

Ordering Subjects: Governmentality and Lifelong Learning

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Background

This paper explores the relationship between changes in governing in contemporary social orders and the significance of lifelong learning for this. Drawing on Foucault's notions of governmentality and technologies of the self, and concepts derived from actor-network theory, it argues that discourses of lifelong learning act as intellectual technologies through which there is the attempt to fashion certain networks and order certain form of sociality. In the process of representing and mobilising lifelong learning, new orderings for the conduct of conduct are produced, which provide possibilities for subjectivity in alignment with a moral economy of enterprise, in which the self becomes something to work and capitalise upon. The paper also points to the fragility of such actor-networks, as the processes of representation become more diffuse and subject to (dis)orders. Theoretically, the paper is concerned with the socio-rhetorical work in the intellectual technologies with which we engage in and around lifelong learning, and the exercises of power at a distance that are involved in the discursive work of the notion of lifelong learning itself.

What is suggested is that there is a requirement to look at lifelong learning as co-emerging with changing forms of governing and identifying different forms of the exercise of power. Discourses of lifelong learning are ascribed particular meanings and with them come certain practices of learning and subjectivities amenable to learning on a lifelong basis. What is clear is the way in which certain pedagogies are coded as forms of power-knowledge that play a significant part in ordering the social. As lifelong learning is fostered outside as well as inside specific educational institutions, the practices through which specific networks are formed become more complex, often involving hybrid mobilizations of disciplinary and governmental power. The resulting networks through which the exercise of power is dispersed and deployed are fluid and rely on the practices of mediation between different objects/subjects within the network. Thus, even as there are attempts to mobilize lifelong learning in specific ways, these will be subject to diverse and unexpected shifts and changes, as the spaces for reflection precisely provide possibilities for critique and alternative meanings. Following Foucault, as a regime of truth, lifelong learning may need to be decentred in order that we can look again at the meanings it has, and the work it does. Whether it has established itself as a regime of truth also remains a question to be explored.

There have been many tracings and translations of the discourses of lifelong learning with a multiplicity of meanings generated from these analyses (Fejes and Nicoll 2007). Lifelong learning, with its current concern for developing human capital, means for some an abandonment of the traditional significance for education of the struggles for personal development, justice and social equality. However, the complexity of practices that fashion the social order suggests the need for caution in trying to explain the discourses of lifelong learning simply in terms of the codes of 'the knowledge economy', or 'capitalism', or 'globalization' or 'the new work order'. This is not to say that these codes are unimportant. However, their importance rests

more in their semiotic positioning of certain social practices within particular discursive domains than in their description and explanation of what is 'truly' going on. They are not merely commentaries on politics and policy but integral to the discursive struggles to inscribe certain meanings rather than others in the language games of lifelong learning (Nicoll 2006). How powerful they are remains an open question.

Foucault's (1979, 1980, 1981, 1991) accounts of power and the historical changes in its mode of deployment in ordering the social opens up possibilities for exploring the significance of the discourses of lifelong learning in changing conditions. In so doing, it provides the possibilities for analysis without reducing lifelong learning to a mere epiphenomenon of some deeper underlying structure(s) of meaning. I do not pretend that Foucault is the only voice providing useful insights, nor that his work provides a full set of answers to the questions we may pose. However, it does offer useful positionings in the discursive struggles in which we engage.

Disciplining subjects

It is now well known that Foucault's work challenges certain assumptions of the separation of knowledge from power. Power and knowledge, power-knowledge, are always found embedded together in discursive regimes of truth. According to Foucault, a discourse is a structuring of meaning-making whose major characteristic is its disciplinary and hence regulatory power. Foucault's argument is that in every social order the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to certain rules and structures. Any social order requires that people are not free to say or do anything, whenever and wherever they like. It is the risk of this that requires discourse, in its everyday sense, to be corralled, controlled and channeled, and it is 'discourse' in Foucault's sense that does this. A Foucauldian discourse therefore defines what can be included and what is prohibited. It covers objects that can be known and spoken about, rituals that must be carried out, the right to speak of a particular subject, who can speak, from what institutional base and about what. These prohibitions and possibilities interrelate, reinforce and complement each other, forming a complex web, continually subject to modification. Discourse fashions subjects in terms of social positioning, subjectivity and voice. Thus it is powerful, both productively and in prohibiting. Discourse is *constitutive* of knowledge, rather than simply the neutral expression or representation of something outside language. It fashions *representations* and shapes *actions*, making possible different ways of knowing the world and of acting within it. This means that meaning is fashioned *through* discourse. Here meaning performs, with discourse merging into *praxis*, in the process subverting the common-sense distinction between talking and doing. Foucault traces the emergence of discourses that have shaped modern institutions such as the prison, the asylum and the hospital. It is from these institutional sites that discourse is authorized and from and through which individuals are regulated.

Discursive practices render particular aspects of existence meaningful in particular ways, which then become thinkable and calculable and thus amenable to intervention and regulation, with documentation, computation and evaluation as the main instruments or technologies for achieving this. It is through these practices that power is exercised and where it takes particular forms. In relation to the institutions

emerging with the modern nation state, the dominant form of power is discipline, displacing the coercive power of sovereign monarchies.

Given this analysis, for lifelong learning to be mobilized as meaningful, it is necessary that disciplinary practices emerge in correlative power-knowledge formations embedded in discourse(s) that define truth. To put it another way, truth-making practices of lifelong learning need to take hold. Such practices operate through technologies that draw upon and perpetuate a mind/body dualism, inscribing the educated/uneducated, the trained/untrained, the skilled/unskilled, the competent/incompetent, and through these inscriptions allowing the construction of standards and the deployment of normalizing judgement. Here we see the means that realize the performance of what Foucault referred to as the disciplinary practices in training and re-shaping 'docile bodies'.

However, these docile bodies must also be *active subjects*, because discipline does not turn people simply into passive objects. Indeed, discipline as a form through which power is exercised cannot work unless subjects are *capable of action*, even if this capacity is not the same as that identified by those who insist on human free will. It is through mobilization into discursive regimes and material networks that people become active subjects inscribed with certain capacities to act, based upon the particular conjoinings of human and non-human artefacts. Here the meaning of human agency does not entail an escape from power, but consists rather of a specific exercise of power – one is empowered in particular ways through the forms of actor-network of which one is a part. Thus, even social movements entail exercises of power, even as they might oppose the power of governments. Capacities are brought forth and evaluated through the disciplinary technologies of observation, normalization, judgment and examination, the extent, criteria and methods for which are provided by the discourses in play. Here to become inscribed within certain discourses and actor-networks of lifelong learning is to become an active subject of a particular sort, one for whom care of the self – the ways in which we conduct ourselves - through the technology of learning becomes an expression of (self-)discipline.

What this means is that the modern disciplined, normalized social order is underpinned by a set of pedagogical practices which at one and the same time are explicitly the concern of educational discourse, but which are practiced in *all* social organizations and institutions. However, educational discourse usually identifies the practices of education as an institution. This wider understanding of pedagogy across the social order and within other disciplines is denoted through the emergence of the discourse of lifelong learning. In this sense, discourses of lifelong learning can fashion and mobilize a range of embodied subjectivities within and through the wider disciplines. These subjectivities are not a natural 'given', but are themselves effects of networking practices. It is partly the extent to which these come to be mobilized that lifelong learning becomes a site for explicit pedagogic debate and practice, even as it challenges the exclusivity of educational institutions as pedagogical institutionalizations of disciplinary power. Shifts within education, such as shifts towards and within the framing of lifelong learning, therefore provide the possibility for disturbing the pedagogical practices that form and maintain other discursive regimes and, with that, the subjectivities of individuals and, in the case of lifelong learning, their subjectivity precisely as *learners*. 'Lifelong learner' therefore in part

displaces the docile body of disciplinary practices, as both a response to wider changes and as a contributor to them.

Undoubtedly, the significance of Foucault's work poses a paradox for many educators. Many understandings tend to view education as the slow unfolding of knowledge and truth, a humanizing and developmental process, one which results in individual and social progress, enlightenment and emancipation. However, what are we to make of the ever more extensive knowledge generated in and about learning, and those further dimensions of the learner to be framed for pedagogical intervention? Wherever there are social practices, so increasingly learning seems to be identified as taking place (Chaiklin and Lave 1996). At the same time, disciplinary practices seem to be ever more intrusive, the technologies for 'governing the soul' (Rose 1989).

In Foucault's terms, wherever and when learning takes place, those learning are required to bring forth their subjectivities for disciplining so that they can become a particular type of person. In becoming subject to particular disciplinary regimes, people also become active 'subjects'. However, discipline was not the only form of power explored by Foucault. As well as discipline, the discourses of lifelong learning can also be positioned in relation to contemporary forms of governmentality.

Governmentality and populations

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in developing Foucault's later ideas on power associated with the concept of governmentality. Governmentality is 'an ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power' (Foucault 1991: 20). This is as a framing within which to analyze the practices through which governing takes place alongside other forms of power. In addition to disciplinary power invested in nation states, which has as its object the regulation of individuals within a territory, there is also sovereign power invested in the monarch; and *biopower* which involves a governmentality that regulates populations as resources to be used and optimized. The legitimacy of governmentality derives from its capacity to nurture individual life by integrating bodies, capacities, and pleasures into a productive force. The training of bodies requires the development of healthy populations and vice versa. What is identified here is that governing is about increasing productivity or capacities rather than simply training. To achieve this, subjects again need to be known, a knowledge that forms the basis of efficient management and the maximization of productive capacity in all parts and levels of the social order. Without this knowledge the risks that are inevitably involved in the process of maximizing productivity would be too great for this project to be successfully realized. Thus with governmentality, it is essential that subjects become empowered in the sense of their capacities being maximized. Governing is distributed and at a distance from the state.

On this reading, the policy discourses of lifelong learning are not only exercises of power but also signal a change in the ways in which power is being exercised and the social form thus ordered. For Foucault (2003), discipline and regulation identify the ways in which the exercise of power in life has become a matter of self care. Here, since power is enmeshed with regulation, there is a process of self-regulation where subjects accept a regulation which is self-imposed though the interiorization of the regulating gaze. With governmentality subjects are still fashioned within power-

knowledge relations, but this is now brought about by inciting people to talk about their desire and to signify themselves as subjects of desire, a desire which includes a *desire for learning*. Reflecting on oneself signifies the uncovering of a hidden truth about self. Subjectivity is fashioned around this uncovering which reveals and enables the fulfillment of desires.

For Foucault then, governmentality is concerned with the conduct of conduct and this involves regarding 'the forces and capacities of living individuals, as members of a population, as resources to be fostered, to be used, to be optimized' (Dean 1999: 20). Thus, as Dean suggests, 'to analyze government is to analyze those practices that try and shape, sculpt, mobilize and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups' (Dean 1999: 12). Government then is the disciplining into a form of life *freely accepted* that works by shaping subjectivity through the 'educating' of subjects who would otherwise remain 'undisciplined' and therefore unproductive. This mode of shaping becomes increasingly important within cultures where disciplining through force, coercion or intrusive regulation meets with increasing disapproval. In contemporary culture therefore, governmentality involves a non-coercive *pastoral power* that works through infiltrating regulation into the very interior of the experience of subjects (Rose 1989). Subjects 'educate' or fashion themselves, a process where subjective experiences are simultaneously shaped and yet paradoxically remain uniquely one's own.

Governing therefore does not so much *determine* people's subjectivities, but rather elicits, fosters, promotes the attributes and capacities of populations. It is not oppressive in any obvious sense, but instead it works on, through, and with, *active* subjects by promoting working on oneself through, among other things, processes of reflection and reflexivity. Thus, the changing exercises of power are coded by changing discourses of learning, with greater emphasis placed on the fashioning of reflective spaces through which to do the work required in the care of the self. What this suggests is that the regulation of populations combines with the disciplining of individuals to mobilize subjects who may combine differing aspects and combinations of docile bodies and active subjectivities, and where notions of reflection become more the order of the day. Here reflection is not simply a more humane or empowering form of pedagogic practice. It is still a form of regulation, but one that is more subtle and apparently less intrusive, enabling individuals to have more space so that they can act upon and for themselves and express desires.

Through the elaboration of the interstices between these forms of power and their differing practices, we may illuminate the complexities of contemporary mobilizations of lifelong learning in ways which go beyond some of the over-generalized discourses that currently fashion its meaning(s).

Actively seeking subjects

One influential argument that has been put forward is that the shifts in governing aim to fashion active subjects through the norms and values associated with 'responsible' consuming and enterprise. Here, subjectivities are themselves re-fashioned to elicit a particular image of human beings:

The self is to be a subjective being, it is to aspire to autonomy, it is to strive for personal fulfillment in its earthly life, it is to interpret its reality and destiny as a

matter of individual responsibility, it is to find meaning in existence by shaping its life through acts of choice.
(Rose 1998: 151)

It is the ethos of enterprise that helps to re-shape subjectivity through self-fashioning. This enterprise, usually coded in discourses of flexibility, adaptability and innovation, can be found in many policies concerning employability and competitiveness. For Foucault, ethics are not formalized moral codes, abstract senses of right and wrong. They are construed as the practices through which one evaluates and acts upon oneself, what he refers to as *technologies of the self* (Foucault 1988). These are the devices that enable the fashioning of personal identity, or a means by which people fashion themselves as subjects. Technologies, including those of the self, are the means whereby subjects come to accept, value, desire and strive to achieve a congruence between their personal objectives and those objectives external to themselves – an internalization of external objectives.

Insofar as enterprise, flexibility and innovation are positioned as essential to the 'good life', a range of technologies, or pedagogic practices, are deployed through which human beings are positioned as enterprising, innovative and flexible (l)earners. Organizational technologies (involving the exercise of power) and technologies of the self (the fashioning of subjectivity) become aligned with technologies of success (motivation and enterprise). The organizationally desirable (more productivity, flexible working, increased efficiency, maximization of outputs) counts as the personally desirable (greater self-fulfillment through performing excellently and being recognized as such). In this way, subjects are brought forth who are (self-)fashioned and positioned as active learners *and* as self-regulating subjects, where the subjectivity stimulated is one that regards the maximization of capacities and dispositions appropriate to maximizing their own productivity as both necessary and desirable. Subjects with an enterprising relationship to the *self* are framed in certain discourses of learning, a self that exhibits qualities of autonomy, self-management and personal responsibility, and reflectiveness.

This work of acting upon oneself is supported by 'experts of organizational life, engineering human relations through architecture, timetabling, supervisory systems, payment schemes, curricula, and the like' (Rose 1998: 154). The social order is itself scaled as a learning order and different actors are mobilized to be worked upon to enhance their desire for learning to choose and choosing to learn in order that they become enterprising and flexible. At the same time, however, it is important to emphasize that these technologies can only *shape* rather than determine, because once people become active subjects there is also brought forth the capability to fashion different meanings and to code their practices differently.

Du Gay (1996) argues that the ethos of enterprise is crucial to the development of discourses of flexibility among nations, organizations and individuals in support of economic competitiveness. Thus, in workplaces, workers are subject to practices of management, appraisal and development that attempt to position them as enterprising subjects, engaged in an 'enterprise of the self'. In this position,

no matter what hand circumstances may have dealt a person, he or she remains always continuously engaged... in that one enterprise... In this sense the

character of the entrepreneur can no longer be seen as just one among a plurality of ethical personalities *but must rather be seen as assuming an ontological priority*. (du Gay 1996: 181, emphasis in original)

Exposure to the risks and costs of these activities are constructed as enabling workers to take responsibility for their actions, signifying a form of empowerment and success within the organization. Nor is this restricted to careers alone, as the whole of life is inscribed with this ethos of enterprise. Here 'certain enterprising qualities – such as self-reliance, personal responsibility, boldness and a willingness to take risks in the pursuit of goals – are regarded as human virtues and promoted as such' (du Gay 1996: 56). Fashioning people's values, norms, desires and dispositions therefore becomes a key dimension of organizational change through the recoding the meaning of work and its significance in people's lives. Here the directions and processes of change are formed through the attempted production of a shared ethic, in effect a set of shared meanings, that both exposes all to the risks of failure and failing to change but also inscribes shared desires, goals and aspirations.

The ethos of enterprise is both prescriptive and powerful and the practices through which it is fashioned are many and varied. As Rose (1999) indicates, one of the calculations in which an enterprising self engages is that to do with its own learning. There is a felt need to adopt an active learning approach to life and to calculate the learning needed to enhance one's freedom and self-reliance. Learning therefore becomes a more explicit actor, a positioning congruent with attempts at different forms of social order:

The new citizen is required to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling, enhancement of credentials and preparation for a life of ceaseless job seeking: life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self.
(Rose 1999: 161)

This mobilization of active, enterprising and flexible subjects of learning can be thought of as part of the wider mobilizations in the social order, in which the range of interactivities and actors involved will vary but where the desire to learn will be forthcoming. Here, to realize oneself, to find the truth about oneself becomes both personally and economically desirable - 'individuals, themselves... can be mobilized in alliance with political objectives, in order to deliver economic growth, successful enterprise and optimum personal happiness' (Miller and Rose 1993: 102). Here lifelong learning is positioned as a *moral* obligation and the self becomes objectified or commodified. It is targeted as a self that is lacking, one that has a duty to affirm and re-affirm its worth by perpetual learning – in many cases through training and retraining. To stand still, to fail to update oneself, is to move backwards, and therefore fail to fulfill one's obligations or responsibilities.

Ordering subjects

The shift in forms of governing - emphasizing the mobilizing of civil society and the support for active citizenship - has also been a central issue for those writers who draw upon Foucault. Here the learning subject is positioned in particular ways – autonomous, flexible, enterprising – within a moral economy designed to populate and order a learning society of a particular sort. Here order is taken to mean both

organizing and commanding, with a view that those who manage and represent a range of interests bring actants together in a network and are thus able to speak authoritatively. This shift in networks and the representation of changing technologies of the self is signified in pedagogies that focus on the development of autonomy, self-direction, core and transferable skills, learning to learn, etc. A learning subject is one who adopts a learning approach to life as part of their care of their selves – a constant disposition or apprenticeship - rather than gains mastery over a body of knowledge/skill. In the constitution of lifelong learning as an intellectual technology, there is an alignment of interests among normally unaligned actants. In this process, ‘persons, organisations, entities and locales which remain differentiated by space, time and formal boundaries can be brought into a loose and approximate, and always mobile and indeterminate alignment’ (Callon and Latour, in Miller and Rose 1993: 84). Who gets to represent the interests of that network and the knowledge produced in its constitution remain crucial questions to be addressed

Within this type of analysis, policy and research are explored for the mobilizations of certain subjects/disciplines to both represent what is occurring and put forward directions for policy, as ‘before one can seek to manage a domain such as an economy it is first necessary to conceptualize a set of processes and relations as an economy which is amenable to management’ (Miller and Rose 1993: 80). In the process, certain notions of the subject/subjectivity become mobilized as actants that both do work and are worked upon and are brought into relationship with one another to form an actor-network. Here investigations provide a range of intellectual technologies through which there is an attempt to represent and order phenomena. ‘The government of a population, a national economy, an enterprise... or even oneself becomes possible only through discursive mechanisms that represent the domain to be governed as an intelligible field with its limits, characteristics whose component parts are linked together in some more or less systematic manner’ (Miler and Rose 1993: 80). The mobilizing of subjects is part of the way in which power is exercised in society, where power is taken to both enable and constrain and to circulate in the social rather than be held by certain groups or organisations (Foucault 1980). Here the actions of subjects rely less on their own inherent capabilities but on their relational character – ‘all the attributes we normally ascribe to human beings, are generated in networks that pass through and ramify both within and beyond the body... an actor is also, always, a network’ (Law 1992: 384).

Governing therefore has less to do with a rational process of social reform and more to do with fashioning conduct based on certain cultural norms and values, wherein individuals are represented as active subjects and not passive objects through the networks of which they are part. In particular, these norms and values take the forms associated with responsible consuming and enterprise. Flexibility, autonomy, self-direction and learning become ontological conditions for successful societal participation. Thus, there is the attempt to re-order subjectivities in representing and mobilizing a particular image of human beings through which people can work on themselves in conducting their conduct. A network of interests that brings together certain policy makers, business people, trade unions and educators is represented in a certain view of the future, one that is further supported by the commissioning of research to order the populations identified as in need of further work – in the many senses of that term. Here ‘the self is to be a subjective being, it is to aspire to autonomy, it is to strive for personal fulfillment in its earthly life, it is to interpret its

reality and destiny as a matter of individual responsibility, it is to find meaning in existence by shaping its life through acts of choice' (Rose 1998: 151). It is the ethos of enterprise – of calculating one's worth within the economy - that helps to re-shape subjectivity through self-fashioning in the practices of governing in advanced liberalism. This ethos of enterprise therefore is a technology of the self through which to represent and order the conduct of conduct. Active subjects are precisely that. Central to acting upon oneself is the capacity to learn and, as this is an ongoing process, there is the necessity for learning to be lifelong. Such technologies can only shape and not determine because people are subjects and therefore have the power to interpret and act themselves of course; to mobilize and be mobilized within alternative actor-networks.

Attempting to order people's values and norms therefore becomes a key dimension of organizational change, enhanced through certain possibilities for knowledge production. Thus national and international competitiveness have been 'recoded, at least in part, in terms of the psychological, dispositional and aspirational capacities of those that make up the labour force... Personal employment and macro-economic health is to be ensured by encouraging individuals to "capitalise" themselves, to invest in the management, presentation, promotion and enhancement of their own economic capital as a capacity of their selves and as a lifelong project' (Rose 1999: 162). Rose focuses on the enhancement of people's economic capital and indeed the major thrust in lifelong learning policies is grounded in human capital theory. However, it is also possible for lifelong learning to be positioned as central to the development of social and cultural capital. Alternative imaginaries are always possible if actants can be related and mobilised in ways that are sufficiently robust.

What is suggested in this paper is that there is a requirement to look at lifelong learning as co-emerging with changing forms of governing and identifying different forms of the exercise of power based upon changing actor-networks. Discourses of lifelong learning are ascribed particular meanings within particular actor-networks and with them come certain practices of learning and subjectivities amenable to learning on a lifelong basis. Of course, none of this is monolithic, but what is clear is the way in which certain pedagogies are coded as forms of power-knowledge that play a significant part in ordering the social. As lifelong learning is fostered outside as well as inside specific educational institutions, the practices through which specific networks are formed become more complex, often involving hybrid mobilizations of disciplinary and governmental power. The resulting networks through which the exercise of power is dispersed and deployed are fluid and rely on the practices of translation between different objects/subjects within the network. Thus, even as there are attempts to mobilize lifelong learning in specific ways, these will be subject to diverse and unexpected shifts and changes, as the spaces for reflection precisely provide possibilities for critique and alternative meanings. Totalizing the diversity of social practices under a single sign of 'lifelong learning' does not in and of itself do justice to the variety of meanings translated and ordered in specific contexts.

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