Contemporary Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning: An Epistemological Analysis

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Abstract This chapter seeks to shed some light on the prevailing vocationalisation of adult and lifelong education and learning policy and provision. It does so through a framework of competing educational epistemologies, which are seen as being generated, shaped and selectively foregrounded through educational responses to the prevailing cultural context. Shifts in the nature of that context selectively favour different epistemologies, and may be used to explain: the historical hegemony of disciplinary epistemology; the episodic flourishing of constructivist and emancipatory epistemologies and—with the recent development of a neoliberal cultural context—also the shift from 'education to learning' in labelling the field, the contemporary ascendency of instrumental epistemology evident in the vocationalisation of the field, and the anticipated future decline of that epistemology, with the possible rise of a situational epistemology.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of contemporary adult and lifelong education and learning as a field of educational provision and learning engagement is demonstrably constrained by a policy context demanding its delivery of vocational outcomes. That framing has been the subject of wide-ranging critique and analysis: critique from

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a diversity of views of what is educationally valuable, and analysis focusing largely on its being understood as a neoliberal turn in social policy.

This chapter builds on that body of scholarship in arguing that the general nature of the field at any moment in time may be better understood through a framework of competing educational *epistemologies*—different accounts of what is important in the act of knowing, and hence of how such knowledge should be learned and imparted. Those different educational epistemologies have been generated and selectively foregrounded over time through educational responses to the prevailing cultural context. Four such epistemologies may be seen as having featured significantly in the formation of the field: disciplinary epistemology (wherein valued knowledge is that which is *true*), constructivist epistemology (wherein valued knowledge is that which is *authentic*), emancipatory epistemology (wherein valued knowledge is that which is *powerful*) and instrumental epistemology (wherein valued knowledge is that which is exhibited in *effective action*). Each draws on historically deep roots in educational policy, practice, advocacy and theorisation. Each has come to entail particular properties of education and learning. Differences across the epistemologies in those properties are matters of kind as well as degree. They are also matters of *ethical* import—differences in what it is educationally right to do and good to be. Across epistemologies, such matters tend to be mutually exclusive, suggesting a degree of *incommensurability*—or irresolvability—between educational approaches across the epistemologies. The epistemologies thus may be understood as competing in those respects with others in their educational and learning implications and as conforming to some extent to the notion of competing *paradigms*: epistemic traditions maintained by and through their persuasiveness to their broader cultural context.

Shifts in the nature of the prevailing cultural context selectively favour different epistemologies. The prevailing cultural context during the development of modern adult education and, subsequently, lifelong education as a field of educational provision and learning engagement, was that of the modernist project of progressive scientific humanism, which encouraged the episodic expression of disciplinary, constructivist and emancipatory epistemologies. However, the critical rational empiricism that drove the project of modernity progressively reached the point in the course of the twentieth century where it not only undermined the grounds for the traditional commitment to the universal intrinsic values of progressive humanism, but also spawned a cultural pervasion of electronic communications technology. These developments have redefined social realities, leading to the contemporary cultural context of globalising performativity or neoliberalism. Under those conditions, cultural value has become strongly extrinsic, encouraging the ascendency of instrumental epistemology in the field of adult and lifelong education and learning.

Criticism of instrumentalism in adult and lifelong education and learning draws strongly on disciplinary, constructivist and emancipatory epistemologies, all now marginalised by their incompatibility with the contemporary cultural context. As such, that criticism is essentially ineffectual in influencing

educational policy and practice, because of the compatibility of educational instrumentalism with the contemporary cultural context. That context, though, may be seen as continuing to evolve into one that is more demanding of diversity, flexibility and situational responsiveness. It is thus increasingly at odds with instrumental education and epistemology.

However, none of the traditional educational epistemologies emerges as capturing the sort of education that is likely to be compatible with the emerging contemporary cultural context. There are intimations, though, of adult and lifelong education and learning developing the nature of what may seen as a *situational* epistemology, grounded in instrumental education, and hence beholden to it, but also striking out in radically different directions.

This chapter expands that line of argument by, firstly, introducing the epistemological framework. An argument for the importance of the contemporary cultural context in determining the prevailing epistemological form of adult and lifelong education and learning is then developed, followed by a sketching of the rise of instrumentalism in the field and an outline of recent critique of the contemporarily prevailing instrumentalist epistemology from within the field. The chapter then ends with a reflection on a possible future of the field evidencing an emergent situational epistemology.

The Epistemological Framework

The nature of the field of adult and lifelong education and learning at any point in time and place is argued here to be reflected in, and valuably understood as expressing, an educational epistemology. The notion of epistemology here follows traditional usage in identifying that discipline of inquiry which is focused on the philosophical study of knowledge: what knowledge is and how it is generated, learned, taught, assessed and used (Sulkowski 2013). Epistemological inquiry has traditionally identified and focused critical attention on a diversity of different conceptions of what constitutes knowledge—of what it actually amounts to—including coherentist, foundationalist, pragmatic, naturalistic, relativist, positivist, realist and critical realist conceptions (Abel 2011). These different conceptions of knowledge may be seen, then, as constituting distinctive, substantive accounts of the nature of knowledge—as what may be termed different *epistemologies*.

While such epistemologies are certainly important in education, particularly in educational *research* (Brown and Baker 2007), in educational policy and practice, attention has traditionally been focused not so much on the nature of knowledge, as on *what is important in the act of knowing*. Such attention introduces a *normative* element into the recognition of different epistemologies— that of what is humanly *important*. Such normativity recognises that the epistemologies give expression to the cultural practices of education, including adult and lifelong education, in articulating what *should* be done and should be the case in those cultural practices (Hansen 2007). Correspondingly, the epistemologies defined in this way are different from those defined by traditional

philosophy. They align only partly with traditionally recognised epistemologies, with, for example, logical positivism (Hanfling 1981) historically falling into what is recognised here as disciplinary epistemology, although the latter is now substantially critical realist (Archer 1995), and critical realism is also influential in what are here presented as the constructivist and instrumental epistemologies. What is recognised here as emancipatory epistemology, though, is closely aligned with traditional epistemic relativism (Muller 2000). The educational epistemologies draw on earlier educational scholarship that recognised different *philosophies of education* (Elias and Merriam 2005). Our concern here, though, is with epistemological expressions that are interpretatively *emergent from* different educational approaches, or clusters of epistemically similar approaches; and this presents a clarity, coherence and empirical grounding not evident in earlier theorising: hence, the use here of the notion of *educational epistemologies.*

We may recognise four such traditional, historically prominent, conceptions of what is important in the act of knowing: knowledge as truth, knowledge as authentic commitment, knowledge as power and knowledge as effective action. Each of those conceptions is seen as defining an epistemology: knowledge as truth defining *disciplinary* epistemology, knowledge as authentic commitment defining *constructivist* epistemology, knowledge as power defining *emancipatory* epistemology and knowledge as effective action defining *instrumental* epistemology. The recognition of these four epistemologies seeks to capture the substantial majority of published arguments about the value of different conceptions of adult and lifelong education and learning.

Each epistemology captures a distinctive approach to the development of new knowledge, to learning, and to using knowledge, as well as a distinctive view of how that use contributes to human well-being (Williamson 2000). Each thus captures the distinctive normative constraints evident in educational policy and practice that serve as the grounds for that policy or practice being judged as properly educational, or as education of a high standard, from the perspective of that epistemology. In particular, it captures the nature of particular ways of thinking about education, over others, and it captures particular aspects of educational policy and practice, rather than others—including the sort of educational outcomes that are prioritised, the criteria for assessing educational attainment and the qualities that are particularly valued in educators. These educational characteristics are evidenced in different *approaches* to education: each epistemology giving expression to a closely related cluster of approaches evidencing those characteristics as its essential qualities, and each epistemology capturing the arguments *for* each approach.

Although the recognition of these four epistemologies is grounded in educational scholarship, their articulation to date has been fragmentary, and hence their implications for our understanding of the value of adult and lifelong education and learning have not been recognised or systematised as we are attempting to do here. Our purpose, then, in focusing on the four epistemologies in this work, is to sketch their epistemic and normative features within

the field of adult and lifelong education and learning, and to examine how those features may inform our understanding of the recent evolution of the field.

The following brief outline of each epistemology (Table 1) sketches, firstly, selected key epistemic features: its conception of knowledge, how new knowledge is developed, how it is learned and how it is seen as contributing to human well-being. Selected normative characteristics of educational theory, policy and practice through which the epistemology is expressed are then outlined: its educational teleology, the core focus of educational engagement, its criteria for assessing educational attainment, the sort of knowledge sought in its educators, and contemporarily significant educational approaches evidencing it.

Disciplinary Epistemology

At the core of disciplinary epistemology is a view of knowledge as truth about reality (Abel 2011). Such knowledge thus tends to be propositional and theoretical in nature, in its being articulated through explanatory and predictive frameworks (Pollock and Cruz 1999). Its generation focuses on the objective, disciplinary, discovery of theoretical knowledge through discrete academic disciplines (Archer 1995). Likewise, the learning of disciplinary knowledge is through the study of disciplinary bodies of knowledge (Hutchins 1968). Disciplinary knowledge is thus seen as contributing to human well-being through the Enlightenment path to wisdom, on which better knowledge of what is right, good, true, and beautiful, and of how reality actually works, itself leads to human action for the individual and greater good (Collier 2004).

Education evidencing disciplinary epistemology is directed to achieving individual enlightenment across all important domains of knowledge (Mulcahy 2009). Educational engagement focuses on the immersion of learners in the theoretical content of academic disciplines as bodies of knowledge (Hirst and Peters 1970). Criteria for assessing educational attainment are strongly focused on assessing learners' mastery of the content: their capacity to understand, interpret, interrelate and manipulate disciplinary content through language and numerical symbolic systems (Barnett 1994). Educators (as teachers) are valued particularly for their disciplinary or content expertise, and are seen importantly as transmitting disciplinary content to their students through good teaching and their capacity to assess student learning objectively, reliably and validly (O'Hear 2012). The contemporarily or recently significant educational approach evidencing disciplinary epistemology is commonly characterised as being *liberal* in nature (van der Wende 2011).

Constructivist Epistemology

At the core of constructivist epistemology is a view of knowledge as authentic commitment and engagement—authentic in the sense that such commitments are, in some way, true to the nature of humanity and its cultural contexts, across the range of artistic, scientific, individual, social and political endeavour

Table 1 Selective features of the framework of educational epistemologies

Epistemology	Educational epistemological features				
	Contribution to well-being through knowledge as…	Teleology through educational engagement	Learning processes and assessment	Valued educator knowledge	Educational approaches
Disciplinary	Wisdom through knowledge as truth	Enlightenment through immersion in disciplinary knowledge	Engagement with bodies of knowledge assessed as mastery	Disciplinary expertise	Liberal
Constructivist	Character formation through knowledge as authentic commitment	Actualisation through immersion in authentic experiences	Lived experience and reflection assessed on models of human development	Character as persons	Progressive Humanist Student-centred
Emancipatory	Emancipation through knowledge as power	Transformation through immersion in social criticism and action	Conscientisation and radicalisation assessed as conformity to the framework	Commitment to the emancipatory framework	Critical Radical Transformative
Instrumental	Capability development through knowledge as effective action	Action through engagement in proven routines	Cycles of practice and assessment assessed as performance of predetermined actions	Expertise in the field of need and in the implementing framework	Behaviourist Competence-based Outcomes-based

(Dooley 1974). The idea of commitment here entails that which is meaningful in some sense to the subjects, in that it expresses or realises notions or capacities that are valued by them—aesthetically, descriptively, experientially, historically, interactively, scientifically or in other like ways. Such knowledge thus tends to focus on the idea of *being* and to be dispositional in nature. Its generation, correspondingly, may be characterised as the culturally grounded generation of dispositional knowledge (Biesta and Burbules 2003), often negotiated or interactive, and drawing upon a wide range of types of human experience and engagement (Alexander 1995). The learning of constructivist knowledge tends to be grounded, experientially, in structured human engagements or interactions and to involve discursive reflection on those experiences (Fairfield 2009). Constructivist knowledge is thus seen as contributing to human well-being by its direct relationship to matters of human concern, through its development of human character in all of its dimensions (Blackham 1968).

Education evidencing constructivist epistemology is directed to the realisation or the actualisation of individual and collective potential to *be* fully and holistically human (O'Hear 2012). The core focus of educational engagement is on the immersion of learners in the process of their development as persons, in and through authentic interactive educational engagements situated in the cultural contexts of significance to them (Dewey 1966). It is directed to developing individual character—holistically, through self-knowledge and self-development—in its social and spiritual context. Criteria for assessing educational attainment are drawn from pertinent models of human, social and spiritual development, with appropriate cultural contextualisation (Patterson 1973). Educators, commonly regarded as learning facilitators, are valued for their communicative and social skills, and their character as empathic, understanding, encouraging and accepting guides of their students (Valett 1977). Contemporarily significant educational approaches evidencing constructivist epistemology are commonly characterised as being humanistic or progressive and student-centred (Howlett 2013).

Emancipatory Epistemology

At the core of emancipatory epistemology is a view of knowledge as power, in the sense that all knowledge is seen as serving a political agenda involving the structuring of relationships between and among categories of persons (Abdi 2006). All knowledge is thus accepted as being relative to the explanatory framework through which it is generated, although it is acknowledged that some such frameworks better represent the world than do others (Hart 1992). The generation of emancipatory knowledge involves the construction, elaboration and use of an explanatory framework of meaning that is paradigmatically radically oppositional to the prevailing hegemonic framework or ideology, but which is understood to be the natural one (Freire 1970). The emancipatory framework is thus seen as being totalising or universalising, and hence naturally universal (Brookfield and Holst 2011). Learning through it involves the

conscientisation (consciousness-raising with respect to the emancipatory framework) and the radicalisation of the learner (against the false realities of the prevailing hegemony) (Newman 1999). The contribution of emancipatory knowledge to human well-being is thus through the emancipatory explanatory framework being understood as optimising social, economic and environmental relationships for the greater good of humankind: liberating oppressed persons from the false consciousness and exploitation they have been experiencing under the prevailing hegemonic framework (Monchinski and Gerassi 2009).

Education evidencing emancipatory epistemology is directed to individual and societal transformation through the development of learner commitment to living in and through that framework (Brookfield and Holst 2011). Its core focus is on the immersion of learners in the emancipatory explanatory framework: a strategy that focuses attention, simultaneously, on the weaknesses of the opposing hegemonic framework, as the object of critique and social action, and on the strengths of the emancipatory one, as the source of criticism and social action (McMurchy-Pilkington 2008). The criteria for assessing educational attainment informed by emancipatory epistemology are strictly and straightforwardly dictated by its explanatory framework: they are immanent to it (Brookfield 2005). Educators are valued primarily for their knowledge of and commitment to that framework and their ability to persuade learners to its cause (Illich 1973). Contemporarily significant educational approaches evidencing emancipatory epistemology include those commonly characterised as being critical, radical or transformative, including socialist, feminist and Freirean approaches (Collins 1998).

Instrumental Epistemology

At the core of instrumental epistemology is a view of knowledge as effective action—as the capability to act on and in the world according to rationally proven procedures (Bagnall 2004). The ends, though, to which action is directed, are essentially external to the epistemology, being drawn from the prevailing cultural context, rather than the epistemology itself (Bauman 1995). Such knowledge is essentially manipulative in nature, in that it makes it possible to do certain things in particular ways (Bagnall 1999). Its generation focuses on its rationally reductionist elucidation in the context of its effective practice, foregrounding the skills and capabilities—together with their informing understandings, inclinations and propensities—to undertake the otherwise-determined valued tasks effectively and efficiently (Monette 1979). The learning of instrumental knowledge is, correspondingly, undertaken through repeated cycles of practice and assessment in particular realms of practical engagement—vocations, professions or other domains of human instrumentality (Harris et al. 1995). Instrumental knowledge is thus seen as contributing to human well-being through providing more effective and efficient ways of attaining desired ends valued in the prevailing cultural context (Tuxworth 1989).

Education evidencing instrumental epistemology is directed entirely to the end of informing contextually valued action that will be demonstrated performatively by the learners under appropriate conditions (Bagnall 1993). Its core focus is on learning engagements in which learners develop and practice skills predetermined as appropriate to the identified task (Bagnall 1994). Both the nature of the intended performative attainment and the conditions for its demonstration or display are specified prior to educational intervention (Gonczi et al. 1990). Their specification is commonly achieved by subjecting the external performance goals to formal processes of task analysis (van der Klink et al. 2007). Ideally, the nature and extent of the learning required by each individual learner will also be known prior to educational intervention, so that the intervention may be structured to achieve the desired change with maximum efficiency (Hyland and Winch 2007). Criteria for assessing educational attainment are predetermined by the learning task as being performatively demonstrable and measurable—centrally, the application of skills and capabilities—under the pre-specified conditions (Jesson et al. 1987). Educators are particularly valued both for their experience in the cultural context (vocational in most cases) and for their technical expertise in learning assessment, task analysis and structuring educational opportunities to achieve desired performance outcomes (Bagnall 2004). Contemporarily significant educational approaches evidencing instrumental epistemology include behaviourist, outcomes-based and competence-based education (Elias and Merriam 2005).

The Epistemologies in Context

Each epistemology thus represents a distinctive understanding of what is educationally *important*, and that understanding pervades the different dimensions of education and learning in which the epistemology is empirically grounded. The question arises, then, of how these differences come to be expressed. Our response to that question is to argue that the differences are the effects of (1) the cumulative historical interactions between apologists, critics and scholars of different educational approaches, responding to the prevailing cultural context of the moment; and (2) the 'fittedness' of different approaches to those contexts. Those interactions involve, among other things: (1) the progressive refinement and articulation of what is distinctive and important about the different approaches; (2) defending one approach against others, as being more suitable for the context; (3) criticism of other approaches as being less suitable to the context; they (4) the development of education theory that supports and explains any given approach; (5) the development of criteria and standards by which those claims can be supported; (6) the gathering of evidence on those criteria to support the claims; and therefore (7) the selective use of evidence to support particular types of educational theory, policy and practice over others. All those and their associated activities inevitably have the cumulative effect of sharpening the differences between the emerging different positions, of differentiating them more clearly and minutely, and of encouraging educational

policy-makers, planners, practitioners and scholars into learned and informed adherence to one position over the others. In so doing, educational players thus position themselves in relation to the prevailing cultural context. Inevitably, the developing positions become increasingly more centred on different conceptions of what is important in the act of knowing, since that is what is politically central to all education. They thus take on the form of educational epistemologies.

Crucial to the distinctiveness of the epistemologies is their ethical nature. The foregoing articulation of the four epistemologies importantly reveals that the differences between them are not just matters of degree—of differences in the relative weight or attention to be given to different educational activities. The differences are, rather, significantly matters of *kind*—of the nature of actions that *are* or are *not* properly to be regarded as educational. The normativity inherent in the different conceptions of what is important in the act of knowing thus develops *ethical* importance in their respective commitments and actions. Each epistemology thus entails a view of what *should* be done in enhancing the educational attainment of learners; to do anything less—through, for example, compromising what one does by incorporating requirements from *other* epistemologies—is unethical. For example, educational engagement within a disciplinary epistemology should involve the immersion of learners in disciplinary knowledge of all types. On the other hand, educational engagement within a constructivist epistemology requires that it be through the immersion of learners in authentic experiences. From the perspective of either epistemology, the essential educational engagement of the other is *non*-educational or, at best, only *partly* and *insufficiently* educational. It either does not *count* as being educational, or it counts for very *little* educationally. From either epistemological perspective, what the other *requires* education to be is *unethical*, because it denies what education *should* be and, in so doing, it denies what stakeholders have the *right* to expect that education will involve (and deliver).

The extent to which educational engagements within any one epistemology may embrace the constructions of any others is thus limited to the extent to which the constructions of other epistemologies are *congruent* with its own. This is a severe limitation, for it pits each epistemology as, potentially, being oppositional to the others. It thus raises the prospect of *incommensurability* between the epistemologies, in the sense that the differences between the epistemologies and their approaches to education may be irresolvable unless essential features of education informed by the respective epistemologies are denied (Feyerabend 1978). The possibility of incommensurability is also indicated partly by the *irrationality* of compromise across educational engagements that express different epistemologies: because the differences are not just a matter of degree, but also of kind, they speak to different features of education. The possibility of incommensurability is, though, most importantly grounded in the *totalising* nature of each epistemology, in that the educational implications of each epistemology constitute, normatively, the valued nature of *all* education, or of all education in a certain domain. None of the epistemologies has the nature of a partial construct, the educational implications of which may be taken

on board to some variable extent and which therefore might be combined with selected features flowing from other epistemologies. Any educational initiative that is identified as being within the purview of an epistemology—whether it be in the nature of policy, curriculum, pedagogy, learning assessment or whatever —thus creates, in itself, an obligation on the part of educationists to adopt or conform to it. Each epistemology thus speaks to a different form of education, any compromise of which is not only *irrational*, but also a matter of *ethical* concern from its epistemological perspective, and each demands recognition of its *essential* features of education.

In the light of that incommensurability, the arguments from different epistemological perspectives may be seen as creating a policy and practice environment of *forced choice* between the epistemologies. In such a situation, the epistemological commitments immanent to educational policy and action will tend to be shaped by influences *outside* the logic of the epistemologically based educational arguments. They will tend to come, in other words, from the of prevailing cultural context in relation to which they are formed and moulded.

The prevailing cultural context does, though, demonstrably *shift* over time and place (Toulmin 1990). In Western culture, at least, the prevailing cultural context in recent times has been the product of the modernist project of critical rational empiricism, grounded in the Enlightenment, with its persistent undermining of traditional fundamentalist beliefs and its extraordinary generation of culturally transformative technologies (Habermas 1983). The historical playing out of the various developments and strands of that project and its cultural effects has created prevailing cultural contexts that have foregrounded one or other of the four educational epistemologies outlined above. Over the last few hundred years, the shifting of prevailing cultural context may be seen as largely favouring disciplinary epistemology, with pockets of constructivist epistemology (as, e.g., in the USA) and, with the rise of socialist dogma in particular, of emancipatory epistemology.

We argue, though, that the contemporarily prevailing cultural context has tended strongly to favour instrumental epistemology, allowing it to flourish in many political contexts (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). Its ascendency thus marks the shift from adult and lifelong *education* to adult and lifelong *learning* (Field 2001). That shift has been the object of much of the critique of contemporary instrumentalism in the field noted above. The contemporary cultural context has commonly been characterised in recent analysis and critique as *neoliberal* (Rizvi 2007), although that terminology is, perhaps, misleading in its suggestion that liberal ideology is a primary *driver* of the nature of the contemporary cultural context. Lyotard's (1984) notion, adopted by Ball (2000), of its being performative in the sense that all human endeavour is judged in terms of its effectivity, is closer, but is perhaps too narrowly focused on human action. Here we avoid those distractions, in using the generic notion of the *contemporary cultural context* and in following the arguments of those contemporary commentators who have argued that the contemporary cultural context is more a

function of the success and progression of the project of modernity (Bauman 1991).

Central to contemporary cultural context is the erosion of the intrinsic value in knowledge, action and metaphysics: value being significantly reduced to *instrumental* value: to the value of the extent to which it is useful in achieving other ends (Bauman 1998), or what Vattimo (1988) termed 'exchange value'. Value thus comes to lie substantially *outside* of or *extrinsic* to human being and action (Bauman 1995). It is conspicuously in the prospect of becoming or acquiring something else (Schecter 2010). Such instrumentalisation has become the culturally dominant determinant internationally through the logical progression of what Habermas (1983: 9) termed 'the project of modernity … to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art'. That project, which progressively dominated at least Western (and westernised) cultural contexts from the eighteenth century (Dreyfus and Kelly 2011), has seen the infusion of cultural realities with critical rationalist empiricism: undermining traditional metaphysical commitments and replacing them with commitments grounded in reason and empiricism (Toulmin 1990). It reached the point over the course of the twentieth century where it undermined the grounds for believing in the truth of its own foundational commitments to the universal intrinsic values of progressive humanism as the zenith of the project of modernity—what Lyotard (1984) termed the loss of faith in the grand narratives of modernity—with the progressive, but rapid, rise of a culture of instrumentalism (Bagnall 1999). Such culture is substantially lacking in non-arbitrary intrinsic value. It is culture in which human activity is strongly focused on instrumentally achieving outcomes drawn from a multiplicity of different domains of human engagement and systems of belief, and in which the common determinant of value is that of achieving competitive advantage (Bagnall 2004). It has become the culturally dominant determinant internationally under the influence of contemporary electronic communications technology (Castells 1998a): technology which is *globalising* in the sense of its involving the international integration and convergence of culture and cultural artefacts, including political, social and economic systems Giddens (1990).

That contemporary cultural context pervades liberal cultural contexts just as it does the realities of other political persuasions. Any likeness to classical political liberalism in the contemporary cultural context is quite accidental, and is focused on the latter's individualisation of accountability and choice, the essential moral values of classical liberalism being understandably absent.

Such a cultural context focuses on, or places a high value on, *action*: on doing, on performing and on achieving (Ball 2000). In so doing, it focuses on *outcomes*—on what is done or achieved in and through that action and on its *effectiveness* in doing so (Bauman 1992). It is both grounded in and exhibits the *externalisation* of value from human engagements (Bauman 1995). Value is *extrinsic* to, rather than intrinsic in, those engagements. In its focus on achieving desired performance outcomes of extrinsic value, it places a high value on the *efficiency* with which resources are used in doing so, to the exclusion of

other outcomes being attained (Rizvi and Lingard 2010). It therein promotes attention to the *comparative competitive advantage* of different types of engagements, processes, programmes, policies or organisational arrangements in achieving the desired outcomes (Marginson 1997). In assessing comparative competitive advantage, all value tends to be reduced to a common commodity or currency—that of *economic* cost and benefit—cultural 'economism' (Ritzer 1996). The focus, then, is on *technical, mechanistic* and *programmatic* relationships between the desired economic outcomes and the costs of contributing human actions, engagements, policies and interventions (Bauman 1998).

CRITIQUE OF INSTRUMENTALISM IN ADULT AND LIFELONG EDUCATION AND LEARNING

We argue that cultural context has strongly favoured instrumental epistemology in adult and lifelong education and learning in recent decades. Instrumental epistemology aligns well with the contemporary cultural context on each of the features outlined above. Its pervasion of policy and practice in the field over the last half century has been observed through much critique, grounded in a diversity of educational jurisdictions. Bagnall (2004) and Hodge and Harris (2013), for example, have painted pictures of the transformation of the adult and community education sector in Australia into an extension of the vocational education and training sector.

Critique of instrumentalism from within the other three traditional epistemologies has been the focus of a large number of scholarly papers, but has also been embedded in explanatory articulations of and arguments for the educational epistemologies in which the critique is grounded. From a disciplinary perspective, such critique peaked, at least in Britain, during the emergence of the vocationalisation of adult education after World War II. Wiltshire (1956), in articulating what he argued to be the 'Great Tradition' of disciplinary adult education, targeted different aspects of the new vocationalism, including its vocational attitude, its focus on technical subjects and its contribution to education as being limited to the development of 'technicians, functionaries or examinees' (Wiltshire 1956: 88). Lawson (1975) argued, from a disciplinary perspective, for the importance of what is effectively *liberal* education. He saw true adult education as necessarily being liberating, through its concern with bestowing freedom to choose and judge by imparting knowledge of *principles*, rather than the narrowly specific knowledge of predetermined actions, which he saw as being, merely, *training*. Training, he argued, was the concern of what was being presented as instrumental adult education, but which, in truth, was neither education in its provision and engagement nor educational in its outcomes. Paterson (1979) developed a thoroughgoing articulation of liberal adult education, and its contribution to the human condition. His work made a detailed case for liberal education as the only proper conception of education. In so doing, he dismissed as non-educational, forms of instrumentalist training that he saw as threatening the opportunity for individuals to become liberated

through adult education. Also from a disciplinary perspective, Barrow drew on his reading of Plato to argue that lifelong education should properly be striving for *personal fulfilment* through the development of understanding (Barrow and Keeney 2012). His critique of instrumentalism in education led him to argue for reviving the concept of *lifelong education*, as focusing on what is valuable, in place of the now widespread alternative *lifelong learning*, which, in its all-encompassing inclusiveness, misses what is central and essential to education.

From a constructivist perspective, Houle (1963) argued that instrumentalism in adult education should be seen as a misunderstanding of what adult learners are seeking from their engagement. Adult education, as a substantially voluntary engagement, relies on individual learner self-perceptions or constructions of how they see and justify their involvement in it. He saw those constructions as being alternatively goal-directed, activity-oriented and learning-oriented. While instrumentalism may be seen as responding to goal-directed learners, it represents only a part of that population and it fails entirely to address the other two. Constructivist epistemology infused Knowles's (1990) argument for adult education and his andragogical theory of adult learning, which he developed from constructivist articulations of the human condition and learning. His criticism of educational instrumentalism was in terms of its humanistic limitations: its failure to contribute to adult learners' development as self-directed learners; its failure to properly acknowledge their prior learning; its failure to acknowledge their learning interests and goals; and its misconstruction of education as the transmission of predetermined skills. Wain's (2004) reflections on the field since his earlier (Wain 1987) argument for a constructivist epistemology ('philosophy' in his terminology) of lifelong education encompassed a thoroughgoing review of critique, theorisation and research into what he termed the 'death of the movement' of lifelong education. Implicit throughout that review were the instrumentalist threads that interweave the different perspectives that he presented of that death in the face of the contemporary cultural context. Also from a constructivist perspective, Halliday's (2012) critique of instrumentalism in lifelong learning argued that it misconstrues the contemporary cultural context as overwhelmingly homogenising in its globalisation. Drawing on a range of counter-argument, he focused on the strong tendencies for heterogeneity, flexibility and responsiveness in lifelong learning. Educational instrumentalism, he argued, demonstrably fails to respond constructively to those tendencies, raising the hope of a future shift towards more contextualised, constructivist approaches to lifelong learning policy and practice.

From an emancipatory epistemological perspective, Freire's (1970) critique of the prevailing educational provision as being based on a 'banking concept' of education targeted instrumental and disciplinary education alike. Education as banking involves imparting knowledge and rewarding its efficient up-take by learners. Freire argued that it results in social oppression: reconciling learners to existing power structures by blocking their development of alternatives. A more detailed critical conceptualisation of instrumentalism was offered by Mezirow (1991), who appropriated Habermas's distinction between instrumental and

communicative knowledge-constitutive interests. He argued that education for instrumental learning—which he saw as the contemporarily dominant approach—directs attention away from the conditions of action and on to predictions about action and the refinement of knowledge and skills relating to it. Such learning, Mezirow argued, fails to foster learning that could lead to the personal or social transformation arising from communicative learning, which has the potential to provoke critical reflection on constraints to action and consciousness. Field's (2006) analysis of contemporary policy and practice in lifelong learning recognised the ways in which the discourse of lifelong learning had co-opted, instrumentalised and subsumed the traditionally autonomous field of adult education, contextualising it within an economic framework. In so doing, he argued, it had a number of socially negative consequences. It contributed to enhancing social inequality, through the discourse of the knowledge economy stimulating a positive response in learners already educationally advantaged. In raising educational expectations, it had relegated some adults to a position where they were unable to participate in, or even to identify, learning opportunities. And it involved the reconciliation of the poor to the capitalist order, legitimating inequality, rather than fostering social change. Brookfield's (2005) argument for a critical theory approach to adult education was firmly articulated from an emancipatory epistemological standpoint. It focused on the task of challenging the contemporarily hegemonic capitalist ideology, with its implicit instrumentalisation of life, including adult education and the ends towards which it is directed.

A New Epistemology?

Supported by the contemporary cultural context, adult and lifelong education and learning evidencing instrumental epistemology appears to be immune to all such criticism. The strength of the press from the contemporary cultural context may be expected, then, to dominate at the political and hence the policy-making levels. In such a context, there is little likelihood that educational arguments from disciplinary, constructivist or emancipatory epistemological perspectives would have any significant political or policy-making purchase, but every likelihood that educational arguments from an instrumental perspective would do so.

However, we suggest that there are good grounds for thinking that the hegemony of instrumental epistemology may be drawing to a close. Those grounds relate to the contextual dependency of the hegemony, to the changing nature of the contemporary cultural context, and to the unsuitability of the other traditional epistemologies to the contemporary cultural context.

We have already argued for the contextual dependency of the epistemologies, not only in their formation and continuing refinement, but also in their relative compatibility with the prevailing cultural context, and hence in their relative contemporary significance at any given moment. We have also argued that the contemporary cultural context has favoured, most recently, adult and lifelong

education and learning that evidences instrumental epistemology. However, it should also be recognised that, while maintaining its focus on globalised performativity, that context continues to shift in ways that may be seen as being contrary to the hegemony of instrumental epistemology. Theorists of contemporary globalisation have argued in different ways that globalisation is importantly characterised by a dynamic tension between forces for globalising homogenisation (cultural convergence) and those for localising heterogenisation (cultural pluralisation) (Powell and Steel 2011). In recent decades, the forces for homogenisation have been seen to prevail over those of heterogenisation (Halliday 2012), which has favoured the highly systematic epistemology of instrumentalism. There may, though, be seen as occurring now a shift to more localised forms of globalisation, foregrounding diversity, flexibility and situational responsiveness, with which educational approaches evidencing instrumental epistemology would not be congruent (Castells 1996). Contemporary information technology may also be seen as moving in the same direction: away from massified approaches to communication, towards more tailored, localised approaches, often within globalised frameworks (Castells 1998b). More broadly, knowledge, value and action are also becoming more contextualised (Bagnall 1999), in a direction that is increasingly at odds with instrumental epistemology. It is arguable that the privatisation of risk, performance and responsibility to progressively lower levels of social organisation (and ultimately to individuals)—which is an important feature of contemporary globalisation—is also becoming more pronounced and hence contra-indicative of instrumental epistemology (Edwards 2012). In essence, the globalised *pluralisation* of social meaning is undermining the ascendancy of globalised homogenisation (Edwards 1997).

With such shifts in the contemporary cultural context, the sort of criticism of instrumentalism identified in the previous section from the other epistemologies may, in paradigmatic fashion, reach a point where there would emerge a political shift to an alternative epistemology. The notion of paradigm here is that of an epistemic tradition maintained by and through its persuasiveness to its broader cultural context (Feyerabend 1993): ranging in epistemic embrace from that of a particular conception to an epistemology. However, none of the other epistemologies—disciplinary, constructivist or emancipatory—would seem to be strongly compatible with the emerging form of the contemporary cultural context, especially with its continued focus on performativity. None of them, accordingly, would present a sufficiently politically attractive and persuasive option that may be expected to become dominant.

We suggest, rather, that there are intimations of an emergent new educational epistemology, which we term *situational*. Lacking strong historical grounding, its emergence takes the form of a more Kuhnian paradigmatic shift, wherein the new epistemological paradigm emerges *out of* the old (instrumental epistemology in this case): taking on some features of the old, modifying others and introducing other different features (Kuhn 1970). The emergence of such a situational epistemology has been largely overlooked in contemporary

educational theorising, because it has been largely marginalised under the banner of sociological *postmodernity* (Briton 1996; Bagnall 1999). From an adult and lifelong education and learning perspective, there have been a number of significant contributions to the articulation of such a contribution, including those of Usher (2012), in his recognition of difference and his call for post hoc mapping, rather than a priori normative constraining; Edwards and Usher (2007), in their pedagogy of dislocation; Briton (1996), in his vision of a postmodern future of engagement; Wain (2004), in his Foucaultian politics of hope and suspicion in lifelong learning; and Bagnall (1999), in his notion of future adult educators as 'situationally sensitive wayfarers'. All these works make clear that what is being described is an *emerging* paradigm, the future nature and impact of which is unknown. However, there is a tendency in some of this work to avoid the reality that all such descriptions of social realities are irreducibly normative in effect, if not in intent (Bagnall 1990). In describing what each of the authors considers to be an interpretation of possible futures, they unavoidably contribute to the creation of another grand narrative. In that vein, we are here suggesting that a situational epistemology, grounded in such theorising and emerging from instrumentalism, should be seen as a strong contender to depose instrumental epistemology.

At this stage, we rather tentatively and somewhat speculatively, suggest that it may take the following form, articulated here using the same structure as that which we used in outlining the four traditional epistemologies earlier in the chapter (Table 2).

At the core of situational epistemology might be a view of knowledge as achieving in context, of knowledge in use, evidenced in the capacity to respond to contextual particulars. Its generation might focus on understanding and responding to the complexities of situations, the human engagements in and with them, and the likely effects of those engagements—through what may be termed *situational analysis*. Correspondingly, the learning of situational knowledge might be through contextualised engagement informed by disciplinary knowledge, and a strongly developed critical situational sensitivity and responsiveness. Situational knowledge might be seen, then, as contributing to

Table 2 Selective features of situational educational epistemology

Contribution to well-being through knowledge as…	Teleology through educational engagement	Learning processes and assessment	Valued educator knowledge	Educational approaches
Situational capability through knowledge as achieving in context	Adaptability through immersion in lived experience	Contextualised, informed and critical engagement assessed as self-efficacy in diversity	Situational expertise	Experiential Work-based Problem-centred

human well-being through the situational capability that it would afford individuals and collectivities in responding to their cultural realities.

Education informed by situational knowledge might be directed to achieving individual and collective adaptability and flexibility, educational engagement focusing on immersion in lived experience—direct, vicarious or contrived—with critical reflection on that experience, drawing on and developing all types of knowledge appropriate to the situation. Criteria for assessing educational attainment might focus on the demonstration of capacity to respond effectively to contextual diversity—of self-efficacy in diversity. Educators, then, might be expected to be valued for their situational expertise—their evidenced capacity to respond sensitively, appropriately and capably to challenging situations in their field of expertise and in their work as educators. Contemporary educational approaches that may be seen as evidencing aspects of situational epistemology may be found in some experiential, problem-centred, work-based and self-directed education.

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