

Per Himmelstrup's intervention at the LERNPOTENTIALE-meeting in London.

September 2001

In 1972 UNESCO organised a big international conference on Adult Education in Tokyo, Japan. The conference based part of its work on the idea of *Lifelong Learning* and the role of Adult Education in this context.

The idea of lifelong learning was not new. It had been discussed under different names during the late 60'ies. In UNESCO it was called *Lifelong Education*. In the Council of Europe it was *Permanent Education*. In OECD it was named *Recurrent Education*.

But I am quite convinced that the original idea and initiative came from the world of Adult Education. There was optimism and creativity in the field during the 60'ies and great expectations about the future. We talked about the 70'ies as the decade of education and culture for adults. Preparing for the Tokyo-conference in Denmark we established several working-groups to study different aspects of this new concept of lifelong education. As an important part of the preparatory work, which started 2 or 3 years before the conference, we also published a journal - limited in time. We named it *Lifelong Learning* (Livslang Læring) - not education - to stress that it is not just a question of teaching but just as much of learning.

This distinction was important to us - not least because they are both covered by the Danish term *undervisning*.

Learning (læring) is a question of motivation, accessibility, guidance and counseling

The aim or the idea was/is - according to the Danish/Scandinavian tradition of education for adults, which we call *folkeoplysning* (popular enlightenment) - that personal development and enrichment is central. The aim is to develop the capacities of the individual - based on his or hers potentials and talents; to make the individual a selfrelying person who has the courage to be him/herself and become an active and responsible citizen.

When this kind of learning is in focus it is very difficult to measure the outcome of teaching.

Traditionally we do not like exams and certificates and diplomas in Denmark.

But unfortunately new trends are coming even to Denmark from outside. And trends now favour exams and papers, they believe it is possible to measure what I get out of a teaching/learning situation.

As a follow-up to the Tokyo-conference we succeeded in getting a debate in Parliament about the outcome of the conference and the new ideas about education. But the political interest was minimal.

Many politicians looked upon lifelong learning as an attempt to gain ground and money for adult education/folkeoplysning. Different part of the educational "system" competed in stead of cooperating. And the "spirit of time" changed. It was no longer in fashion with folkeoplysning (general, liberal education) now the talk was about teaching and vocational education.

We published a book about "Strategies for Lifelong Learning". It was hardly noticed.

In accordance with the new "spirit" OECD took over and linked *recurrent education* with the labour market and economic development in the 70'ies.

It got some impact on reforming vocational education/training - and employability was introduced in the educational discussions.

New teaching methods drawing upon all the new technology developed. It was the time of Overhead-projector, distance teaching by TV a.s.o. - In Germany, in Marl, annual meetings or festivals took place to show and discuss educational TV-programmes.

About 1990 there was not much interest for the new technology or for adult education and lifelong learning.

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But in the changing societies in the 90'ies the ideas - especially about lifelong learning - were slowly revitalised and even politicians who had previously been reluctant became positive; and the different parts of the educational system were no longer defensive. - They realised that all parts and elements - and also culture and social work - are interlinked.

As the European Commission says it so beautifully: Lifelong Learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts.

Personally I would like to include culture and social work to make Lifelong Learning a Whole.

We must still - or again - be aware of the fact, that people do learn a lot - without learning - and without being able to provide any kind of documentation or certification

A problem - or an issue - we have to take into consideration when talking about lifelong learning:

What is need?

Who needs what?

In the past the weakest part - adult education - was the initiator and driving force.

As I have indicated - it did not work.

Now other forces are in the forefront and adult education has to fit in and work hard

- especially the Popular Enlighthenment (folkeoplysning).