

Lifelong Learning – A Challenge for the Education Theory

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***Anotácia. Celoživotné učenie sa – výzva pre pedagogickú teóriu.** Táto štúdia nastoľuje otázku, či pojem “celoživotné učenie” nie je synonymom “celoživotného vzdelávania”. Aj keď sa vzdelávanie končí v mladom veku, človek sa učí celý život. Nastoľuje to nejakú zmenu v teoretickom diskurze v pedagogike? Je oddelenie roly žiakov/študentov od roly učiacich sa reálne, relevantné, obhájiteľné a vysvetliteľné? Alebo tieto javy sú len parafrázami základných pojmov, a preto v pedagogike potrebujeme nové paradigmy, ktoré ponúkajú koherentné odpovede na tieto otázky.*

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***KLúčové slová:** pedagogická teória, paradigma, celoživotné učenie sa, celoživotné vzdelávanie, formálne vzdelávanie, non-formálne vzdelávanie, informálne vzdelávanie*

***Lifelong Learning – A Challenge for the Education Theory.** This paper discusses whether the concept of „lifelong learning” would be a synonym for the concept of „lifelong education”. Whether the fact that even if education ends quite early, one learns all life long, indicated any changes in the theoretical discourse on education? Is the separation of students’ and learners’ roles true, relevant, defensible, explainable? Or the above described phenomena only rephrase the basic concepts, and we need new paradigms of education that offer a coherent answer to this question.*

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***Key words:** educational theory, paradigm, lifelong learning, lifelong education, formal education, non-formal education, informal education*

Gyula Csoma (2004) clearly distinguishes between the ideology of „permanent access to culture and education”, the trend of the „culture-optimistic” world of 1960-70’s and the current trend of lifelong learning (LLL). I share this approach, that considers the former as a quasi-utopia, aiming to help the „human being as a whole” to build a complex, rich career and live a happy life; and the latter as a technology to create a new one, up to all „human resource” for the sharp competition on the market. Obviously, this harsh judgment needs more shades: relevant theoretical domains should be identified by an analysis of the role models of post-modern humans that is able to interpret the moral-didactic principle of „Live and Learn”, avoiding a meaningless, but seemingly scientific rephrasing of a commonplace.

Heribert Hinzen and Koltai Dénes (2000) in the preface to a volume on adult education identify the education for a healthy lifestyle and the art and handicraft education, besides language learning, as the most popular fields of study at community colleges.

However, when comparing the two concepts, a very clear difference can be distinguished: the former uses very confidently, almost as synonyms, the concepts of culture and education, while the latter shifts the emphasis from teachers to learners, the learning humans. Would it be a sheer stylistic change? Or is it a turn in the theory of education? Is the metaphor of „transmitting knowledge” becoming empty, and its central role will be replaced by the „knowledge-constructing” individual? (Nahalka, 2002) This concept is surely present in the change of definitions. But there must be other factors as well. I argue that this other factor is the challenge itself that pushed for the change of paradigms in education theory, and later authenticated it. The challenge was the strengthening of the theoretical interpretation of humans as individuals, as opposed to their interpretation as social individuals, belonging to groups (and even pushed to groups and group-identities). On the other hand – and it makes the issue even more complex – parallel to the growing theoretical importance of this „atomic individual” (or, as Miklós Csányi, 2000) phrased the one-person community, one-member group), there are signs of the disappearance of the individual, which is often replaced by the one-dimension man, the faceless member of the consumer society, and other significant alienation theories, e.g. the knowledge factory-phenomenon in terms of education.

This paper discusses whether the concept of „lifelong learning” would be a synonym for the concept of „lifelong education”. Whether the fact that even if education ends quite early, one learns all life long, indicated any changes in the theoretical discourse on education? Is the separation of students’ and learners’ roles true, relevant, defensible, explainable? Or the above described phenomena rephrase the basic concepts and we need new paradigms of education that offers a coherent answer to this question.

To bring up, raise up, a grown-up: these expressions refer clearly to the traditional age limits of education, involving a time definition, a term that indicated the end of this social task within the life span of an individual. It is worthy to compare the theoretic approaches to this term. In some cultures there is a sharp border between the „immature” and „mature” stages; roles are entirely different, as we know from ethnography: names, dress-codes clearly show the difference. Rituals were slowly transformed into folk-costumes and official state ceremonies (as e.g. the Matura – the high school leaving exam for the urban middle class). It was easy to find the time for this symbolic term, until the biological and social maturity coincided (especially for the non-industrial societies), however by the growth of the gap between timing of

maturities made such terms merely symbolic. And modern psychology gave the coup de grace. The concept of the „coexistence” of development proved that components of the human personality may get mature in very different times. The experiences of constructivism transform the „age related features” to „sensitive periods”, which made it difficult to determine the end of „being raised up”. And still there is the age related interpretation of the „transaction-analysis” that uses the shift from one big life period to the other as a tool to defend the personality from „attacks” (Berne, 1999).

The conceptual system of István Bábosik (1994) offers another escape-route: he uses the soft concepts of „mature personality” and „constructive personality”, and puts a benchmark behind them: the desirable status of disappearance of instruction, and the arrival of dedication and skills for self-instruction.

Is this arrival relevant to any age standard? There are children and adolescents who get mature earlier than the average, and there are adults, who need in some aspect of their – otherwise mature – personality an external guidance.

State-concepts based on ideological doctrines identify the „end station” of education independent of the psychic age. In our geographical-geopolitical context socialism was such a concept. Forming an „all-sided socialist man” by education, as a life-span-embracing directive for socialization actually did reach over the immature age of childhood, however the paternalist self-ideology of the state-raison – that labelled itself socialist – looked at its citizens as if they were children. I might even say, it happened so, because the goal was inaccessible.

We should also analyze here another expression: *re-education* in the so called socialist context meant brainwashing. However this also can be the term for re-educating deviant individuals, without that negative connotation. Following the Anton Makarenko’s Poltava experiment, Marek Kotanski’s Monar (Kotanski, 1995) and the Golden Cage of István Benedek had a very good reception in the Hungarian educational discourse. On the other hand, the initiative of a mayor in a Budapest district was received with refusal and confusion, when he wanted to prescribe a dress-code besides a behavior-code for public servants.

In the LLL ideology continuous change is essential. To meet the continuously changing challenges exclusively reproducing and restructuring knowledge cannot be sufficient: new or newly structured competences are needed, that are impossible to create with a traditional concept of knowledge, learning or teaching, respectively. Even in the most inflexible LLL program the new rules and norms of living in groups will be part of the curriculum, and this

can widen the interpretation framework of the transformative process to education.

Or the concept of education has to be reconsidered? Where are the limits of the developmental intervention that wants to *bring changes in the human quality of the other individual*? May we have a narrower concept of education when referring to LLL?

The triadic structure of LLL (formal – non formal – informal) calls for a wider spatial concept as well. In my recent publications to replace the concepts of the education sociologies using the dichotomy of school and family, and at the most they add the softly defined „extra scholar education” I recommended a new taxonomy (Gombocz – Trencsényi, 2007). As the unharmed world of the naive „*natural communities*” faces the challenges of modernization, especially the historic period of the middle class formation *educational institutions* are set up, and also *market oriented services*, and somewhat later *civil initiatives, organizations*. These are the four corner stones of the educational system, and in the space bordered by them educational sub-systems are dynamically organized and reorganized, that may be state financed or private, and use their sources more or less effectively. The dynamic of the transitions of the educational sub-systems is nicely illustrated e.g. by the church’s replacement from the world of the natural communities to the world of civil initiatives. (Kamarás, 1994), or the institutionalization of children- and youth organizations by the socialist regime, combining them with the school to fulfil its monolithic view of society (Szabó, 1991; Trencsényi, 2006). The dynamic formation and reformation of the educational space is reflected in the media that replaces, compensates, precedes, and suppresses (respectively) the interpersonal interactions.

Education theories that divide the world of education to family and school are captives of the dichotomic education labelled „state controlled and private”. Their world-view, depending on the actual historical context, gives priority to one or the other and creates an ideology of dualist education. However, in the post-modern world of the pluralist democracy the dualism is no longer a valid approach, there is a much more complex system of educational organizations, and they are not always connected to the above two, no matter if we speak about alliances or enemies. A typical phenomenon of our time, that the school cannot blame the family any more – since its ideological base collapsed - so to explain its failures the school tries to find a new scapegoat, and it has found the media that works based on the freedom of speech. In the space of educational purposes and processes the LLL-universe has a very important position, and there freedom of speech is an obvious thing. To apply it also in the life-period of the „classic” education – in many respect I consider this the paradigm able to offer valid solutions.

The Delors-report could be considered as a symbolic overture (Oktatás, 1997). The expression „education” in its title is already a sign. But more importantly, the four pillars („learning to learn”, „learning to do”, „learning to live together” and „learning to be”) is a clear reference to the *classic educational character* of acquiring culture. (NB: This structure is very similar to the four core activities in László Gáspár’s theory of education; Gáspár, 1997).

All this was followed by the theories of competences as Kraiciné (2006) and Lóth (2006) described in the context of andragogy. Nagy József’s (1996) four factor competence-system is a core theory for this analysis: the concepts of „personal competences”, „cognitive competences”, „social competences” and „special competences” do match well to the previous approaches. The originality of Nagy’s theory is the knowledge-skill-attitude triad of the competences. It clearly dissolves the traditional, but dead-end dichotomy of teaching-education or cognitive development – affective development. It clearly refers to *education*, and is a result of the „life-long” interpretation of the issues of education.

However, while I argue that there are no reasons to cut the human life span clearly into two poles of *learner* and *non-learner roles*, there are some issues that require mediation. Let’s start with the physiological differences. There are several arguments supporting the senior-age learning, facts remain facts. Aging, wear-out, scleroses in varying extent, but do limit the plasticity of the nervous system, it becomes more and more difficult to create learning situations, and the learning process requires ever growing efforts. And these facts stay even if several transfers actually help the senior age learning (Ádám, 2002). The basic physiological process changes direction as time passes, of course the dynamics of this change depends on the person, and fields and timing can vary even within an individual.

The question of personality is even more complex. There stages of the human characters, when it becomes difficult to shape or change it. History and classic literature have very few examples of cathartic transformations after the rebellious youth is passed. If we look at these transformations from Saul in the New Testament to Andrej Bolkonskij by Tolstoy, the agent of the transformation is always transcendent.

And a third dilemma that is even more important. The (educational) intervention in the personality of an adult human in a modern/post-modern society has its legal limitations. Apart from special cases (that would hurt others rights) in a legal context the integrity of the others personality cannot be questioned. A memorable example of this is the debate in the Hungarian parliament right after 1989 on the new law of defence. Opposing the socialist and country-party standpoint, the liberal actor, Iván Darvas said passionately

the following: There is no such a situation in which an adult can intervene in the personality of another adult as a disciplinarian, even if a sublime ideology like patriotism stands behind it. The parliament of the time supported his arguments. And while there are no laws supporting the theoretical questions of education, this case has lessons for us.

And another thing. The approach to education as a two-pole phenomenon is in transformation. The traditional approach gave the responsibility to the teacher in the teacher-learner system, and structured their relation as hierarchy. This asymmetry was refused already quite early. The works of Karácsony on the importance of social relations is completely about this. When we think about the metaphor of symmetry-asymmetry, we may say: an absolute hierarchy cannot describe educational relations. Applying vertical axes we could only describe relations of dictation and enslavement. In an educational sense the personality does in change here. There is no education in such a structure. It's not an education what happens there. We can only speak about education if the axes are in a horizontal, symmetric position. This symmetric relation would be a relation of colleagues that would describe a modern, clear partnership. And if we think this example a little further: many partnerships wreck due to the sway of this balance towards one or the other partner.

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