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Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Education: a critique

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ABSTRACT It is suddenly fashionable in political circles in the United Kingdom (and elsewhere) to talk about lifelong learning and lifelong education. This seems to be the direct result of the present economic climate which has called into question many previous assumptions: job security has become an effective myth for most of those who can actually get work; long-term unemployment seems to have become structural and permanent. Consequently, the notions of lifelong learning and lifelong education have taken on dimensions far removed from the almost utopian ideals of their supporters in the years following the publication of the report *Learning to Be*. Given the current economic gloom, the popularity of the terms with politicians and the fact of being in the European Year of Lifelong Learning, it is perhaps appropriate to take stock of the whole notion of lifelong learning and lifelong education and to see just what meaning (if any) lies behind these words and where they might take us in the future. This essay lays its foundations in the historical background to the ideas of lifelong learning and lifelong education before moving onto a critique of the post-Faure advocates of the principles. It discusses various problems inherent in the concepts (such as lifelong inadequacy) before concluding that, although many of the difficulties in the concepts are due to the confused nature of adult education itself (e.g. is it education or leisure?), there is a greater need than ever for sustained efforts in favour of lifelong education to help to restore the hope which seems to have become a rare commodity among an all too large section of society.

Preamble

It has suddenly become fashionable once more in political circles in the United Kingdom to discuss the concepts of lifelong learning and lifelong education.[1] This seems to be a direct result of the economic and employment climates of the moment whereby it can no longer be assumed that an employee will maintain the same employment for the length of his/her working life. Mobility and short-term contracts have become the order of the day, with the concomitant

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need to constantly update knowledge and skills. Even where there is a measure of security in employment an employee resists with difficulty the constant threat that today's secure place can yield to tomorrow's unemployment.

As a consequence, the notions of lifelong learning and lifelong education have taken on dimensions far removed from the almost utopian ideals of their early supporters. No longer have we the vision so popular in the beginning of the latter half of this century that increasing automation and computerisation would lead to a general decrease in working hours to the benefit of all. We have moved away from being seemingly on the verge of Karl Marx's vision of dropping in and out of multiple trades as the whim takes us. The hard nose of monetarist capitalism put paid to that and we have seen the creation of the chronic unemployed, of the low-paid, low skill workers who do the grafting tasks that the machines cannot yet handle (or cannot handle cheaply enough). Against this somewhat gloomy backdrop, it is perhaps appropriate to take stock of the whole idea of lifelong learning and lifelong education, to endeavour to examine just what we might mean by these terms. It is through such an examination that we might determine whether these terms have any real meaning beyond their current use as buzz-words by politicians.

Introduction

There can be few topics in the field of education which can be said to have generated so many publications and so much debate in the academic world as have lifelong learning in general and lifelong education in particular, especially in the couple of decades since the publication of the report *Learning to Be*. However, it is self-evident that each of us continues to learn throughout the length of our lives, even if physical or mental damage may occasionally make us appear to regress. Each of us who is short of brain death, with the possible exception of the catatonic, will continue to acquire new knowledge, new ways of dealing with situations, new ways of coping with life.

From this it becomes clear that the concept of lifelong learning must concern itself with something more than simply learning throughout life. Otherwise it is a mere tautology and is hence beyond elaboration. Instead it must concern itself with purposeful learning, be this formal, non-formal or informal. There is, however, the other problem of deciding when learning constitutes education and when it does not.

Some Historical Background in Europe

Although this section will concern itself only with the European situation it is worthwhile reminding ourselves that "the concept and practice of lifelong learning belongs to the world history of education and cannot be confined only to the culture of one country or a single period of history".[2] In this vein let us not forget that it was Confucius who said that "life is limited, while learning is limitless".[3]

There are two distinct strands of thought which occur in the history of lifelong education. In one we see advocacy of education for the masses. In the other, it is destined for the élite.

In his *Republic*, Plato lays down a method whereby education is to be used as a means of sifting out the various layers of society. He defines four social classes to be filled – Gold, Silver, Iron and Bronze – but of these, only the Men of Gold will continue to be educated throughout life in order to decide who will become Philosopher Kings who by definition must continue to instruct themselves.[4]

In the 17th and 18th centuries, various rulers ‘adopted’ philosophers almost as pets. In this way, Descartes found himself (and subsequently his death) in the court of Queen Christina of Sweden[5] while Voltaire spent some time with Frederick II of Prussia. For their part, Diderot and Helvétius spent some time in Russia with Catherine the Great. This experience led Diderot to lay down plans for a Russian university.[6] The so-called enlightened despots whom the philosophers served may indeed have learnt from them but their major aim seems to have been to further legitimise their despotism by claiming for it a philosophical basis. In this sense they may arguably have been following Machiavelli’s counsel that a ruler must be *seen* to be great if s/he is to remain ruler. Hence, the enlightened despots leaned on the respectability enjoyed by philosophy to make themselves appear more superior to their subjects. The subjects in turn might then be better convinced that the ruler knew what s/he was doing and was doing it for the good of the people.

Not long after the Reformation, Comenius proposed a notion of lifelong education for all:

Comenius aimed to perfect society, to realise the ideal ... (of) society perfecting itself through the improvement of man, with the participation of all.

(His education system) is seen as democratic, firstly in its conception based on the equality of men, then by the insistence on the necessity to bring every effort to bear in the education of everyone.[7]

Comenius proposed a system of a unique school, free of charge, open to all and in which the pupil’s class would be determined only by his/her prior knowledge and by the material which was to be learnt. Ideas such as this are, as we shall see, the very stuff of the lifelong education debate begun by the Faure Report. However, in Comenius’s day the mode in education was more in favour of the principle of *non omnia omnibus*[8] whose head has been raised at various times throughout modern history.

Helvétius, famed for his aphorism *l’éducation peut tout*, made demands for the introduction of popular education for all ages and attacked those who “jealous of domination, wish to exhaust the people in order to reign as tyrant over them”. [9]

Twenty-one years after the death of Helvétius, Condorcet, in a report to the French National Assembly (20-21 April 1792), introduced the Députés to the notion of lifelong education: “Instruction ought not to abandon individuals at the moment they leave school: it ought to embrace all ages”. [10] However,

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such ideas were slow to find favour in *l'An II* and much less ambitious programmes were adpted which effectively structured schooling in terms of age and ignored adults except for the most token offerings.[11]

At about the same time in the United Kingdom education was being seen as a means of social control or as opening the door to social collapse. On the control front a major proponent was Robert Owen who, following on from Helvétius, wrote in his *A New View of Society* that: "Any general character, from the worst to best, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community by application of proper means." [12]

As Owen's writings and practice show, by *proper means* he meant education. It was this concept which Owen and his followers translated into action in both the New Lanark and New Harmony ventures, in the Halls of Science and throughout the whole Owenite movement.[13] Social collapse through education was foreseen by Davies Giddy who in 1807 in an address to the House of Commons told the assembled members that:

Giving education to the labouring classes of the poor ... would be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture and other laborious employments. Instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them fractious and refractory.[14]

Thus, simultaneously in the United Kingdom (to name but one country) two opposing poles and many shades of opinion existed, ranging from Owen's ideas on lifelong purposeful learning as a means of developing a more equitable society to those of Giddy denying the poor the right to any formal education whatsoever in order that the *status quo* be maintained.

Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Education

According to Kirpal: "the very process of living and participating in any manner in the life of the community entails continuous learning." [16] This, as mentioned earlier, is a tautology. However, Kirpal goes one stage further and equates implicitly lifelong learning with lifelong education, a stance which brings him immediately into conflict with Lawson who writes:

A concept of 'education' which includes ... learning within the home, the neighbourhood, from the mass media and from recreational agencies (etc.)... is loose and lacking in 'cutting edge' ... What we call 'education' can be regarded as planned, intentional preparation, it is an aid to coping, a way of short-circuiting personal experience by drawing upon the accumulated experience of others.[16]

Taken to its logical conclusion, this argument would admit only formal education. Hence, it is compatible with any learner-centred educational model only insofar as the learner has set or been set goals, and attains these and only these goals. Any form of unplanned learning is excluded from the concept of education. Thus, the very essence of scientific discovery is excluded. A discoverer

may learn, Lawson would admit, but will rarely be educated by his/her discovery.

Contrary to popular belief, the discoverer in science rarely does so by methodical plodding, setting goals and attaining them, i.e. by what Lawson would term education. Instead s/he proceeds by intuitive leaps and by failing to attain goals. A case of the first is Einstein, much admired by certain logical positivists, and of the second, Michelson and Morley. These latter set out to find the speed of the medium through which light was thought to travel (the ether) and ended up by making the crucial discovery that the ether does not exist. In neither case would Lawson admit that 'education' had taken place. So we might learn from our mistakes, but, for Lawson, we can never be educated by them!

However, a valid point made by Lawson is that the occasional use of the term *lifelong learning* as a synonym for *lifelong education* may be seen as a weakening of the concept of education[17] since, while learning undeniably occurs continually in just about everyone, education's occurrence depends on the definition taken of the term. This said, the narrowness of the definition demanded by Lawson is, while quite precise, too restrictive given that *education* carries greater status than the mundane *learning*. As Lawson himself says: "to call an activity or process 'educational' is typically to vest it with considerable status".[18]

Much of the literature on lifelong learning and lifelong education proceeds from the standpoint that we *know* what education is and then carries on to discuss lifelong education in terms of an absent definition. For an example of the logical difficulties which can result we need only look to the UNESCO report *Learning to Be* which restarted much of the lasting debate on lifelong education. For their first 40 pages or so, Faure et al implicitly assume that education equals formal learning (*school* in an American sense) and, having discussed other points, suddenly condemn the very dogma they earlier appeared to accept.

The inconsistency over the "Education equals School Dogma" is only one of many in this report which suffers from repeated use of terms such as democracy (whose meaning can clearly vary according to the user and his/her country of origin, but which rarely strike other than a positive note) without venturing any definition. This is perhaps indicative of the report being the result of an international commission which was, by its very composition, required to serve many political masters at once. However, despite the faults, definitional and otherwise, which occur in *Learning to Be*, we must acknowledge the major contribution it made to spawning discussion on education.

Cropley comments that "education ... focuses on the experiences which influence learning"[19] and this illustrates in its very wooliness just how difficult it is to pin down a definition of education without stumbling into the trap in which lie the liberal philosophers such as Hirst, Peters and Lawson who, besides other failings, imply that education must have some form of qualification or accreditation at the end for otherwise is it not recreational? However, who is to define recreation and why should not recreation result in qualification? The very argument which Lawson adopts to put down Dave's Concept Characteristics (reproduced as an appendix) as lacking in cutting edge is itself blunt.

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Learning to Be favoured the term lifelong education over lifelong learning (presumably to avoid accusations of tautology but, in doing so, falling into the minefield of defining education – a problem avoided by ignoring it). Griffin, for his part, states that lifelong learning can be translated into lifelong education [20] – a point which implies that certain kinds of learning may be excluded from the concept of education, but Griffin hedges his bets and declines to say which! Dave includes most modes of learning as education, but while acknowledging that “life itself is seen as a major source of learning”[21] declines to use the term lifelong learning, preferring lifelong education which he takes implicitly to mean lifelong purposeful learning – the learner or the teacher (roles which are interchangeable) may define what is to be learnt and how, but one sets out to directly or indirectly teach the other. Education is also, for Dave, process learning ... both the means and the end are influences on what is learnt. Lying at a far pole from Lawson and company, Dave, in common with many of the UNESCO school of thought, adopts a definition of education which is flexible and wide, while being arguably more philosophical than Lawson who nestles more in the area of theory. This, of course, begs the question as to when philosophy turns into theory and vice-versa!

The question also arises as to when it is better to construct a philosophy around a concept and when to be content to philosophise about it. This highlights a problem in much of the literature on philosophy and education; namely, that of distinguishing between philosophy of education and philosophising about education. To speak of philosophy of education implies that education somehow exists apart from the rest of life as an entity in its own right instead of being a part of life, interacting with all that surrounds it. On this basis, it is arguable that any philosophy of education can only be conceived of as a philosophy of life.

The Concept of Lifelong Education

The movement towards mass education has gained much momentum over the last 200 years – to attend school as a child, for example, is now considered the international norm. So much so that Faure felt inclined to write that between 1960 and 1968 by not being able to attend school “every year some 2 million or more children (aged between 5 and 14) were denied the right to an education.”[22]

Of course, other than those missed entirely by schooling one must also consider the dropouts, the school failures (though whether a child fails school or is failed by it is open to conjecture), the unemployed, the misorientated, etc. The list is vast of those categories of people for whom skills and knowledge acquirable at school might be of use. To this must be added skills and knowledge acquirable outside school which might help an individual be educated. The result is certainly an enormous mass of people who could benefit physically, mentally or financially from furthering their education, and widening their knowledge and understanding.

The Second World War and the consequent social upheaval brought in their wake an upsurge in the West of a softer form socialism as opposed to the

much more radical popular socialism of the 1920s and 1930s and, unlike its radical precursor, acceptable in a large degree to much of the political spectrum, right-wing as well as left. A characteristic of this movement was that, although basically socialist, the moves towards socialism should be neither too large nor too fast. A bandwagon of softer socialism was and still is, to a large degree, equal opportunity for all, a concept open to many interpretations. Hence, the growth of comprehensive schooling, student loans and grants, compensatory education and the like, and a growing awareness that formal schooling left many behind. The equal opportunity debates also brought many countries in the West to the point where their similarities in school with the East Bloc outnumbered or at least equalled their differences. Radical differences loomed less large and place was open for discussion, under the auspices of UNESCO, of education in general. So the commission under Edgar Faure was established and its report *Learning to Be*, published in 1972, reopened the lifelong education for the masses debate to which Comenius, Helvétius and Owen had given so much in their day.

The background notions in lifelong education as defined by UNESCO are a mixture of old and new. A basis for the idea comes from Erasmus who wrote: "Man is not born man, he becomes him or rather ... he makes himself man." [23] Compare this with the following quotes used by Faure as "the major argument in favour of lifelong education"; Lapasade: "Man never ceases to enter life" and Fromm: "The individual's entire life is nothing but a process of giving birth to himself; in truth we are only fully born when we die." [24]

Despite the span of several centuries the ideas are shades of the same thing. However, there remain problems in defining the concept. For example, for Dave "the learning process is the key to all education." [25] However, for Faure education is conceived of as a vector – "the path to learning is irrelevant; only what is learnt or acquired has any importance." [26] The contradiction between these standpoints is clear, but there is also a major contradiction within Faure; in lifelong education the end is, by definition, death. Therefore, unless the path to learning is seen as part of their learning there is little point in learning at all as the path to learning begins at birth and ends at death. Besides, there is a distinct lack of logic in viewing final products of an educative process (short of death) as identical on the basis only of what has been learnt or acquired. If the experience has been different then the product must be also. Faure, however, characteristically hedges his bets by employing the word 'acquire' instead of some stronger term.

According to Gelpi: "the hypothesis of lifelong education (is) that the educators need not necessarily be professionals." [27]

This is essential for Dave for whom:

lifelong education seeks to view education in its totality. It covers formal, non-formal and informal patterns of education and attempts to articulate all structures and stages of education. [28]

The possibly sinister consequences of such articulation will be discussed later.

For Skager "lifelong education is not a concept or a thing but a set of basic principles". [29] This effectively says nothing and may even contradict itself, depending on how strong a meaning is taken of concept or principle. Besides, is

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not a true concept in fact a set of basic principles? Cropley takes an almost equally spurious tack when he writes that "lifelong education is an orientation, concept or principle, not a tangible thing." [30] Unfortunately, Cropley does not define his meaning for tangible upon which his argument hinges. The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* admits three meanings which encompass both the concrete and the abstract. Assuming that Cropley means that lifelong education is not concrete then he agrees with Lengrand who insists on the undefinable nature of lifelong education remaining forever so:

Lifelong education is still at the conceptual stage. As with other principles such as freedom, justice and equality, it will doubtless retain indefinitely that certain distance in relation to concrete achievements which is in the nature of concepts. [31]

Thus, Lengrand places the question 'what is lifelong education?' on almost the same footing as a moral philosopher might put the question 'what is good?' This doubtless raises the philosophical status of lifelong education but does nothing to expedite its implementation, unless of course it can be argued that there is a moral imperative to lifelong education as might be claimed for 'good'.

For De'Ath lifelong education is of anthropological importance in that it:

could be instrumental in not only preserving all kinds of cultural diversity but also in placing a positive value on individual and collective difference. [32]

While for Cropley:

lifelong education shares the view that autonomy is better than conformity, open-mindedness better than dogmatism, democracy better than élitism, sharing better than authoritarianism. [33]

All these writers demonstrate the lack of rigour that Lengrand warns of when he writes: "the term lifelong education is used haphazardly and loosely in a variety of situations and realities." [34]

Unfortunately, this very warning is often ignored by its own writer!

Bélanger, for his part, remains more than circumspect: "Lifelong learning ... is not a norm to prescribe, but an empirical reality to analyse and reconstruct." [35]

Conceptually, there is very little to grasp in the lifelong education debate that is not either very fine straws or collections of undefined terms and hurrah words such as those used by Cropley and De'Ath above. What there is consists of:

- an attempt to view education as not confined to school, but as consisting of purposeful and process learning undertaken wherever and whenever;
- a view of education as a whole life activity which ought to be facilitated by the State and in which some may take longer than others to achieve their goals, but no-one is deemed a failure.

Dave's Concept Characteristics, although sometimes in disagreement with Faure, expand on these bases though they too suffer from over-use of undefined terms and hurrah words.

The conceptual thinness of lifelong education has, far from inhibiting it, apparently stimulated the quest to put it on a philosophical base. A cynic might argue that such urgency to align lifelong education with a philosophical school is tantamount to building a house on sand unless the philosophical base provided can somehow pad out and strengthen the concept and give it a consistency based on proper definitions and depending on emotive terms and 'understood' meanings.

A Philosophical Base for Lifelong Education?

Within the UNESCO school of lifelong education the process of being educated is centred upon the individual, rather than upon a group or upon society as a whole. An over-riding aim which emerges from the literature is that the individual is to be set psychologically as early as possible in life in a mode which encourages, if not actually obliges, him/her to purposefully seek learning at every stage in his life, instead of viewing active education as finished at some arbitrary age or stage.[36] Such a concept of mass education centred on the individual shares affinities with many schools of philosophy and with many individual philosophers.

Lawson, roughly quoting J. P. White, writer:

Learner-centred models have affinities with the 19th century Idealists for whom self-realisation is the end of man: realising or perfecting himself is his highest duty.[37]

This is a view shared to some extent by the radical rationalists of the 1790s who were concerned with the concept of justice, because it is unjust for society to deprive an individual of his equal right to the fullest development.[38] This view, expounded by Godwin on a basis set by Helvétius was adopted by Owen who also took on board at least echoes of Comenius's ideal of perfecting man by perfecting society.

It is this view of man as a social being, perfectible in order to perfect society, that is central to much of the writing on lifelong education. Hence, Humanism or one of its descendants is perhaps a more appropriate area to look for a philosophical base for lifelong education. The major disagreement comes in the mass of the literature as to whether Humanism or, especially, Existentialism is the more appropriate.

For Lawson, discussing Lengrand, there is no doubt:

Lifelong education has its philosophical roots in Humanism: Man is at the centre, but 'Man' is an abstraction, therefore, lifelong education becomes concrete by stressing individual men.[39]

Wain, however, see Lengrand as an existentialist, quoting from him that: "existence has always meant for Man, for all men, a succession of challenges".

This, says Wain, is in "true existentialist fashion."[40] This disagreement over Lengrand's stance is surpassed only by disagreement from one page of Wain to another. We quote: "The lifelong education programme needs to look

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elsewhere than to existentialism for its philosophical statement"[41] and "Existentialism can supply the basis for a lifelong education programme." [42]

It is worth mentioning in passing that it is possible to have a generally workable concept which contains inconsistencies and depends for its working on ignoring paradoxes. A classic example of this is Set Theory, originally devised by Gregor Cantor as a tool for use in topology and which found a major use in the work of the logician John Venn. However, it is not well-defined as the following paradox shows:

1. If A is a set then a *universal set* E for A contains at least all the members of A.
2. The *complement* A' of A is the set composed of those members of E which are not members of A. A' may have no members, but it is still a set since the empty set is admitted as a set.
3. Now let A be the set of all sets. A' cannot contain members of A and consequently cannot be a member of A. Therefore, A' is a set which is not a set.

However, this represents an extreme case and as long as such extremes are avoided then Set Theory remains a quite workable concept in practice. The point is that paradoxes may be admissible as long as they are avoidable in general practice. As we shall see, with lifelong education this is not the case.

When Sartre wrote his essay which claims existentialism to be a humanism he was, in our opinion, taking cognizance of the basic differences in tenets between Humanism and his own philosophy and using the term 'humanism' in a large sense. Wain, for his part, seems to see existentialism as a *branch* of Humanism and hence ignores the differences in basic tenets (on, for example, human nature) which exist between the two schools. He does, however, highlight some of the problems in existentialism – a topic which he attacks with some vigour, even if inconsistently. However, he misses others and at times appears to have misunderstood existentialism entirely. He claims, for example, a theoretical incompatibility between existentialism and the concept of school, and goes further to say:

The existentialist point of view is incompatible with the very having of an educational programme, lifelong or of any other description, since any programme, lifelong or of any other description, since any programme, even a personal one, constitutes an attempt towards systematisation and unity of outlook of some sort and these are contrary to a subjectivist outlook. [43]

Wain is right to highlight the problem of school, but he does so for the wrong reasons. The existentialist problem with school is not with the entity of school, but with the role of *authentic* choice within school. Noticeably lacking from existentialist literature is discussion of the age or stage at which such choice can be assumed and how to distinguish it from "leading from behind" *à la* Rousseau. Once this is settled, whether to say that a school pupil is incapable of authentic choice, is capable of it from the outset or can have this faculty developed within him, then existentialism has no problem in accepting, if not encouraging, school. Similarly with other programmes, educational or otherwise, the role of authentic choice is crucial in order that "man is responsible" and that "he can assume the situation and overcome it by acting." [44] Where existentialism might find itself

at odds with educational programmes is in the extent to which they may fail to live up to their good intentions and hence be guilty of *mauvaise foi*, of which 'bad faith' is but a literal translation.

Incidentally, although individualistic, existentialism as defined by Sartre does not rule out unity of outlook or purpose. In fact, Sartre translated his philosophy into action by his political engagement,[45] being able to reconcile his socialism and then communism with existentialism.

The draw of existentialism is evident in Faure who writes: "Education must be conceived of as an existential continuum as long as life." [46]

Bearing in mind Sartre's adage "*je fais, donc je suis*", this ties in neatly with Suchodolski's view that: "Motivation is the foundation and at the same the consequence of lifelong education." [47]

It is also possible to argue as does Kenneth Wain that the pragmatism of John Dewey, for all its occasional lack of forcefulness and strength, is a consistent choice of philosophical base for lifelong education. Wain works primarily from Dewey's concept of growth which sees education as: "the enterprise of supplying the conditions which insure growth or adequacy of life, irrespective of age" [48] and seeks to: "establish the points of convergence between (Dewey's) education programme and the (UNESCO) concept of lifelong education." [49]

Wain does this quite convincingly and concludes that lifelong education must have its basis in a humanism and that of these only the Deweyian outlook really fits. [50]

However, lifelong education's philosophical basis might, as we have seen, be argued as Idealist, Humanist, Existentialist as well as Pragmatic. The concept has undoubtedly at least a toehold among the liberal philosophers. A place could be argued for it in Logical Positivism, and in many religious philosophies such as Judaism and Islam which raise education, especially in the former, almost to the level of the sacred. In fact, lifelong education emerges as a sort of banyan tree to the ground of philosophy, except that every discernible branch in lifelong education seems capable of putting down its roots in several places and the whole concept seems capable of being in several places at once. This goes to exemplify Dearden's thought: "I do not myself think that philosophy of education stands in need of a single paradigm." [51]

More Problems

Central to the UNESCO concept of lifelong education is the notion that education must be integrated along its horizontal dimension and articulated along its vertical. [52]

Suchodolski writes: "Lifelong education represents the entirety of learning and teaching. Lifelong education can and must be *organised* as a whole", (our emphasis). [53]

Taking these together the implications are far from pleasant. In the extreme they lead to a situation where, far from the autonomy and democracy sought by Faure in his view of a 'learning society', we are in Orwell's 1984 – the

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ultimate totalitarian state, perhaps made all the more totalitarian by preserving the illusions of autonomy and democracy.

Less far along this path there are Ohliger and Dauber's warnings that: "concomitant to lifelong education is lifelong students, condemned to perpetual inadequacy." [54]

In a lifelong education society, those who do not learn continually will rapidly become obsolete or out of date. As a result it would be necessary for everyone to engage in a frantic process of endless learning, simply to avoid falling behind. [55]

According to Lynch:

The concept of lifelong education is not per se a danger even though ... it may offer unlimited scope for the further subjugation of man to the world of work, in the effort to combat increasing unemployment and to legitimise stubbornly unchanging wealth and income distributions within society and internationally. [56]

In other words, lifelong education could serve a similar, though vastly more sophisticated, role to that of the 'pet philosophers' of the 17th and 18th centuries.

If, as Cropley states, lifelong education has as its goal the actualisation of values such as autonomy, democracy, open-mindedness and sharing (however they may be defined) [57] then it is difficult to see how the decentralisation and flexibility required in attempting such actualisation can be reconciled with the centralisation of decision making and bureaucracy needed to actualise Dave's Concept Characteristics, or indeed any provision of mass education, especially on a lifelong basis. This paradox alone is sufficient to relegate lifelong education to the utopian since the values espoused by Cropley and Dave are inherent in most of the UNESCO school's thinking.

In order to bring lifelong education back to the realm of the attainable it is necessary to excise at least the bureaucracy implicit in it. Concepts with contradictions in them can work in the real world as we have seen with Set Theory, but only as long as the contradictions are removed from general practice. The contradictions within lifelong education are not of this order. They not only stop it being well-defined, but render it unworkable and distinctly unphilosophical.

Conclusion

Lifelong education has all the trappings of what might be termed a 'good idea' – it is bedecked with hurrah words and emotive terms, liberally dispersed by its proponents, and this gives it an air of conceptual solidity, together with making it more readily popular. Unfortunately, like many 'good ideas' before it, such as comprehensive schools in the United Kingdom, it has not been properly thought through even to the extent of properly defining the basic concept. Instead, there has been a headlong rush to align it with a philosophical school in order to mask its inadequacies.

Lifelong education in its present format is too confused to be of any real use except in encouraging discussion. However, as long as that discussion accepts (as does most of the literature) the paradoxes inherent in the concept without trying to circumvent them or at least answer the questions thrown up by them then it will continue to rise up in a monolithic fashion with no real idea of its direction until the whole lifelong education movement as at present defined collapses under its own imponderability or assumes a life of its own which masks its shallow roots and true purposes, if any. In this latter sense, lifelong education could be more and more compared to a device with so many accessories bolted on that its original purpose is forgotten. It becomes forgotten even whether it *ever* had a purpose, still less whether that purpose was logically and philosophically sound.

There is also an essential naivety in lifelong education. This naivety extends beyond assuming the meanings of undefined terms to carefully avoiding following through arguments to their conclusions and concomitant to this, avoiding asking questions which risk leading to problems. Some of these questions have been mentioned earlier. Others which demand answering to tighten up even slightly lifelong education's leaking hull are among the following:

- Should the individual choose to be educated or must education be foisted on him *by whatever means*? If it is to be foisted, how can it be reconciled with the notion of *authentic choice*, assuming that lifelong education is indeed existentialist?
- Will human nature allow lifelong education programmes to develop? Do we (as a society) really want to teach each other?
- Do we really want to share?
- Is a lifelong education programme compatible with society such as we have now, whether in the West or East, or in the developing countries? Must not lifelong education (in its ideal) lead to conscientisation of the masses and, hence, be inadmissible by those in power?
- Is lifelong education not just an attitude of mind, both on an individual and societal basis?

The list could go on.

The lack of conceptual solidity to lifelong education is in some ways a reflection of the confused nature of adult education. After all, we generally spend more time as adults outside of formal education than as children or in formal education and therefore it is adult education which has more bearing on the nature of lifelong education than can have any other form of education. Adult education appears unable to define its nature as education or leisure or as a fusion of the two. As education, there is arguably a moral right to have it. As leisure it has much lower status and lacks any moral right to supportive funding, etc. Without such definition, what hope is there that lifelong education will define *its* nature?

We should heed the warnings quoted above from Dauber and Ohliger and from James Lynch. Should lifelong education and the learning society become reality then who is to decide who does the learning? The better-off have the means to decide for themselves (unless this freedom of choice is curtailed). The

less well-off generally have such decisions taken for them by availability of classes within travelling distance from their abode. The higher up the economic scale the student is, then the greater access s/he has to the educational opportunities available through greater access to funds, to means of transport and to energy left at the end of the day with which to enjoy what is on offer. Indeed, Bélanger reminds us that adult services are usually among the first targets of financial cut-backs and consequently "tend to favour an immediately profitable clientèle".[58]

Despite the warnings of Lynch and others, the 1970s which spawned the modern lifelong learning debate were a time of optimism. As we move pessimistically towards the next millenium, we are confronted with the down-side of science and technology. We are becoming increasingly aware that the previous promises of utopia for all are far from realisation, that the increase in our material living standards has been bought at the cost of global pollution, decreasing male fertility through the use of oestrogens in fabrication, etc. The list is potentially endless. We have a global economy whose inadequacies become clearer with each passing day. Money has become an entity in its own right rather than a token of exchange. Secularisation is proceeding apace. Science stands helpless (apparently) in the face of new and revived diseases. In other words, what were pillars of faith in our temple of knowledge are now crumbling to dust under a Samsonian onslaught.

The stubbornly unchanging patterns of wealth which the soft socialism of post-World War II hoped if not to eradicate, then to at least even out a bit (whether by redistribution of wealth as advocated by the Left, or by general increase in living standards with trickle-down to the lower economic echelons as advocated by the Right) have entrenched themselves further than ever seen since the rise of Trades' Unionism in the 19th century.

So, in this picture of gloom and insecurity, is there a future for lifelong education? In these writers' opinion, the need is greater than ever. Western society has lost its old paradigms and, most importantly, lost its hope. In this respect, we have an occasion to define the goal of lifelong education in a manner not evident in the 1970s: let us propose that the aim of lifelong education be to restore and to maintain hope. We can term this consciencitisation if we wish, but with this simple goal in mind we have at our disposal the means of developing a philosophical basis which not only hangs together, but which we can explain to our political masters and to the public at large in terms which are meaningful to them and which stand some chance of loosening purse-strings. Failure to do so will result in lifelong education continuing to be a political buzz-word destined to mean whatever an orator wishes it to mean. Failure to actualise lifelong education will mean even more social stratification, more situations where those who have shall receive (in this case education and wealth), while those who have not must content themselves with the droppings from the richman's table. However, let us not forget that in the background there are rumblings akin to the anarchist slogan of the 1970s:- "no more crumbs, we're taking the bakery."

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Notes

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Appendix

Dave's Concept Characteristics

1. The meaning of the concept of lifelong education is based on the elemental terms – 'life', 'lifelong' and 'education'. The meaning attached to these terms and the interpretation given to them largely determine the scope and meaning of lifelong education.
2. Education is not to be seen as restricted to a particular period of life. It is a lifelong process which covers the entire life-span of the individual, embracing and unifying all stages of education – pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education. It views education not as a fragmented spectrum of individual parts, but in its totality – as an integrated whole.
3. Lifelong education encompasses those parts of education commonly described as formal, non-formal and informal. This flexibility allows for varied patterns and forms of acquiring education.
4. Education is not confined to formal institutions of education. While they remain important as one of the agencies of lifelong education they no longer enjoy a monopoly on education. Indeed, the family is seen as exerting a crucial influence on the initial and continued development and learning of its members in a truly lifelong dimension.
5. Lifelong education is rooted in the community which performs an important educative role. Life itself is seen as the major source of learning.
6. Lifelong education seeks integration at its horizontal and depth dimensions at every stage of life.
7. Lifelong education also seeks continuity and articulation along its vertical dimension.

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8. Lifelong education represents the democratisation of education. It is based, not on an élite principle, but on the universalist principle of education for all at all ages.

9. Lifelong education is a dynamic approach to education which allows adaptation of materials and media as and when new developments take place. Learning tools and techniques, content and time of learning are flexible and diverse.

10. In lifelong education the learning process is the key to all education.

11. There are two broad components contained within lifelong education – general and vocational – which are interrelated and interactive in nature.

12. Lifelong education provides individuals and society with opportunities not only to adapt to change, but also to participate in change and to innovate.

13. Lifelong education provides an antidote to the shortcomings of the existing formal education systems.

14. The ultimate goal of lifelong education is to maintain and improve the quality of life.

15. There are three major prerequisites for lifelong education – opportunity, motivation and reducibility.

16. At the operational level lifelong education is an organising principle providing a total system for all education.

From Kenneth Wain (1987) *Philosophy of Lifelong Education*, pp. 37-39. Beckenham: Croom Helm.