

Lifelong learning and intercultural education

Words, like "Lifelong learning", can be used in different contexts in which they have different meanings. The context where lifelong learning is used in the policy of the European Union is as a human capital concept, which means that a human being is an object for investment and knowledge is a market-driven commodity. Education is then an economic investment and loses its democratic and humanistic values. The intercultural question is mainly investigated in social sciences and expressed in another "language" and with other concepts. These problems are difficult to discuss meaningfully within the frame of how lifelong learning is understood in an economic context. It is far from the basic problems in the field of education. In Sweden it increases for instance adult education the adaption to the labour market, but diminishes the meaning with learning and knowledge. It gives an instrumental value, for what efficient goal, but it forgets the aim, the very meaning, and the value of what we are doing.

The intercultural question

Intercultural questions are expressed in terms of diversity and difference in relation to a nation or a union. In Sweden the multicultural policy has been dominating, where Culturalisation is used as an explanation of behaviour. This is today met by critic where diversity is changed into difference, and the acknowledgment of difference and "the other". Research show that a unity always excludes groups of people, often in terms of inclusion. I would propose that the policy makers in EU took part in, dealt with for instance the postcolonial tradition, where we find the most scientifically developed language and concepts to treat the intercultural problems. Here the "third space" is the term for where something new can be created. Here difference means to be, and have the right to be, different. Turn the world map upside down and the dark Africa, the "Heart of darkness" can be in London. Let hybridism works and we can have lifelong experiences around the globe. If such insights were worked in the very understanding of a human being in an intercultural situation and society could be something else, beyond the policy excluding non-European people to be citizens and fruitful parts of society. Then lifelong learning could be transformed into a humanistic concept, which it was in the first generation of the world, produced by UNESCO, and an important democratic concept, counting full citizenship as a human democratic right. In this case lifelong learning could be a fruitful concept for inclusion and how differences could create something new, something which we do not know now.

The lost dimensions

Education has historically three dimensions – a humanistic, a democratic and an economic. Up to the Second World War the humanistic was dominating, after the war up to 1986 education was democratically motivated. After 1986 the economic is increasingly dominating, diminishing the other two. This is in Sweden recognizable in the whole educational system. As long as this is the case lifelong learning is limited to rhetoric. The lost dimensions cannot be created in resumption of something old, but to be created in a new way. This knowledge exists in human and social science, mostly outside the province of Europe, or in a double experience of the European and some other part of the world. Lifelong learning can mean different things in different parts of the world. 1993 the concept was introduced by the South African trade union, COSATU, with the ambition to make theoretical and practical forms of education equal in the system. That was a good ambition since education was mostly for white people and training for mainly the black or colored population. 1997 was a conference where I asked the educational minister about human capital. “No, we have not yet been reached by this cold wind from the north”, was the answer. At the same time there was educational experts present, prepared to let the wind blow. Sweden has a great responsibility, not just for its own sake, but even for others. The obeying atmosphere in relation to EU and the lack of critical thinking among educational experts makes adult education and increasingly even popular education into a human capital market. We have to wait for, and work for the humanistic and democratic wind to blow anew.

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