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The learning city in a 'planet of slums'

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This paper considers the implications of current notions of the learning city. It argues that popular neoliberal ideologies create an environment in which lifelong learners strive for the learning city as an end product, both in production and for consumption, rather than embrace it as a living, social context. The rhetoric of the knowledge economy ideologues is very narrowly construed but at the same time politically powerful and, despite clearly documented effects of globalized capitalism such as massive deskilling, tremendous structural unemployment and vast (and rapidly growing) urban slums, the dominant economistic paradigms and power structures make critical reconsideration very difficult. Some adult educators, like those in Hume City, Australia, or of the Shikshantar Institute in Udaipur, India, who hold a wider, critical view of lifelong learning, are promoting the learning city not as an end but as a social process of participation and negotiation.

Introduction

Given recent global trends towards urbanization, the notion of the 'learning city' warrants continued critical attention in adult education. While, due to the strong efforts of some of its more notable proponents like Norman Longworth (1999, 2001, 2003), the learning city has gained some prominence as a notion to guide urban development, to date the concept has yet to receive sufficient critical theorization. For the most part, many of the learning city's most ardent promoters uncritically assert the value of the learning city as a way to improve the competitiveness of urban contexts in the global knowledge economy. Rather than realizing the full promise of the learning city as a notion that can help promote the development of urban forms that can enable the full participation of citizens in the development of their city, narrow, economistic notions of the learning city can only contribute to a growing polarization of urban life. In this paper we argue that, to prevent a politicized and oppressive use of the notion, we must develop a far more robust and nuanced understanding of the learning city. We contend that to advance our understanding of the learning city we must abandon individualistic, essentialized, and typologized notions of adult learning that lie at the crux of the learning city's most common formulations. A more contextual, dynamic, and social view of adult learning puts us in a position to draw upon a vast wealth of rapidly developing theory in geography, sociology, and anthropology to formulate a far more critically attuned notion of the

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learning city. Rather than lying on the fringes of adult education as it currently does, a fully developed concept of the learning city has great promise to inform core theories and practices in the field of adult education.

Planet of slums

A recent report by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2003) offers important reasons why we should pause before we rush to embrace the notion of the learning city. The authors of this report observe how, at the same time as certain limited and very privileged urban metropolises develop in the flows of global capitalism, more and more of humanity is being relegated to large and proliferating slums that span great regions of the Third World (their very conservative estimate of the current number of slum-dwellers is over a billion people). Moreover, as the authors of the UN report observe, 'instead of being a focus for growth and prosperity, the cities have become a dumping ground for a surplus population' (p. 40). As Mike Davis (2004) relates, 'at the end of the day, a majority of urban slum-dwellers are truly and radically homeless in the contemporary international economy' (p. 26). Importantly, according to Davis, the production of surplus humanity is not a result of a *malfunctioning* process of globalization. The slums of the world are *an inherent product of globalization*, a side-effect of silicon capitalism's capacity to increase productivity at the same time as it decreases employment.

Davis (2004) tells us how, at some point in 2005, for the first time in history the urban population on earth will surpass the rural population. Moreover, from this point onward, the vast urban slums of Africa, Asia, Indonesia, and Latin America will account for *all* of the world's population growth, which the United Nations predicts will reach 10 billion by 2050. Whereas classical economic theory suggests that the growth in urban populations would be caused by rising economic opportunities in urban areas, the stark reality of Third World urbanization is that population growth has mushroomed over the past two decades despite rapid declines in urban economic growth. In terms of sheer numbers—80 cities with a population of one million plus in 1950, 400 today, and a projected 550 in 2015—the urban form seems to be enjoying great success; in terms of our shared future, the growth of poverty in urban slums is undoubtedly one of humanity's direst problems (Davis, 2004, p. 5).

Depictions of abject poverty are always extremely disheartening (Sachs, 2005a,b). What is particularly disturbing about the accounts of the effects of *urban* poverty, however, is that they confound our ability to find easy villains (drought or disease) or to imagine possible solutions (sustainable agricultural production). The poor who inhabit the vast slums of today's cities have no access to land from which they might scratch out even a meager self-sustaining existence. Their dwellings hang on precipitous hills, ring the polluted fringes of industrial complexes, adorn city dumps, or, like in Kingston, Jamaica, the Third World city we know best, cling to the banks of urban sewage trenches, or 'gullies', so treacherously that the police are reluctant to approach them. Without any prospect for 'formal' employment, slum-dwellers

survive by joining the wretched ranks of 'informal' workers, eking out a stark existence through a myriad of marginal or illegal activities. In Kingston, for instance, the informal drug economy competes heartily with other economic sectors, drawing hosts of young and vulnerable men and women into a vortex of horrific violence (Kingston has one of the highest homicide rates in the world).

Moreover, according to Davis (2004), even amongst the very poorest the burden of deprivation is unevenly distributed: 'Throughout the Third World', he relates, 'the economic shocks of the 1980s forced individuals to regroup around the pooled resources of households and, especially, the survival skills and desperate ingenuity of women ... Deindustrialization and the decimation of male formal-sector jobs compelled women to improvise new livelihoods as piece workers, liquor sellers, street vendors, cleaners, washers, ragpickers, nannies and prostitutes' (p. 21). Theorists like Marx contended that the very poor, which he identified as the *lumpen proletariat*, functioned as a reserve pool of labor in the capitalist economy to keep wages low and to provide labor in times of unanticipated expansion. It is very difficult to imagine that the very poor in today's urban slums have even such a meager function. Davis contends that 'the real macroeconomic trend of informal labour, ... is the production of absolute poverty' (p. 26). Rather than viewing the poor as a standing reserve army, it is much more accurate (and heartrending) to see them for what they have become: the refuse of global capitalism—a growing pile of unusable waste, festering with violence, despair and death, which, in cities throughout the world, rings the shining towers of the radically wealthy.

As accounts like David Harvey's *The new imperialism* (2003) and *A brief history of neoliberalism* (2005) powerfully remind us, the vast expansion of urban slums is completely in keeping with the larger trajectory of capitalist development over the past half century, especially since the early 1970s, when aggressive neoliberal policies provoked vast global restructuring programs to address declining profitability of big business. To find new outlets for capital investment, the United States and other countries supported IMF and World Bank efforts to restructure Third World economies to open them to unprecedented levels of economic exploitation. Harvey contends that, in recent years, accumulation of wealth has been achieved by the direct dispossession of the assets of some of the world's most vulnerable and powerless sectors. Harvey (2005) observes the following:

> Displacement of peasant populations and the formation of a landless proletariat has accelerated in countries such as Mexico and India in the last three decades, many formerly common property resources, such as water, have been privatized (often at World Bank insistence) and brought within the capitalist logic of accumulation, alternative (indigenous and even, in the case of the United States, petty commodity) forms of production and consumption have been suppressed. Nationalized industries have been privatized. Family farming has been taken over by agribusiness. And slavery has not disappeared (particularly in the sex trade). (pp. 145–146)

In the case of Jamaica, for instance, neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s and 1990s resulted in changes that made it very difficult for the domestic agricultural sector to compete with international agribusiness. Agricultural employment, once

the mainstay of the rural region, dried up and, as a result, over the past 20 years rural people have flooded into the Kingston urban area (including the adjoining cities of Portmore and Spanish Town), often to overcrowded and violent zinc-roofed communities.

While the most calamitous effects of unbridled capitalism are most palpably evident in the violence-torn slums of Third World countries, Harvey (2000) argues that increasingly all people on earth are becoming embedded as laboring and consuming bodies within an ever more intense and expansive circulation of capital. The global economy penetrates all aspects of human life: we are never really off duty. We are all subject to the constant, powerful influence of global economic flows, whether directly through our gainful employment—if we are not physically there, we are 'there' with various technological connections—or, indirectly, through the mass media. Harvey, in describing the American city of Baltimore as an example, discusses this powerful media influence:

> In the midst of all this spiraling inequality, thriving corporate and big money interests (including the media) promote their own brand of identity politics, with multiple manifestos of political correctness. Their central message, repeated over and over, is that any challenge to the glories of the free market (preferably cornered, monopolized, and state subsidized in practice) is to be mercilessly put down or mocked out of existence. (Harvey, 2000, 154)

The structured, rigid, technologized modes of ordering that increasingly shape urban contexts around the globe trap, channel, direct, and monopolize the complex, indigenous energies of the lifeworld. Increasingly, the urban citizenry passively accept one-way, mediated, 'progress' rhetoric. Harvey (2000) writes:

> The free-market juggernaut, with its mantras of private and personal responsibility and initiative, deregulation, privatization, liberalization of markets, free trade, downsizing of government, draconian cut-backs in the welfare state and its protections, has rolled on and on. For more than twenty years now we have been battered and cajoled at almost every turn into accepting the utopianism of process of which [Adam] Smith dreamed as the solution to all our ills. We have also witnessed an all-out assault on those institutions—trade unions and government in particular—that might stand in the way of such a project ... An overwhelming ideological configuration of forces has been created that will brook no opposition. Those who have the money power are free to choose among name brand commodities (including prestigious locations, properly secured, gated and serviced), but the citizenry as a whole is denied any collective choice of political system, of ways of social relating, or of modes of production, consumption and exchange. (pp. 154–176)

According to McMurtry (1998, 2002), the global knowledge economy has at its very base an individualist value system that jeopardizes the well-being of civil society. For much of the history of capitalism, this value system expanded in fits and starts under the banner of liberalism. In recent years, with the aggressive development of neoliberalism, the value system underpinning capitalism has achieved unprecedented growth. 'Neoliberalism', David Harvey (2005) relates, 'is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an

institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (p. 2). Neoliberalism conflates democracy (reconceived in individualistic terms) and economy and perpetuates messages using the mass media for people to be entrepreneurial and to assert their individuality. Harvey (1989) describes 'a general shift ... towards a much more competitive individualism as the central value in an entrepreneurial culture that has penetrated many walks of life' (p. 171). Moreover, according to Greider (1997), 'The irresponsibility [of rampant individualism] is generalized now, thanks to the mechanisms and relationships institutionalized by modern business and banking and often codified in law. Irresponsibility is passed around to all' (p. 46). Supported by neoliberalism, capitalist forces have rampaged (and continue to rampage) throughout the globe in search of profitable opportunity. In the process, they have inflicted social, cultural, and environmental transformations of unprecedented scale: entire populations have been set on the move; massive cities have sprung up over night (Dongguan, China, grew from a town to a city of seven million in 20 years); and, countries (like Argentina) have oscillated wildly from ruin to riches and back (Harvey, 2005).

There is a mutually reinforcing process at work in all of this: transformations in the built environment (physical structures, laws, cultural groupings, boundaries, social gradients) interrupt capacities for communication or collaborative action and increase individualist strategic action. This growing imbalance results in a further transformation of the built environment even more inimical to the lifeworld and conducive to capitalist growth and development. Round by round, the strategic action that is the modus operendi of capitalism inexorably generates an environment increasingly conducive to its own functioning. As Robert Putnam (2000) has so carefully described, we are far less likely now to engage actively with our community and far more likely to passively consume through one-way channels of distribution and communication than we were only a few decades ago. Moreover, as Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2001) observes, disconnected from community and ecology, we increasingly communicate and convey identity through the consumables we collect and, indeed, through the act of consumption itself. Disconnected from our ecology, we lose track of who we are or what our community is. This is, indeed, a learning crisis. There is a lack of meaningful engagement, but more importantly, in the urban contexts of contemporary capitalism, the environmental framework we need to support this engagement is fast disappearing.

The learning city in the information age

The important thing about these accounts of modern urban slums is that they help us understand how, due to inherent tendencies in contemporary capitalism, initiatives to help cities more deeply connect to the flows of the knowledge economy (like most learning city initiatives) must be viewed very dubiously. Although they can manage to provide competitive access for certain privileged social groups to the highly concentrated flows of wealth of global capitalism, initiatives like the learning city

do little to challenge the overarching exploitative and wealth concentrating structure of the knowledge economy. Unfortunately, up to this point, the notion of the learning city is too weakly developed to prevent its misappropriation for self-interested purposes.

Norman Longworth (1999), perhaps one of the best-known advocates of the learning city, reveals little awareness of the uneven impacts of globalization. While Longworth does acknowledge the need for any notion of the learning city to be a 'caring city' and to 'make special provision for the excluded, the slow learner, and the late developer, the eccentric and the deranged, the damaged and the desperate' (p. 115), his prime reason for advocating the learning city is his concern that we all become 'members of the Learning Society which must inevitably accompany the Information Society in order to assist and support its development' (p. 109). Citizens 'encumbered' by what he calls 'the seven Is—Ignorance, Incomprehension, Inability, Incapacity, Impotence, Incompetence, and Inadequacy' must be swept up in a 'learning revolution' so that, they too, can enjoy the great benefits of the exciting new Information Age (p. 109). The rhetoric of the 'learning city' mixes with a host of other 'learning' discourses (lifelong learning, the learning society) to generate an ideological froth (Harvey, 2003) that disguises the extent to which the everyday learning capacity of so many urban citizens is being imperiled by contemporary capitalism. What Longworth and others fail to realize is that the very Information Age they glorify, systematically and as a matter of course, produces disenfranchisement, poverty and despair. There is no sweeping up to be done. The Information Age is structured for exclusion, is powered by dispossession, and is rooted in exploitation and oppression.

Longworth's view of the learning city as a context essential for the successful production of the Information Age is widely shared. In the United Kingdom, for instance, 'Liverpool, Glasgow, Southampton, Norwich, Sheffield and more than 10 other cities and towns' have participated in an OECD-sponsored learning city project that aims to enhance the capacity of its member cities to participate in the global knowledge economy recognizing that 'the economic future of the city depends upon creating interlocking and interdependent structures based on lifelong learning principles' (Longworth, 1999, p. 115). The European Lifelong Learning Initiative (ELLI) (of which Longworth is past president) also promotes the learning city as an engine for economic, and cultural growth and a number of European cities have designated themselves 'learning cities'. The idea of the learning city as a precursor to competitive success in a global knowledge economy has become widely influential. In Australia, for instance, a coalition of business and education leaders in Ballarat have designated their city as a learning city, contending that 'the only way Ballarat will find and maintain its place in the global economy is by challenging what we are doing and how we can do it better—by being a Learning City' (Ballarat Learning City Board, 2005).

In our own city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, a coalition of business and government leaders (representing the elite interests of our region), known as *The Greater Halifax Partnership*, promotes Halifax as a 'Smart City' (admittedly a bit of a derivation, but

close enough to the 'learning city' to make our point). Halifax is an urban context that is competitive in the global economy, they contend, because it 'has 81.1 post-secondary students per 1,000 people, three times the national average. More than 60% of the working population have post-secondary education, the highest rate in Canada' (Greater Halifax Partnership, 2005). A recent, a visit by Richard Florida (Florida, 2004a) to our region greatly excited the proponents of this vision. Florida contends that urban contexts that support the growth and development of the creative class will be best positioned to reap the full benefits of the knowledge economy (Florida, 2004b). Florida adds considerable fuel to the widely held belief, in our region, that the people of Halifax need to commit wholeheartedly to developing our ability to compete in the knowledge economy. Like many global citizens, Halegonians are left with the niggling feeling that, if they do not get learning to get on board the knowledge economy, they might end up in serious social, cultural, and economic trouble. The existence of the world's slums (even as they exist in our very midst) are seen more as a warning (the disturbing potential outcome of failing to learn) instead of what they really are: lifeworld contexts depredated by technologically upgraded, ideologically enhanced global capitalist forces.

What learning?

According to Contu *et al*. (2003), the discourse of learning in contemporary times (of which the learning city has been a part) functions ideologically to secure support for the neoliberal knowledge economy. In this discourse, learning is posited as an unproblematic and unquestionable social virtue that all citizens recognize as good and laudable. '[W]hat is most striking', Contu *et al*. relate, 'is how learning discourse seems to have become constituted as truth: it is unproblematically assumed that learning, like vitamins and stopping smoking, is *a good thing*' [emphasis in original] (p. 933). Whatever 'learning' is applied to—the learning organization, lifelong learning, learning society, or learning city—it imparts a smooth and positive glaze. According to Contu *et al*., 'learning' has become so puffed up and ambiguous that it has acquired 'the capacity to short-circuit contention and debate in favour of a formulaic commonsense' (pp. 993–994). Learning is the unproblematic (and 'inescapable') answer to the difficult prospect of thriving in a knowledge economy. It is the shining way forward offered by neoliberalism. But this offer is thinly posed. What exactly the term 'learning' actually refers to is left eerily undefined.

Interestingly, with a little effort, it is rather easy to scratch away the unproblematic gloss of learning. For instance, in many urban slums throughout the world, citizens must learn and re-learn constantly simply to survive. With a sharp eye for any advantage, people angle their way into a myriad of roles, practices, and niches—driver, huckster, babysitter, courier, vendor, pusher, handicrafter, laborer, don, sex trade worker—with remarkable flexibility and skill. Although the roles they take on are not always by choice and often are hazardous, each requires an intricate process of learning. To become a drug dealer requires a person to learn to connect his or her

life and capacities to an intricate pattern of material, cultural and social processes. A sex trade worker is required to learn how to respond to pimps, johns, police and the public to conduct his or her practices. Is it learning like this, though, that proponents of the learning city want to enhance? Does the notion of the learning city cover people in Nairobi who learn to resolve the problem of inadequate sanitation facilities by defecating in plastic bags ('flying toilets')? (Davis, 2004, p. 16). Does it describe the intricate learning of a drug don in Kingston who plans to exact retribution from an upstart in a neighboring 'garrison community' by killing the man's entire family (contributing to Jamaica's 2005 world record homicide rate) (*The Gleaner*, 2005, p. A1)? It is doubtful that advocates of the neoliberal learning discourse have contexts like urban slums in mind when they glorify the positive virtues of learning. Moreover, it is unlikely that advocates would be willing to stretch the concept of the learning city to fit urban contexts torn by violence, deprivation and despair no matter how much is learned by people in the struggle for daily survival. Certainly, despite the supposed ubiquity and taken-for-grantedness of their notion of learning, proponents of the learning discourse uphold a far more specific and political notion of learning than they want anyone to realize. A city becomes a learning city not just when learning prevails, but when a certain *type* of learning prevails.

The problem, of course, is that, although proponents of the neoliberal learning discourse hold a particular (and politically contingent) view of what counts as learning, they promote it as if it is the only view. Rather than appearing as a problematic concept with a complex history and multiple possible interpretations, learning appears as an unproblematic and stable notion that can easily be held up as a standard to guide social development. In accordance with the more encompassing tenets of neoliberal philosophy, proponents of the neoliberal learning discourse posit a highly individualized and cognitive notion of human learning. People are characterized as nodes that receive, process, and transmit the flows of knowledge that course though the networks of the knowledge society. Knowledge is viewed to be objective and independently existing, capable of transmission or incorporation into individual human brains. Learning is understood to be the process by which knowledge is transferred from a knowledge receptacle (a person, a book or other holding device) to a person. Learning is best guided by a teacher or curriculum developer—an expert possessor of knowledge, to a learner—someone who is a novice and who may not yet be positioned to determine what knowledge is most important to learn. The learning discourse also characterizes 'successful' people (those who are productive, healthy, adjusted) to be diligent implementers of 'positive' individual and organizational processes. When associated with the imperatives of the knowledge economy, these are the people who actively develop skills, adjust values, make choices, and take actions in ways that maximize economic productivity. Through learning, individuals can integrate the knowledge that enables them to achieve success for themselves, their organizations, their community, and their city. Importantly, the things that are important to learn are identified by expert holders of the most valid and valuable elements of knowledge.

Learning cities, in this frame, are urban contexts that maximize the willingness and ability of individual citizens to connect up to the flows of knowledge in the global economy. They provide means to ensure the availability and accessibility of important knowledge, support the learning process with resources (to provide people with time and opportunity to incorporate new knowledge), and promote a culture of learning (that is the willingness to submit to expert-directed knowledge acquisition).

The individualistic and cognitivist view of learning that is promoted by the neoliberal learning discourse is certainly not the only possible conception of learning that exists. In recent years, contributors throughout the social sciences have been articulating a range of alternative conceptualizations of learning that raise deep questions about the legitimacy of the neoliberal view. For instance, rather than viewing learning as a process by which knowledge (imagined as bits of information held in people's heads or transcribed in books and other media) is transferred into the heads of individuals, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) offer a notion of situated learning that posits learning as a collaborative process of negotiating meaning in situated communities of practice. Learning, on their account, is not an abstract, decontexualized process of knowledge transfer but a process that transpires in a real spatiotemporal context. In agreement with David Harvey (1989), who contends that whatever spatiotemporal frame we inhabit exerts a deep influence on the nature of our social interactions, Lave and Wenger hold that our surrounding context becomes a 'framework for participation in social practices' (p. 15) that permit us to form shared understandings, develop relations of solidarity, forge strong identities and engage in social action (Plumb, 2005). Wenger (1999) argues that learning is not an individual pursuit and nor does it need to take place in a 'sanitized' formal educational context. He suggests that we consider learning as '. . . a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing' (p. 3). Implicit in Wenger's theory is that experiences involving methods and systems disseminating information without social participation are not learningful.

As Frank Coffield (1997), contends, it is imperative to resist the individualistic views of learning that underpin dominant discourses of lifelong learning and to recognize how 'a learning society worthy of the name should deliver social cohesion, social justice and economic prosperity to *all* its citizens rather than wealth to a minority' (p. 86). Cities are learningful, in this view, when citizens in the community are actively involved in participating in defining what learning is, determining what is important to know, and deciding what resources are warranted to support the learning process. Because of the importance of collaboration in learning, a learning city cannot be predetermined externally by experts or through instrumental or teleological reasoning. This view of the city is confirmed by Jane Jacobs (1961). Teleological reasoning, she observes, has been instrumental in the production of urban spaces throughout history and top-down urban planning still dominates urban development throughout the world. According to Jacobs, however, as long as basic needs are met, many neighborhoods that are deemed to be economic slums actually

are among the most lively, healthy and satisfying human contexts in which to live. The most meaningful structures of the city derive not from teleological urban planning but from the day-to-day participatory interactions of people in the neighborhood itself (Forester, 1989; Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2002) for, as Martin Yarnit (2000) relates, 'the key to overcoming social exclusion is engagement, and the key terms here are democracy and citizenship' (p. 86). Urban space, Jacobs (1961) contends, is not designed from on high. Rather, it is woven like cloth by the inhabitants of an urban space as they engage with each other in acts of social learning in communities of practice (Brothers, 1997).

Revitalizing the notion of the learning city

Given the rather patchy history of the notion of the learning city, one wonders whether it might be best, at this point, simply to give up on the idea, write the notion off as a passing fad or dismiss it as another incident of learning society boosterism (Hughes & Tight, 1995). It is our contention, however, that the study of lifelong learning should not only retain the notion of the learning city but should place it at the focus of much more energetic, critical, and wide-ranging inquiry. We make this claim for two reasons.

First, according to contemporary geographers like Henri Lefebvre (1991), David Harvey (1989, 2000, 2003, 2005) and Edward Soja (1989, 2000), the city remains a vital frame for emancipatory and transformative action. Soja (2000) argues, for instance, that the density of social interactions that are sustained by urban forms releases an immense creative learning potential uncommon in other forms of human association. Thus, reversing a long-standing historical view, he argues that the very first cities did not arise out of agricultural society. Rather, the intense learning interactions in Neolithic cities like Çatal Hüyük actually generated agricultural practices (p. 24). On his account, the city, because it supported particularly intense learning relations, preceded agriculture and rurality. According to philosopher and ecologist Murray Bookchin (1992), urbanization, understood by him as intense human settlement, only has achieved its hazardous form (which he identifies as the modern city) under the particular developmental conditions of capitalism. For him, urbanization in a different context holds great promise because of the fact that urbanization places people in close proximity where they can engage intensely in social interactions. According to thinkers like these, cities are not incidental at all to human learning. Rather, the city has been and will continue to be a form of human association deeply interwoven with intense learning processes. It might even be argued that an important *raison d'être* for cities is that they enable humanity to express everyday learning potential impossible in other spatial frameworks.

A second reason why it is imperative to retain a revitalized notion of the learning city is that it opens the possibility for transformative action that might begin to address the disastrous urban developments of contemporary times. Understanding the complex intertwining of human learning and urban development, and, in

particular, how this intertwining has resulted in the violent and divided forms of urbanity that prevail in our contemporary world, can open possibilities for positing critical, emancipatory and transformative requirements for urban development. It is important, at this stage, to posit a revitalized notion of the learning city that can challenge existing notions of urban development and foster practical actions that can transform the urban context to support healthy learning processes. It is also necessary to develop strategies that can draw on these new learning processes to foster the development of concrete urban forms to support more non-violent learning. To advance the long-range goal of emancipatory urban development, researchers committed to the study of lifelong learning have much work to do.

Investigating the city, then, becomes a crucial part of our work as people committed to the theories and practices of lifelong learning. The learning city changes from being an endstate we promote to an important context we investigate. In what ways, we must begin to ask, do the varied urban forms that make up our world enhance or constrain the prospects for everyday human learning? In what ways can we create conditions within which people can learn and decide for themselves what kind of cities they want to build?

The promise of learning cities

Fortunately, despite the massive advancement of neoliberal ideology, people throughout the world, with great diligence and effectiveness, continue to resist the relations of globalized techno-capitalism. While, as we have argued above, we must guard carefully against hyped-up, neoliberal notions of the learning city, it is equally important to recognize that more critical, socially conscious and environmentally friendly notions of the learning city are informing actions all over the world. Even in contexts where neoliberal notions of the learning city are most rampant, rumblings about the importance of social inclusion, justice and environmental sustainability are detectable. For instance, in their reports on the state of learning cities in the United Kingdom, Ron Faris (1998) and Martin Yarnick (2000) observe how opposition to predominant economistic visions of the learning city often simmers just below the surface. While many advocates of the learning city avow the importance of economic development, they also often believe that fostering economic competitiveness should not be done at the expense of other social values like justice and social inclusion. Unfortunately, very often, the ideological din that accompanies the drive to develop urban contexts capable of competing in the global economy drowns out these critical voices.

There are many instances, however, where the fuller potential of the learning city is more manifest. For example, in Hume City, a metropolitan area 20 km north-west of Melbourne, Australia, the learning city is conceptualized explicitly as a way to build civil society and to foster social justice. Rather than viewing learning in neoliberal terms, as a way to increase capacity for participation in a global economy, the city council in Hume City has recognized 'learning—in all its many and varied forms—as

one of the keys to equality of opportunity and enhanced quality of life' (Hume City Council, 2004, p. 12). Guided by the *Hume social justice charter* (2001), Hume City opened the Hume Global Learning Centre in the suburb of Broadmeadows in 2003, to serve its ethnically diverse population. At the same time, the city council inaugurated the Hume Global Learning Village which links over 160 stakeholder groups into 'a consortium that aims to deliver on Council's vision for Hume City as a learning community' (2004, p. 13). These learning city initiatives are part of a much larger plan to enhance participation and democratic action across the city.

A second promising example of the ways in which the notion of the learning city can be mobilized to support progressive, democratic, socially just lifelong learning processes is articulated by the Shishatar Institute in the Indian city of Udaipur. Expressly concerned about the limits of predominant notions of the learning city, particularly as they might apply in non-western contexts, activists like Vidhi Jain and Manav articulate a unique vision of the learning city. Vidhi Jain and Manav observe that 'Rural villagers, who are forced to migrate to the city or those who already inhabit urban slums, are often blamed for, or seen as the roots of, . . . problems in India, and so the solution most often prescribed is that these villagers need more education' (Jain & Manav, 2006). Usually, though, the kinds of education that are proposed accord with dominant notions of development. 'There is little desire to explore how . . . the overall set-up of the city, or the mind-set of the "well-schooled" contribute[s] to the growth of . . . problems. Nor is their much desire to explore how solutions can grow from their own local context' (Jain & Manav). According to Jain and Manav, 'very few school-educated people really want to engage in understanding the true meaning of "learning" . . . They are too caught up in the transmission-based and surface-learning processes that are practiced and taught in school.' Drawing on Gandhi's notion of *Swaraj* (loosely translated by the British to mean home rule, but with a deeper meaning of responsible involvement), the Shikshantar Institute has engaged in a wide variety of activities to recognize and support the everyday learning capacities of the people of Udaipur. They have worked to regenerate learning spaces ('learning parks') in which people can gather to learn about things of shared interest or concern; held workshops for 'learning activists' (in which *un*-learning predominant modes of learning has played a large part); supported public discussions, meetings, and exhibitions to promote engagement in key issues facing neighborhoods; fostered the self-organization of learning communities grappling with specific issues; and investigated and raised awareness of the rich mosaic of everyday learning already transpiring in Udaipur.

The vision of the learning city held by Shikshantar, like the vision held in Hume City, emphasizes the great potential of people to learn collectively to build healthy urban forms. It is examples like these (and many others across the world) that stand as the main reason we must continue to investigate and support the notion of the learning city. As observed by Burhan Yigit, Mayor of Hume City in 2004, local government, as the most participatory of all governments, has a central role to play in fostering the conditions of social justice (Hume City Council, 2004). It is in the learning city, specifically, and in learning towns, villages and communities more

generally, that socially just, economically sustainable and peaceful social relations can best be forged.

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