imposition to be avoided and resisted wherever possible. The response from the ACE field to both the accreditation of liberal adult education in universities and aspects of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act can be seen as evidence of this tendency. However, the conception of formality on which this view rests is often relatively narrow, focusing principally on the assessment and certification of learning.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Informal educators enter** | particular social and cultural situations |
| **with** | personal, but shared ideas of the good<br>an ability to think critically and reflect in action<br>a disposition to choose the 'good' rather than the 'correct'<br>a repertoire of examples, images, understandings and actions<br>an understanding of their identity and role. |
| **They encourage** | dialogue between, and with, people in the situation |
| **out of which may come** | thinking and action. |
| **This affects** | those situations, the individuals concerned,<br>significant others, and the educators themselves. |

The contemporary situation – in which formal syllabuses, accreditation and the imposition of lifelong 'upskilling' have, in many instances, supplanted the negotiated curriculum and the group of voluntary learners – is characterised by considerable conflict, as the accommodation between assumptions of what have been conventionally termed formal and informal learning is negotiated. However, if we look at the range of adult learning activities more closely, it is clear that the settings, processes, purposes and content involved vary enormously, and that any analysis of formality and informality needs to take these aspects into account. Here we consider three different settings of adult learning: 'informal education' in a community context; a voluntary adult learning organisation; and a political group.

### 'Informal education' within the community

Practices associated with informal learning within community settings draw on a variety of intellectual and social traditions. They bring together strands of thinking from fields of practice which have evolved into separate professional and organisational territories, but which remain ideologically related. Theories originating in social work, youth work, community development, psychotherapy, basic education, overseas development, political education, etc may be drawn upon to justify particular forms of practice within community educational work. This work may not even be conceived by its practitioners as educational, but often rests, nevertheless, upon implicit or explicit ideas about learning. It may also rest upon particular ideas about formality in education which cast it as an impositional and undesirable practice to which 'informal education' is seen as a more emancipatory and socially desirable alternative.

However, on closer examination, it is difficult to discern what precisely distinguishes informal education in this sense from many other forms of educational practice. Jeffs and Smith (1990) take the view that it is the *process* and *purpose* (or 'direction') of the activity which define it, rather than any prescribed idea of setting or content. They offer a description of the 'elements of the informal education process' (1990, 19) which are summarised in Figure 11.

Despite this somewhat romantic, but otherwise unexceptional, view of educational process (which could, of course, also be identified within many so-called 'formal' educational settings), several of the examples of informal education described by their contributors raise difficult questions about purpose – in terms of power relations, for example – and content.

Writing in the context of community care and support for unpaid, home-based carers, Gertig's (1990) contribution addresses some of the learning-oriented work required of professionals such as social workers and community health professionals. Like many others writing in the 'community'-oriented literature, she is keen to distinguish the kind of informal education which occurs with clients from that offered by educational institutions, which are seen as inflexible and not client-focused: 'attendance at an evening class is possible only if you have the money to pay, the time to go, adequate transport, public or private, and access to a competent sitter', while 'intervention via the casework relationship … can be adapted to the carer's social system and network' (1990, 105).

It is not only the organisation of formal education which makes it unsuitable for these clients, but the learning assumptions which underpin provision:

*Education implies that the process of learning is deliberate and purposeful and that the people concerned are seeking to acquire knowledge … This highlights a conflict in orientation between the educator and the caseworker. The informal educator assumes that the learner wishes to attain knowledge or some skill or attitude. That is to say they possess some autonomy or choice about the matter and positively elect to learn.*
(Gertig 1990, 104)

However, she points out that in some cases, the 'caseworker' may have to persuade a carer to undertake specific training or acquire particular knowledge. In such cases, the 'learning' is not necessarily voluntary, and may indeed be unpleasant or challenging for the learner. This imposition would present serious problems for a number of other advocates of informal learning, but illustrates one of the problematic differences between (voluntary) formal provision for adults and (possibly compulsory) informal provision. For example, it would be almost impossible to place this type of learning in Livingstone's (2001) classification (see Section 3).

When we look more closely at what is meant here by an 'informal' learning setting, however, it becomes apparent that its principal informality lies in the fact that it is not organised by an educational institution. Gertig describes relatives' support groups which are 'run by' a range of social and health professionals. The informality of such a group is said to be determined by voluntary attendance, a variety of settings with no 'overt educational function' (1990, 107), and the fact that it may be neighbourhood-based. In addition, the provision (in, for example, a sheltered housing unit, or the day room in a hospital assessment unit) of 'comfortable chairs and refreshments helps to generate an informal atmosphere. People are not sitting behind desks, as they would be in a classroom environment … this would be difficult to achieve in formal and institutional settings' (1990, 107). Such groups may also have:

*…a structured programme of topics, speakers and discussions to be addressed within a given time span. The content of the programme can be designed to take account of the particular problems faced by individual carers and will often include inputs from various specialists such as psychogeriatricians, community psychiatric nurses, psychologists and welfare rights officers. The course content need not be fixed and is often tailored to address the particular needs of the carer.*
(Gertig 1990, 108)

In the longer term, the organisation of the group and the responsiveness of the 'curriculum' to the 'learning needs of the participants' can be passed from the group leader to the carers themselves (Gertig 1990, 110).

In this example, the *location or setting*, although not within an educational institution, is part of the formal system of social care or healthcare. The provision of comfortable chairs and refreshments is, of course, hardly unknown even in the most formal educational institutions. The *content* is structured by professionals, albeit taking into account the 'needs' of participants, and is not put into the control of participants until the professionals deem it appropriate (suggesting that some form of informal assessment has to take place). The *purposes* of the provision are unclear, in that the learners themselves may not necessarily be participating voluntarily; the professionals themselves appear to be deciding, openly or otherwise, that this learning is necessary for these learners. The *process* involves professional organisation of regular meetings, speakers and other structured input, and discussion.

In this example, the principal claim to informality seems to rest on the following: that the provision does not take place within a designated educational setting (though the setting is institutional); that the content does not conform to an educationally imposed syllabus (although the content is decided by professionals); and that there is no overt formal assessment of learning (although the implication is that some assessment must nevertheless take place). This conceptualisation of informality seems to emerge from a very specific, clearly demonised notion of formal 'schooling' against which other learning practices can be favourably compared. Despite this, the 'informal' activity bears many of the hallmarks of what other writers would term formal learning.

This perspective on 'informality' presents two quite different models according to Livingstone's (2001) framework. The first, where the caseworker decides that a client needs to learn particular ideas or behaviour, appears highly informal, but is akin to his notion of formal education as practised within indigenous communities, where the voluntarism of the learner is low, knowledge status is rational cognitive, learning is mediated by an expert, and the expert designates the learner as requiring knowledge. The purposes and interests of such work have been questioned by some, particularly in its claim to empower learners (eg Baistow 1994/95; Ecclestone 1999).

The second appears very close to his category of informal education – without a prescribed curriculum, based on community development activities, facilitated by a 'teacher', and with a high degree of learner voluntarism. But even this view of such learning may ignore power relations in a situation where caseworkers still dominate the process, and particular ideological interpretations of high-status knowledge are enforced (Ward and Mullender 1991). This reinforces our point that even practices which demonstrate archetypal 'informal' characteristics may, when examined more critically, contain important attributes of formality in relation to at least some of our four aspects. We now turn to the case of a voluntary educational organisation.

**Workers' Educational Association (WEA)**

Founded at the beginning of the 20th century as the Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men, the WEA originally took (for the time) a relatively radical approach to learning processes, while maintaining a traditional view of the curriculum. It followed a number of principles in its organisation, most fundamental of which is that it was, and remains, a democratic and member-led federation of branches (part of its purpose being to promote more general democratic engagement among the population). Thus, traditionally, members themselves would decide what classes should be offered within their own branch, engage a tutor of their choice and undertake any necessary organisation. The organisation was thus conceived as robustly 'non-formal', in the sense that Livingstone (2001) uses the term.

Within classes, the WEA advocated the discussion method, whereby the contributions of tutor and students were ostensibly valued equally (Jennings 1976; Brown 1980). This was a reaction against traditional didactic methods and was a recognition of both the previous experiential learning of adult students, and the likelihood that participation would itself be a form of learning – again, an attempt to model democracy within educational practice. However, its strong allegiance to established liberal ideas of what constituted educational knowledge, which attracted strong criticism from more overtly political quarters such as the Plebs League (Armstrong 1988), meant that the content of classes was unlikely to be different from that of any other class on, for example, history, social science, literature, etc. The curriculum was thus difficult to distinguish from that of other apparently more 'formal' educational institutions.

In recent years, the practices of the WEA have changed considerably. While the branch structure and self-organised traditional classes continue, it has – like many other voluntary organisations – become both professionalised and much more directly driven by state policy. Having pioneered new approaches to the curriculum – for example, within women's groups (Marshall 1985; Tallantyre 1985) which borrowed from the process, but not the content-tradition of the organisation – the WEA was taken under the wing of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) from 1993. It was subjected to many of the curricular and funding constraints that were applied across the FE sector, although, crucially, it continued to receive funding for provision that did not lead to an approved qualification.

Its current work is extremely wide-ranging: covering, for example, basic education; 'traditional' courses on architecture, history, etc; socially-oriented classes for students with learning difficulties, disabilities or mental health problems; and more vocationally-oriented classes funded by the EU – for example, through the European Social Fund (ESF). These funding changes have brought with them the need to accredit some (but not by any means all) of the WEA's provision – at which point the distinctions and relationships between formal and informal learning become more complex.

For our purposes, it is the non-accredited and thus ostensibly more 'informal' elements of the WEA's provision which are of particular interest. These cover a very wide range of provision, some of which is aimed specifically at vulnerable or disadvantaged adults, but much of which remains within the 'self-organised' tradition. In most cases, however, the negotiability of the curriculum has remained a central principle. In recent years, the WEA has been forced to consider how it can meet funding and inspection requirements by 'measuring' and thus demonstrating the learning which takes place in these classes. This has been undertaken through a learning outcomes strategy which required students and tutors to record and monitor the outcomes of what might otherwise be seen as 'informal' learning (Foster, Howard and Reisenberger 1997; Daines 1998).

A small-scale evaluation of this strategy in one WEA district (Malcolm 1998) exposed some of the contradictions and difficulties arising from this attempt to further formalise what had hitherto been regarded as voluntary 'learning for its own sake'. One of the principal findings was that, without some form of assessment, adherence to any externally imposed measure of learning outcomes was impossible; that the WEA had, in effect, 'allowed itself to be drawn into a contest which it cannot win' (Malcolm 1998, 9), because the outcome claims which it made could not be substantiated. An alternative approach was recommended if the organisation wished to retain its commitment to the principles of voluntarism, the negotiated curriculum and student autonomy and control.

The WEA, as a highly practice-oriented organisation, has generally refrained from theorising its approach, although claims have always been made for its social, democratic and other benefits. However, the increasing degree of scrutiny and regulation to which it is exposed means that it remains under pressure to use formal measures to demonstrate and quantify the learning which occurs. Recent work by the LSDA on the recognition of outcomes in non-accredited learning (Greenwood *et al.* 2001) identifies nine elements of good practice in this respect, several of which inevitably involve formalised assessment processes, although this report also points out that the measurement of learning in relation to 'soft' outcomes is fraught with difficulty. The continuing drive to measure learning suggests that the WEA will increasingly find its basic values challenged.

In terms of our four aspects of in/formality, the *setting* and *content* of WEA provision have always been extremely variable. Provision can take place in any number of educational, other institutional or alternative community settings; *content* varies from the classic liberal curriculum of the art history class to the self-identified mutual support needs of a group of incest survivors (Malcolm 1998). The claim to informality has rested principally upon *purpose*, in that learner control and group self-direction are seen as key determinants of provision; and *process*, in that learner priorities and participative strategies guide classroom activity. While this has never precluded 'formal' pedagogic approaches, it has meant that the assessment of learning has long been seen as contentious in an organisation ostensibly devoted to 'learning for its own sake'. As the LSDA researchers conclude (Greenwood *et al.* 2001), it is not at all clear how learners themselves benefit from the process of recording and validating achievement when they have sought out non-accredited provision.

## Learning in the community: a political example

The radical tradition in adult education has often focused on the learning which occurs in settings of social and political action, and which arises from the efforts of groups and communities to seize control of aspects of their own lives. Springing originally from roots in Marxist, social-democratic, trade union and other forms of emancipatory self-education, the tradition was reinvigorated in the 1970s by the work of Freire (1970, 1972; in particular, the concept of conscientisation), the rise of the New Left and the growth of anti-racist, feminist and development movements. The contemporary field of 'popular education' encompasses an enormous range of broadly emancipatory activities, and while its focus has shifted strongly towards 'the South' (eg Youngman 2000), it retains a significant place in the adult education tradition in many countries of 'the North' (eg Thompson 1997; Mayo 1999).

Most recently, it has undergone a further revival of interest in the face of a renewed policy focus on 'active citizenship', and the rise of 'new social movements' (eg Crowther, Martin and Shaw 1999; Martin 2000; Coare and Johnston 2003).

Foley addresses some of the questions raised by this type of 'informal learning/education'. His particular interest is 'emancipatory learning', to which the 'unlearning of dominant discourses and the learning of resistant discourses' are seen as central (1999, 14). This learning can take place in a number of different settings; for example, he provides case studies of learning in a green campaigning organisation, in a 'neighbourhood house' which is a part of formal social provision, in workplaces characterised by conflict, and in very different political movements in Brazil and Zimbabwe.

*…in order to understand informal and incidental learning in social action and sites we need to develop analyses which take account of specific social contexts which treat all aspects of adult learning as socially constructed and problematic.*
(Foley 1999, 48)

His analysis derives from a world view which sees all of human history as characterised by 'the mind-shaking reality of consistent, unending, unruptured oppression and exploitation' (Eagleton 1989, 167). His concern as a radical adult educator is the way in which:

*…domination originates in, and is constructed in, relationships of production and power, but it is also constructed in ideologies and discourses, that is in the way in which people make meaning about situations and speak about them. So domination comes to be internalised, to be embedded in people's consciousness.*
(Foley 1999, 48)

Crucially, however, this domination is constantly contested. This, as Foley admits, is a considerable oversimplification, but serves to locate him within a radical and critical intellectual tradition which is well established in adult education. This critical tradition – drawing, for example, on the thinking of Gramsci, Williams and Freire – has, according to Foley, failed to tackle the analytical challenge of 'the contestation problematic'. By this he means the way that social and cultural practices such as education and learning can both reproduce existing social relations *and* develop a critical contestation of those relations. His case studies of informal learning in sites of social action are intended to illuminate the ways in which critical consciousness is developed and the conditions in which it is cultivated; in short, how informal, critical learning occurs.

## Informal learning in an environmental campaign

This study concerns a white, largely middle-class environmental action group, established in the 1970s in the Terania Creek Basin in eastern Australia to prevent logging in the area. The environmental movement is an example of the 'new social movements' which are increasingly engaging radical adult educators (see also Malcolm and Rourke 2002; Moore 2003). The Terania Native Forest Action Group (TNFAG) engaged over a number of years in activities ranging from information gathering and public meetings to non-violent direct action involving confrontations between protesters, police and loggers. Learning was clearly not the primary purpose of the group: '…we were very alarmed … so we really sprang into action after that with a lot of fear. We had no idea how to go about a campaign, we just knew we wanted to stop it. It was a real knee-jerk reaction.' (Foley 1999, 28)

In this respect, the group represents one of the ideal scenarios of community education theorists; it is not established for an explicitly educational purpose, and springs directly from the concerns of a community itself, rather than from any professional diagnosis of its educational or social needs. The aspects of *setting* and *purpose* have many attributes of informality. Foley's focus in this account is on the campaigners' informal learning, but it is clear that some of their learning had more formal attributes, drawing on expertise and information from outside when necessary. The group came to its own realisation of its specific learning needs through the activities in which it was engaged: so, for example, it engaged a national museum and the archaeological service to carry out field studies; and took advice from Aboriginal people on the cultural significance of sites in the area.

These deliberate learning activities, while not occurring within a formal learning setting, often drew upon formal repositories of specialist knowledge (in this case, arguably, both 'vertical' and 'horizontal'). They demonstrated an awareness on the part of the learners that for some aspects of their learning, they needed to look beyond what was immediately available to them; arguably their desire for specialist assistance also reflected the largely middle-class and (formally) educated backgrounds of the people involved. The *content* of the learning was thus self-determined and, in its political and interpersonal aspects, essentially 'horizontal'; but it drew on existing and often formalised bodies of 'vertical' knowledge.

Foley describes in some detail the difficulties of *process* arising once the group had established a camp of 200 people on land near the threatened site. This self-organised group of diverse people inevitably experienced tensions and disagreements about the division of labour, knowledge and responsibility, and had to work through political and emotional conflicts about tactics and decision-making processes. As one participant recalled much later: 'I've learnt to live with problems that are insoluble … It's a hard lesson to learn' (Foley 1999, 32).

The move towards confrontation with loggers and police brought with it both greater solidarity and conviviality among the group and further polarisation. While one part of the group was still doggedly attempting to lobby the State Cabinet on the issue, some 'individualists' took it upon themselves to thwart the loggers by hammering spikes into felled logs, effectively making their progress impossible. 'The most questionable acts and those which lost a great deal of public support, actually saved the day', as one protester recalled (Foley 1999, 35). The fact that this was seen as subversive suggests that the group had by this stage tried to develop protocols for decision-making and action – thus emulating (though doubtless not imitating) forms of formal procedure learned outside the group itself.

Foley analyses the broader social impact of the campaign as well as its internal workings. Feelings in the region were polarised between the campaigners and various powerful groups such as the timber industry, farmers, the mass media and local business. There was also a clear and unresolved tension between the conservationists' aims and the immediate economic interests of the far from powerful local workers in the timber industry. The outcome of the campaign was that a public enquiry was finally established into the proposed logging; this large-scale public and formal learning process dissipated the campaigners' active support and campaigning energy, and was seen later as a tactic to defuse the issue. However, although the enquiry did not find in favour of the campaigners, by the time its report was issued, 69% of voters were said to be against further rainforest logging, suggesting that the learning which occurred had not been confined to the active group members. Very soon afterwards, Terania Creek was incorporated into a National Park.

As we have seen, the campaigners' learning involved the development of new skills, knowledge and expertise in relation to rainforest ecology, state structures and mechanisms, the workings of the mass media, and the immense complexities of democratic organisation and direct action. However, what Foley calls a 'deeper sort of learning' was also taking place (1999, 29):

*We certainly learned a lot, mainly the courage to stand up to politicians. We had been imbued with this idea that the experts really know what they're talking about and that judges are honest and that politicians are basically there because they like people and want to do something for the state. But all these ideas came tumbling down really quickly. […] I think we became a lot more threatening then. The more informed we became the more they backed off, hoping we would go away…* (Foley 1999, 29)

Foley relates this learning process to Freire's concept of conscientisation (1970, 1972) and Mezirow's (1981) linked notion of perspective transformation. As Brookfield (1987) argues, the process begins with a 'disorienting dilemma' – in this case, the conflict between the activists' initial assumptions and the realisation that others do not share them.

*The activists moved from assuming that the value of the rainforest was self-evident to learning that it was something to be struggled for. Their initial faith in experts and authority was replaced by an understanding of some of the ways in which expertise and authority are embedded in social interests, power relations and epistemologies … Finally the activists learned that they could acquire expertise, build new forms of organisation, take action and change things.* (Foley 1999, 39)

This kind of learning, in Foley's view, is both unarticulated and embedded in social action. In addition, it appears to assume a third, hybrid category of knowledge (see Section 2). This knowledge is ostensibly 'horizontal' or 'profane', in the sense that it is generated through social practice and social action, and lies outside 'expert' fields. However, it also bears the hallmarks of the 'sacred', characterised by Young (in press, 6) as enabling people to 'make connections' and to '"project beyond the present" to a future'. This supports our view, presented in Section 2, that types of knowledge, however conceived, cannot be straightforwardly linked to formal or informal learning contexts. It also raises serious questions about how 'critical' knowledge of the kind described by Foley might be obscured and/or changed by the kinds of audit practices discussed in Section 6 below.

Foley argues that both adult educators and activists need to be more aware of the complex and contested learning dimension of social action. As an adult educator, his own role in this instance is to revisit the campaign from a research perspective a decade after it occurred; there was, as far as we can see, no direct formal educational (or indeed other professional) involvement in the campaign itself. The educational intervention here is Foley's, encouraging the learners to articulate, with hindsight, what they have learned. This issue of the role of the researcher or educator is pursued further in Foley's following chapter on informal learning in the neighbourhood house. Here, Foley utilises Hart's (1994, 66) 'enabling conditions' for consciousness-raising as a basis for his analysis of a specific site of learning. These are two of the conditions.

■ The members of the learning group must have the motivation and the time to reflect critically on their subjective experience.

■ Members of the learning group must gain a 'theoretical distance to personal experience'.

These conditions are of particular importance and relevance to this study, since they indicate a specific approach to distinguishing between what Foley terms 'informal' learning and everyday life. Freire's view (1972, 52) is that 'Only beings who can reflect upon the fact they are determined are capable of freeing themselves'. Without the 'special powers of theory', which 'does not follow the contours of immediate experience' (Hart 1994, 67), people cannot learn critical consciousness. This would suggest that without some element of intentionality, in undertaking reflection at least, learning of this kind cannot be said to have occurred.

Foley himself asserts that critical learning 'involves people in theorising their experience: they stand back from it and re-order it, using concepts like power, conflict, structure, values and choice' (1999, 64), but this process has to occur informally, rather than in formal courses (for example, through the APEL processes discussed in Section 6). There is a paradox here, given his own role as an adult educator and educational researcher, investigating, describing and recognising informal learning. It is at least arguable that this *process* of theorising and re-ordering, which in this case takes place many years after the social action itself and with 'expert' assistance, itself introduces attributes of formality which modify the supposedly informal nature of the learning. Without Foley's purposeful research intervention, could the environmental campaigners of the previous case study be said to have learned from their experience, or merely lived it? Our final example in this section focuses on the highly topical field of mentoring.

## Mentoring for professional development and for social inclusion

### Introduction

Mentoring is arguably one of the most visible examples of a practice where the formal and informal attributes of learning interpenetrate in a highly permeable way. Over the last 25 years, we have witnessed a spectacular increase in its use as a mechanism for learning across a range of contexts, from the professional development of business managers to interventions with socially excluded youth. It has been described as 'learning of a higher mental order' in its own right (Garvey and Alred 2001, 520), although such claims tend to be asserted without evidence.

Much discussion in the literature on mentoring focuses on the degree of its informality or formality (we have found no use of the term 'non-formal' in this context except in the EU classification – see Section 3), given that its essence is most commonly agreed to be that of a relatively close personal relationship (Roberts 2000a, 2000b). On the one hand, mentoring appears to have been initially 'discovered' as a highly informal learning experience, and then increasingly formalised in the hope of replicating its perceived benefits more widely. On the other hand, formalised mentoring programmes are still generally regarded as introducing informal attributes to education and training practices that were previously more formal. This represents one particular expression of the central paradox we pointed out in the Introduction of this report. Mentoring thus provides a rich case study in which to map and analyse attempts to transfer or 'hybridise' formal and informal learning, including unintended consequences that may arise.

Mentoring has been increasingly used in a wide range of settings, and the literature is vast. Here we focus primarily on the still dominant dyadic form of mentoring, and on just two of those contexts: first, the professional development of business managers; and second, the provision of support for socially excluded young people in transition to adulthood. These provide a useful comparison between groups that are widely removed in the spectrum of social class. The political dimension of mentoring is therefore addressed in the analysis of each of these specific contexts.

It is more difficult to locate mentoring within the theoretical dimension we identified in Section 2. Perhaps due to the unplanned origins and predominantly informal appearance of mentoring, it has remained ill defined, conceptually unclear, and suffered from a confusion of different models. Although it is seen as an important form of learning (or intervention for facilitating learning), the connection between mentoring and theories of learning is rarely addressed explicitly. It is often associated with the crude image of 'sitting next to Nellie', and has occasionally been linked to Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the 'zone of proximal development' or Bandura's (1977) theory of 'social learning'. Such connections would suggest that, in respect of the theoretical dimension, like some other forms of learning to which a high degree of informality is attributed, mentoring might be placed within the tradition of learning as a social practice of legitimate peripheral participation (see Raffo and Hall 1999; Raffo 2000). However, the emphasis that is usually given to the mentor's function as a role model, and the widespread use of mentors in support of competency-based approaches to workplace training and development of employability in socially excluded young people, suggest that a more behaviourist, acquisitional view of learning in fact underpins much mentoring.

### The formalisation of informal mentoring in business management

Interest in mentoring as a discrete practice first arose in the late 1970s. Some seminal studies of the careers of middle- and upper-class men, predominantly business managers, in the US (Levinson *et al.* 1978; Roche 1979) reported the 'discovery' of mentoring as a hitherto unrecognised, informal practice which they claimed was a powerful factor for success. The study by Levinson *et al.* is regarded as seminal in this field, and epitomises what is often termed the 'classic' model of mentoring: typically dyadic, male-to-male, based in the workplace, and located in higher social groupings. Such mentoring brings together an older, more experienced 'senior' professional with a younger, less experienced 'novice' or 'protégé', to provide support for both career and personal development.

Like many subsequent studies (eg Alleman 1986; Gray 1986; Shea 1992; Megginson and Clutterbuck 1995), Levinson *et al.* identified a series of functions in the role of the ideal mentor. As well as teaching, coaching and providing moral support, these also included sponsorship of the protégé through the mentor's benign use of power and status, and initiating the protégé into social networks in the workplace. They highlighted the importance of mentoring in the acculturation of individuals into organisations. Beyond these functions, however, they also argued that mentoring aspires above all to human relationship. Respondents perceived the most effective mentor relationships to be highly informal, described as being akin to platonic or parental love. More formal relationships (such as research supervisor–student) were seen as less satisfactory.

This study was rapidly followed by the publication of a large survey of top business executives (Roche 1979) which supported these findings. Mentoring was predominantly seen as an unplanned, informal activity, and often matured into long-term friendships. It was perceived by respondents to be indispensable for women wishing to progress into senior management positions, yet it was difficult for women to obtain a mentor. Once more, highly-rated aspects of mentor support included sharing knowledge of the organisation's internal politics, and ability to use power and status effectively on the protégé's behalf.

Such findings led to intense interest in the possibility of introducing mentoring in a more formal and planned way, to make its benefits more widely accessible. The spurs for this interest were two-fold, related to broad socio-economic factors in the 1970s. On the one hand, the worldwide recession following the oil crisis of 1973 initiated the economic developments now summed up in the term 'globalisation'. The move to jobs based on higher levels of knowledge and knowledge creation was seen as a key aspect of this shift (Hunt 1986), although the economic imperative of competitiveness reduced companies' resources for training and development (Shea 1992; Megginson and Clutterbuck 1995). This in turn increased the need for new business managers to 'hit the ground running' with sufficient adaptability to respond to the rapidly changing demands of global markets and of the post-Fordist workplace. The introduction of formalised mentoring was seen as a way of maximising on-the-job learning from experienced colleagues, which is described in this literature as 'informal' learning (see Alred and Garvey 2000; Garvey and Alred 2001). It also represented an opportunity to minimise expenditure on more formal, off-the-job training and development activities that required additional staff and time for instruction.

At the same time, a very different set of concerns related to the political dimension was also driving forward the agenda for more formal mentoring provision. Critiques of informal mentoring argued that it often served to reinforce inequalities. By sharing privileged access to powerful social networks and inside knowledge of corporate culture among wealthier white men, unplanned mentoring covertly reproduced their domination and marginalised other social groups. In these respects, 'informal' mentoring embraced and reproduced within the workplace aspects of social structures and conventions, as well as organisational power and status, that are in fact deeply formal (see Billett 2001a). As the civil rights and women's movements in the US won affirmative action legislation, forcing companies to recruit women and ethnic minorities in numbers proportionate to the population as a whole, planned mentoring was often introduced as an element of positive discrimination programmes (Gray 1986).

However, these attempts to formalise mentoring as a means of informalising learning and challenging hierarchical social relations within the workplace reveal the problematic nature of assumptions that informal practices can simply be transferred into more formal institutional arrangements. Hunt (1986) attempted to tackle this debate on one level by categorising the differences between formal and informal mentoring in terms of style and outcomes that we have already reviewed in Section 3 (see Figures 4 and 5). These differences show that formalisation tends to weaken the dyadic relationship established through mentoring. In particular, it introduces external, institutional interests into the process of mentoring, and shifts the locus of control to the institution (see Gay and Stephenson 1998).

This in turn can lessen the degree of intentionality and voluntarism on the part of both mentor and mentee. Yet, ideally at least, formal mentoring should encourage dynamism rather than stasis within organisations, and should redress rather than reproduce social inequalities. Despite the apparent coincidence of interests which impelled the initial development of formalised mentoring programmes, Hunt (1986) posed a further difficult question. He acknowledged the likelihood that, despite the introduction of formal mentoring programmes, informal mentoring would probably continue to function much as it had done traditionally. In this case, would there be conflict between formal and informal mentoring processes? Such a question spotlights the formality in 'informal' mentoring, if we recognise its connection with deeply entrenched structures of class, gender and race within our society and its organisations.

This highlights a flaw in Eraut's (2000) rejection of the 'informal' in relation to learning. His view is that 'informal' denotes the casual or colloquial in dress, discourse and behaviour, and therefore that it suggests practices that have 'little to do with learning'. However, these practices are good examples of the interrelationship of the formal and informal. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'formal' as 'done in accordance with rules of convention or etiquette'. If such conventions are seen in terms of cultural capital, although often invisible because they are so taken for granted, they are nevertheless highly formalised and institutionalised (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

There is evidence (Nespor 1994; Alimo-Metcalfe 1995; Colley, James and Tedder 2002) that dress codes, physical deportment, interpersonal behaviour and conversational styles are crucial elements of occupational socialisation which have to be learned in particular professions; which are often class-, gender- or race-specific; and which are assessed in the allocation of individuals to different levels of occupation and to different roles. They are outcomes that contribute to significant changes in capability or understanding, which would suggest that they do indeed fall within Eraut's definition of learning, contrary to his assertion. However, given the highly competitive nature of corporate culture, which often militates against supportive behaviour between individuals, there is a likelihood that mentoring may reinforce negative aspects of the dominant culture rather than enhance equality of opportunity (Alred and Garvey 2000).

The subsequent development of mentoring has provided evidence to answer Hunt's question, and in doing so has revealed the problems in shifting the balance between informal and formal attributes of mentoring towards greater formality. Formalised mentoring has been shown to have the potential for negative consequences, although these are under-researched and under-reported (Merriam 1983; Long 1997; Scandura 1998). Kram (1988), for example, found that mentoring still remained unavailable to many women. Even where formal programmes had been introduced, the old informal networks, favouring middle-class white men, often continued to operate. Moreover, formal cross-gender mentoring made some women more vulnerable to sexist prejudice and sexual harassment on the part of male managers.

On a broader level, productivity targets and work design often minimised opportunities for interaction, reflection and relationship building, hindering the implementation of mentoring programmes. This continues to be a concern for those convinced of the positive potential of mentoring in the workplace (Alred and Garvey 2000). Thus, despite the benign intentions of formalised mentoring programmes, intended positive consequences can fail to materialise, while unintended negative consequences may arise, and the negative consequences of 'informal' mentoring remain unchallenged. A similar history can be traced in mentoring young people for social inclusion, to which we next turn.

## Informal mentoring for disadvantaged young people

As in the field of business management, mentoring for young people also rose initially to prominence from the late 1970s onwards, again as an unexpected finding of longitudinal psychological research. In this case, it focused on the transitions to adulthood of 'at risk' adolescents in poor communities (Rutter 1979; Werner and Smith 1982; Rutter and Hersor 1985; Werner 1990). These studies revealed that informal mentors, sought out by young people themselves among their own kin and community, appeared to be a key protective factor for successful transitions. Resilient young people solicited information, advocacy, challenge and emotional support from these older mentors in tackling particular crises and in overcoming adverse circumstances.

Philip (1997) terms this 'natural' mentoring, and argues that certain characteristics underpin its effectiveness. It is located within the young person's own community and neighbourhood, and therefore the mentor has localised knowledge that is highly relevant. The mentor may have some status in the local community – Werner and Smith (1982) found that some young people turned to religious pastors as mentors – but is not in a position of direct authority over the young person. Such mentoring is unplanned and spontaneous in nature, but nevertheless largely intentional, with young people negotiating their own agenda and exercising control over the interactions. The young person's participation is unequivocally voluntary, matched by the willingness of the mentor to respond.

Philip (1997) argues that there is a high degree of intimacy and trust in the relationship, and the mentor preserves confidentiality even though this may bring them into conflict with others in authority (eg parents, police). Related to this, the goals of mentoring may relate not only to conventionally accepted achievements such as successful school graduation, but also to young people's goals of establishing independence and identity, and even of experimenting with sexual activity or drug use – goals which dominant value systems construct as risky or deviant. This requires a high degree of acceptance of the young person on the part of the mentor, and a willingness to be non-judgemental. Despite its appearance of extreme informality, this type of mentoring in fact relies on practice that is strongly coded in terms of the unspoken rules by which it operates, and the boundaries it maintains between official and unofficial sources of support for young people. This suggests that, in order to be effective, it has to take into account and respond to highly formalised structures and processes within the community.

Philip (1997) also argues that a similar type of mentoring has traditionally been part of the role of professional youth workers (see also Jeffs and Smith 1987). This does not appear as informal as the 'natural' mentoring described above, nor is it strictly formalised. Youth workers are often drawn from the local community, their knowledge is grounded in that locality, and they tend to adopt styles of dress and speech patterns common to the youth sub-cultures in which they are working. However, they are able to do outreach work with young people who are not resilient enough to seek support themselves. The focus is on helping young people to define their own needs, to find ways of meeting those needs, to develop knowledge of other cultures, and to practise social skills and experiment with new identities in a safe environment (Philip 1997). Youth workers emphasise the importance not only of relating to individuals, but also to their peer group and the wider community. Fostering young people's existing friendships and social ties is seen as creating an important 'anchor' in their lives, and this loosens the purely dyadic nature of the mentoring relationship.

Youth work mentoring aims explicitly to develop young people's social and political awareness and their capacity for active citizenship. Gender has sometimes been an organising factor, with some female youth workers having developed separate provision for girls in order to empower them and counter the domination of mainstream resources and activities by boys. An important basis of this provision has been consciousness-raising work, and the shared experiences of oppression common to the mentor, individual mentees, and peer groups of young women.

Before moving on to look at the increased formalisation of youth mentoring, we have a final caveat to add to these analyses of more informal mentoring. In contrast with unplanned mentoring in business management, where there are at least some critiques of its practices, evidence of its negative effects, and discussions of its relation to deeper social structures operating in the workplace, we have not discovered any such critiques of unplanned youth mentoring. Philip's study (1997) combines a review of the literature with one of the most detailed empirical investigations of such mentoring in the UK. Yet, despite acknowledging that her research revealed evidence of negative outcomes, she chooses not to incorporate this into her study. Consequently, the available research may present an idealised and favourable view of unplanned mentoring practice for young people, reflecting the deep-seated interests of one particular group of professionals (youth workers) in asserting the superiority of the 'informal' model they promote.

Just as in business management, however, findings of research into 'natural' mentoring for socially excluded young people were used as a rationale for introducing planned mentoring programmes on a massive scale in the US, the UK and other (mainly Anglophone) developed countries throughout the 1990s (Miller 2002). However, rather than encouraging the 'youth work' form of mentoring, these practices have suffered from their dependence on resourcing from local governments. Current policies towards youth have been seen as authoritarian and prescriptive (Jeffs and Smith 1996b; Philip 1997), and consequently as favouring more formalised models of mentoring.

Here too, the political dimension is striking. We can see the process of increasing formalisation as driven by two different responses to the socio-economic climate. Freedman (1999) argues on the one hand that the state has used mentoring to minimise the social unrest that might be created by cuts in welfare spending in response to the deep recessions of the 1980s. On the other hand, he suggests that the middle classes have flocked to volunteer as mentors through concern for social justice. The combination of these good intentions with policy imperatives, however, has resulted in engagement mentoring as a missionary 'crusade' waged by the middle classes on poor, working-class youth. To a certain extent, he sees the middle classes salving their own consciences by mentoring inner-city youth even as they themselves retreat from those areas, taking their social and economic capital with them (1999, 128). A more optimistic view is that this might generate social solidarity and lessen the threat of anomie, and that it might also undermine class, gender and racial inequalities in the labour market by enhancing young people's social capital (Raffo and Hall 1999; Raffo 2000; Aldridge, Halpern and Fitzpatrick 2002).

Mentoring has now become a central element of government education and welfare policies in the UK, and Colley (2001a, 2003, in press b) reviews this process of increasing formalisation. She dubs the dominant model that has emerged 'engagement mentoring', since it explicitly targets socially excluded youth with the aim of re-engaging them with paid employment and formal routes into the labour market. Engagement mentoring is currently being promoted by four different UK government departments: the new Connexions youth support service and the introduction of learning mentors through the Excellence in Cities project are two of the most significant initiatives so far.

**Figure 12**
Contrasting styles
of mentoring

| Natural mentoring – styles | Engagement mentoring – styles |
| --- | --- |
| Unplanned | Planned |
| Unfunded, or difficult to obtain funding | Central, long-term funding |
| Voluntary participation | Degree of compulsion |
| Individual goals | Policy and institutional goals |
| High level of negotiation | Low level of negotiation |
| Shared background and experiences | Social distance |
| High social intensity | Low–medium social intensity |
| Self-sought friendship | Relationship mediated by matching process |
| Indefinite timespan | Limited timespan |
| Less directive | More directive |
| Difficult to track | Intensely monitored on specific criteria |
| Located in familiar surroundings | Located in institutional settings |
| Relates to wider social ties and peer group | Focuses on individual |
| Rooted in the local community | Separate from local community |

In contrast with more informal models, engagement mentoring takes place within an institutional framework shaped by policy-makers and professional practitioners, and is often confined to institutional locations. As other reviews of engagement mentoring practice confirm (Skinner and Fleming 1999; Employment Support Unit 2000), there is usually a more or less overt element of compulsion for young people to participate. This includes close monitoring of interactions, and sanctions threatened for non-compliance, such as withdrawal of welfare benefits, eviction from supported housing, or imprisonment rather than a probation order. Agendas and goals are negotiable only within tightly framed expected outcomes, which young people may contest and resist, but often at the cost of invoking the above-mentioned sanctions (Colley 2000). A central aim cited in all major recommendations for, or reports on, engagement mentoring is that of altering young people's attitudes, values and beliefs in order to develop the necessary attributes of employability that employers demand (House of Commons 1998; DfEE 1999, 2000; Ford 1999; Skinner and Fleming 1999; Social Exclusion Unit 1999; Employment Support Unit 2000).

Mentors are overwhelmingly drawn from higher-status groups outside disadvantaged young people's own communities, with business people and university undergraduates as two favoured sources of volunteers. Mentoring relationships are therefore marked by social distance, competing value systems, and more intense power differentials than pertain in unplanned mentoring (Freedman 1999). In parallel, engagement mentoring is often geared towards getting young people to separate from their local peer group (or even from their families) and move out of their communities (Philip 1997; Colley 2001a).

The result, in practice, has been a polarisation of mentoring provision for so-called excluded youth, with 'natural' and more informal youth service-based approaches on the one hand, and more formalised, planned schemes on the other. On many of the criteria listed in Sections 3 and 4, mentoring is often judged to be an inherently informal type of learning. Yet in practice, there are two distinct types of mentoring, which can be labelled unplanned or 'natural', and planned, 'engagement' mentoring.

Both these types contain mixed attributes of formality and informality. Natural mentoring is strongly influenced by the more formalised structures of its social and organisational contexts; for example, in the family or local community. On the other hand, as Colley's (in press a, b) research shows, in the most formalised engagement mentoring schemes, young mentees exercise significant agency in controlling dialogues and events, often evading or resisting the official purposes of the scheme. Professional interests are also relevant here: youth work mentoring is a powerful example of the ways that attributions of formality and informality can serve the purposes of specific groups.

In many respects, the differences between 'natural' and engagement mentoring can be mapped onto similar aspects to those in the field of mentoring for business managers: degree of external control, nature and locus of goals, level of intentionality and voluntarism, depth of the relationship, timeframe and evaluation, and ecology of setting. The difference, however, is that the polarisation of types appears far greater in mentoring for socially excluded youth. This may be related to the fact that mentoring for business managers remains an intra-class mechanism, whereas youth mentoring appears to be an intra-class process in its more informal manifestations, but has become an inter-class mechanism as it has become invested with more formal attributes.

The increased formalisation of youth mentoring was in part based on the benign, but flawed, assumption that if resilient young people have found themselves mentors, then all disadvantaged youth who are given a mentor will become resilient. As in the business management context, the flaw lies not just in ignoring other variables, but in interpreting a correlation between having a mentor and success as a direct causal relationship. Garmezy (1982) and Philip (1997) warn that formal mentoring may entail less benign value judgements about what may constitute 'success', and about what sorts of people make suitable mentors. As in business mentoring, questions can be posed about the continued operation of natural mentoring alongside official models.

In the context of youth mentoring, however, where the distance between the two appears greater, and the value judgements potentially more conflicting, these questions are sharpened. What might the consequences be for young people facing the competing and sometimes conflicting directions of natural and engagement mentoring? Dishion, McCord and Poulin (1999) report a systematic review of engagement mentoring research in the US, which demonstrates that many such projects recorded worse outcomes for young people who had been mentored than for control groups. Williamson and Middlemiss (1999) suggest that interventions which aim to separate disadvantaged young people from their kinship, peer group and community ties and re-engage them with the formal labour market are unrealistic, since the social and financial costs to young people are too great. Philip (1997) is quite emphatic in her judgement that more informal mentoring is superior to the formalised engagement models that have recently been introduced.

Engagement mentoring has been critiqued by a number of authors (Philip 1997; Gulam and Zulfiqar 1998; Jeffs 1999; Piper and Piper 1999, 2000; Colley 2001a, in press a, b) who have argued that it represents a form of social engineering. In summary, they claim that it is based on constructs of young people, and of the poor working-class communities they inhabit, as deviant and deficient. The qualities of 'employability' that it seeks to instil have been characterised as little more than compliance and deference to the will of powerful employers (Ainley 1994; Gleeson 1996). Interventions taking such a pathological view may reinforce rather than counteract inequalities. Here too, less visible power relations and the covert interests of dominant groupings are at issue.

Inequalities may not just pertain to those being mentored. The vast majority of formal mentors for socially excluded youth (voluntary or employed) are women (Skinner and Fleming 1999; Colley 2001b). Although it is often marketed to volunteers as an experience that will enhance their cultural capital, the continued perception of mentoring as an inherently *informal* process means that their cultural capital becomes, in fact, limited: they receive only a minimal amount of training and support in comparison with traditional levels of postgraduate education and with clinical supervision for professionals working with disadvantaged youth. There is also an emphasis on mentors' personal dedication to their young mentees, and an expectation that they will go 'beyond the call of duty' in their caring (this is exemplified in Ford 1999, although repeated many times elsewhere), which may itself be highly exploitative of women's gendered role as carers.

This returns us to the earlier linguistic argument in our genealogy exploring the political dimension in Section 2. The mentor's role is constructed in powerful romanticised discourses of self-sacrificing nurture – and policies are based on the assumption that mentoring encourages learning through the formation of close personal relationships. This is another example of how the current policy interest in informal and non-formal learning may in fact entail a 'perlocutionary' or persuasive effect that is also disciplinary, as it draws the personal and private into arenas of covert but formal regulation (Colley in press b).

**Implications for policy and practice**

This analysis of actual types of youth mentoring therefore confirms the important aspects of Hunt's (1986) formal and informal ideal types of business mentoring (Figure 4): political and economic purposes, association with different types of knowledge, and the reinforcement or disruption of the *status quo* within institutions, communities and society as a whole. This confirms our view that any consideration of informality and formality in learning has to be understood in terms of theoretical and political dimensions. It also confirms our thesis that there always appear to be aspects of formality within informal models of mentoring and vice versa.

However, the rapid spread of engagement mentoring does not just represent the formalisation of a more informal process. It can also be seen as introducing greater informality into more formal learning contexts. School classrooms, for example, no longer contain the sole professional figure of the teacher, but increasingly include learning mentors as well. Not only have new personnel entered the process, but, as we saw earlier, the process itself is often conceived as essentially informal because of its emotional, relationship-based characteristics. This resonates with points we have made earlier in relation to the work of Beckett and Hager (2002) (see Figure 1 in Section 3), and allows us to draw out one aspect of their model far more clearly.

Central to their view of learning is the rejection of Cartesian dualisms, and the claim that learning is not a purely intellectual process, but a deeply embodied one that engages the whole person – intellect, values and emotions. If mentoring is seen above all as a process that engages 'hearts and minds', this may explain why it retains a distinctive appearance of informality even when its practices have become structured through planned programmes. In unplanned mentoring, the relationship is social and voluntary. In engagement mentoring, the relationship is legal and artificial; it aspires to a closer bond. This may lead to unreasonable expectations of the dedication and personal time that the mentor should devote to the mentee, as well as false expectations in the mentee of the personal and private commitment they will receive. Here we can point to some implications for policy and practice which can be drawn from the research we have reviewed.

The evidence from both fields of mentoring suggests important implications for policy and practice in relation to in/formality in learning. Mentoring offers us a case study of what happens in attempts to hybridise a practice which is assumed to be informal, with other practices which are assumed to be formal. There are obvious attractions in seeking to take a practice which appears to be successful in supposedly informal contexts, and trying to extend its benefits more widely by introducing it in planned programmes. Not least of these attractions is the hope of extending more equal access to the learning opportunities it may afford.

The evidence from Colley (in press b) and Ford (1999) suggests that young people who have been able to pursue their own agendas within mentor relationships perceive real benefits that they may not have gained without the intervention of a formalised mentoring programme. One of these benefits can be their awareness of the value of seeking out other mentors for themselves in less formal situations in the future. Phillips-Jones (1999) argues that young people are more able to apply this experience in other situations if planned mentoring programmes include specific efforts to help mentees reflect on what they have learned from the mentoring process, as their relationship draws to a close.

Any transfer of benefits from more informal to more formal mentoring is not straightforward, and the evidence we have reviewed here suggests two things: first, that the benefits of unplanned mentoring cannot necessarily be assumed, and that more critical research into its outcomes is needed; and second, that these benefits (where they do exist) cannot be directly read across to more formal models. The nature of the mentoring process changes as it is applied through planned programmes. It shifts from a dyadic model to one that is fundamentally triadic, through the intervention into the one-to-one relationship of purposes, outcomes and values specified by a third party (often institutional), and representing external interests. This in turn alters the power dynamics of mentoring, the potential for negotiation, the locus of control over purpose and outcomes, and the degree of autonomy for the mentee/learner and for the mentor as well.

Also, the question of values is raised. The artificial rather than voluntary nature of engagement mentoring relationships may create tensions between different and deeply-held personal values, cultural practices and belief systems. The risk in such schemes is the imposition of dominant values over those of subordinate groupings. This applies not only to the risks faced by mentees, but also to the impact upon mentors, where socially constructed gender roles may make women mentors more vulnerable to practical and emotional overload.

Even where the intention of formalising mentoring is explicitly concerned with advancing social justice and widening access to opportunity, this process can have unintended adverse consequences, while intended consequences may be subverted. Affirmative action mentoring and mentoring young people for social inclusion are both instances of these effects. Engagement mentoring may still have to operate in tandem with – and suffer the effects of conflicting with – unplanned mentoring, in the ways that more formalised education sometimes conflicts with the operation of the hidden curriculum. Using Billett's (2002) approach highlights the fact that formal aspects and structures may covertly operate in practices which we assume to be highly informal, even in cases of unplanned mentoring. In the next section, we directly explore the current trends to increasingly formalise the informal, taking APEL as our focus.

## Section 6

## The impact of audit-driven formalisation of learning: the case of APEL

### Introduction

Within the current, fifth moment of non-formal learning (see Section 2), a consistent trend has been discerned across a number of policy areas. As policy-makers in the EU, the UK and elsewhere turn their gaze onto learning outside mainstream educational provision, they intervene to promote, influence and control that learning through particular types of more formalised procedure. This takes the form of, for example, clear specification of intended outcomes, combined with measures intended to ensure their achievement, such as accreditation, specified measurement processes subject to external scrutiny, and funding that is directly linked to the achievement of pre-specified goals. All this is, of course, consistent with, and related to, much wider trends towards an audit society (Power 1997).

That is to say, there is a strong sense in many areas of public policy that the only way to achieve change and to ensure value for money is through tightly targeted activities, focused on clearly measurable outcomes. The example of engagement mentoring, discussed in Section 5, is merely one example of this growing trend, which is also having a massive impact upon educational settings; upon learning in the workplace – for example, through performance management schemes; and upon a wide range of community learning initiatives – for example, those funded by the EU and the UK government as part of their social and economic regeneration agenda.

The adoption of such audit approaches inevitably leads to a focus on the more measurable aspects of learning. We would argue that this focus fundamentally alters the balance between formal and informal attributes of learning in any context or situation where it is applied. The promotion of these approaches in much of the policy literature appears to proceed from a basic assumption that such changes are either self-evidently beneficial; or, sometimes, that they represent the only possible course of action. The question of how audit processes themselves may change the nature of learning remains largely unaddressed.

In the case of youth mentoring, the split between engagement mentoring schemes drawn up entirely within this audit frame, and unplanned mentoring which currently lies almost wholly outside it, can lead to a superficial assumption that what was once informal has now become formal. However, in other situations, including the less clear-cut case of mentoring in business, this use of two supposedly opposite ideal types is misleading. This is because such a separation implies that we have simply to choose between them – taking us back to the simplistic 'formal equals good, informal equals bad' stance (or its opposite), which we have already criticised. The analysis suggested here permits a more subtle examination of the ways in which particular balances of formal and informal attributes are altered through the spread of audit approaches. It then becomes possible to consider how more productive balances can be developed, as could be the case in Fuller and Unwin's (in press) expansive workplace example (see Section 5), though this lies beyond the scope of our research. Here, we address this issue of audit-driven formalisation directly.

Accreditation of Prior and Experiential Learning (APEL) began as an educational response to ideas of informal and self-directed learning, focusing specifically on experiential learning. It arose from a desire on the part of educators to acknowledge the learning that people undertake – intentionally or otherwise – within their daily lives, and without the intervention of educational institutions or practitioners.

Experiential learning has always had particular significance within adult education. The radical and politicised end of adult education has consistently promoted the idea that ordinary daily life potentially provides more insight into the social and economic realities of human conditions and relations than institutionalised education (see Section 2). This has often been accompanied by the idea that the value of 'horizontal' knowledge has to be asserted in the face of the dominant (and oppressive) 'vertical' knowledge. Over the past 20 years, experiential learning has taken on a particular importance in educational contexts in Britain – principally in further and higher education – where processes have been developed to enable formal academic credit to be awarded to students for previous learning which may not have taken place within educational institutions, or been accredited by them. This process is known variously as APEL, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Prior Learning Assessment (PLA).

In this section, we look briefly at theoretical perspectives on experiential learning, before going on to consider how APEL has developed as an educational practice in Britain and elsewhere. Two examples of the implementation of APEL are then described. Finally, we consider the implications of this audit-based 'formalisation' process for 'informal' learning.

## Perspectives on experiential learning

Theoretical work on the *nature and processes* of experiential learning has emerged from a number of disciplinary domains, including adult education, workplace learning, psychology, sociology, anthropology, management theory and systems theory. The term is used in a number of different ways, and clearly encompasses some of what is often labelled as informal learning. Fenwick (2001, vii), for example, describes informal learning as '*a form of experiential learning*'. The idea has been used as a conceptual vehicle for recognising and legitimating learning that occurs outside educational institutions, often but not always with the aim of empowering learners themselves. Fenwick's detailed analysis of the various conceptualisations of experiential learning, written from her own adult education standpoint, offers a valuable overview of the strengths and weaknesses of five different theoretical perspectives on the term, which are summarised very briefly in Figure 13 opposite. Our purpose here is simply to sketch the range and complexity of ideas about experiential learning, and thus place in a clearer context our discussion of the development and implementation of APEL processes in Britain and elsewhere.

## APEL in Britain

The development of APEL in Britain can be traced from at least two starting points. First, the development of Access provision, and specifically of feminist-inspired courses for women from the early 1970s onwards, had enormous influence in drawing attention to the significance of experiential learning. The point was to 'reclaim' women's learning and capacity in the face of an education system which recognised only the learning which it both provided and accredited, and which systematically excluded women from the curriculum and from the institutions. Thus there was great emphasis upon acknowledging the unrecognised skills, knowledge and understanding which women necessarily developed in their 'feminine' work and lives, drawing heavily on the 'psychoanalytic' perspective identified by Fenwick (2001). However, there was also an emphasis upon the 'critical cultural' perspective in that power and dominance were named, and the learning process used to develop strategies of resistance to structures and practices which were seen to oppress women. In terms of our aspects of in/formality, the political and personally emancipatory *purpose* was fairly clearly delineated, although *processes*, *content* and *setting* might vary considerably.

The initial focus was on bringing to the surface and *recognising* learning derived from experience, rather than making any attempt to *accredit* it. Traces of this distinction can be seen in the term Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) which remains the preferred term in some Anglophone countries. It is equally important to note that feminist education practitioners were not only involved in bringing to the surface the learning that women experienced in their everyday lives; they were simultaneously attacking the boundaries and content of 'vertical' or 'sacred' academic disciplines which were seen as manifesting a masculine – and thus partial, exclusive and inadequate – idea of what constituted knowledge. The gendered nature of knowledge was the focus of feminist work inside the academy as well, and this work contributed to the development of both Women's Studies as a disciplinary area, and curricular change in a number of established disciplines. The epistemological front of the feminist project was thus also working towards the formalisation – through academic recognition – of women's horizontal knowledge and learning.

The second principal starting point for the development of APEL lies in the work of the 'assessment movement' in the US from the early 20th century (Keeton 2000). Evans (2000) provides a detailed institutional history of the growth of AP(E)L (ie including prior *and/or* experiential learning) in nine countries, almost all of them Anglophone (a point which relates to our argument in Section 2 that the English language itself often acts as both a conduit and a shaper of educational thought and practices). He and his contributors trace the practice of APEL from its beginnings in the 1940s, through the establishment of the US Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning (CAEL) organisation, and then into Evans' own tireless efforts to import into Britain the 'valid and reliable procedures for assessing the learning which adults had acquired themselves without any formal tuition, and for turning it into academic credit at one level or another' (2000, 50) which he had discovered in the US.

It is significant that Evans (2000) saw the success of APEL as being dependent on both the modularisation of academic programmes and the specification of learning outcomes, both characteristics of the audit approach within education. His early activities in the field focused very much on the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) and the polytechnics and HE colleges which were dependent on its validation services. These institutions were also involved in developing and implementing the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS), whereby academic credit could be specified, regulated and transferred across different contexts.

**Figure 13**
Fenwick's (2001)
classification of
perspectives on
experiential learning

| Key themes in perspectives on experiential learning | Illustrative examples | Pedagogic roles |
|---|---|---|
| **Constructivist**<br>Humanistic; learners as independent constructors of knowledge; understanding derived from action in the world ; learning involves concrete experience, reflective observation of experience, abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation.<br>Key contributors: Piaget 1966; Vygotsky 1978; Schön 1983, 1987; Kolb 1984; Brookfield 1987; Mezirow 1991; Boud, Cohen and Walker. 1993; Boud and Miller 1996 | **Boud and Walker 1991**<br>Learning from experience<br>**Brookfield 1998**<br>Critical reflection | ■ **Facilitator**<br>■ **Instigator**<br>■ **Coach**<br>■ **Assessor of prior experiential learning** |
| **Psychoanalytic**<br>Disruption of notions of progressive development, certainty of knowledge and the centred individual 'learner'. Focus on relations between 'the outside world of culture and objects of knowledge, and the inside world of psychic energies and dilemmas relating to these objects of knowledge'.<br>Key contributors: Lacan 1978; Grumet 1992; Pinar 1994; Britzman 1998; Pitt, Robertson and Todd 1998 | **West 1996, 2000**<br>**Fraser 1995**<br>**Caddick 1999**<br>Auto/biographical approaches and life-history perspectives on learning | Unclear and problematic. Some possibilities:<br>■ **Self-analyst**<br>■ **Creator** of 'conditions and dynamics' for 'working through' learning processes<br>■ **Listener**<br>■ **'Bringer to voice'** of 'unconscious fantasies and fears' |
| **Situative**<br>Primacy of participation, learning in experience rather than from it; knowledge emerges from interaction of community, tools and activity. 'Transfer' of knowledge is problematic because 'there are no definite boundaries to be crossed' (Sfard 1998).<br>Key contributors: Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989; Rogoff 1990; Lave and Wenger 1991 | Workplace learning, eg<br>**Beckett and Hager 2000**<br>Some pedagogic literature, eg<br>**Malcolm and Zukas 2001**<br>Action learning<br>**Revans 1980** | ■ **Helping** learners to participate meaningfully<br>■ **Organiser** of authentic conditions of participation<br>■ **'Indirect guidance'** (Billett 1998)<br>■ **Mediation** |
| **Critical cultural**<br>Centrality of power; focus on structures of dominance; politics; resistance/reconstruction of oppressive practices and discourses. Competing perspectives, eg conscientisation; discourses and semiotics; cultural capital; borders and boundaries; colonisation.<br>Key contributors: Freire 1970; Foucault 1980; Lather 1991; Gore 1993; Giroux and McLaren 1994 | **Foley 1999**<br>Learning in community and political action<br>**Freire 1970**<br>In literacy, community education | ■ **Helping** to awareness of power relations, production of meaning, etc<br>■ **Challenging** assumptions, discourses<br>■ **Engaging** people in dialogue<br>■ **Helping** others 'read' their experiences<br>■ **Questioning** own authority/role in shaping others' understanding |
| **Enactivist**<br>'Systems' represented by person and context are inseparable; cognition and environment are simultaneously enacted through experiential learning. Humans are part of the context of interconnected systems; change occurs through structural coupling between systems; systems are constantly engaged in joint action and interaction, changing systems themselves (autopoiesis). Understandings are embedded in conduct; individual and collective knowledge co-emerge. Rooted in evolutionary biology; rejects anthropocentrism.<br>Key contributors: Maturana and Varela 1987; Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991; Wheatley 1994 | **Davis and Sumara 1997**<br>**Wheatley 1994**<br>On organisational development – collective experiential learning | ■ **Communicator**: helping participants to trace and name the changing understandings which emerge around/within them.<br>■ **Story-teller**: helping to trace and record interactions of actors and objects.<br>■ **Interpreter**: making community sense of patterns emerging among complex systems and clarifying their own and others' involvement in such patterns |

Evans was working within a very specific cultural context of academic bureaucracy – quite different from that prevailing in what are now known as 'old' universities – and saw 'the basic issue in all AP(E)L work [as being] to enable people to *produce statements* about the knowledge and skill which is *locked up inside them* and to produce *evidence to substantiate their claims*' (Evans 2000, 58; our emphasis). Here, APEL is conceived as a process which converts experience into tradeable 'hard' academic currency. By contrast, the 'old' universities at the time tended to admit 'non-traditional' mature students on the basis of thoroughly unsystematic interviews, essays, and 'academic judgments', rather than through the formalised trading of credit.

Evans' work coincided with and – given his work with the Further Education Unit (FEU) – perhaps encouraged the growth of the competence-based and portfolio-building approach to education in the 1980s. Indeed, the secondary title of his book on experiential learning (2000) – *Employability and the global economy* – suggests that he saw the APEL movement as clearly and unproblematically linked to the skills and employability agenda in education and its promotion through assessment procedures (although this was certainly not true of all APEL advocates). The early manifestations of these new approaches to assessment could be seen in pre-vocational education initiatives and in what has now become the Open College Network (OCN), which focused on recording what learners had achieved rather than which examinations they had failed.

The establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in 1986, and the imposition of its particular version of competence-based assessment throughout vocational education, introduced a strongly formalised approach to APEL in the (real or simulated) workplace. The dominance of this model from the late 1980s onwards created a framework within which the formal accreditation of experiential learning, using a specifically employment-related notion of valid learning, became normalised in certain sectors of education and training. This was one of the earliest extensive applications of the principles of audit to learning in the UK.

Evans (2000, 80) sees the acceptance of APEL in many diverse contexts as a 'relatively happy ending' to the first phase of APEL in Britain. He cites the establishment of the experienced-based route into the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE – an organisation set up in 1999 to act as a professional and accrediting body for university lecturers) as evidence that APEL has finally become academically respectable, and holds out hopes that this may herald a new era of student-centred learning in universities. He appears unmoved by criticisms of the technicist approach and regulatory function for which such initiatives have been criticised (Malcolm and Zukas 2000), issues which are explored in more detail below.

## APEL across European contexts

Cleary *et al.* (2002) examine APEL within mainstream educational systems in England, Finland, France, Scotland and Spain. It is important to note that APEL as manifested in the British National Vocational Qualification/Scottish Vocational Qualification (NVQ/SVQ) system was not included in their analysis; although this system uses APEL principles, it is rarely labelled as such. They uncovered a surprising variation in the extent of APEL in these five countries and the practices associated with it. As they point out, without some degree of formality in the process of APEL, it is impossible to monitor the fact that it is taking place. The researchers therefore had to focus exclusively on APEL which was recorded in some way, and which was conceived as an 'active process of reflection, analysis and self-evaluation that allows learning outcomes or achievements to be identified from personal experience' (Cleary *et al.* 2002, 6). They were then able to distinguish between those processes which were used principally for personal development purposes, and those aimed at the gaining of credit for entrance to further study. Some of the key points covered in the report are as follows.

- The extent of APEL practice varies enormously: in Spain it is virtually non-existent, while in France it has a high and formal status supported by legislation and centralised systems for recognition by universities. In England and Scotland there was surprisingly little evidence of academic APEL activity given the amount of discussion of the topic; the researchers conclude that it is either very limited in practice, or is occurring almost exclusively at an informal level.

- There was little evidence to suggest that APEL was a practice of particular benefit to 'socially excluded' learners; the class, gender and educational profile of participants varied greatly across the five countries. For example, 43% of respondents in Scotland already had degrees; in Finland, 62% had vocational diplomas. It was only in England that the majority of participants had no prior qualifications. None of the countries surveyed appeared to be attracting many ethnic minority students to APEL processes. This raises questions about the extent to which varieties of 'horizontal' knowledge are afforded recognition through APEL procedures.

- In all of the countries except Finland, APEL appeared to be more common in higher education than in further education; in England, the earlier interest in APEL within further education seems to have diminished considerably. Most of the provision took place in traditional educational institutions rather than community settings; and in both France and Scotland, the bulk of APEL was associated with postgraduate programmes of professional study.

One of the most important findings of the study for our purposes relates to the detailed working of the APEL process. Portfolios are particularly common in England, France and Scotland. However, the French approach is markedly different in that it emphasises the 'learner's ability to engage in problem-solving and critical thinking' rather than 'establishing equivalence between the outcomes of experiential learning and the required outcomes of the element of academic programme against which the learner is seeking credit' (Cleary *et al.* 2002, 9) – the common process in England and Scotland. Thus it would seem that the French system does not attempt the task of measuring 'horizontal' against 'vertical' knowledge – a process fraught with difficulty, which we discuss in the second of the two practice examples below. The researchers point out that this fundamental problem has been raised by APEL practitioners and researchers (eg Davies and Feutrie 1999; Harris 2000): 'the difficulty of relating learning gained through experience to the recognised outcomes of academic study can often be perceived by the learner (and indeed by the academic institution) as insurmountable' (Cleary *et al.* 2002, 9). However, the French system suggests that an alternative approach is feasible.

## APEL in practice

Fraser focuses on the implementation of a WEA programme based on the surfacing and recognition of experiential learning, and provides a useful account of different approaches to APEL, written from a feminist adult education perspective. One of her respondents (1995, xi) summarises a simple feminist argument in favour of recognising and thus validating women's learning: 'I thought I was just a housewife but this course has made me value just how much my caring and nurturing entails. I feel better about myself.'

At the beginning of the APEL phenomenon in the UK, everyday learning was recognised in a largely informal way, in that it was assumed or inferred through interviews, discussion or writing. This was possible because of the absence of accreditation requirements from much adult education (and other) provision prior to the early 1990s: the process of students recognising their own learning could be an integral element of courses simply in order to benefit the students themselves. 'Accreditation' in the early forms of APEL did not necessarily imply official certification of learning; it could be simply an acknowledgement that it had taken place. Fraser's view is thus markedly different from that of Evans:

*The key to the heart of the* [APEL] *endeavour is the reflective process which will open the door to the learning derived from experience … 'Learning' is understood as a process which operates in any number of formal or informal situations. It is not restricted to scholastic or vocational environments, but includes all learning gained from the myriad quotidian experiences we all encounter as we perform the various roles our social obligations demand of us. The intention of* [the programme] *is to facilitate understanding and thence 'ownership' of the learning process, which will lead, in turn, to enhanced self-esteem and increased self-confidence … and this approach is reflected in the numerous publications and lesson plans and programme notes to facilitate the reclamation process.* (Fraser 1995, x)

Here, APEL is conceived as an individually empowering process for learners, in that they become more confident of their own existing achievements and their capacity for further learning. However, the fact that such provision was often seen as a means for adults to progress further within the education system, together with the increasing requirement for accreditation within both further and higher education, meant that it became more necessary to demonstrate both the extent and the academic level of 'reclaimed' learning. Once the process was formalised in such a way as to enable learners to meet entry requirements for planned programmes of study, 'private concerns have now become a matter for public adjudication' (Fraser 1995, xi). We would argue that this public adjudication itself impacts upon the balance between the formal and informal attributes of the learning. Two of Fraser's case studies will serve here to illustrate some of the questions arising from the implementation of APEL within different contexts.

### Making experience count with women

A non-accredited course of this title was established by the Brighton Women's Education Branch of the WEA South Eastern District in 1987. Feminist approaches to experiential learning were very much rooted in the consciousness-raising movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. This course provided a 'women only' space in which not only women's educational and social disadvantages, but the entire sexist edifice of educational knowledge were to be challenged. The WEA at the time had an explicit policy aimed at 'putting women into the curriculum … identifying and remedying the sexist bias of traditional subjects … [and] dissolving the unreal boundaries which exist between fields of subject expertise and between thinking and feeling …' (WEA 1989).

The course involved students identifying and recognising what they had done in their lives and what they had learnt from it; identifying how that learning, 'competence' and acquired skill could be applied in different situations; and developing a portfolio to demonstrate their achievements and a plan for their future development. Materials developed by the Learning from Experience Trust (in which Evans was involved) were used to facilitate these processes. Fraser (1995) describes in some detail the problems which arose in the running of the course. The principal issues were the pain and fear which the uncovering of experience brought to the surface, the focus on negative experience as the prime source of learning, and the difficulties experienced by the women in making the transition from the relation of their lived experience to the formulation of 'general competences'. She cites an example of this process as presented in one student's CV:

*1987 – present: full-time mother and housewife*
*Responsibilities include: planning and preparing nutritious food; creating comfortable home environment; providing necessary care and nursing in times of illness; planning cost-effective ways within family income to provide housing, clothing, nutrition, and entertainment; ensuring upkeep of home when necessary, decorating, repairing, renovating; managing transport; liaising with doctors and teachers; developing and sustaining social – friend/family – relationships through socialising, correspondence and telephone contact.*
(Fraser 1995, 123)

On the face of it, this can be seen as a very positive way of encouraging learners to value themselves and their experiential learning. Some of Fraser's students commented positively on the way in which the course had reduced their isolation and increased their self-esteem, and several went on after the course to mainstream educational provision. However, for other students, the translation of experience into these outcome categories was an alienating experience. Fraser (1995) emphasises the importance of addressing the specific issues which women face in this process, issues which she feels are often ignored in much APEL material; for example, the common focus on the 'workplace' as a source of experiential learning, which can transform the apparently emancipatory recognition of such learning into a further source of oppression.

In terms of our four aspects of in/formality, the *setting* of this form of learning was outside an educational institution, although the WEA is clearly an educational organisation and uses some familiar and more formal educational practices such as courses and tutors. The voluntary and democratic nature of the organisation, however, gave scope for a *purpose* which might be difficult to pursue in formal education, namely the overtly political promotion of feminist ideas of individual and collective empowerment, and the reclamation of women's knowledge. In this respect, the approach to experiential learning reflected both 'psychoanalytic' and 'critical cultural' approaches to experiential learning, and a valuing of horizontal' knowledge. The primary focus was on the students' personal benefit, in the form of increased confidence and self-esteem. However, the *processes* involved in the learning entailed the exploration of experience with a view to converting' it into something else, namely specific 'general competences' which could be applied in more formal (though in this case, not necessarily academic) settings. The *content* focused on learners' own experience and was thus not concerned with disciplinary or 'vertical' knowledge; however, the mapping of general competences from experience seems to have involved particular (possibly 'constructivist' in Fenwick's (2001) terms) conceptualisations of skill and transferability.

## APEL and admission to higher education

Another of Fraser's (1995) case studies, written with Linden West, looks at a much more formalised version of the APEL process. It describes a project which was undertaken by the University of Kent at Canterbury, funded by the Department of Employment and coordinated by the Learning from Experience Trust; it aimed specifically at the assessment and accreditation of experiential learning for the purpose of access to higher education. It should be noted that this project was not necessarily typical or representative of approaches to APEL in higher education; different institutions have often adopted radically different procedures. This particular project involved the establishment of a 'fast-track' alternative to an Access course 'to help adults to identify those experiences in their life which have developed their academic abilities' (1995, 138) – that is, ostensibly, to translate informal into formal learning.

Fraser points out (1995, 140) that the majority of students recruited were 'typical Access students', in that they had all 'enjoyed a fair degree of success at school and had continued with a conscious pursuit of learning in other forms, formal or informal, for vocational or leisure purposes', and that the course would inevitably attract only those who would look through an Access brochure and already have some idea of what they wanted to study. They were, therefore, not so acutely in need of 'empowerment' and of the encouragement to take up learning which characterised the women in the previous case study.

Parts of the account of the content of the course (Fraser 1995) are of particular interest to this study. At the beginning of the course, students were asked to distinguish between formal and informal learning, and between an 'experience' and a 'learnt experience'; they then moved on to analyse a life event from 'what I did' to 'possible general competences'. These competences, once identified, were then further translated in terms of admission tutors' requirements. As the course progressed, students learned to analyse their 'competences' not simply as 'desirable outcomes', but as 'levels of achievement'. These levels were in turn analysed in relation to the vocabulary of academic levels (eg knowledge, interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis). The term 'vocabulary' here masks an intensely complex process which is perhaps closer to transubstantiation than to translation. This process reflects one of the basic aims of the course, which was to 'alleviate the tension between student-centred learning and academic requirements' (Fraser 1995, 149). It also reflects Evans' (2000, 50) faith in 'valid and reliable practices' for assessing experiential learning and converting it into academic credit.

Interestingly, one of the responses of the increasingly confident students, as they neared the end of the course, was to 'express doubts about the whole enterprise. There was an increasing tension between the need to "play the game" (and win a place) and the need to prove that the "game" itself was highly suspect' (Fraser 1995, 151). The students themselves seem to have been unconvinced by the APEL process as manifested in this project, and their increasing cynicism is echoed in Fraser's (and others') misgivings. She (1995, 158) takes a fairly negative view of the success of the project overall: 'We did not do APEL justice … We can blame time constraints and our own fuddled approach. The alternative is to conclude that our traditional phenomenology of knowledge and education is still relatively safe from the student-centred and process-oriented approach that APEL tries to offer'. Interestingly, the blame here is laid at the door of the traditional academy, rather than on the audit-driven requirement that informal learning be expressed in terms of outcomes and levels.

**APEL: formalising the informal?**

The case of APEL, in parallel with that of mentoring (see Section 5), charts the formalisation of a learning process which starts out displaying many informal attributes. It demonstrates, first of all, the acute tension between the essentially 'private activity of reflecting on experience and the public activity of having the learning from that activity publicly assessed' (Fraser 1995, 157); and second, the way in which this process actually changes the nature of the learning which it is intended to promote and validate. Fraser was clearly ill at ease with these contradictions, working as she did in an adult education context where the empowerment of educationally and otherwise disadvantaged adults and the valuing of their learning and knowledge were seen as priorities. She criticises some of the assumptions upon which the APEL process is based, namely:

■ the concept of a unified subject enjoying equality of opportunity

■ the concept of 'experience' as coherent, consistent and a site for rational intellectual excavation

■ parity between the learning gained in one arena and the skills and competences demanded by another.

This case, although it cannot claim to be representative, highlights some of the ontological, epistemological and practical difficulties which can arise from attempts to 'formalise the informal' by accrediting experiential learning. These difficulties are clearly linked with important questions raised in Section 2, namely the relationships between the in/formality of learning, types of knowledge and the purposes and power relations evident in learning settings. Evans' (2000) work, like the parallel developments in the NCVQ, implicitly adopts an individualised, acquisitional view of learning, with a strong audit dimension – to count as learning, something needs to lead to clearly identified outcomes which can be measured, at least in a broad evidential manner. It is only when such theoretical and ideological questions are seen as unimportant or irrelevant – when the audit-based formalisation process is seen as a straightforwardly practical and technical task – that the concomitant increase in these particular formal attributes of learning can be construed as a self-evident good. It is therefore unsurprising that the practical Evans came across some resistance to his APEL crusade from more critical practitioners:

*During these early years of growing interest, there was one group of people who were sceptical of, sometimes downright hostile to, the very idea of uncertificated learning being accredited. They were the adult educators …* [This] *epitomised the debate between those who put emphasis on experiential learning as a powerful mode of education* [sic] *and those who, whilst agreeing with that, saw the assessment of experiential learning as a way of empowering individuals.*
(Evans 2000, 61)

This brief extract scarcely does justice to the ideological and theoretical chasm which opens between those who see knowledge and power as crucial aspects of educational practices; and those who see assessment, measurement and individual accreditation as essentially benign and unproblematic processes. Put differently, Evans seems to be quite unaware of the complexities and contestations we have described within both the theoretical and political dimensions of informal and non-formal learning. Yet these issues are at the heart of EU policies that are currently driving interest in the identification, assessment and accreditation of what is termed non-formal learning.

## Knowledge/content

In Fraser's (1995) view, while APEL attempts to challenge the idea of objective, quantifiable, subject-based knowledge on which higher education rests (by recognising the existence and validity of other kinds of knowledge and learning), it can equally be seen as reinforcing the *status quo*. The way in which the content of learning is approached suggests that (higher-status) academic knowledge can be found in everyday knowledge, but only through a process of translation which involves expert assistance and institutional recognition. As Bryant (1994, 15) claims: 'Experience is hijacked as currency … the only experiences worth having are those which are so accredited'.

This process can both confirm the power of academic institutions to determine whether learning is valid or not – thus running counter to one of the espoused purposes of the APEL movement – and expose these students to a level of personal scrutiny and judgement which is simply not required of those who pursue more traditional routes. The mere fact that experiential learning has to be processed within a formal institutional setting to meet academic requirements reinforces the idea that some types of learning are superior to others, and that informal learning has to be officially recognised in order to be valid. We can see here further evidence of the 'perlocutionary' function of language, discussed in Section 2. Learners are persuaded to see their experiential learning as valuable, and are thus ostensibly empowered; but the learning is valued only insofar as it can be reinterpreted in terms of its exchange value, as currency in the academic or employment marketplace.

This is paralleled in the APEL processes employed in vocational and workplace assessment frameworks. The elevation of particular elements of employment-related knowledge to a new form of 'sacred' status (see Section 2) still leaves much experiential learning in the 'profane' wilderness, where it has always been. The arguments about the reductive and intrusive nature of the British version of competence-based assessment have been very well rehearsed over the past 15 years (Ashworth and Saxton 1990; Hyland 1993; Hodkinson and Issitt 1995); for our purposes here, it is sufficient to note that both academic and vocational forms of APEL can create their own versions of officially endorsed, tradeable knowledge. To this extent, the process can be seen as *actively reinforcing* the superiority of 'academic' or 'vertical' knowledge and imposing its own meanings on experience. Ultimately, this imposition means that, far from being brought to the surface, recognised and valued, more informal, experiential learning is changed into something else.

## Power and purpose

The criticisms of writers such as Usher and Edwards (1995), among others, suggest that this perlocutionary process of formalising and publicly recognising private and informal learning, far from empowering learners, merely serves to coopt them in their own oppression and entangle them further in a growing web of surveillance and control. Fraser appears to be drawn to a similar conclusion in her criticisms of the – fundamentally well-intentioned – educational practices in which she and her colleagues engaged, since she finishes her book by asking for whose ultimate benefit processes such as APEL are developed and carried out. This echoes the conclusions of the LSDA research (Greenwood *et al.* 2001) on measuring outcomes in non-accredited learning, which was discussed in Section 5. The process is very much driven by the requirements of educational institutions and the categories and judgements of academics, rather than of the learners themselves. As in the case of mentoring, this movement of power and the imposition of meanings which it can entail must be a constant concern in any attempt to apply audit-driven formalisation to the processes of informal learning.

It is paradoxical that Livingstone's (2001) review (see Section 3), located as it is within adult education, does not engage more fully with this question of power and purpose. However, the North American focus of his work may help to explain this paradox. Livingstone criticises the DfES/NALS categorisation of learning (La Valle and Blake 2001) for limiting itself to the 'tip of the learning iceberg' and failing to quantify accurately (and presumably unproblematically) the amount of informal learning taking place. In his view of learning as human capital, there is no 'skills shortage', but rather a failure to recognise the skills and knowledge learned informally; the suggestion seems to be that the whole iceberg should be measured and assessed, rather than simply its tip. This process, as we have seen, has profound implications for learners and, as Gorman (2001) points out, can be seen as simply another means of exercising control.

For our purposes, it is important to note that a process which was originally seen as valuing experiential learning for emancipatory purposes has been very easily adapted for other purposes, and that this once again calls into question any judgement on the superiority or otherwise of one kind of learning over another. The vocational (or NCVQ) APEL process in the UK became formalised in a way which recognised only certain elements of everyday or workplace learning – that is, those which were held to contribute to the achievement of specific and predetermined occupational competences. Bjornavold and Brown (2002) offer the process of the *bilan de compétence* in France as an example of a much looser form of accreditation that is not so technicised or strictly related to quantifiable assessments. The success of the *bilan de compétence* seems to derive from its positive and non-threatening function for employees in assisting their own career management and development. This also relies on a cultural acceptance by employers of a form of certification that is not strictly auditable, and does not represent a particular position within a credential hierarchy.

The introduction of APEL for academic purposes in the UK resembled the NCVQ pattern rather than the French approach. In this case, the translation of experiential learning into formal credit had to be achieved in terms of academic knowledge and skills. In both cases (APEL and NCVQ), the process can be seen as simultaneously driven by two distinct desires or purposes. The first is pedagogic – in that educators have sought ways of recognising, valuing and rewarding learning among those traditionally excluded from academic recognition or other forms of certification, in order to further their empowerment or emancipation. The second purpose is strongly related to policy: changes in FE and HE policy and funding, and the inexorable growth of audit, have required the strict systematisation of the assessment and recording of learning. There is, we would argue, an incommensurability between these two purposes. For APEL to work, more rigid audit approaches have to be softened, as Bjornavold and Brown (2002) suggest is the case in France.

It is our view that the approach advocated in this report makes these issues easier to recognise and understand. For if the more conventional view of two types of learning – informal and formal – prevails, then all APEL does is what Evans (2000) set out to achieve: it recognises the informal and converts it to the formal. However, our approach and the analysis presented above suggest that by introducing additional attributes of audit-driven formality, the nature of the learning itself is transformed. In some contexts, the introduction of some formal attributes can enhance learning, as we saw in the Modern Apprenticeship study by Fuller and Unwin (in press). But in the case of engagement mentoring and of APEL, it is clear that the largely audit-driven changes have not always been entirely beneficial – either when seen from a more radical and critical perspective, or even in terms of the purposes of their advocates.

Here lies the fundamental and rarely addressed problem with audit approaches. Their perlocutionary claim is to provide a neutral, objective and self-evidently useful measure of what already exists. In fact, they change its very nature, sometimes significantly. Consequently, when increased formalisation is proposed, it is necessary to examine what effects such changes will have on the learning taking place. The same point can be made in relation to informalisation; for example, of the kind discussed in the Introduction. In other words, it is necessary to examine carefully the ways in which informal and formal attributes of learning interrelate with each other and with wider contextual issues, and the impact such interrelationships have on the nature and effectiveness of that learning.

**Section 7**

**Conclusions and recommendations**

## Summary of the main analysis

We found this a difficult report to write. The issues addressed are complex, and the literature is vast. Here, we try to draw together the main argument that developed through the analysis, with some limited referencing back to the previous sections where significant parts of that argument were presented and the evidence cited.

In Section 2, we argued that the origins and development of debates around informal, formal and non-formal learning can be traced through two overlapping dimensions. The first of these focuses on theoretical and empirical issues within the research community, concerned primarily with learning outside educational institutions: everyday learning. This dimension focused largely upon workplace learning, drawing on socio-cultural theories of learning, within a broadly participatory perspective. The emphasis within this dimension is primarily upon the ubiquity and effectiveness of everyday or informal learning, as opposed to formal education, against which it is characterised.

The second dimension was political, in the sense that adult educators promoted what was sometimes termed non-formal education and sometimes non-formal learning, hoping to empower underprivileged learners in the advanced capitalist and the underdeveloped world. There was another, very different, political imperative in more recent times, as governments and the EU sought to promote policies focused on improving economic competitiveness and, to a lesser extent, increasing social cohesion and inclusion. As we have seen, since World War II, the pendulum has swung repeatedly between these two ideological strands of the political dimension, although the latter has always proved dominant.

Though writers located mainly within the theoretical dimension are more likely to use the term 'informal' learning, and those in the political dimension to talk of 'non-formal' learning or education, in practice we could discern no difference between informal and non-formal provision or activity. Rather, informal and non-formal appeared interchangeable, each being primarily defined in opposition to the dominant formal education system, and the largely individualist and acquisitional conceptualisations of learning that had developed mainly within such educational contexts. As a result, we have argued that within both dimensions there has been an unhelpful tendency to see informal/non-formal learning and its formal counterpart as being fundamentally distinct. This has resulted in exaggerated claims about the superior effectiveness and potential for empowerment of one or the other.

In Section 3, we showed how 10 different attempts to classify learning into informal, formal and non-formal types could be traced back to those two dimensions in the discourse. Based upon the analysis of these 10 attempts, we draw the conclusion in Section 4 that it is not possible to clearly define separate ideal types of formal and informal learning which bear any relation to actual learning experiences. Superficially, this was because the many criteria for establishing such separate categories were too numerous, too contested, and too varied for this purpose.

More fundamentally, when we examined a range of different contexts in which learning took place against the issues that supposedly distinguished informal/non-formal from formal learning, we discovered that what we termed attributes of in/formality were present in all of them. We chose the term 'attributes' after much deliberation. It signifies both the characteristics of learning in a wide variety of situations, and also the fact that it is people – often representing particular group, professional or political interests – who attribute labels like formal, non-formal and informal to that learning. Our analysis strongly suggests that such attributes of formality and informality co-exist in all learning situations, but the nature of that co-existence or, to put it another way, the interrelationships between informal and formal attributes vary from situation to situation.

However, it is important not to see informal and formal attributes as somehow separate, and the task of policy and practice as being to integrate or hybridise them. This is a dominant view in the literature, and it is mistaken. The challenge is not to, somehow, combine informal and formal learning, for informal and formal attributes are present and interrelated, whether we will it so or not. The challenge is rather to recognise and identify them, and understand the implications of the particular balance or interrelationship in each case. For this reason, the concept of non-formal learning is redundant, in the sense that it implies some sort of middle state, between informal on the one hand, and formal on the other.

Some further conceptual complications need to be teased out. First, because of the theoretical dimension, certain ways of conceptualising learning have come to be associated with either formal or informal learning. This is also a mistake. In principle, any theory of learning can be used in any setting, so that cognitive psychology and/or acquisitional views of learning can, at least in principle, contribute much to our understanding of learning in what some authors term 'informal' settings. However, if issues of in/formality are of prime concern, theories which take a broad view of learning as social practice are likely to offer more purchase than those more centrally focused on individual development/cognition, or the acquisition of knowledge.

Next, debates about the nature of knowledge are often interlocked with debates about formal and informal learning. Thus, there is an apparent synergy between formal learning and propositional or academic knowledge, while informal learning focuses on everyday or practical knowledge. However, we argue that to see things in this way is also a mistake. Even if everyday and academic knowledge are completely different, and many argue that this is not the case, both can be learned in a variety of situations, each of which contains mixed attributes of formality and informality.

Within the political dimension, there are frequent claims about the superior emancipatory potential of informal/non-formal learning. This argument is also dangerously misleading. Our literature trawl made it apparent that all learning situations contain significant power inequalities, and that what are commonly termed informal and formal learning can both be emancipatory or oppressive, often at the same time. In other words, power differentials and issues of learner inequality need to be taken seriously in all contexts. Furthermore, the extent to which learning is emancipatory or oppressive depends at least as much upon the wider organisational, social, cultural, economic and political contexts in which the learning is situated, as upon the actual learning practices, knowledge content and pedagogies involved.

When we examine particular learning situations, the literature on informal, non-formal and formal learning contains many valuable insights and understandings that must not be lost in following through our analysis. Consequently, we need ways of revealing and unpacking these attributes of in/formality. We have tentatively suggested four aspects of in/formality, as a heuristic device for doing this. However, there may be other and better ways forward, which have yet to be developed.

We analyse a number of contrasting learning situations, to further advance our argument. As a result, we make certain claims, as follows.

- All learning situations contain attributes of in/formality.
- Attributes of formality and informality are interrelated in different ways in different learning situations.
- Those attributes and their interrelationships influence the nature and effectiveness of learning in any situation.
- Those interrelationships and effects can only be properly understood if learning is examined in relation to the wider contexts in which it takes place. This is particularly important when considering issues of empowerment and oppression.

We conclude by exploring in some detail the ways in which current audit cultures have significantly increased certain more formalising attributes of learning in a wide range of settings. Using APEL as an exemplar, and drawing upon our earlier discussion of mentoring, we show that by increasing such formalising attributes, the nature of the learning is changed in ways that may run counter to the intentions of those introducing these approaches, and which raise more substantial questions of unequal power relations in learning. This analysis further supports the last two claims listed above.

Before concluding, it is important to prevent two possible misunderstandings. First, we are emphatically not claiming that learning is just the same in all situations. There are very real and significant differences between, say, learning at work and learning in college; or learning in the family and learning through political action. Our claim is that such differences cannot be adequately addressed by classifying learning into two or three types – formal, non-formal and informal. Second, we are not claiming that it is always and inevitably inappropriate to use adjectives such as formal, informal and non-formal to describe learning. Rather, we argue that any such uses should be carefully developed for particular purposes, and authors should make clear in what senses they are using the term(s) and why.

Based upon this analysis, the ways of understanding informality and formality in learning advanced in this report have the following significant advantages over the more conventional arguments about separate types of learning.

- Avoiding misleading and stereotypical claims that either formal or informal/non-formal learning is inherently superior to the other.

- Avoiding unhelpful assumptions that different theories of learning apply in informal and non-formal learning, and that different types of knowledge can be unproblematically linked with either formal or informal learning.

- Making it easier to analyse the nature of learning in many situations, and to recognise changes to learning; for example, as the balance between attributes of formality changes.

- Making more transparent the fact that audit-based approaches to learning change its nature, encouraging analysis of the benefits and costs of such changes.

- Aiding the understanding of inequalities in learning, provided wider contextual issues are carefully considered.

Finally, we turn to some recommendations, first for further research, and then for policy and practice.

**Recommendations for further research**

**Recommendation 1:**
**There should be further research into learning as social practice, addressing attributes of in/formality in relation to learning contexts, in a range of learning situations**

Although there is a large literature on learning, only a small fraction of it examines learning as social practice; when such approaches are used, there is, furthermore, a great deal more coverage of some learning situations than others. While it appears that this type of research into learning focuses more on the workplace than learning in other environments, we still do not know enough about:

■ learning in a number of significant workplace environments

■ the pedagogic practices adopted in different workplaces

■ the impact of social and organisational inequalities on learning in the workplace

■ how individual workers – as learners and as teachers/tutors/mentors – interact with and (re)constitute workplace practices and pedagogies.

There is less research of this kind related to other learning situations, including: a variety of educational environments: community learning; learning in the home; learning related to leisure activities; e-learning. In determining where new research should be focused, we suggest two parallel priorities.

i **Research that can further enhance conceptual and theoretical understanding**

■ Valuable insights are contained in theories of learning that draw on a participatory metaphor (Sfard 1998). But what are the limitations of this approach, and how can other theoretical perspectives help to make sense of learning as social practice? In particular, work is needed to develop understanding of how learning relates to learners' movements from one situation to another, and to determine what alternatives can be advanced for such non-participatory concepts as 'applied knowledge' and 'knowledge transfer'. Also, we need to know how well participatory theories of learning fare when applied inside educational institutions.

■ How can attributes of in/formality of learning be better understood, and the significance of their interrelationships be identified?

ii **Research that can help to fill gaps in empirical knowledge**

In the context of current UK and EU policy, there are many examples of learning situations about which very little is known on the basis of robust empirical research. Equally, there is insufficient empirical work in areas in which national stakeholders [including the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)/Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI)] are now developing an interest. Examples include studies relating to: learning within the voluntary sector; learning related to community renewal; and use made of programmes such as Learndirect in the UK. This lack of empirical investigation is particularly important in view of a previously highlighted concern; namely, the potential implications of increasing the formalisation of learning previously regarded as largely spontaneous, student-centred, and not focused on outcomes specified by government.

**Recommendation 2:**
**There should be further research into pedagogic practices in educational and non-educational settings, in relation to attributes of in/formality**

More research is called for into the nature of pedagogic practices in all types of learning situation. This requires, for example, examining the ways in which participants – often learners – engage with practices that enable or promote the learning of others. We also need to understand better how wider contextual issues, inequalities and social practices may themselves contribute to pedagogy. It is necessary, therefore, to recognise that professional teachers, tutors or trainers are not the only people with a pedagogical role. Relating pedagogic practices to the attributes of in/formality of learning should help to widen the research focus, and reduce the dangers of oversimplified assumptions about learning processes and relationships. It is from improved pedagogic understandings that guidelines for further improvement of learning can be developed.

There are several arenas in which research would be especially profitable.

- The traditions and cultural values of pedagogues, and how these influence their work; how pedagogic work relates to their other activities in the same learning situation, and to the lives of learners and pedagogues outside that situation.

- The pedagogic practices of growing groups of new workers with pedagogic responsibilities, including: learning mentors, learning advisers, non-qualified technician-level tutors in FE colleges; trade union learning representatives; and students acting as peer mentors.

- The pedagogical practices of more well-established professional groups who are not primarily thought of as teachers – such as youth workers, community workers and careers advisers.

- Learning situations involving several pedagogic practitioners in the same multi-agency team or even in the same classroom. How do the relationships between such practitioners influence the attributes of in/formality and the effectiveness of learning? What new pedagogic practices are being developed, and what is their impact on learning?

**Recommendation 3:**
**There should be further research into the effects, be they positive or negative, of changes in the balance between formality and informality in a range of learning situations**

Learning activity is increasingly drawn into the bureaucratic mechanisms of government; for example, in relation to measured outcomes, inspection criteria and such broader policy objectives as social inclusion, economic competitiveness and the need to demonstrate value for money. There is a need for research into the positive and negative effects of these developments in diverse learning situations. There is a parallel need to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of any tendencies towards a greater informalisation of learning. In the terms expressed in this report, we require a better understanding of the ways to balance formal and informal attributes of learning.

**Recommendation 4**
**There should be further research to improve understanding of power relations and inequalities in connection with learning, with reference to all learning situations**

In contemporary policy and practice discourses, emphasis on individual responsibility for learning, together with universal standards of provision, combine to marginalise issues of inequality and unequal power relations in respect of learning. These issues warrant further examination in the context of wider social practices of learning. There remains a need for more work in relation to educational institutions and the workplace, but less is known about the significance of these issues in other learning settings, and in relation to pedagogic practices that do not directly engage professional teachers. The fact that oft-cited claims as to the inherent superiority of 'informal' learning are untenable contributes to the need for new research. Such research is a high priority, if claims by government and other stakeholders to promote learning for all and to overcome social disadvantage are to be realised.

**Recommendation 5:**
**In order to address the needs identified in the previous four recommendations, there is a need for more high-quality case study research**

In both the UK and the US, high priority is given currently to scientific – that is, experimental and quantitative – approaches to research, as exemplified, for example, by the randomised controlled trial. If the issues raised in this report are to be further investigated, we need also to attach a high priority to case studies. Research of this kind is best equipped to explore the complex interrelationships found in learning, and to articulate the subtleties attaching to what we have termed attributes of in/formality of learning. Indeed, these attributes may not be comprehended by the measures employed by some commonly used scientific research methods, because the latter focus upon the measurable and clearly definable.

## Recommendations for policy and practice

The focus of this report is conceptual clarification, as a preliminary to further research activity; we have kept at a distance the questions about 'what works' that are of importance to some research users, be they policy-makers or practitioners. There is a two-step process here: detailed recommendations for improving policy and practice can stem either from existing research, including that which figured in our earlier analysis, or from new research, including that directed at our recommendations above. However, there is scope for three recommendations directly aimed at policy and practice, based upon the analysis of issues that we have conducted.

### Recommendation 6:
### It is advisable to relate policy and practice to the nature of particular learning situations

Our analysis has made clear not only the very diverse and wide-ranging situations in which learning can be identified, but also the deep-seated differences between some of those situations. It follows that great caution should be used in any attempts to apply procedures or approaches universally in all situations. Even where more general factors can be identified, their relative significance varies from situation to situation, as does their relationship with other significant factors. Furthermore, divisions based on broad notions of formal, non-formal and informal learning are likely to be unworkable and even seriously misleading. Progress is therefore most likely to stem from a decision to focus on particular contexts or settings. For example, we advise against any simplistic application of school-based 'good teaching' guidelines to the diverse contexts found in further education, the post-16 sector generally, or to learning outside educational institutions. In short: develop policies and practices that meet the needs of different situations differently – develop horses for courses.

### Recommendation 7:
### Where use is made of the terms 'formal', 'non-formal' or 'informal' learning, it is important to specify the meanings, the purposes and the contexts of that use

There may be good reason to make use of such terms as 'formal', 'informal' or 'non-formal' learning – to sustain ongoing survey data collection, or to respond to EU policy frameworks, for example. But it is essential that an effort is made to define precisely what is meant by each term, the context within which it is used, and the purposes that are served by its use. It would also be good practice to identify the main limitations that are entailed. Our analysis suggests that the use of 'non-formal' learning, conceived as an intermediary between informal and formal learning, has neither an empirical nor conceptual foundation. Particular care should be taken, if the term is to be used in this way.

### Recommendation 8:
### It is important to be fully aware of the limitations and effects of such management tools as measurement of learning outcomes, retention and achievement rates, and universal inspection criteria

Our analysis suggests that use of technical procedures that adopt an individualist and an audit view of learning – implicitly or otherwise – can distort understanding of learning and pedagogic practices; and that their application will also change the practices themselves. There may be good reasons for using these procedures, and they may bring some benefits. However, they frequently cut against the grain of effective learning practices, rather than providing support and reinforcement. In some cases, the effects may turn out to be very far from what managers and policy-makers intended. Consequently, where these procedures are adopted, their more damaging effects should be recognised and, wherever possible, ameliorated. Equally, we suggest it is a priority to investigate alternative methods of providing government support to high-quality learning.

## Appendix 1

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## Helen Colley

After a first degree in Philosophy and Modern Languages at the University of Oxford, Helen Colley had a 15-year 'portfolio career' of elderly care, bus driving, factory work and community activism. She then became a professional careers adviser, working in inner-city schools, with unemployed adults, and with long-term drug users. A full-time PhD studentship completed in 2001 resulted in her ground-breaking study of mentor relationships with 'disaffected' young people. This won the John Tunnadine Prize for Research and the British Educational Research Association Award for Best Dissertation, and is to be published soon by RoutledgeFalmer under the title *Mentoring for social inclusion*. She is now senior research fellow and academic coordinator at the Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Leeds. She is working on a project on transforming learning cultures in further education within Phase II of the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP); and on a study of the career trajectories of full-time Master's students for the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (CSU). Her particular research interests include the influence of class and gender on learning and careers.

## Professor Phil Hodkinson

Phil Hodkinson is professor of lifelong learning and director of the Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Leeds. He has researched and published widely on vocational education and training, further education, and the transitions from education into work. Publications include *Triumphs and tears: young people, markets and the transition from school to work*, written with Andrew Sparkes and Heather Hodkins on and published by David Fulton; *Moving into further education: the voice of the learner* and *College life: the voice of the learner*, both written with Martin Bloomer and published by FEDA. He is currently engaged in research into learning in the workplace, as part of a research network on improving incentives for workplace learning, and as contributor to a research project investigating transforming learning cultures in further education. Both are funded by ESRC, as part of the TLRP.

## Janice Malcolm

Janice Malcolm is a lecturer in the School of Continuing Education at the University of Leeds, and has been at the university since 1991. With a background in language and philosophy, she previously spent eight years as an adult educator in further education, focusing on community education and Access provision. Her most recent research, funded initially by the ESRC, has been on teacher identity in higher and further education, and on understandings of pedagogic theory and practice in a range of learning settings. She has also undertaken research on adult vocational education, teacher education, and learning and pedagogy in contemporary social movements. She is a member of the Centre for Policy Studies in Education and of the Lifelong Learning Institute at Leeds.

## Appendix 3

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Sue Cousin
Lisa Doyle
Keith Forrester
Ken Franklin
Alison Fuller
Eric Galvin
Jeff Gold
Rachel Gorman
Paul Hager
Elaine Hall
Roger Harrison
Amanda Hayes
Geoff Hayward
Heather Hodkinson
Maria Hughes
Mary Issitt
Rennie Johnston
Meg Maguire
Shahrzad Mojab
Pauline Nashashibi
Alison Rowland
Tony Scaife
Jenny Shackleton
Miriam Simpson
Jean Spence
Cathy Stasz
Jane Storr
Mike Tedder
Sue Webb
Andy Westwood
Miriam Zukas