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## **LIFELONG LEARNING – The Research Perspective**

1. In 1998 the International Academy of Education and the Wenner-Gren Foundation of Sweden held a conference on the agenda for research on lifelong learning. The results of the conference were published in the book "Lifelong Learning Policy and Research" (London, Portland Press 1999). I will present some of the findings of that conference, give an analysis of them and then try to present the situation in 2002 focusing on what has changed in the sense of what has been accomplished and what new challenges have shown up.

2. In 1998 Albert Tuijnman presented the results of work done by a Task Force set up by the academy. He first gave the following three objectives:

- a. to analyse the shifting meanings of concepts connected to the field of lifelong learning
- b. to identify and map the problems besetting the implementation of lifelong learning policies and practices
- c. to propose questions and priorities for educational research relevant to the objectives of lifelong learning policies especially connected to adult education and informal learning in the work-place.

Tuijnman concludes after a summary of the various concepts around and the history of the lifelong learning "movement", that there is a significant dilemma between the policy aspect and the research aspect. For policy purposes a very open and flexible concept is good, but this is bad for research purposes. The whole area is closely connected to fundamental changes in our society and our values and forms of life, and involves a complex web of facts, norms and values. This is difficult to research on. There is vagueness all around.

Tuijnman proposes that at least educational research relevant to the area should be interdisciplinary. Simply creating forms of collaboration would be beneficial. So many disciplines are involved. Also curriculum studies should be seen in a different perspective – a perspective of the life-line. Historical studies should be

done seeing the history of education and educational ideas in a new light. And he suggests that new types and forms of research could be relevant, like political science and management and business administration. Issues surrounding adults must be faced. And then there is a fairly extensive set of issues that relate to the changing nature of society and the new forms of work we see. This demands research on new forms of organisation and new social and economic roles for learning and education.

Tuijnman then goes through a list of themes that are important:

- Motivation and readiness to learn
- Teachers and teaching
- Learning environments
- Learning technologies
- Student differentiation and pre-career preparation
- Higher education and lifelong learning
- Demand and supply issues
- Institutional aspects and linkages
- Informal learning in the work-place
- Management and planning
- Issues in economics
- Evaluation and monitoring
- Assessment and certification

As one can see this is comprehensive. At the end he proposes five more specific recommendations:

- a. Studies on "integrative" adult learning, trying to overcome segmentation and heterogeneity in the field, among other things by carefully looking at contexts and settings for lifelong learning,
- b. Studies on skills and competencies. Are there key competencies and skills and if so what are they and how do they relate to context?
- c. Research on outcomes. Again a contextual issue. We need to know more about what actually is the outcome of lifelong learning, especially broken down to specific groups, like women, immigrants, highly skilled professionals,
- d. Longitudinal investigations. Lifecourse investigations, life histories, biographical research. Learning trajectories,

e. Comparative studies. Relevant indicators to make international comparisons possible and especially trend data will become increasingly important.

3. It is obvious that this is a very broad agenda for research in lifelong learning. We can look at it from a number of perspectives. One is the relation between the concept of lifelong learning and the learning society. In his paper "On a contradictory way to the "learning society" (Studies in the Education of Adults 31, 1, 1999) Peter Altheit refers to the Richard Edwards and various concepts of the learning society. The point is that the concept is different with different conceptions of the learning society. The three different conceptions that Altheit finds in Edwards are

- a. the concept of a free, democratic education society with open and free access to formal education,
- b. the concept of a free education market in which learners can raise their qualifications,
- c. the concept of the open learning networks where learners creatively and self-directed use learning resources to satisfy their learning needs.

Altheit himself claims that much focus has been on the macro- and the micro-level of analysis of the learning society – the larger economical needs and the biographical aspects of individual learners. He himself thinks that what is needed is research at the meso-level, the level of the learning environments. He offers three theses that should guide research:

Thesis 1: the concept of learning society should be squarely seen as a political concept and we need research on what he terms a collapse of systemic integration and social integration. The concept of social capital enters here,

Thesis 2: the shift is away from education and training towards learning – from system control to learner control, towards a patchwork model of qualification,

Thesis 3: a focus on learning environments, and the courage to invent and model these in new ways that do not base themselves on implicit middle-class models of informal learning.

Future-workshops and involvements in research of others than members of the scientific community is important.

4. Altheit here offers aspects for a research agenda but centered on the issues raised by the political utopia of the learning society. If we return to the agenda put forward by Tuijnman we see that he wants the concept of lifelong learning made more specific, but avoids the issue of how it is interpreted in different contexts. This will of course be clear if one looks at its development. From an opportunity of education and learning to an

obligation. From a political and social project to an individual project. Tuijnman is open to the issues surrounding the transformation of society, the changes in work, in the economy, in the role of knowledge, but they are not central. He is open to new disciplines and forms of research, and can see the necessity, but still the central core of issues are squarely in the tradition of "educational research". At the 1998 conference Tom Schuller summed up the discussions. In the same year he (as co-author) had published an interesting paper "Social capital, human capital and the learning society" (International Journal of Lifelong Education 17,4, 1998). In that paper Schuller and co-author John Field investigates the consequences of a shift from a focus on human capital (as the concept was developed by Garry Becker) to social capital, especially using the concept as developed by James Coleman. The point of the paper is that the level of social capital affects the achievement and participation in various forms of education and learning in different ways. And this has consequences for lifelong learning. High levels of social capital discourages participation in formal adult education whereas it encourages participation in non-formal adult learning.

5. Altheit and Schuller/Field in a nice way supplements the analysis that Tuijnman presented. So what can we say about the situation today? First let me create a sort of map. I think that there are three borders that are important. These are

1. the border between the formal and the non-formal types of learning
2. the borders between different stages in life – childhood, youth, etc.
3. the border between being an apprentice and being a qualified member of an educated group (a craft, a profession etc.),

I might add a fourth, which is really of a different sort, a kind of meta-border. It has to do with the kind of basic concepts we use and have access to. It is

4. the border between on the one side pre-industrial and industrial conceptions of learning and education and post-industrial conceptions.

I think that research on lifelong learning can focus on all four borders. The first border posits a number of problems and issues f.i. concerning certification and forms of certification. How do we transfer some of the features of the formal learning situation into the informal? In the formal sector we have hundreds of years of experience in measurement of knowledge and skill – the examination and degree systems. How do we create measurement in the non-formal learning sector? The issue of human and social capital comes up here as central too. In general I think that we see an interesting mix of developments. In the conceptions of lifelong learning we move from a very social to a much more individual perspective, but when analysing and

researching we move the other way, from an individual concept of human capital to a concept of social capital. The fact that we introduce the concept of capital at all is also significant, because we now see the necessity to broaden the range of value concepts that can be used. From moral and aesthetic values to also economic values, but economic values as conceived in a "new economy" context. The second border focuses on our conceptions of life and the good life. But it also focuses on what actually constitutes learning processes. And are learning processes the same through life. There is a complex interplay between biological and social factors, and we only barely understand f.i. the various forms of learning in relation til the functions and developments of the brain. Learning and memory we know is fundamentally affected by aging. And the role of the various ages in society is also shifting. The third border is connected to the saying that in the learning society with lifelong learning we are all forced to be lifelong apprentices. What social structures can cope with this, when nearly all the institutions of society depend on the border being kept. That we have a fairly fixed conception of being a qualified even certified person, and definitely no longer an apprentice. The fourth border is a meta-border. It relates to the important phenomenon that most of our conceptions and institutions of learning were developed in societies very different from ours. We have two important medieval institutions still with us: apprenticeships and apprenticeship learning (coming again into focus in theories of learning) and the university. The manual and the spiritual. Body and mind. Forms of learning and forms of institutions. With the university we also got the ideas still central to much of secondary education, the cathedral schools – the preparation for university education. Of course we also have industrial forms of education and learning, where schools and learning is thought of in factory and production terms. We see it in the architecture of most industrial age schools. They are factories. We need to develop new conceptions and organisational models based on post-industrial contexts. At least we need to consider what they could be through an analysis of the history of the "old" models and concepts.

6. So what are some important tendencies that we can see in the last years? In 1998 the constructivist theories of learning seemed to be at the center, implying the shift from education to learning. From an informational and communicational conception of education as the acquisition of knowledge and skill to a more constructivist approach, where learning is seen as a form of construction. The victory one could say of Dewey and Piaget. In 2002 the challenges of more social theories of learning are felt. Learning is seen in a context, always situated. Communities of practice and apprenticeship learning are central concepts. Constructivism becomes "social" constructivism. Dewey is supplanted by Wittgenstein, so to say. This has important consequences for the conceptions of lifelong learning and the learning society. It has often been said that the advent of e-learning (the Internet, the Web etc.) is the answer to the prayers of the lifelong learning "movement". In a constructivist framework this might be so – but if this is supplanted by a much more social approach to the understanding of learning we have problems. The issue is then much more focused on how we create learning environments not based on the interaction face to interface, but face to

face, and how we introduce the social into the inter-face to inter-face interaction. Another development in the theory of learning it seems to me also have important repercussions. This is the move away from a cartesian-cognitivist conception to a conception involving affectual, emotional and bodily aspects of learning. Based both on brain research, the phenomenology of learning and new theories of situated learning.

In 1998 we saw the signs of an emergence of the importance of new social and economical developments. New forms of capital entered and new forms of value creation too. Educational economy became a new economy of learning with new forms of capital. The focus would be on new organisational forms – the meso level. Interestingly intellectual capital was not mentioned. New forms of knowledge production neither. Implicit was that we still had a valid thesis concerning the importance of learning to learn. Learning was not the creation of knowledge, but rather the individual re-creation. In a knowledge economy this is of course not enough. More and more work consists of the creation – not the acquisition – of knowledge, nor its re-creation. So we need to learn not to learn but the create knowledge. Of course the concept of knowledge also changes here. Knowledge creation is no longer seen as the discovery of facts – as in the traditional conception of science and research. Knowledge creation and learning are seen as related. The discussion of forms of knowledge production in "Mode 2" forms of society as has been introduced by the works of Michael Gibbons, Helga Nowotny and Peter Scott f.i. in the book "Re-Thinking Science" (London 2001) is indicative. This necessitates reconceptions of knowledge and learning, and of educational institutions.

If one looks at the most recent comprehensive collection of materials on lifelong learning (that I know of), the three volume "Supporting Lifelong Learning" (London 2002), coming out of the Open University research groups on lifelong learning, one can see the tendencies quite clearly.