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"Conceptualising Lifelong Learning:
A Reflection on Lifelong Learning
at Middlesex University (UK) and Lund University (Sweden)"

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Conceptualising Lifelong Learning: A Reflection on Lifelong Learning at Middlesex University (UK) and Lund University (Sweden)

What should really be the meaning and scope of lifelong learning? How do Lund University (Sweden) and Middlesex University (UK) understand the concept of lifelong learning and how do they translate this into action within their environments? Lifelong Learning has in recent years become a fundamental element of many educational policy strategies aimed at achieving the goal of socio-economic development (EC, 2001) in many countries the world over. Despite its wide usage, the concept remains complex, multifaceted and contested (Johnston, 2000; Kokosalakis & Kogan, 2001). This state is demonstrated, firstly, in the many terms used to describe it, which include *Continuing Education, Distance Education, Work-based Learning, Problem-based Learning*, and *Adult Education*.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the concept of lifelong learning and to offer some suggestions in the approach to the analysis and conceptualisation of the concept. Then, further the discussion on lifelong learning in two entities of two European universities: Middlesex University's School for Lifelong Learning and Education (SLLE) and Lund University's Office for Continuing and Distance Education (OCDE), Sweden, based broadly on their *Understandings* and *Practices* of the concept. I have found these two cases of interest and worth examining because of their common but contrasting approach to lifelong learning. It is not simply a comparison between the two approaches, but an attempt to illustrate how two universities ('traditional/old' and 'new/modern') in two European countries understand and deliver lifelong learning and its implication on lifelong learning in Europe. The sources of information for this paper have been varied, but heavily relying on documentary sources outlining policy goals and operational structures from both Middlesex and Lund universities, as well as publications on lifelong learning. Interviews were also conducted with key informants concerned with policy development and programme delivery at the School for Lifelong education (Middlesex) and Office for Continuing and Distance Education (Lund) purposely to check and authenticate the documentary sources.

Literally lifelong learning can be understood as learning that occurs throughout life. Literature suggests that the notion of lifelong learning existed since the creation of humanity and has only recently appeared in its institutional form (Kallen, 2002), or existed as far back as ancient times especially through the writings of such thinkers as Plato and Comenius (Withnall, 2000), and that the notion will continue to exist even if current interest on it dissipates away (Cropley, 1980). One of the early initiatives that provided a platform for scholars to start an examination towards what is now known as lifelong learning, under the auspices of lifelong education, was made by UNESCO in the 1960s and recurrent education by OECD in the 1970s (Tuijman, 2002). Generally, the development of lifelong learning has been credited to three international organisation; UNESCO, OECD and Council of Europe, who played significant roles in promoting the idea, a term originating from policy discourse among intergovernmental agencies. Since then the question of what lifelong learning really is has become a contested issue among scholars, researchers and policy makers interested in it. Several perspectives, therefore,

exist on this phenomenon; and for the purpose of discussion I will have a relatively broad and surfaced outlook of some of these perspectives while basing the discussion on those of Aspin and Chapman (2000, 2001).

In a UNESCO report chaired by Edgar Faure, lifelong learning was viewed as a life-span endeavour by an individual, whether in the formal, non-formal or informal mode, with the purpose of enriching the quality of life of the learner as an individual and the general community as a whole (Tuijman, 2002). According to the European Commission Lifelong learning is:

"All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective" (Thomas, 2003: 4).

Other relatively recent views, closely related, are expressed by notable international institutions such as the UNESCO (1996), OECD (1996), and Nordic Council of Ministers (1995). Since the beginning of the 1990s many countries in Europe have expressed the concept of lifelong learning in many policy documents, showing support for its development (Field & Leicester, 2003). Ideas of lifelong learning varied conspicuously, and can be categorised in different ways such as categorisation according to its purpose, degree to which it is public or private, or types of institutions that delivers it among others. However, these can be put into two broad categories based on its organisation (dimension) and purpose:

- Learning occurring 'from cradle to grave', covering all activities at all stages of life; planned or unplanned learning activities and experiences, or in a restricted sense; all organised learning experiences, formal or informal, from preschool through compulsory schooling to post compulsory stages, including work experiences.

- Learning directed towards achieving (any/all of) economic competitiveness, personal development, leisure and/or social inclusiveness for democratic understanding and for public good.

In other words lifelong learning is conceived in terms of time and space, its organisation, and/or its purpose. The conceptualisation of lifelong learning to cover the whole of human life, which is from 'cradle to grave', raises important concerns about the efficiency and effectiveness of the conventional schooling system that has been in operation for several decades now. Should the conventional schooling system be modified, scrapped off or considered a subset of the new scope of 'learning' that covers all forms of life experiences? The widening means of learning or acquiring knowledge are also acknowledged and more emphasis is placed on learning rather than education. Lifelong learning, it is argued, should cover the total human endeavour including social, economic as well as personal needs of the individual. This conception assumes a holistic form that breaks the boundaries of age, place and scope. The proponents of this view argue that this type of all inclusive and broad spectrum of lifelong learning will reject the school and post school division to encompass the whole lifespan of the individual, thus

maximising learning opportunities for all, enhance community development, increase economic competitiveness and a move towards the idea of a learning society (Field, 2003; Aspin & Chapman 2001). This view is also developed on the philosophy that education is a public good; hence its aim and objectives should be based on enhancing the wherewithal of the general public.

The holistic outlook of the concept can be problematic in a wide range of applications "among them is the risk of dispersion, a loss of focus and the difficulty of assigning and evaluating priorities" (Tuijman, 2002: 105). If 'learning' is seen as a product of living, then it brings to question the need to engage in more careful planning, implementation and evaluation of educational policies and programmes (Bagnall, 1990). Smith & Spurling (1999: 9) in their two-faceted conceptualisation of lifelong learning stressed that at the *empirical level[1],* "lifelong learning is intended and planned learning" while acknowledging that it is a continuous process throughout the lifespan, they maintained that aimless and unplanned learning cannot be lifelong learning, terming it as 'trivial'. Recent debates on lifelong learning have noticed a departure from its unintentional and unplanned notion to one that is aimed at achieving specific goals such as the creation of the knowledge society (Knapper & Cropley, 1991; Field, 2003) and covers the whole lifespan.

Yet some other conceptual classification is based on the economic capital – social capital understanding tied to the purpose of lifelong learning. The adherents of economic capital orientation have put high priority on its economic benefits, indicating a shift from considering education as a public good to a private good. Apologists of this view argue, among other things, that if individuals in the public are economically empowered they will directly benefit as individuals as well as contribute to the "betterment of society, both directly through their productive work, and through their beneficence and generosity of spirit towards others" (Ball, 1995; cited by Bagnall, 2000: 23). It is suggested that the current post-modern inclined society may be the cause of this economic deterministic nature of education (Bagnall, 2000). Bagnall continue, however, to elaborate on the negative implication of the claimed virtue of this view by pointing out that such an individualistic focus has a high tendency of excluding and marginalising a much more disadvantaged members of the public, while strengthening the already wealthy and powerful members of the public. The supporters of social capital perspective underscore the public value of lifelong learning rather than for just the individual good. In following the different arguments on lifelong learning, it seems we might still be a long way to arriving at a broad consensus on what lifelong learning is, especially if arguments advanced for or against particular perspectives of lifelong learning fails to acknowledge the different backgrounds and circumstances in which this concept operates.

Of interest in this paper on the current discussion of lifelong learning is to put forward another analytical perspective, of an initial formulation and open to further analysis and critic by the intellectual community, based on the perspective of Aspin and Chapman (2001), in which, after a revision of the different visions of lifelong learning, cautiously rejected the view that an 'essential' definition of lifelong learning can be arrived at. They

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[1] The other is the moral level.

identified three elements, described as the 'triadic' nature of lifelong learning which are characteristic of most policy statement or activity of lifelong learning across the globe. The three are framed around the purpose of lifelong learning which are: to bring about economic progress and development; seeks to bring about personal development and fulfilment; and for social inclusiveness and democratic understanding and activity. They stressed on the interdependency and complex interconnection between these elements that culminate to bring about an education "for a more highly-skilled work-force *at the same time* an education for better democracy *and* a more rewarding life" (Aspin & Chapman, 2001: 29) for the individual.

Aspin and Chapman suggested what they termed a 'pragmatic approach to conceptualising lifelong learning' as a way forward and a more applicable option to realising lifelong learning for all. They maintained that "Neither logical empiricism, positivism, nor ordinary language analysis will serve as single 'will be' comprehensive theories to account for all the phenomenon constituting the bases…of lifelong learning" (Ibid: 15). That this pragmatic approach requires philosophers, policy makers, researchers and educators to find a common ground, an area of interplay in which common interests agree; a point referred to as 'enmeshment' or 'touchstone'. This stand seems to bring to the limelight the complexity and difficult involved in trying to frame an acceptable conceptual definition for lifelong learning, especially in identifying the variations in the nature of problems in different communities across the globe.

Lifelong Learning, from the Operational Level Conceptualisation?

Postillating on Aspin and Chapman's analysis, as much as it is agreeable with the fact that it seems rather difficult to arrive at an essential definition of the concept due to its elastic nature, I tend to be critical on the philosophical levels at which the concept is being handled. It seems to me that this 'pragmatic approach' suggested still bogs down to a common problem of handling the issue of lifelong learning at *only* the philosophical level by 'cautiously' calling for a common agreement on the philosophical premises by all and sundry, while ignoring the wide gap that exists between the theories and practices of lifelong learning. This trend creates a wide gap between the conceptual understanding and the operational level understanding of lifelong learning (Kokosalakis & Kogan, 2001). We need to recognise the current state of lifelong learning which suggests a departure from being a mere 'policy of education' (Lawson, 1982: 97) to a situation where pragmatism is a pivotal element, in which providers practically respond to the needs of their partnership *communities* in the most rigorous, innovative, unconventionally and in a non-bureaucratic styles. This undoubtedly calls for analyses that carefully consider happenings in provider perspectives and domains rather than the present brandishing at the philosophical levels.

Furthermore, this view is emphasised by Millinson (cited by Osborne, 2003: 22) in which it is proposed that "researchers should 'seek to understand society not by examining the stated ideas of a small elite, but by participating with ordinary members of it in the construction of their social world'". According to Williamson in order to provide a much

wider educational opportunity for (adults) it will be important to start from an understanding of people's personal interests and how they perceive change in their own lives and that of the society. That it is not sufficient to "follow the market research model…it can only be done on the basis of dialogue between those providing learning opportunities and those for whom they seek to do so" (2002: 63).

Universities[2], to some extent, act as centres to serve different community types (local, national, regional and international)[3] at both physical and virtual levels and possess an understanding, in practical terms, the different views and understandings of lifelong learning and shape their courses and programmes to meet these views. They probably would also possess information on both the long and short term effects of such courses on learners and to some extent the challenges and suggested remedies to these challenges to making learning more useful to both the learner and the community in practical terms. Being at the very centre and operational level of this 'confusion', with a broader view of the scenario, the university can then be described as the 'touchstone' or 'enmeshment' where the different perspectives of lifelong learning can be practically expressed, and as a reliable reference point to start any conceptual foundation. In other words, the best place to understand lifelong learning is the delivery stage; whether delivered in a formal, informal or non-formal setting.

Thus through such an approach, the gap between theory and practice could be bridged. This should be understood against the background that in some cases there seems to be some gaps/differences between lifelong learning as a state policy and lifelong learning as means by which the state practically uses to improve its human capital. In other words a policy on lifelong learning could be so elaborate as to include all the 'essential ingredients' to satisfy the spectrum of necessary characteristics to make a nation strive, in the philosophical sense, but when viewed from the implementation level could be, for example, inclined to only the economic empowerment of individuals. The way lifelong learning is introduced by institutions reflects the roles they see for themselves in a rapidly evolving higher education marketplace. The prioritisation of access and overcoming disadvantage will lead to one set of solutions, community development another, playing a part in the development of the knowledge economy yet another.

Against this backdrop, I argue that if philosophers and researchers were to turn their attention to the implementation or delivery level of lifelong learning, in this case the universities, and take careful and critically view at this action stage (not in the form of market surveys), they probably would get an understanding of the operational, but hidden definition and real meaning of what lifelong learning is. This may give them a starting point of understanding the growing disparity between the philosophical lifelong learning

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[2] Again, lifelong learning provisions are carried out at different levels and in different forms in the society, however the concern here is higher education.

[3] The concept of 'community' can assume different forms and dimensions depending on time and place (see Elliott et al, 1996), but in this case the use of the term refers not only to the local community but in the sense of 'local, national, regional and international' having a complex interactions and interdependence at both the geographical and virtual levels.

and the operational lifelong learning for a more elaborate and inclusive concept formation, perhaps.

In positioning in the on-going debate/discussion on conceptualising lifelong learning, this paper cautiously recognises the difficulty in establishing a realistic meaning for lifelong learning without having to plunge into too wide a scope that could become difficult to deal with or probably too narrow that can exclude many other views. Nevertheless, it is important to identify certain parameters for the purpose of guiding the discussion in this regard. Lifelong learning is discussed in the light of developments and efforts made by universities to respond to the new realities and forces guiding the evolving information age and of globalization, beside the conventional (regular and discipline-based/taught) mode of delivery characteristic of most higher education institutions. In this context lifelong learning is viewed as involving all strategies that are put in place to created opportunities for people to learn throughout life. It therefore should be a *process* of conscious continuous learning that goes throughout life, formal or informal, and directed towards catering for both the individual needs and that of the *relevant* community(ies), across the socio-cultural, economic and democratic constituents, that will not only develop individuals to become responsible to themselves and their communities, but understand and involve actively in the democratic dispensation at all levels and forms of community. In a more simple sense lifelong learning refers to the distribution of learning opportunities for all throughout their lives pan (Green, 2000). In understanding lifelong learning in this perspective, all progressive interests will be catered for across all levels and forms of communities, creating equal opportunities for all to acquire knowledge at every stage of life. Putting this in the context of Europe, opening learning opportunities for the European population could be particularly imperative and expedient in enhancing and expediting the move to unify Europe. In this way, higher education institutions would be required to be more critical and look beyond the theoretical/philosophical underpinnings of lifelong learning, and to be conscious about the different expectations across the range, from the individual through to all the different community types the universities deal with to be able to translate the varied views into feasible educational programmes creating opportunities for people to continuing learning.

Lifelong Learning: the Lund University's initiative

In this section, I will have an overview of lifelong learning in Sweden before moving further to look at how lifelong learning is understood and practiced at Lund University's Office of Continuing and Distance Education – OCDE under the following themes: *policy and structure, access, curriculum and pedagogy, and finance/quality assurance and control*

Swedish Policy Perspective

Sweden is acknowledged to have been well ahead in policy deliberations regarding lifelong learning (Tuijnman & Schuller, 1999), despite the fact that it appeared in different forms since 1800 (Askling & Foss-Fridlizius, 2000). Presently, at the national

level, there are rigorous official policies to promote lifelong learning across the educational sector which is influencing all levels of education. Such policies have some influences on the lifelong at Lund University. Key policy issues that are characteristic of lifelong learning in higher education in Sweden include:

- Lifelong learning in higher education is aimed at "deepening the democratic societal goals as well as the continuing upgrading of the labour force" (Badersten & Wigforss, 2001).

- Lifelong learning in higher education is viewed as a combination of adult education, continuing education and all forms of recurrent education (Ibid).

- Resource allocation by government favours universities who have long programmes and course for regular students.

- The development of a Swedish Virtual University (SVU) to university level education in the form of distance education through the use of ICT.

The Office of Continuing and Distance Education – Lund University

Counted among the oldest universities in Sweden, Lund University has put lifelong learning as a priority in its policy strategies. The university opened the Office for Continuing and Distance Education (OCDE) in 1996 to implement its Lifelong Learning policy which is geared towards the provision of comprehensive services and support to meet the rising demand for continuing and market-driven educational demand (Ossiannilsson, 2002). By the 2003 statistics, Lund University had about 38, 000 students with about 12, 140 being part-time students (Lund University, 2003).

The policy for lifelong learning at Lund University can be understood from the OCDE's mission statement accepted by the board of governors of the university on the 9 of June, 2000. In the mission it is stated:

"education should be a life-long process in a society like ours…due to the swift changes in today's working life, everybody needs continuous updating of competence to cope with the job…for the university it is an important task to respond to the increasing demands for university-level training for professionals."

The university's understanding of lifelong learning is tilted much towards equipping individuals and organisations with knowledge and skills appropriate for economic empowerment, and run like a business enterprise in which the non-regular students are seen as its customers. According to Ossiannilsson (2002: 2) "So as to consistently meet organisations' and business's requirements of competence development and reflect the individual's requirements for lifelong learning, a particular structure has been developed at Lund University. A special policy group under the leadership of the chancellor has been established, as well as a group of professional project leaders, with the various faculties all present". The OCDE is not an academic faculty, but a body, to run,

coordinate and monitor lifelong learning in the university. The regular staff in the office are about three supported by some part-time project managers from the faculty network who together form a professional group for competence development. The office is charged with the responsibility of working closely with the seven faculties of the university to draw up relevant courses to meet the needs of its customers. It is also expected to report directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

The relationship between what is continuing education, distance education and lifelong learning is one of uncertainties, they are used interchangeably. However, lifelong learning is much seen as a political and philosophical jargon.

Access to courses and programmes are as flexible as its delivery, ranging from persons with no formal qualifications to specific qualifications. Courses are specifically modelled for professionals. There are also strategic alliances with organisations that contract the office to draw up courses geared towards upgrading the skills of their staffs; in this circumstance, the mode of access is more or less determined by the organisation in question.

Actual planning and delivery of courses and programmes are done by the respective faculties in the university and range from free modules to postgraduate ones. According to the mission statement, teaching courses in lifelong learning is part of the regular tasks for the teaching staff of the university. University lecturers go through a kind of training to enhance their skills to involve in the exercise. The curriculum of lifelong learning is very flexible and pays more attention to customer needs (OCDE, 2000); hence the courses are termed *non-regular courses*. There are over 250 web-based distance courses running in the university which are generally designed to help professionals who cannot attend regular courses and programmes in the university (Ossiannilsson, 2002). The courses are available in many of the seven faculties especially in medicine, natural sciences, law, humanities, social science and engineering. Learning activities are also carried out at local centres across *Skane* to aid participates to be able to use computers and follow courses delivered through video presentations. Learning outcomes are measured through level descriptions of some generic skills of which learners are expected to demonstrate, and the ability of learning outcomes to practically meet the needs of the learner. An innovative form of teaching and learning known as 'Learning Lund' has been introduced. The strategy "merges pedagogy, pedagogic ICT and networking for learners. It emphases insight through individual, collaborative and teacher coached learning" (Ibid: 3). Teaching and learning takes the form of both campus and distance activities that sought to unify the best from both. The Learning Lund strategy is said to involve a relatively large number of specialists and interested persons who collaborate to research and develop advanced learning tools.

The OCDE has identified two categories of lifelong learning based on financial considerations: continuing education as a form of lifelong learning that is in line with state policy of free education, and commissioned education as another form of lifelong learning that involves payments of fees or for cost of delivery by learners. In short some of the courses are sponsored by government and others by private companies. However, OCDE seems to have a clear financial policy when it is stated in its mission: "In the long

run, lifelong learning courses should generate a surplus and always cover their own cost" (OCDE, 2000: 1). The quality of courses are determined by the impact or satisfaction derived from the point of the student. The OCDE maintains that the quality of lifelong learning courses is very high and at par with the traditional courses in the university, and a lot of exploration is underway to further raise the quality.

From this stand, Lund University has responded to a greater extent to the Swedish state policy to promote lifelong learning, but stresses its institutional policy and practice more on the economic dimension of lifelong learning all geared towards strengthening its competitiveness and financial stability.

Lifelong Learning: An Innovation at Middlesex University?

This section explores the policy and practice of lifelong learning at Middlesex University, before than a note will be made of the lifelong policy in the UK.

UK Policy Perspectives

Lifelong learning in the UK has assumed different understanding and dimensions since the last four decades; it has existed as adult education, distance education, continuous education, and vocational education among others, and said to be the first country to open lifelong learning university – the Open University (Henkel, 2001). In the UK lifelong learning has appeared in several government educational policy documents highlighting its importance. However, according to Withnall (2000: 2, citing from Tight) "a detailed analysis of three major policy reports relevant to the development of lifelong learning in the UK reveals a strong priority accorded to vocational education and training in spite of some general rhetoric about the non-economic, personal and social benefits of lifelong learning". Government policy on lifelong learning can be summarised as follows:

- Lifelong learning is viewed as "the continuous development of skills, knowledge and understanding that are essential for employability and fulfilment…' (DfEE, 1998: 1)

- Policy has been non-direct and tends to encourage institutions to involve in lifelong learning programmes rather than strict policy prescription.

- Lifelong learning is not directly funded from state coffers in many cases; however its quality delivery by an institution stands to have a positive financial impact through quality assurance assessment.

The following statement from the Department for Education and Employment shows the central understanding of lifelong learning in the UK:

"For the nation, learning will be the key to strong economy and an inclusive society. It will offer a way out of dependency and low expectation towards self-reliance and self-confidence. In doing so, it will be at the heart of the government's welfare reform

programme. We must bridge the 'learning divide' which blights so many communities and the widening gap, in terms of employment expectations and income, between those who have benefited from education and training and those who have not" (DfEE, 1998: 6)

The School for Lifelong Learning and Education (SLLE) – Middlesex University

Middlesex University is one of the post 1992 universities in the UK, upgraded along with other institutions as part of national efforts to make higher education accessible to as many Britons as possible. It enjoyed great success during its years as a polytechnic. Middlesex in its efforts to reach out to a greater portion of its communities developed a number of innovative ways of delivery starting in the 1990s that included the creation of the School of Lifelong Learning and Education to run various programmes/schemes: Education (teacher training), National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships (NCWBLP), and Product Design and Engineering (PDE) referred to as innovate types of learning centring on career development and personal growth (Middlesex University, 2002).

The mission of SLLE is to provide "opportunities of the highest quality for lifelong learners to initiate, develop and enhance their capability for life and work" (SLLE, 2004). This seems to be in line with the official (not practical) UK national policy intentions for lifelong learning as expressed in many official documents. The school[4], like any other academic school in the university is headed by a dean with curriculum leaders and academic group chairs, yet has a unique place in the university (and nationally) due to its role as the biggest provider for lifelong learning and its proactive National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnership (NCWBLP).

Investigation indicates that there is no much or specific conceptual connotation attached to the terms 'lifelong learning' and 'education' as appeared in the name of the school, but at a literal level it runs lifelong learning courses which are akin to work-based learning, and also education studies, and Product Design and Engineering. The three main units (Education, NCWBLP and PDE) in the SLLE can conveniently be put into two categories for the purpose of discussion. The first category covers Education and PDE and is tied more to the conventional/regular type of university education. The other category covers work-based learning courses run by the NCWBLP which are non-regular/unconventional, and have flexible entry requirements based on an individual's or organisation's needs. However, it is worth noting that since the conceptualisation of lifelong learning in this paper is based on the principle of efforts made by institutions, beside the conventional courses, to make higher education accessible to all which would lead to the creation of the knowledge society, later discussion would be on the basis of activities in the NCWBLP. Initially all work-based learning courses in the other schools of the university were linked to the NCWBLP but some have developed their own work-based learning programmes which are closely related to their traditional discipline areas, even though

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[4] Unlike in the conventional/traditional university system where the term 'faculty' is used to describe academic units (like in Lund University), Middlesex University uses the term 'school' to describe its academic units.

with some occasional consultation with the NCWBLP. By far and large, work-based learning courses in the other schools form a negligible part of their over all academic courses and more especially an insignificant part of work-based learning in the university when compared with the NCWBLP at the SLLE, regarded as the main unit responsible for work-based learning, particularly. Nevertheless, this gives a better understanding of what goes on in the university as far as lifelong learning is concerned.

All courses in the SLLE are higher education ones ranging from certificate to PhD or DProf (Doctor of Professional Studies in the case of WBL). Access to courses in Education and PDE involves standard prescribed entry requirements based on the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) requirements and/or a university or school requirements. Which means prospective candidates should possess a particular qualification before they can be considered into a given course/programme as a full time or sandwich student. WBL courses are non-disciplined and opened to people above the age of 16 years and to both individuals and organisations who are employed (including self employed), and paid and unpaid employment. NCWBLP has developed strong partnership and collaborations with highly rated organisations and enterprises that may also influence patterns of access. For example a partnership organisation such as Marks and Spenser has some level of control in deciding which of its employees should or should not join a module at what time. According to Osborne (1998) the initial aim of the WBL at Middlesex took the form of return-to-learning option and directed towards matured students intending to access the traditional university programmes. Later developments demonstrated a relationship between employers and employees that led to a tilt towards continuing professional development.

The curriculum for the Education/PDE is disciplined-based and more or less preset or university and national (education) controlled curriculum with some limited student choices especially on projects. Modules are set out for students to follow with varied options. Research students within these programmes seem to have a level of flexibility of curriculum which is based on negotiations with the relevant lecturers and supervisory team. Mode of learning and teaching in Education/PDE is full time or sandwich with students expected to attend sessions regularly. It is basically the conventional teacher-learner interactions either physically or through the university's learning support webs: Information and Learning Resource Services (ILRS) and OASIS. WBL curriculum is work/work-place, non-disciplined based, learner centred and negotiated, and "does not assume a deficit model of student knowledge and skill but takes as a starting point the learning that an individual has *already* developed" (Osborne, 1998: 87). In most cases, the curriculum is based on an understanding between the partners and the university (NCWBLP) for the purposes of accreditation of programmes of partnership organisations by the university. Costly (2000: 24) points out that work-based learning at Middlesex "does not attempt to too narrowly define itself by restricting the boundaries of its knowledge based to paid work only" since it is worth acknowledging that "people bring their experiential knowledge from both paid and unpaid work activity to whatever new work they undertake"(Ibid). The mode of delivery is distance learning through email communication supported by the university's learning support webs: (ILRS) and OASIS.

There are also optional tutorial options which learners use as a platform to address some of the challenges they face with lecturers and colleagues. The work-based programme consists of a sequence of core modules which include a work-based project forming an important part of it (Doncaster and Garnett, 2000).

Assessment in the SLLE cuts across a number of ways ranging from different forms of examinations to various forms of written course work. In Education and PDE assessment assumes the traditional university form of written examinations, essays, projects, and exhibitions. Formal examination is not part of the assessment in WBL but students are expected to take the Accreditation of Prior and Work-Based Learning module (APWBL) that will aid in determining/assessing their level of experience or capabilities and a point to start/continue. The APWBL involves building up of a portfolio that captures their entire experience or knowledge. Assessment of students work involves generic criteria of 10 or 11 level descriptions. However, in all cases outcome of learning is demonstrated in a project or an exhibition that reflects an innovation, innovation especially in PDE.

In principle Middlesex University is not a profit making institution. Therefore the SLLE is supposedly not a profit making organ of the university. However, the reality is that the school is under an obligation to generate enough funds to cover its activities and if possible a surplus into the university's chest. The school obtains its funds from three different sources: Higher Education Funding Council, Teacher Training Agency (akin to Education) and Organisations and individual students (akin to WBL). It also attracts some funding from the research councils based on the number of research students enrolled. International students are also an important source of funds for the school. Strategies at SLLE are more geared towards increasing the number of students year by year with the main aim of increasing its income. Finances obtained are sent to the central management for reimbursement according to need, this involves a complex trajectory. The SLLE believes that the quality of its programmes is very high, citing two instances that demonstrate this: excellent conferment by the Quality Assessment Agency and the winning of the Queen's Anniversary Award, as well as from their students. Some form of criteria such as student feedback questionnaire, staff review activities, and the reflective handbook are used as means to improve quality in the school, especially more akin to WBL.

One thing needs to be cleared in the case of lifelong learning in the SLLE. The work-based learning courses are more reflective of lifelong learning when considered in terms of flexibility and the ability to make higher education accessible to all, and also in the sense of comparing it to the conventional form of higher education delivery.

Discussion

Influenced by different socio-economic and political environments backed by respective institutional and national policies of education and lifelong learning, overviews of lifelong learning at Lund University and Middlesex University above have shown some marked commonalities and differences which can be discussed from different standpoints. Thus, it is important to acknowledge the similarities and differences that exist between their organisational, content and delivery of lifelong learning provisions,

discussions would not be based on the above line of analysis, but will be more limited broadly to the complexities in their *understandings* and *practices* of lifelong learning rather than a straight one-to-one comparison.

Lifelong learning, what understanding?

Firstly there is an indication that conscious efforts exist in both universities to promote the practice of lifelong learning. Thus, the on-going engagement and concern for lifelong learning in the two institutions, at least, signals some seriousness and good prospect for lifelong learning as an institutional, national and regional policy. This is seen from policy deliberations and practice in the two universities. Despite this awareness of the essence of lifelong learning in the two institutions there seems not to be a clear conceptual underpinning in the sense of having a generally acceptable institutional definition of the concept. From the interviews conducted and the literature consulted on the conceptual underpinning of lifelong learning in the two institutions, no one source has proven so clear as to state in real terms what the official definition is, but rather being little sceptical and conceiving as much more a political jargon.

In both cases there is a feeling of limited links between national policy of lifelong learning and the institutional understanding and practice of lifelong learning despite the rhetoric of citing national policy statements at the institutional level to stress its importance. This can be seen from the pattern of delivery that pays more importance to the 'customer' needs rather than the national policy requirements.

Nonetheless the understanding of the concept can be observed much more on its practical delivery. Understanding based on the principles of widening access to more participation in higher education and desire to respond to the needs of its communities at all levels. As a result of this, practical division between the traditional form of university education and lifelong learning provisions are evident in both institutions; in terms of purpose, curriculum and pedagogy among other things, leading to segmented systems within institutions. The segregation undermines the claim of lifelong learning as covering all planned learning activities, and question the extent to which lifelong learning provisions have proven efficient. In view of this, lifelong learning seems to be facing a dilemma of 'place' in the university, especially when trying to delve into what should be its mode of access, curriculum, methods of delivery and assessment among other things. Several issues have been raised concerning some components of the practice of lifelong learning, especially on doubts about the efficacy of the pedagogy used, that is, whether those pedagogic practises actually links learning activities and learning outcomes.

Some factors that can be singly or jointly be attributed to this lack of a clear conceptual definition of the concept in the institutions are; firstly, the conflict between state commitment to diverse purposes for lifelong learning and at the same time its focusing exclusively on learning for economic competitiveness (Ecclestone, 2003). Secondly, as a result of dealing with diverse communities with different needs as a result of the knowledge revolution (Castell, 2001) and globalisation; globalisation in the sense of advancement of communication technology that is swift with no regards to national

borders and its knowledge having no respect for space and time (Giddens, 1994). Thirdly the current debate on lifelong learning which has witnessed strong and air tight arguments for and against different versions of the concept (Field and Leicester, 2003), probably could be a cause of the scepticism on the part of institutions. Perhaps an interesting issue worth investigating into could be to find out the implications of the unclear conceptual underpinning of lifelong learning on the learners, institutions, and national and regional policies of lifelong learning. Directly or indirectly these factors influence the understandings of lifelong learning in the institutions to be tilted, concentrating more or less on the economic or human capital perspective of education. This highlights the dangers in particularising or generalising the meaning and scope of lifelong learning, and then enforcing it as the essential without actually having a deep understanding of what actually happens in the practical situation in which the concept is being implemented.

Lifelong learning practices, a Mode 2 knowledge production

Perhaps the strongest point of contention between the traditional/conventional form of delivery and the current lifelong learning provisions in universities is the mode or way in which knowledge is produced. In the former, knowledge and knowledge production more or less belong to the academia, based on disciplines, produced in the university and the main interest of knowledge is to seek truth (Boud, 2001) and has little or no links to the immediate solution of current practical problems. The later shows a divergence of view and practice from the former, a view that indicates that knowledge and knowledge production are the shared ideals between/among all 'stakeholders', in which there is uncompromising links between the knowledge sought and the practical needs of learners. Knowledge is produced in a wide range of places rather than just the university, and carried out in collaborations or in project settings. The bases of knowledge and knowledge production spring from the context of application. This form of knowledge production has been termed mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons et al, 1994) (Scott, 1995; Edward and Usher, 2000 cited by Gallacher and Reeve, 2000).

The direction of lifelong learning practices in the two institutions show resemblance to mode 2 knowledge production if analysed from three standpoints. Firstly, in the case of the OCDE and to some extent in the SLLE (WBL) knowledge production is started from practical problems, based on the perspective of the learner, what the learner sees as useful endeavour worth venturing into that will lead to the solution of the practical challenges in his/her real life setting. Another standpoint is that in both cases knowledge production is not limited to the university environment but carried out in collaborations with other organisations. Furthermore, unlike in the conventional where the quality of knowledge is determined by peer review judgements (Welle-Strand, 1999), in the case of the OCDE and NCWBLP the quality of knowledge is determined through accountability and reflexivity, in the sense of judging based on applicability of knowledge to solve practical problems.

But does this trend in the two institutions symbolise lifelong learning or a movement towards customisation of education delivery? If lifelong learning in higher education seeks to create opportunities for more people to have access to higher education, then the tilt of the two institutions to a more 'entrepreneurial' form of operations where the

monetary rewards from their activities take the centre stage in their strategic plans raises concern on the ability to achieve lifelong learning for all. According to research, the desire of people to further their education in educational institutions is influenced by many factors including the ability to afford the financial cost of the studies. Many may be forced to up grade their skills for the sake of job security, in other words more inclined to the economic reasons.

Lifelong learning in both institutions seems to be a response to a call by industry and/or the desire to keep up with the growing competition among institutions rather than the golden objective of making lifelong learning available to all with the aim of enhancing the overall capability of the learner in terms of developing individuals who are "functionally independent, culturally informed and publicly aware" (Olafson 1973, Paterson 1979, cited by Bagnall, 2000), or in other words catering for the socio-cultural and economic constituents of learners. This is demonstrated by their emphasis on serving the needs of the 'customers' not the 'communities' which are most often tied to the specific demands of the learner(s). The SLLE programmes looks a little varied and directing towards achieving this fist in the sense of its education programmes, nonetheless the issue of what amount of money comes into the school at the end of the day is paramount and informative to whatever decisions and innovations to be dared. Similarly, lifelong learning as continuing education in the context of Lund University is free, falling in line with state policy; however the fact behind the OCDE operation is that at least enough funds should be generated to cater for its cost of operations and a surplus to the university. Having stated the above, it is important to acknowledge that (to some extent) the programmes in both units reflect the practical needs of the communities they deal with. Although it may be arguable that this caters for the needs of only those who can afford to support themselves financially, thus raising concerns of exclusion, there is no doubt about the fact that the lifelong learning provisions in both Lund and Middlesex have open the opportunity for some people who may not have the opportunity in their life time, for one reason or another, to further their knowledge in higher education to do so.

Implication to united Europe

Policy documents and discussions of intergovernmental organisations in Europe indicate strong support for lifelong learning. Some examples of this are the proclamation of 1996 as the European year for lifelong learning, and the 2000 Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, in which the European council placed great emphasis on lifelong learning as a tool for a better Europe when it is stated in a staff working paper:

"**Lifelong learning** is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it **must become the guiding principle** for provision and participating across the full continuum of learning context. **The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision.** All those living in Europe, without exception, should have equal opportunities to adjust to the demands of social and economic change…" (EC, 2000: 3).

If the above analysis of lifelong learning at Lund and Middlesex Universities is accepted, then this could well have some implications for the objective of the European Community to make lifelong learning a guiding principle of education in Europe. Firstly,

the differences that exist in the understanding of the concept of lifelong learning due to its elastic nature could create a very big challenge for Europe to formulate a feasible lifelong learning agenda applicable in its member countries, especially considering the existing faint link (i.e. in some cases) between state policy and institutional practice of lifelong learning. Perhaps one way to deal with this is to adopt a more flexible approach to the conceptualisation and practice of lifelong learning that will give individual states (in collaboration with their institutions) to organise and practicalise the concept based on their individual national needs, educational systems among other things. The on-going communication between heads of higher education institutions in Europe and the various national forums organised earlier to reflect on creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) could be a platform to deliberate more on this issue.

Furthermore, the tilt of institutions towards making lifelong learning an economic issue or a profit making enterprise could play against the European aim of making lifelong leaning a guiding principle in the provision and participation by all in learning in the sense that it could lead to the exclusion of a large number of the population who are unable to afford to pay for lifelong learning provisions, especially in a case where state support is limited. To ensure effectiveness in achieving this aim, there should be more strategic support (financial resource) to subsidise the cost for lifelong learning by states and the regional organisation towards achievable and measurable targets.

Perhaps the biggest and central challenge in this development is the extent to which institutions in Europe can translate, manage and strike a workable balance between their institutional, national and the regional policies on lifelong learning in a globalise setup where swift communication systems is its hallmark and in which knowledge has no regards for time and space. This means institutions will be confronted with varied interests across local, national, regional and international dimensions. The ability of institutions to handle this challenge in a balance way would largely depend on how much resources they will have at their disposal and how their involvement will affect their quality of delivery and competitiveness at all levels. This would also require a genuine commitment on the part of nations and their institutions in Europe towards achieving the collective agenda agreed on lifelong learning by being conscious of and 'sympathetic' to this 'progressive agenda'. Identifying and understanding of the practical needs (not assumed) of the relevant communities being dealt with (right from the local to international), and collaborations[5] among institutions in the region through combine research and exchange expertise, overseen and well involved by the European Community could be another way of supporting the success of the objective.

Another issue is that the push towards a greater acceptance of mode 2 of knowledge production might lead to the ignoring of other areas of disciplines which are, even though not immediately linked to practical problems, yet are very important in safeguarding cultural continuity and for future development and progress of the society. This could post a challenge to Europe especially and nations in particular to ensure that lifelong

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[5] Many collaborative programmes such as THENUCE (Thematic Network Project in European Universities Continuing Education) and NIACE geared towards understanding lifelong learning across universities in Europe.

learning provisions actually cater for the overall socio-economic and democratic dimensions of society, rather than just a component of this. This requires close deliberations between the regional organisation, states and institutions to work together towards an understanding and addressing of these real concerns. For lifelong learning to become the driving force for the formation of a knowledge society in Europe, perceptions about it should move beyond the mere understanding as a supplement to the conventional systems of learning to a more central role in the learning and teaching process of the university, where more research is conducted to establish correlation between lifelong learning provisions and their outcomes.

However, the problem-based knowledge production observed could go well with the European lifelong learning strategy if it is operated in a manner that would create equal opportunities for all to adjust to the socio-economic demands of the time, rather than 'customising' provisions that is limited to a portion of the community and could lead to exclusion of many who can not afford. Against this background, uniformity in the level of engagement of the entire components of the lifelong learning movement across Europe could be an illusion unless, of course, the need and rule of interpretation and flexibility is acknowledge. This may not go without strong conflict between the academia, national interest and the regional body. Notwithstanding this, the dynamics in understanding of lifelong learning could well be a source of strength and optimism to realising the objectives if all players take a proactive stand in this regards.

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