

## **Give us a break! A sceptical review of contemporary discourses on learning**

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Discourses on learning have proliferated in recent years. Education policy texts and the research literature are peppered with phrases like the learning society, the learning organisation, lifelong learning, e-learning, learning to learn and so on. This lecture will begin with a review of some of these discourses which can be clustered into two loose categories that I will call *Living to Learn* and *Learning to Live*. The former refers to the ways in which all aspects of life are increasingly translated into domains of learning. This, for example, includes every aspect of the life course from pre-natal to 'third age' learning and every aspect of the self, including emotional and spiritual as well as cognitive and moral components. The latter refers to the ways in which all learning is instrumentalised as preparation for life. This includes education for economic and civic participation at all levels of education systems from early years to higher education, for example, requirements for 'transferable skills' to be incorporated into traditionally purely academic and discipline rich contexts such as doctoral programmes. Following this review, some consideration will be given to different explanations for these phenomena, drawing on sociological and policy analysis sources including Bernstein's (2001) work on the 'Totally Pedagogised Society', and this will begin to open up and lead into a discussion of the central evaluative questions about these discursive currents. Specifically, how should we understand the potential gains and losses of both *Living to Learn* and *Learning to Live*? I will answer this question by focussing on a range of concrete examples. In doing so, I hope to raise some concerns about the pervasiveness of learning discourses and the dangers of losing both 'learning-free' and 'learning-rich' spaces.

Bernstein, B. (2001) From pedagogies to knowledges, in A. Morais, I. Neves, B. Davies and H. Daniels (eds) *Towards a Sociology of Pedagogy: The contribution of Basil Bernstein to Research*, New York: Peter Lang.