LIFETIME LEARNING

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Keywords: Higher education, learning society, educational reform

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Summary

Lifetime learning is not only a necessary and trendy collateral aspect of the approaching knowledge society. It will be a central element of the future education system. Higher education will play, under these circumstances, the central role of an intergenerational hinge and an agency for society and individual learners. Lifetime learning cannot be reduced to a mere methodological change. It must have sustained consequences for institutions and their cultural and social environments, and it will be demanding for all types of students and teachers. The individual strategy of change for all participants in lifetime learning processes will be central for the maximum success of the vision of a learning society.

1. Introduction

Any enlightened view of humankind considers our species to be educable and capable of learning under any circumstances. In fact, all of us are learning throughout our whole lifetime. The old pattern of biography (lifetime development), however, divided the lifetime into several distinct phases orientated to the main fields of individual development and actions: education, which covers the period of making a person a personality; the phases of working, of creating families or other sustainable social structures; of leisure; and of retirement.

There is one special sector that has become only recently a distinct phase of biographical regularity or contingency: the stage of higher education. Squeezed between education and work, between the moratorium of the adolescent personality and a

privileged working place and status, this stage has special features with regard to people's learning and lifetime.

Since the establishment of universities as big licensing and qualifying institutions where research and teaching also bridge knowledge gaps between the generations, it has never been decided whether and to what extent higher education is part of society's education system.

If we consider it an integral part of this education system, we must investigate the correspondence between higher learning and the previous stages of education; and we must ask what "education" means in this context. Furthermore, we have to reflect on the other sectors of social and cultural life, especially the economy, that influence higher education. Finally, the very special effects of science and scholarship, with their distinct claims for autonomy and academic freedom and their universal approach, have to be taken into consideration. Will it be possible to transfer the answers into a concept of lifetime learning (LTL)? Or do we, despite all good intentions, just stick to an extrapolation of existing structures, using modern technology to hide the ruptures in our concept? There is one assumption that the trend towards LTL is also a reaction to poorly accomplished other educational reforms.

These questions are important, because they point to several interesting further aspects in the debate:

(a) How will the basic structure of passages in status, biography, and learning be changed by the notion of LTL?
(b) Will the distance between lay cultures and expert cultures vis-à-vis science be affected by this notion?
(c) How can institutions adapt to the demands of LTL?
(d) How must academic teachers and students adapt to these demands?

This article will not follow the order of these questions, but will take them up and revisit them as appropriate.

Another problem that should be touched upon in this introduction is that LTL is frequently linked with two big issues: a new and intensified relationship between higher education and the labor market; and the rise and victory of new technologies.

The first issue is closely related with the question of the position the sector of education will have in a future system characterized by LTL. There are two concurrent options, which may cause conflict and competition. If the tertiary sector is the dominant model for all post-secondary training, then the direction will indicate clearly that:

(a) the system of higher learning is an integral part of the education system, and
(b) there is one unifying perspective of this sector, and this will be qualification (work).

This clearly implies the subsuming of higher education under this tertiary sector concept. There is a consequence for what is envisaged as a highly qualified society in the future (Ulrich Teichler). Even if it is unclear how this type of society will be

organized, it will clearly depend on coping with enormous amounts of information, condensed into short-lived knowledge.

On the other hand, if the sector of higher education points at a different notion of education and the education system, then universities and all other institutions of higher learning will be clearly distinct from the rest of the tertiary sector and will have to have an established relationship with this rest. In the traditional discourse this would point at a certain "autonomy" of LTL vis-à-vis traditional organizations of education, with a strong link towards new concepts of society, marked by individualization and multifunctional constructions of personality.

This dilemma is not at all trivial, in the face of the tremendous reforms under way in the field of higher education. A system that places the institutionalized sections of LTL not into the top universities but into only loosely related institutions will affect the engagement of faculty quite differently from an option where LTL is part of the core mission of a university.

Many consequences can be deduced from this, including the arrangement of courses, the training of faculty, and the administration. More important is the philosophy behind such an alternative. The full equality between the traditional differentiated academic training to earn a bachelor's or a master's degree, a diploma, or a Ph.D., and LTL activities will be important for all functions of higher education, especially universities, to be imbedded into new concepts of LTL such as licensing, conferring of status, and expertise. And the solution to this problem will certainly draw reactions from the economic system. Whether and how it will also draw reactions from culture and individual lifetime development will depend on how ready the institutions are to meet the challenges from these fields.

The other big issue is the use of new technologies. It is almost impossible to cover this phenomenon except superficially, as it is considered to be of equal significance for human knowledge as the invention of printing half a millennium ago. From the decades of experience of open universities and distance education we know how important the effective and efficient use of these technologies is. They gain a new dimension in the field of higher education and science, and there will be many ethical, philosophical, and practical consequences for those in LTL.

One last aspect should be mentioned in this introduction: this text will restrict itself largely to the fields of science, technology, higher education, and research, which means that the main interface with other aspects of LTL will be at the point where lay and expert cultures intersect.

2. Principles of Higher Education and Lifetime Learning

There are three very special aspects to "higher" education: the educational, the socioeconomic, and the cultural. The term "higher" points to a hierarchy and to the linear upgrading from primary via secondary to tertiary, which also approximates "highest." Other systematic approaches see higher education as directly linked only to scholarship and science, as opposed to any knowledge situated on the level of common

sense and everyday understanding of the world. A third approach would stress the intellectual quality of higher education, as a responsibility toward the people in order to make them competent to face problems that can be solved only by scientific understanding. As for labor and industry, higher education provides the qualifications necessary for any work or service that requires scientific input, either directly via research and development (R&D), or indirectly via a sensitivity toward scientific tools and methods. All approaches share, more or less, the conviction that higher education adds to all kinds of development in a society, and adds a lot of private value, expressed by status, income, quality of life, and individual flexibility.

Thus, it is understandable that the classical "university," and later on the system of higher education, tended to become central to any developed society, and played an important role in the making of modern states. Secondary effects are elaborate licensing systems, the organization of expertise, the political and cultural impact of the scientific community, etc.

All these elements will be projected onto LTL. At first glance, there is only the organizational problem of opening the institutions to students or customers of all ages, and, consequently, altering parts of the didactic concept. But this is almost to trivialize it. The concepts of LTL surpass the older idea of continuing education and derive from a very different social anthropology and cultural point of view. We may link the idea of the learning society and the knowledge society to the new notion of learning humankind, central to LTL. The easiest explanation is that the old system of clearly distinct phases in a lifetime does not match these aspirations. The traditional higher education system is unable to cope easily with the introduction of overlapping time concepts and of diachronic structures. But, and this is the main thesis, LTL and only LTL will be able to preserve the central position of higher education in a modern civil society.

There is a clear line of increasing elaboration of this aspect from the first UNESCO approaches to the current Council of Europe's concepts, the European Commission's implementation efforts, and the importance of LTL as a central aspect at the UNESCO 1998 World Conference on Higher Education, the Hamburg Declaration, and the 1998 Mumbai Statement.

3. "Academic Lifetime Learning"—Definitions and Positions

In a learning society, the educative and anthropological aspects are under scrutiny. One of the key questions is whether the university, or any acknowledged institution of higher learning, is prepared to deal with these aspects and to implement the principles of LTL. UNESCO and the Council of Europe have clearly linked LTL to the reform of higher education: the university must change in order to comply with the demands of LTL.

What is unique about the university that makes it so precious to human achievement? Very briefly, one can define it as an institution that is central to the foundations of any civil society. It hosts a specific type of knowledge, theory based and above particular interests, it enjoys academic freedom, which is situated above the general human rights of the liberties of free speech and thought, and the mobility of experts and ideas. Here

we have two links with LTL: the specificity of higher education lies in the ties between academic freedom and quality, and in the actors' permanent reflection of the relevance of method and content. Common sense alone will not suffice.

Academic LTL, apart from adult education in the fields of vocational training and continuing cultural formation, will have to re-interpret its position vis-à-vis the diverse scientific communities. If the confrontation with science is at the core of higher education, then all concepts of LTL should adapt to the challenge from the various lay cultures to the expert culture of higher education. One of the first decisions to be made is whether academic LTL should be imbedded into the existing structure of the university, or be established as a second, parallel, track.

4. Educative Aspects

There is a new meaning to being adult in the context of LTL. Lifelong does not simply mean permanent in the sense that all human beings are continuously adapting to their environment. Being adult also implies being autonomous to a certain extent; moreover, it means that all individuals should attain a certain independence of judgment with regard to society and their environment. Being adult is an aim that suffers from many social and cultural restraints and barriers, mainly social, but also in the field of culture, living conditions, and all aspects of deprivation against the natural wish to participate actively in making a livable "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*; this term was coined by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas). This is the reason why informality and self-governance in the learning process is so important. However, this individualizing of the learning process presents two possible obstacles to the present state of the traditional university. On the one side, there is little guidance to avoid a crude autodidactic approach toward hard science and scholarship; on the other side, the individual academic freedom of learners, other than professional scientists, is not disconnected from the institutional freedom that characterizes the university. All virtualization of higher education has to overcome these, and here the discipline is not as far as expected. The reduction of the problem to mere applications of new media and forms of communication is not enough. The concept of mature personalities organizing their learning processes according to a high level of self-determination is almost complementary to the concept of the university; it is a paradox that this complementary function is currently endangered because the centrality of higher education to society is at risk, and universities must fight hard in a segmented market under the pressure of highly efficient agencies of LTL that are outside the system of higher learning. Thus, the reform of higher education can use the concept of adult learners as a vehicle for its own purposes, and this explains, why so much emphasis is given to LTL in the context of reform. Open universities, such as in the U.K. and the Netherlands, have been rather successful in coping with this problem.

The learning of adults does not automatically imply education. This is also a crucial issue for the standard of civilization and culture. Do we need lifelong education? The traditional idea is that the main educative process comes to a provisional end after secondary education in institutions like the family and school. Beyond the adolescent phase, grown-up, adult people, with all their rights, duties, commitments, and options, are personalities for whom educational development is replaced by flexible responses to

the challenges of social life (family, peers) and the world of work and individual leisure. But it is evident that the rapid change of external conditions requires more than mere adaptation. New challenges demand not only new skills, abilities, and information, but also a permanent revision of ethical principles, moral standards, recognition of and critical views on rules and regulations. In short, many elements of basic education are at stake—which does not mean that they should be abandoned at every minor attack from reality. However, the really innovative challenge for LTL is to provide adequate information for a lifelong process of self-education and collective educative efforts. Again, this implies the reflection of these challenges in the content and methods of LTL.

Higher education cannot accept purely utilitarian concepts where LTL is reduced to providing to learners the exact amount of useful information required for a defined situation. Three layers of educational processes may be identified:

(a) The need for adults to keep up with cultural standards and techniques necessary for communicating and interacting; this is the sphere of building cultural capital;
(b) The building of competence in order to be able to discriminate and discover relevance in all fields where science plays a role; this is a sphere where learners of all ages and backgrounds are confronted with an enlarged mission of science and scientific knowledge;
(c) The establishment of a layer of values and rules or methods in order to gain and maintain a standard of self-organization within the expert culture of higher education.

These layers should not be separated artificially, but we must have a closer look to the consequences of recognizing them.

Cultural capital (Bourdieu) means that individuals are able to link themselves into discourse by knowing when to develop and utter an opinion in a situation, where more than knowledge and basic information are asked for. As we know that in future science and technology will play a decisive role in all problem-orientated discourses, this ability (i.e. the possession of a certain repertoire of cultural capital) will be not only instrumental in the cohesion processes in a society; it will be also important for the degree of integration and inclusion of individuals into more than one discourse, thus empowering their self-determination and maturity. We may assume that there is a surplus in educational power over the mere cognitive aspect.

It is also important to recognize that adequate definitions of problems and their solution depend on a higher educational level than in the past. This is generally so for higher education. Transdisciplinary approaches require a very high level of combinatory skills and a deeper understanding of the interdependencies between science and reality. The confrontation with the notion of relevance is also an educative aim, because it requires a change in individuals' time and energy budgets. To build a competent public is one of the noblest missions of the university in the future. This competence is also an instrument to overcome secondary analphabetism in scientific thinking and language. A habit for LTL has to be developed, and will further educate people. This comes close to the notion of Humboldt about science being by itself a means of educating people (best

represented by the German *Bildung*, instead of *Erziehung*: **see *Glossary*** for an explanation of these concepts); the combination of these two elements with the third layer makes the adventure of academic LTL even more demanding. Inherent in the privilege of studying in an institute of higher learning is the danger of becoming estranged from one's background. It has to do with the incompatibility of lay and expert cultures. Each and every biographical phase in which individuals come into contact with scientific thinking and problem definitions adds to both the privilege and the danger. The new culture of learning, required by the concepts of LTL must take this into consideration.

Emancipation from unsatisfactory situations is not only a social program. Emancipation through higher education is also a program of compensating for lost opportunities in the past. Since family structures, basic and secondary education, deprived childhoods, poor social and cultural conditions, etc. merge in the adult personality, it is only fair to attribute a compensatory role to LTL. As the mix of unpleasant background experiences can hardly be deconstructed by LTL, many approaches will compete. But they all have in common what can be read from a case study aiming at professional skills:

> The project "seeks to achieve equality of outcomes for people whose circumstances, geographic, physical or cultural, would not permit them becoming professionally qualified."

The argument is not aiming, at this point, at professionalization but to the fact that education is an element of the circumstances. The compensating element always includes an element of "re-education" insofar as the state of and demand for adequate education will always have changed for people who enter a learning process at a later stage. Even if a university is just replacing traditional school education or professional training, this will happen in a way that is modified by the scientific foundations of those involved. This can imply a more or less direct link to research interests and strategies, or it will be shaped by the academic teaching experience of some of the actors. Confronting these students with ordinary undergraduates will have further consequences for the structure of the learning process in academia.

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Biographical Sketch

Michael Daxner, born 1947 in Vienna, received his Ph.D. from the University of Vienna in 1972. He worked in higher education administration for the Austrian government until his appointment as a professor of higher education at the University of Osnabrueck, Germany, in 1974. His research was directed to higher education politics, university reform, and Jewish intellectual problems in the twentieth century. In 1986, Michael Daxner was elected president of the Carl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg. He is a professor in sociology and Jewish studies at his University. Michael Daxner has widely published in both his research fields. He is also a delegate to many boards and committees of European and international associations for higher education. He has received honorary degrees from Towson University and from Novosibirsk State University.