Asia-Europe Meeting

LIFELONG LEARNING & YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT

Engage yourself in becoming a rich person

Self-entrepreneurs commit all their talents, skills and abilities to the labour market. But how do young people balance the relationship between instrumental activities and activities that have an intrinsic value?

By Claus Holm

Human beings have the ability to engage. However, they do so in varying degrees: when people are not involved enough, we call them inactive or lazy; when they engage themselves too much, we call them hyperactive. But in addition to demonstrating a person's activity level, engagement involves putting oneself in debt. But who or what are you putting yourself in debt to? To others, a community outside oneself, *or* to oneself and one's own personal development?

This issue of *ASEMagazine* focuses on how important, but also how difficult, it is to answer this question, foremost because it is not always possible to give an either/or answer. The difficulties are illustrated by looking at how young people engage in transition: between different stages of education, between education and work and, more generally, between different types of (learning) activity. I will illustrate this by looking at some studies that have attempted to assess the so-called 'gap year'.

Embarking on a pre-university gap year is an increasingly popular option for British and Danish students among others. The term 'gap year' is used to refer to a diverse range of activities involving combinations of paid and unpaid work, leisure and travel. But how do you assess the value of a gap year in, for example, Denmark?

In May 2015, a Danish think tank concluded that a gap year is expensive both for the individual young person and for society. The young person is missing out on earnings, while the Treasury loses tax revenue. This leads us first to conclude that a gap year is not only a waste of time, but also an expensive waste of time – both for the individual and society. However, a team of Danish researchers came to a different, more positive, conclusion: namely, that Danish young people aged 16 to 25 who have not completed their secondary schooling and are undecided about their future educational pathway can benefit from a 'gap period' at a so-called Danish folk high school. During a typical stay of four months, students sleep, eat, study and spend their spare time at these schools, which offer non-formal adult education to students mostly between 18 and 24 years old. These schools, the researchers explained, provide the young people with a place that is free from the pressure of performing to meet examination requirements; a space that meets their professional, social and psychological needs all at the same time; and a safe environment in which to clarify their ideas.

Combining these two assessments may lead us to conclude that young Danes can afford not to engage in society's economic needs or indeed their own. Instead, they engage themselves in improving their own personal development. However, it is not quite so simple. We must consider whether the choice of a gap year in Denmark and elsewhere is an expression of a desire to distinguish oneself in a world where educational qualifications are no longer sufficient to guarantee success; where it is also necessary to develop yourself as a 'rounded and rich person'; where a range of broader interests and hobbies – previously seen as enjoyed for their own sake – are now viewed as an investment in socio-emotional skills.

In fact, the OECD's 2015 report *Skills for Social Progress* highlights the importance of this personal and educational ideal. It states that children and young people need an education that gives them a balanced set of cognitive, social and emotional skills to equip them with the flexibility needed to cope with the economic, social and technological challenges of the 21st century. The modern knowledge economy framework requires young people's personal involvement. The difficult challenge therefore is to determine to what extent society is able to achieve a balance between the commitment of young people to pursuing societal and professional financial objectives and their simultaneous engagement in activities that constitute ends in themselves. ■

"…educational qualifications are no longer sufficient to guarantee success; (...) it is also necessary to develop yourself as a 'rounded and rich person'; where a range of broader interests and hobbies – previously seen as enjoyed for their own sake – are now viewed as an investment in socio-emotional skills."

P. 22

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OPTIMISTIC EXPECTATIONS

By Claus Holm, *clho@dpu.dk*

Young Australians' post-school futures are uncertain, insecure and fluid in relation to working life. But if you think that this is the recipe for a next generation of depressed young Australians, you may be wrong. A new book documents that young people are characterised by optimism, but their expectations of the future differ from those of their parents.

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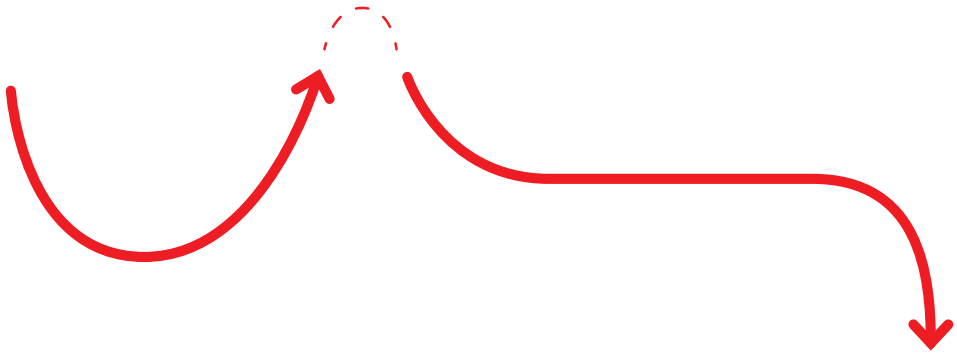

If you are a young Australian, or for that matter any young person, in a global world, there is good reason to be concerned future. This is one's first impression on reading Lucas Walsh's new book *Educating Generation Next*.

From the book's very first page it is apparent that the global labour force is changing: that during the last 30 years, working life has become profoundly different from in previous generations – with 'different' meaning worse. It means that young Australians' post-school futures are increasingly characterised by uncertainty, insecurity and fluidity in relation to working life. And this situation has only become more pronounced since the global financial crisis of 2007–08, which accelerated this situation on a global scale. Globally, as many as 290 million 15- to 24-year-olds did not participate in the labour market in 2013. That is almost a quarter of the world's youth, and a group almost as large as the population of the USA.

If you base your expectations of the book on its beginning, then you will probably expect it to be filled with anxious and worried testimonies from young Australians. The surprise is that this is not the case. Rather, Lucas Walsh's studies indicate that young Australians have optimistic expectations for the future.

But before we hear more about young people's optimistic expectations, let's consider Lucas Walsh's two reasons why young Australians are of interest. The first reason is that they serve as a unique case study that has significance to educators and policymakers throughout the world: Australia has undergone an unprecedented period of prosperity, but Australia's young people are nevertheless increasingly exposed to conditions of workforce fluidity and precarity that bear similarity to broader conditions that are transforming young lives throughout the world. The second reason is that Australia is also a case study of neoliberal policy whose trajectory bears certain characteristics of austerity measures adopted in Europe but without the same underlying economic problems experienced in other countries.

"Globally, as many as 290 million 15- to 24-year-olds did not participate in the labour market in 2013. That is almost a quarter of the world's youth, and a group almost as large as the population of the USA."

Lucas Walsh
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

But back to the young Australians' optimism. Why are they optimistic?:

"Based on the evidence, you would not necessarily expect them to be optimists," says Lucas Walsh, and adds: "It is consistent with our vision of young people as an object of concern which predominates much of the way we think about young people and their transition to working life. It is generalised beyond 'at risk' groups to the young in general. In the globalised, risky labour markets young people are at risk of failing to reach conventional markers of adulthood, such as securing full-time employment or buying a house."

Nevertheless, Lucas Walsh believes that there are signs of optimism among young people. Several years ago, in the wake of the global financial crisis, he was involved in a small project investigating the attitudes and biographies of young Australians in transition, many of whom were living in conditions of precarity and marginalisation from work and study. But still he identified a recurring attitude of optimism.

"My conclusion was then, as it is now, that despite the often unsettling portrayal of young people in transition that emerges from the data, young people are resilient and optimistic about their futures," says Lucas Walsh.

But do young Australians really have something to be optimistic about, or are they hopelessly naive people whose optimism will be destroyed by the economic realities of the 21st century?

Completers feel in control

In Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* the boy Pip's – hopeless – desire is to be a gentleman. This formative novel depicts Victorian England in the 19th century: the century of improvement. And it this very educative progress for the boy Pip that is the theme of the book. Poor Pip actually succeeds – with financial help from a criminal – with his education project. He changes character after committing mistakes and undergoing painful experiences. In the early 21st century, a similar novel would probably bear the title *Optimistic Expectations*.

In any case, Lucas Walsh points out that data from the World Values Survey show that, across almost all participating countries, school completers are more likely to feel that they have control over their lives than their peers who do not complete school or its equivalent. Of young Australians who took part in these surveys between 2005 and 2007, ›

56 per cent believed that they had a high degree of choice and control over their lives. A further 41 per cent felt that they had some degree of self-efficacy. Only 2 per cent stated that they had little or no choice and control. This kind of finding is consistent with that of a Mission Australia study, in which more than 64 per cent of 50,000 young respondents indicated that they felt either positive or very positive about the future.

But Lucas Walsh also notes that optimism is not equally strong for all. He says: "Of course one should be aware of differences in the strength of optimism. Three times as many non-completers feel that they had no choice and control within their lives as their counterparts who had completed school. I think on the one hand the implication of the data showing this is to recognise that young people from excluded groups are less likely to feel that they are autonomous. This is reinforced by other research, which shows that young people from low socio-economic groups are less optimistic than their affluent peers. In addition, the findings of an international survey released after my book went to press suggest that many are not so optimistic – even in countries that are faring reasonably well economically, such as Germany, Sweden and Australia. This is of course at odds with a pervasive view of young people as in general confident, optimistic and trailblazing."

But do your research results support that there is a significant degree of optimism among all young Australians?

"Yes, one of my main conclusions is that despite the often unsettling portrayal of young people in transition that emerges from the data, young people are resilient and optimistic about their futures."

Bolster hope!

It is one thing to be optimistic, but another question is whether there is a basis for this optimism. Is there any justification for young Australians' positive expectations when it comes to having a permanent job and being able to afford buying a house, just as their parents did?

"I am not sure that they want the same as their parents. Having said that, it is a relevant question whether youth optimism will be tempered by the sometimes-jarring realities of post-school study and employment outcomes, which I outline in my book. That is, as the promise of education as a pathway to secure and desirable work is challenged by the global economy, what effects – if any – will this have on what I call 'generation next'?"

But what then do the young people want, if they do not want the same as their parents?

"The evidence indicates that young people see more to life than fulfilling economic need or being the products of 'slack'. Again I would like to refer to data from the 2011 World Values Survey, which indicate that three-quarters of young adults prioritised the need to protect the environment over economic growth – although, among teenagers, this concern appears to be competing with other issues such as 'the economy and financial matters' as identified in recent surveys by Mission Australia," says Lucas Walsh. He continues: "I think it is fair to say that the challenges of youth transitions should be located in a richer world of values, contexts, expectations and possibilities for young people to participate in the economies and societies of the 21st century."

"…one of my main conclusions is that despite the often unsettling portrayal of young people in transition that emerges from the data, young people are resilient and optimistic about their futures."

Lucas Walsh
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

But even when you think of issues in relation to environmental problems, can it be difficult to retain a hopeful attitude?

"I agree that it is a challenge to bolster hope with the tools, resources and support needed, for example, to get young people into work. This includes not only developing adversity capital in a systematic way, but also building and expanding existing pathways to work through further study and training, as well as providing a safety net for those who fall along the way."

Become resilient!

Where risk is predicated on an anxiety about the future, resilience is imbued with a certain optimism. But which competencies make young Australians resilient? Which competencies give the individual Australian young person reason to be optimistic in relation to future job opportunities and life in general, as well as the capacity to navigate changing worlds of work?

Lucas Walsh suggests in his book that the starting point is that many young Australians may not be resilient enough. This is documented in a number of surveys of business in Australia that suggest a perception among employers that young people are underprepared for working life – this ranges from underdeveloped foundational skills in numeracy and literacy to soft skills

Young people are characterised by optimism, but their expectations of the future differ from those of their parents.

such as communication and problem-solving. But Lucas Walsh also points out that the recipe for becoming resilient is to develop these soft skills.

"The development of soft skills, in particular, reflects a wider need to prepare young people for worlds of insecure work in Australia and internationally. Many of these soft skills are already developed in Australian-based education and training programmes such as vocational education and training (VET) in schools and curricula such as the International Baccalaureate. Efforts are also made in the Australian Curriculum, but are they being realised in the classroom? They need to be more widely and explicitly adopted across schooling in general. The reason for this is that the soft skills form part of adversity capital, which enables young people to be more adaptive, flexible and resilient."

But does this not just mean that young Australians simply adapt to the neoliberal social order?

"I am aware that the critical question is whether the development of these skills as a form of adversity capital reflects a shift in focus of education towards developing a subjectivity characterised by individual self-management and responsibility. But this particular shift is a possibility, not a necessity. There is more to it than this," says Lucas Walsh. He continues: "At least I argue that this kind of adversity capital also offers scope for resistance to the responsibilisation of young people as a basis for their regulation and provides the capacity for them to critically engage and resist the domination of certain economistic, neoliberal ways of thinking and being."

How does one ensure that such resistance can be expressed?

"First of all you have to acknowledge that resilience is not a condition of individuals alone, but also exists as a trait of a child's social and political setting. It challenges the dominance of neoliberalism when you stress that resilience includes social policies and structural deficiencies beyond individual-level factors and is a culturally and contextually sensitive construct. Secondly whether a young person, parent or community endures, copes or thrives is dependent on the resources of the community that are accessible and culturally meaningful. Adversity capital relies on these resources alongside the active intervention of states and other actors to support, develop and enhance these resources. This perspective on resilience makes me optimistic." ■

Lucas Walsh

Associate Professor Lucas Walsh is Associate Dean (Berwick) in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, Australia. He was previously Director of Research and Evaluation at the Foundation for Young Australians. Lucas has worked in corporate, government and not-for-profit sectors. He has held four research fellowships and managed the International Baccalaureate's Online Curriculum Centre in the UK. He has been invited to advise local, state and federal governments, including the National Curriculum Board and Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, presented nationally and internationally, and published one co-edited book and two co-authored books. His latest book, *Educating Generation Next: Young people, teachers and schooling in transition*, is published by Palgrave Macmillan.

BIG TROUBLE WITH SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

By Anders Martinsen, *andm@dpu.dk*

A smooth transition from school to work requires each individual to invest in education. It also requires strong cooperation between labour market, education and social institutions at national levels of government. But the fact is that most OECD countries have trouble achieving smooth transitions.

"It is true that most young people will find a job in the end. And, in the end, a permanent job. Nevertheless, the cost of the difficulties faced by young people in their transition is perhaps not sufficiently considered by governments."

Stéphanie Jamet
SENIOR ANALYST

Ideally every young person should have a smooth transition from school to work. The reality for many young people is that they do find a job. But this may take time. And for a large number the reality is also that they do not use the skills they acquired in their education. Furthermore it is also a reality that one in four of those employed has a hard time advancing in their career or participating in further training as they are working on temporary contracts. To sum up the situation, seven years after the global recession more than 35 million 16- to 29-year-olds in OECD countries experience trouble with making this kind of transition. OECD's new publication, *OECD Skills Outlook 2015: Youth, skills and employability*, is an attempt to put forward its solution to the problem. *ASEMagazine* talked to the co-editor, Stéphanie Jamet, about who or what could solve the problem.

Invest in resilience

The million-dollar question is what skills each individual needs in order to achieve the ideal of a smooth transition. Stéphanie Jamet gives two answers to this question.

The first answer is, in short, to invest your money in education! Stéphanie Jamet explains: "Investment in formal education is associated with both higher individual earnings and greater societal wealth. The relationship between educational realisation and income, on an individual level, has remained strong in relative terms and individuals have therefore continued to invest in higher education, since it represents a reasonable economic choice as long as the individual economic cost of obtaining it is not unreasonable."

The second answer is to identify which skills will give you value for your investment. Stéphanie Jamet elaborates: "With this report OECD underlines the importance of obtaining a relatively broad set of skills during education. Like the earlier PIAAC (Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) survey, we see cognitive skills as important for both the labour market and for life. These skills enable a person to learn throughout life and to adapt to the changing demand for skills. On top of this it is important to clearly underline the crucial importance of becoming resilient through learning. If you do not have these skills it will be difficult to upgrade your skills throughout life."

Make a well-functioning system

It is not enough for a successful transition from school to work that the individual person has the will to invest in the education system and develop the relevant skills. More must be done by more actors to make a well-functioning system. Stéphanie Jamet says: "There is a need to bring the education system towards the labour market. There are various ways of making the education system more responsive to the labour market. It can be through unions, government, public policies, to name a few. This is the responsibility of everybody. It is a question of developing work-based learning, developing high-quality vocational education and training systems, and, not least, engaging employers more in the discussions about education."

According to Stéphanie Jamet, not all countries are doing well, precisely because they are not looking at all aspects of employability for young people and do not think in terms of policy to raise this employability. She says: "It is true that most young people will find a job in the end. And, in the end, a permanent job. Nevertheless, the cost of the difficulties faced by young people in their transition is perhaps not sufficiently considered by governments."

Students are overqualified

Different surveys in the OECD report suggest that both employers and young people find that too many young graduates are not well equipped for the world of work or simply are overqualified. Stéphanie Jamet explains: "In the OECD countries 12 per cent are overqualified for their job. This is a clear indication of some mis-match between the skills that they are developing in the education sector and the skills needed for the labour market."

She therefore calls for employers and other stakeholders to be more engaged in the education systems at various stages and through various means. Thus, developing work-based learning is for Stéphanie Jamet a crucial way to strengthen the links between the education system and the labour market, boost youth employability and improve transitions from education to work.

"In a survey we looked at whether young people were in a job linked to their field of ›

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

Presented in *OECD Skills Outlook 2015: Youth, skills and employability*

1

Towards a better formal recognition of skills through "Skills Passport" systems:

In **JAPAN**, the Job Card is a document that records the individual's education, training and employment history, and can be used for further training and job searching. The Job Card system, established in 2009, provides on-the-job training in combination with classroom education (officially labelled as a programme to develop vocational ability). At the end of their training, education, and work placements, the skills and knowledge of participants are formally and objectively evaluated and recorded on the Job Cards. Participants in the programme also receive career guidance to facilitate their transition from training to employment.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION developed the European Skills Passport, an electronic portfolio that documents all the skills and qualifications citizens have acquired, including those learnt during apprenticeships. The idea is to facilitate the validation of employability skills across European countries and fields of work, and to help graduates and students find a job or training.

In **AUSTRALIA**, the government has re-introduced legislation to support the introduction of the Unique Student Identifier (USI), which began on 1 January 2015. The USI allows all of an individual's training records, entered in the national VET data collection, to be linked. It will make it easier for students to find, collate and authenticate their VET achievements into a single transcript. It will also ensure that students' VET records are not lost. The USI will stay with the student for life and will record any nationally recognised VET course that is undertaken from when the USI came into effect.

2

How some education systems are taking a more holistic approach to skills:

In **KOREA**, school curricula and the ways in which students are tested emphasise learning facts over creative thinking. To address this issue, the curriculum was revised in 2009 to include direct and indirect methods for developing creativity and innovation and the academic content of the curriculum was reduced by 20%. The curriculum now includes "creative experiential learning activities" – essentially, extracurricular activities that allow for the learning of the core subjects.

In June 2013, the government of **DENMARK** introduced a comprehensive reform of compulsory education to raise its quality and outcomes. The reform includes the development of a more varied school day to promote curiosity, innovation and entrepreneurship. The national framework sets the number of hours for each discipline, but school leaders have the responsibility of organising school days, including extracurricular activities. Short periods of physical activity have to be included in every school day, and more music lessons are offered. School leaders are asked to be more open to, and to cooperate with, local community organisations, such as sports clubs, cultural centres and other associations.

In addition to including extracurricular activities, the Danish government encourages the development of new forms of teaching to promote social and emotional skills. For example, schools can cooperate with local sports clubs to teach English or maths through physical exercise. In 2014, the government allocated funding to 15 schools, for the academic year 2015/16, to experiment with outdoor education and demonstrate how it could work.

Immigrant students are often unaware that words can have more than one meaning, and have trouble understanding abstract concepts and phrases. In 2014, the Danish government developed a booklet on the "grey zone" of language that can be used by volunteers working in homework cafés, a well-developed system of places, often libraries, where students can go after school to receive help on their homework.

In **FRANCE**, the government introduced in 2014 a new school schedule over four-and-a-half days instead of four days while shortening the school day. The objectives are both to better distribute learning time over the week, with main lessons given in the morning, and to develop extracurricular activities organised by municipalities. These changes aim to develop equal access to extracurricular activities and to move towards a more holistic approach to education.

3

Initiatives to match young people's skills with labour market needs:

Aspiring Minds is an **INDIAN** company founded in 2007 with the goal to "help talent meet opportunity". The starting point was a company assessment that almost half of Indian graduates were unemployable in any sector because of their insufficient English language knowledge and low cognitive skills. Aspiring Minds works closely with students, job seekers and educational institutions in helping them evaluate their employability and connecting them with job opportunities.

Concretely, the company has developed a multi-dimensional evaluation of the employability of young university graduates. The assessment (Aspiring Minds Computer Adaptive Test or AMCAT) covers a wide range of skills: English language proficiency, logical and analytical abilities, quantitative skills (numeracy), managerial skills, social and emotional skills (the "Big Five"), technical skills in a number of domains such as engineering, banking, finance and accounting, and, more recently, computer programming skills.

To ensure that the test is relevant to employers' needs, it is carried out on employees at an industry level and correlated with on-the-job performance to predict what kind of test results a person needs to have in order to be successful in the job. The test is delivered in colleges but can also be taken online. It has become by far the largest employability assessment in the country with 50,000 assessments every month.

Another goal of the initiative is to provide a level playing field for candidates. The recruitment process is based on the direct measure of skills, which means that how these skills have been acquired (at a specific education institution or through massive open online courses) does not hold importance any more; all candidates have equal opportunities to find a job.

Ecole 42 is a **FRENCH** school that was created to address the gap between supply and demand of computer programming skills. The starting point of the initiative, which was launched and personally financed by a French entrepreneur in the telecommunications and technology industry, was the lack of young graduates with good-quality programming skills. The school aims to develop these skills through an innovative pedagogical approach.

The school is open to anyone aged between 18 and 30. With no previous degree required, students are selected on the basis of an in-depth selection process assessing their motivation, skills and potential to become excellent programmers. Particular emphasis is placed on the one-month-long immersion phase known as the "Swimming Pool" during which candidates have to carry out a few information technology projects. Teaching methods aim to develop students' creativity and innovative skills as well as technical skills that are highly demanded on the labour market. The school has no lectures or teachers; instead a pedagogical team is in place. Student learning is based on a "peer-to-peer" review approach including group projects and team problem solving.

The programme is free but as the school does not offer a diploma recognised by the government, students do not have access to grants to pay for their living costs. There is no available assessment of the labour market outcomes of the school's graduates but, according to the school and media, students receive several job offers even before graduating.

SOURCE: OECD (2015), *OECD Skills Outlook 2015: Youth, skills and employability*, OECD Publishing.

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"We see strong risks for youth who struggle in their transitions to the labour market of falling under the radar of labour market and education institutions and being stigmatised. In the current situation where the unemployment rate remains high in many countries, these risks are strong. It can clearly be a barrier to finding a job after a few months out of the job market."

Stéphanie Jamet
SENIOR ANALYST

study or in a job not relevant to their studies. This showed that there is more use and development of skills when you are in a job relating to your field of study. Hence, it is not only a matter of combining work and study, but also to include work-based learning in the studies."

Stop the erosion of skills

A smooth transition from school to work limits the risk of skills weakening and the emergence of what the OECD report calls 'scarring effects' – often triggered by spells of unemployment at the early career stage.

Stéphanie Jamet says: "Most young people end up actually finding a job and successfully integrate into the labour market. But right now they encounter difficulties in the school-to-work transition. The consequence might be that they may not only become disheartened, but also enter a vicious cycle where their unused skills are likely to degenerate over time. And at the same time employers become less willing to consider engaging them. The outcome of this affects both the individual and society, as social cohesion is undermined and investment in developing skills is wasted."

How soon does this risk become a real threat?

"We see strong risks for youth who struggle in their transitions to the labour market of falling under the radar of labour market and education institutions and being stigmatised. In the current situation where the unemployment rate remains high in many countries, these risks are strong. It can clearly be a barrier to finding a job after a few months out of the job market."

So what can be done to prevent this ongoing skills erosion?

"It is of course a difficult situation. The economic crisis has further exacerbated the challenges faced by young people in finding a job and maintaining employment. But my recommendation is that more efforts could be made to ensure that young people do not temporarily end up in situations in which they are neither in the education system nor in employment. This requires better education systems and well-designed and broad-minded transitions from school to work." ■

Stéphanie Jamet
Stéphanie Jamet is a senior analyst at the Directorate for Education and Skills at the OECD. She is in charge of the *Skills Outlook* publication. Stéphanie has also worked in the Economics Department of the OECD on various structural issues, including labour market, fiscal and climate change issues , and on several countries including Denmark and Sweden.

SLEEPING THROUGH CLASS TO SUCCESS

By Claus Holm, *clho@dpu.dk*

The Japanese believe in a healthy eight hours of nocturnal sleep, but they believe even more strongly that the more hours ambitious high-school students spend studying the better. This works only because they sleep less at night and a napping culture is tolerated in schools.

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The Japanese are known for their long working hours and, in the extreme, *karoshi*, death from overwork. Yet, even the most diligent people need time for recuperation. This also goes for Japanese high-school students. In Japan, everyone knows how exhausted high-school students become when they are deeply engaged in preparing for entrance and other exams. But in recent years individuals and schools have started to pay more attention to sleep. Some high schools have introduced a 15-minute 'naptime' after lunch, during which all students are signalled by a Mozart tune to bend over their desk and sleep. The need for such a nap occurs because Japanese high-school students are reducing their night-time sleep. But what cultural and social sense does it make to demand that young Japanese people stay up late into the night to study when they fall asleep during the day? Dr Brigitte Steger from the University of Cambridge has studied sleep patterns among high-school students in Japan and other sleeping cultures worldwide. She explains:

"Japanese high-school students attempting to enter a university with a good reputation are urged to keep their sleep to a minimum. They use the slogan '*yont goraku*', or 'four hours of sleep pass, five fail'. At the same time everyone takes it for granted that students sleep not only on the train, but even in classes at school."

"Many teachers are glad if some students are sleeping so that they can work more intensely with the students who are interested. Students are regarded as responsible for whether they benefit or not from the lessons."

Brigitte Steger
SENIOR LECTURER

How does this make sense?

"This public sleep is called '*inemuri*' in Japanese – that means, literally, to be present and asleep – and can be observed in many social situations. Officially, they are attend- ›

"Japanese high-school students attempting to enter a university with a good reputation are urged to keep their sleep to a minimum. They use the slogan '*yont goraku*', or 'four hours of sleep pass, five fail'. At the same time everyone takes it for granted that students sleep not only on the train, but even in classes at school."

Brigitte Steger
SENIOR LECTURER

ing school, but they often doze off, similar to students daydreaming or sending messages on their mobile phones which we often see in Europe as well. In my research I have observed this phenomenon among high-school students. My interest was to understand how they as well as their teachers and parents understood and handled the discrepancy between the demand for sacrificing nocturnal sleep and the tolerance of daytime napping in the school."

Stay up, stay competitive

Statistically there is a clear relationship between studying and sleep reduction among Japanese children and teenagers. From the first year in primary school to high school the mean sleep length decreases by almost three hours from 9 hours and 31 minutes to 6 hours and 45 minutes. The high-school students who spend an above-average amount of time learning and at lessons sleep only 6 hours and 3 minutes and rest for 24 minutes during the day. The explanation for this short amount of sleep and rest is the hard competition to ultimately get a stable job at a major company.

Brigitte Steger says: "These companies recruit their new employees only directly from elite universities. Admission to such universities, however, is limited almost exclusively to those who attend a good high school, which likewise requires attendance at a good middle school: so the higher the level of education, the greater the competition. In short, Japan is a meritocratic society, where the students – more than requiring specific knowledge – need to belong to a certain institution. This is of crucial importance. Each transition is marked by entrance exams, which test an extensive range of factual knowledge that students could never memorise through the lessons at school. Although it is now easy to get into university, as there are fewer students than places, to get a place at a prestigious university is still very demanding."

How do they cope with this 'examination hell'?

"Aspiring students prepare for the entrance exams for one of the highly competitive universities by attending *juku* – that is, a private study institution after school. *Juku* prepare them for exams and study at home with the help of their school books. *Juku* are usually engaging. Students like going there. So students take naps in class at school. They do not take any naps at *juku*. But after *juku* and before beginning homework and study again they do. Of course, they get tired during their classes, especially when their teachers explain things they already know – or when they do not endeavour to study for the entrance exam." When these young people return home, they still have to do their homework and memorising. So they take a short nap and then get up to study, often into the night."

Time your nap

In Europe, we are not as good at taking naps as in Japan. The reason for this is that Europe is characterised by monochronic and clock-oriented societies. This means that work and rest are clearly separated. Japan – together with other Asian countries – is an example of a society in which people tend to do several things at once and are more event-oriented. This is characteristic of polychronic cultures, which reveal more elaborate structures that allow work and rest simultaneously.

Brigitte Steger says: "Most contemporary studies attribute the rhythm of the high-school students that includes late-afternoon naps and late-night studying to the competitive school system of today. But this is not the whole explanation. It has to be pointed out that high-school students follow historical role models such as the samurai in the Edo period at boarding schools, who

EXPLANATIONS

Inemuri is composed of the Chinese characters for i(ru), to be present, and nemuri, sleep (in the physiological sense). That is to say that inemuri does not imply a certain body posture, duration or particular amplitude of the brainwaves. Its main characteristic is that the sleeper is present in a situation that is meant for something other than sleep. In that way, inemuri is a sociologically distinct form of sleep and has to be differentiated not only from night-time sleep, but also from taking a siesta or napping on a sofa.

The term juku can refer to anything from huge institutions with classes of up to 60 students to tuition in small groups at the home of a teacher. Regardless of the size, classes at juku are usually engaging.

SOURCE: Brigitte Steger (2006) 'Sleeping through class to success: Japanese notions of time and diligence'. *Time & Society*, Sage.

FACTS: THREE SLEEPING CULTURES

In a monophasic sleep culture, sleep is concentrated in one period with a widespread ideal of an eight-hour nocturnal sleep phase. In societies with a monophasic sleep ideal, daytime sleep is therefore generally discouraged and avoided and likewise social rules dictate not phoning early in the morning or late at night.

In a biphasic sleep culture – a siesta culture – sleep is concentrated in two periods, a longer one during the night, and a shorter one usually early in the afternoon. During both periods the sleep role is protected from social demands to a certain extent. One consequence of this is that there is more tolerance towards late-night activity since the siesta culture is an important buffer zone.

In a polyphasic sleep culture – a napping culture – people usually have what is called in medical terms their 'anchor' sleep at night and then individual daytime naps when the time allows. People in these cultures are trained to use the time available for sleep, whenever it comes, and have little or no difficulty falling asleep at any idle moment. A high level of tolerance rather than a set time protects their daytime sleep.

SOURCE: Brigitte Steger and Lodewijk Brunt (eds) (2003) *Night-time and Sleep in Asia and the West: Exploring the dark side of life.* RoutledgeCurzon.


POLFOTO

were woken up in the night to study. Meiji statesmen, military doctors and novelists also describe in their biographies similar sleep patterns. This rhythm seems to be a set sleeping pattern for students in general and in particular students preparing for exams."

But why is this accepted?

"Curtailing night-time sleep and tolerating *inemuri* are two sides of the same coin of what it means to be diligent in Japan. You can measure diligence by the hours one works, especially nocturnal work sessions. But since you cannot often see how much effort others put into their work at home, you have to judge by the busyness one reveals and by the exhaustion and consequent *inemuri* caused by work. Therefore, *inemuri* can indirectly reveal a very diligent person. Therefore it is tolerated as Japanese students' behaviour in the classroom at school."

According to Brigitte Steger, most teachers have accepted these naps. There are several reasons for this. Many teachers are glad if some students are sleeping so that they can work more intensely with the students who are interested. Students are regarded as responsible for whether they benefit or not from the lessons. And last but not least, they know that the evening *juku* and nocturnal learning often result in exhaustion. Most importantly, in some way *inemuri* is not considered sleep. It is comparable to daydreaming and similar mental "aways".

Exhaustion builds character

In Europe and the USA, children and teenagers are taught to go to bed at a fixed time, even if they do not feel tired. In Japan, they are taught to stay up late and get up early despite exhaustion or sleepiness.

Does that make any sense?

"In some ways it does," says Brigitte Steger and explains: "A clear sign of hard work is that the person is exhausted and becomes vulnerable to 'attacks by the sleep demon', as it is called. People are aware that even the most diligent students are only human, and being human means that they need sleep. It is only natural that exhausted students cannot help but fall asleep when they are sitting in class, listening to monotonous lectures. Sleeping at school is thus practically evidence of late-night studying: a very subtle way of showing off one's commitment and diligence."

The grand old man of management, the late Peter F. Drucker, said back in 1993 that Japanese students learned – through fear and pressure – the discipline of the "examination hell", while American students learned to mistake "feeling good" for achievement. But perhaps the contrast is not as great today – possibly a symptom of not as great a distinction between 'Asian' and 'western' sleep cultures. Economic, educational and social reality seems to promote an individual response to the needs of global networking. In short, the individual approach to an international clock seems to promote a napping approach to sleep. ■

Brigitte Steger
Brigitte Steger is a Senior Lecturer (Assoc. Professor) in Modern Japanese Studies at the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Downing College. Her research focuses on the cultural history and anthropology of daily life, in particular sleep, time and cleanliness, as well as the life in post-tsunami shelters.

Book excerpt

"ASIA: THE NEXT HIGHER EDUCATION SUPERPOWER?"

No region has undergone as profound a transformation as Asia during the past half-century, from the 1970s to the present. The unprecedented economic growth has driven major social and demographic changes and institutional reforms and, in most countries, has brought about greater political stability. The advent of a large middle class, coupled with the openness driven by economic imperatives, has contributed to greater interconnectedness among Asian states and between them and the rest of the world. Higher education was not estranged from these dynamics. On the contrary, at a time when economic growth seems to be related to knowledge production and advanced skills, Asian governments and citizens expect higher education institutions (HEIs) to create the conditions for the development of their countries and to train the future generation to be innovative and creative and to pursue sustainable growth.

This acknowledgement and clear shift towards prioritising higher education are not unique to Asia, though the means and pace of reform are. Despite national differences – including varied political and institutional settings, historical legacies and local constraints – reform of the higher education sector across Asia has been largely state-driven and publicly funded. In other regions, the state gradually withdrew from investments in higher education, which encouraged private investments and market competition.

After several years of sustained high economic growth in several Asian countries, most governments in the region succeeded in driving major reforms of their higher education system. These reforms often took inspiration from overseas, while also addressing local issues. China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, as well as ASEAN members and India, have regularly referenced western models and practices – most often those of the United States, but also Europe.

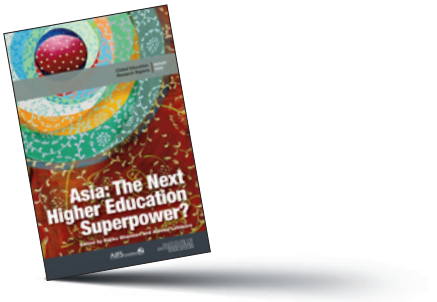
Asia's presence is growing in the international education landscape. When we look at its rise through the lens of academic mobility, a clear pattern emerges: many of the Asian faculty who return to their country of origin to take leadership positions have studied in the United States and obtained their PhD at a US or European university; many post-secondary students in Asia plan at some point to continue their education overseas, probably in the United States or Australia. The most recent *Open Doors* 2014 statistics once again point to the surge in mobility *out* of Asia and well as *into* Asia. Students from Asia make up 64 per cent of the total international student body in the United States, particularly from China, India and South Korea. Asian students are now a strong presence on many US campuses, with faculty and administrators having to rethink their assumptions about the cultural, historical and academic backgrounds of their student population. Although US students are still relatively less mobile than their peers in the rest of the world, they are drawn to Asia in growing numbers for shorter-term study experiences as well as for full degree study.

Given this overall expansion of international academic mobility, most Asian governments decided to join the competition with the clear ambition to have their higher education system play at the top. Yet, if there is a power shift, it is more about redeployment rather than a rebalance. American and European research-based universities are still influential and highly attractive in Asian emerging countries. What happens in major research-based universities in the 'old western World' still matters and still has an impact on the rest of the world, including on Asia. North American and European universities invest considerable financial resources and energy in trying to establish a presence in Asia by creating branch campuses, platforms of services, local representative offices, strategic alliances, dual degree programmes, and large networks.

By attracting a more diversified student body and actively appealing to international audiences, Asian universities are now, like their western counterparts, making commitments to offer portable skills and to train leaders capable of adapting their talents to a variety of institutional and regional settings. In the midst of this profound transformation of their ecosystem, they are progressively moving beyond the narrow confines of academia and becoming central to any political narrative about development and economic growth. Higher education today is one of the most convenient and critical arenas to establish consensual cooperative engagements and partnerships, despite the persistence of divergences and disagreements.

As Asian countries forge ahead to embrace new developments within their systems and beyond, they open the debate about the possibility of reconciliation between the ancient traditions of learning that have existed within the region for centuries and the new emerging models of learning. Among Asian countries are some of the world's oldest and largest universities, such as Nalanda in India, which dates back to the 5th century AD. The period of western colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries further complicated or diluted these ancient systems. Today, professional accomplishments of institutions and faculty are based on a system of merit that is largely western-based, with western criteria and metrics that often place non-western systems at a disadvantage, especially those Asian countries where English – the lingua franca of scientific innovation and enterprise – is not one of the dominant languages.

Nonetheless, the heritage of colonialism in the region has not prevented Asian governments and institutions from experimenting with alternative and perhaps more authentic approaches to higher education development. As a consequence, in contemporary Asia today, traditions coexist with new models of higher education either imported directly from the west or shaped after a notion of what it means to be world class. Hence it is possible that we are seeing the emergence of a unique Asian model of higher education that selectively borrows from the west, yet freely draws upon its own solid academic traditions. ■



Asia-Europe Meeting

News from

ASEM education and research hub for lifelong learning

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

An annotated bibliography has been developed for the second comparative study of the ASEM LLL Hub Research Network 2: *Working Places as Learning Spaces: Contextualising lifelong learning in Asia and Europe*. The study is focused on how employees in selected occupations understand and use their working environments as contexts and opportunities for learning in, at and through work in Asia and Europe – that is, learning that takes place as an integrated dimension of everyday working life. This annotated bibliography presents different understandings of working places as learning spaces in different contexts of lifelong learning in Asia and Europe. **Please download** the annotated bibliography here: http://asemlllhub.org/researchnetworks/workplacelearning/

EVENTS

Different ASEM LLL Hub events have or will take place in November and December 2015:

• **2–4 November,** New Delhi, India: Self-learning in a digital era. Find presentations, photos and recommendations from the event here: http://indiameeting2015.au.dk/

• **18–21 November**, Brno, Czech Republic: Intergenerational learning: workplace learning, community learning and learning within the family. Find more about the event here: http://intergenerationallearning.cz/

• **30–2 December**, Melbourne, Australia: Engaging young people in lifelong learning: Asian and European policies and practices. Find more about the event here: https://www.rmit.edu.au/events/all-events/conferences/2015/december/engaging-young-people-in-lifelong-learning/

Read more

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About ASEM LLL HUB

The ASEM LLL Hub is the world's largest research network within lifelong learning. The ASEM LLL Hub brings together over 100 researchers in its five research networks, senior representatives of 36 universities in its University Council, and senior officials from 22 ministries of education and five flagship international organisations. The ASEM LLL Hub was established as the result of preparatory work for the ASEM IV Heads of State Summit in Copenhagen in 2002. The work underscored that lifelong learning enables governments to respond constructively not only to the changing demands of the knowledge economy but equally to strengthening social cohesion by engaging with the most vulnerable groups of society through raising participation in education and training, regardless of age and social and economic circumstances.

Three GOALS

THE **ASEM LLL HUB** SEEKS TO:

1. stimulate the production and dissemination of new research-based knowledge in the field of lifelong learning.
2. facilitate the exchange of students and academic staff, in the interests of strengthening mutual understanding and higher education collaboration between Asia and Europe.
3. be an advisory mechanism between researchers and policy makers, thus casting the Hub as an important source for sustainable human resource development and policy recommendations concerning competence development and effective lifelong learning strategies.

The FIVE RESEARCH NETWORKS

- DEVELOPMENT OF ICT SKILLS, E-LEARNING AND THE CULTURE OF E-LEARNING IN LIFELONG LEARNING
- WORKPLACE LEARNING
- PROFESSIONALISATION OF ADULT TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS
- NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING
- CORE COMPETENCES

SPONSORS & PARTNERS

THE **ASEM LLL HUB** WORKS IN CO-OPERATION WITH AND RECEIVES SUPPORT FROM ITS PARTNER UNIVERSITIES AND ASEM GOVERNMENTS. THE HUB'S ACTIVITIES ARE ORGANISED AND SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING MAIN SPONSORS:

ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION — Asia-Europe Foundation with the financial support of the European Commission

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Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

LIFELONG LEARNING IN INDIA

A POLICY PERSPECTIVE

Lifelong learning has long been an integral part of Indian culture, but this populous South Asian country is yet to develop a comprehensive framework for lifelong learning.

By S. Y. Shah

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Most countries in South Asia do not have a well-defined policy on lifelong learning. Confronted with the massive problems of illiteracy and poverty, most of them tend to confine themselves to literacy programmes. Besides, they lack the resources and expertise required to frame a lifelong learning policy, develop programmes and institutional infrastructure. However, India – one of the most populous South Asian countries, with the second-largest system of education in the world – has taken certain initiatives in this direction during the last decade.

It may be argued that India's interest in lifelong learning has been greatly influenced by the global discourse on lifelong learning and its advocacy by transnational organisations like UNESCO and the European Commission. These two organisations have played a key role not only in publicising the concept of lifelong learning in India, but also in orienting government officials and the academic community towards lifelong learning. If the academic support provided by these organisations has given a tremendous boost to India's lifelong learning programme, the socio-economic changes taking place within and outside the country due to globalisation, liberalisation of the economy and the tremendous expansion of ICT also necessitated a review of adult education policy and its reformulation as lifelong learning.

Formal recognition of lifelong learning

Lifelong learning has long been an integral part of Indian culture. The ancient Indian religious tradition and culture accorded prime importance to the acquisition of knowledge and upheld the virtues of learning. Notwithstanding the gradual modernisation of society and the emergence of multiple channels of learning, the first formal recognition of lifelong learning came in 1966 when the Indian Education Commission (1964–66) made the following observation:

Education does not end with schooling, but is a lifelong process. The adult needs an understanding of the rapidly changing world and the growing complexities of society. Even those who had the most sophisticated education must continue to learn; the alternative is obsolescence... Thus viewed the function of adult education in a democracy is to provide every adult citizen an opportunity for education of the type which he wishes and which he should have for his personal enrichment, professional advancement and effective participation in social and political life (Report of Indian Education Commission, 1966).

The impetus for lifelong learning

The present system of education in India, which follows the government's 1986 National Policy on Education, considers lifelong education as the "*cherished goal of the educational process which presupposes universal literacy, provision of opportunities for youth, housewives, agricultural and industrial workers and professionals to continue the education of their choice at a pace suited to them*" (Government of India, 1986). It observed that the critical development issue is the continuous upgrading of skills so as to produce manpower resources of the kind and the number required by society. It suggested that the future thrust will be in the direction of open and distance learning.

The policy was translated into practice when large-scale literacy campaigns, projects and adult continuing education programmes were implemented by governmental and non-governmental organisations and universities (Government of India, 1992). With the success of literacy programmes and the increasing number of neo-literates and their keenness to continue learning, the National Institute of Open Learning started an equivalent programme that provided an important channel for continuation of learning of neo-literates by recognising, validating and certifying their learning.

While different programmes of lifelong learning were being developed in India, the influence of UNESCO and the European Commission gave further impetus to the development of lifelong learning policy in India. The global discourse of lifelong learning initiated by UNESCO, especially after its publication of *Learning: The treasures within* (1996) and the European Commission's *Memorandum of Lifelong Learning* (2000), played a crucial role in shaping India's lifelong learning policy.

The organisation of two UNESCO-sponsored international conferences on lifelong learning held in Mumbai (1998) and Hyderabad (2002) and the promulgation ›

"…since the knowledge base of lifelong learning in India continues to be weak, systematic efforts should be made to generate new knowledge through rigorous researches and scholarly publications."

S. Y. Shah
PROFESSOR

POLFOTO

of the Mumbai and Hyderabad Statements on Lifelong Learning that highlighted it as a "guiding principle" and an "overarching vision" succeeded in educating Indian policy planners and generated considerable interest among educationists (Singh, 2002; Narang and Mauch, 1998). The Hyderabad Statement on Lifelong Learning, in fact, clarified the role of lifelong learning in the creation of a learning society and learning community. It emphasised empowering people, expanding their capabilities and choices in life, and enabling individuals and societies to cope with the new challenges of the 21st century (Singh, 2002).

"Blurred focus"

While UNESCO worked with government officials and tried to influence the national adult education policy, the European Commission made systematic attempts to promote lifelong learning through universities. Between 2005 and 2007, several European specialists visited Indian universities and made presentations on the Erasmus Mundus programme, especially the European Master's in Lifelong Learning (MALLL) with a view to publicising it and recruiting potential students. The enrolment of more than 12 Indian students in the MALLL programme during the first five years bears testimony to the effective advocacy and efforts made by the European specialists.

They also met the senior officials of the University Grants Commission (UGC) – the highest statutory body of higher education in the country – and the Association of Indian Universities, and persuaded them to formulate lifelong learning policies and programmes in Indian universities. It seems that the presentations made by the European specialists and their interactions with the senior officials of the policymaking bodies did have some impact on shaping the higher education policy during the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007–12), as is evident from the formulation of the UGC Guidelines on Lifelong Learning and Extension, which stated that "*with the beginning of the Eleventh Five Year Plan, the UGC would accord maximum priority to lifelong learning with a view to meeting the demands of emerging knowledge society and facilitate the process of developing a learning society*" (University Grants Commission, 2010).

It suggested that universities need to integrate formal and non-formal education by opening their doors to adult learners and making them adult learner friendly. The guidelines recommended that the name of the departments of adult education should be changed to departments of lifelong learning and stressed the need for enabling them to play a more dynamic and proactive role in the university system. It emphasised that the departments of lifelong learning should move from the periphery to centre stage and play a major role in the development of human resources, in particular providing professional manpower in the area of lifelong learning.

The importance of expanding the scope of adult education as lifelong learning and improving its quality and developing it as a discipline of study was also mentioned in the policy guidelines. They recommended that since the knowledge base of lifelong learning in India continues to be weak, systematic efforts should be made to generate new knowledge through rigorous research studies and scholarly publications.

Though the guidelines are considered to have a "blurred focus" (Mandal, 2014) and did not discuss the importance of recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning and developing vertical and horizontal linkages among different sectors of education, most of the universities welcomed the new policy, which was the first significant initiative on lifelong learning in India.

"The process of developing the policy framework of lifelong learning has been rather slow in India and seems to be linked to external stimulus."

S. Y. Shah
PROFESSOR

However, only a few universities could implement the policy during the five years (2007–12), mainly due to the limited funding support from the UGC and lack of clarity and understanding about lifelong learning among academics and administrators. With a view to discussing its importance, working out operational strategies and designing academic programmes, the UGC provided funds to Indian universities to organise conferences, seminars and workshops for lifelong learning. However, due to the lack of expertise and interest in lifelong learning and a preoccupation with literacy programmes, not much progress could be made during the five years (2007–12).

With the discontinuation of UGC funds to lifelong learning in July 2013, the majority of Indian universities found it difficult to operationalise the policy guidelines. The formulation of policy guidelines without adequate resource support is like sowing seeds without ensuring the supply of water and manure. Though some universities may initiate lifelong learning programmes following the guidelines, they may find it difficult to sustain them.

Lifelong learning – a reality?

The process of developing the policy framework of lifelong learning has been rather slow in India and seems to be linked to external stimuli. Currently, lifelong learning is often used as an umbrella term to cover basic literacy, post literacy, continuing education and extension programmes of different organisations, refresher/continuing courses of professional bodies, private institutions and business houses; but it is not conceived as an overarching framework of learning. This is mainly due to the absence of intersectoral linkages among different sectors of education and the lack of recognition and validation of prior learning.

Besides, the lack of coordination between the two national bodies dealing with adult education and skill development – that is, the National Literacy Mission and the National Skill Development Mission – and the overlapping of their functions has also put hurdles in the path of the development of a comprehensive national policy on lifelong learning. While the National Skill Development Mission has recognised the importance of skills and knowledge as the driving forces of economic growth and social development for any country and emphasised the need for promoting lifelong learning, maintaining quality and relevance according to the changing requirements of an emerging knowledge economy (National Skill Development Mission, 2009), the National Literacy Mission has continued to focus on literacy mainly due to the massive number of non-literates in the country. Imparting skills training and providing avenues for upgrading skills has not received much importance from the National Literacy Mission.

It was only after UNESCO organised an international conference on prior learning in New Delhi in June 2013, and launched the UNESCO guidelines for recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning, that the Government of India initiated work in this area. Since the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–17), the Sub Committee on Adult Education has emphasised the need for developing a comprehensive policy to guide the systematic promotion of adult and lifelong learning and the creation of structures and mechanisms for recognition, validation, accreditation and certification of prior learning (Government of India, 2011), and it is expected that lifelong learning will soon become a reality and an important strand of India's education policy.

The launching of the first Master's Programme in Lifelong Learning by the University of Delhi in 2014 may also play a key role in furthering lifelong learning programmes, mainly by providing professional manpower. With the concerted efforts of the government and universities and the cooperation of UNESCO and the European Commission, it is expected that India will soon have a comprehensive policy on lifelong learning. ■

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ACTIVE AGEING, **ACTIVE LEARNING**

By David Istance

Active ageing is not only for a minority of seniors, who are healthy and with higher levels of educational attainment. It is relevant for all, including the elderly and those with chronic disabilities. Learning is a crucial ingredient of staying active.

Rapid ageing is taking place in our societies. Trends in longevity and years in retirement confirm a picture of dramatic change. It is predicted that the numbers of OECD populations aged 80 years and above will double by the year 2050. The ratio of those aged 65+ compared with those aged 15–64 will also double if these forecasts are accurate – from around 25 per cent now to 50 per cent by 2050. So, if current levels suggest urgency in addressing ageing and the learning challenge, expected future developments provide even more compelling grounds to do so.

Yet we should examine the ambition of making all older adults active learners, and bring the broad aim of 'learning to be' to the fore, no matter whether the 65+ age group represents 5 per cent, 15 per cent or 30 per cent of total populations. The sheer scale of ageing needs radical new social and educational responses, yet our societies should work towards engaged and active ageing for all (with learning prominent), irrespective of the relative numbers involved.

In this article I argue that the period of our lives referred to here as retirement is one that should be active and challenging, in which learning, and especially 'learning to be', should be central.

Understanding the demand for learning

On the one hand, when one understands demand for education based on existing older students in their 60s, 70s and 80s, this gives an unrepresentative, overly optimistic, picture. They are only a minority of the overall population and one in which the affluent and those with higher levels of educational attainment and health are heavily over-represented. Similarly, those older people who go on working beyond conventional

retirement age tend to be professionals with higher levels of educational attainment: they too are not representative of the older third- and fourth-age population as a whole.

On the other hand, there is a negative, even pessimistic, approach to ageing. This can arise when existing patterns of participation and motivations of post-retired adults are taken as the exclusive evidence base for potential demand. It assumes that the existing supply of learning opportunities saturates demand and that there is little potential for growing older adult engagement in education and learning. The loss of the authority of senior members of communities in many societies and the declining contact between generations have left many older people unclear about what their roles should be or their value to society and the community. When these are then seen to be matters purely of individual choice, for the many seniors who have felt unwilling or unable to choose the active roles of volunteering or 'serious leisure' or semi-retirement or studying there is a widespread acceptance that their lives should be intellectually undemanding.

We need to ask ourselves as societies whether, with inadequate learning opportunities for older people, an image of undemanding decline for older citizens, especially fourth-age seniors, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. How easy it is to adopt a prominently negative paradigm, dominated by obstacles and mental and physical deterioration. Such a paradigm ignores the rights of older people to a fulfilling and engaged life, and misses the enormous benefits that active learning can bring. These benefits are as much for the wider society, economy and community as they are for older people themselves.

Avoiding stereotypes of decline

We should not ignore the evidence when it produces uncomfortable findings, but we should avoid exaggerated stereotypes when the evidence does not justify them, and we need to interpret it for what it reveals about learning needs and educability. In fact, the evidence is mixed and does not support the stereotypical view of ageing as a process of evident decline.

On the one hand, performance on some types of skills do show an average measured decline with age – the 'average' is important, as many older adults score more highly than less well-performing young people – but these skills are especially related to processing and speed and are amenable to improvement through practice and coaching. On the other hand, measures of verbal ability and socio-emotional capacities do not decline in the same way, with virtually no differences seen between those in their 20s and in their 80s. What is more, judgement, experience and wisdom grow with age.

So there is a mixed picture and these are not patterns set in stone but may be changed through learning itself. And, some of the measured declines in skills that suggest problematic older-age learning are of least importance to education and to 'learning to be'. Even where the most marked declines are seen – that seniors are slower than young people in information processing or perform less well in memory retention – they are scarcely reasons for denying the value of diverse forms of adult learning.

Just as evidence of lower attainment and achievement among young people is typically taken as grounds for redoubling efforts and finding new ways of engaging them as learners, so might the same be observed for third- and fourth-age adults. It is even among those showing marked decline in capacity, such as those elderly adults with chronic disabilities, including dementia, who I would argue have some of the greatest learning needs to be addressed as a major societal project. For these older adults, low scores on measured skill levels are simply irrelevant to the educational imperative and the requirement of 'learning to be'.

Learning to become

But what kind of 'learning to be' is relevant for the retired, including the elderly? I think the distinction between 'learning as acquisition' and 'learning as becoming' is a useful one. In the acquisition metaphor, learning is about acquiring content and is associated especially with formal education. With the becoming metaphor, learning is understood to be central to how people change and engage in processes of construction and reconstruction.

The becoming metaphor is highly relevant because a defining challenge of learning for the ageing individual is that it is a time of change and adjustment, sometimes to radically new circumstances. Quite apart from retirement itself, this period in the life span brings profound health, family and social engagement issues, often to be confronted for the first time.

There is much debate over the relative merits of 'education' vs 'learning'. Learning signals the importance of opportunities outside the formal education system: many seniors are not attracted to the formal school and college offer and the formal sector as a whole has not yet risen fulsomely to the challenge of meeting the needs of 60+-year-old adult students. But some of the differences are ones of semantics, as 'education' meaning learning in socially organised settings and programmes with others is highly appropriate.

Active ageing more than lifelong learning

An agenda of learning and education for older adults is best served in my view if the main strategies for learning for the retired revolve around active ageing, with the educational contribution brought in through partnerships in order to give meaning and substance to the term 'active'. It would significantly extend perspectives on ageing beyond preoccupation with health, care and financing, essential though these perspectives undoubtedly are. It would make the learning lives of senior citizens a public policy concern, not regarded as the laudable but essentially unimportant educational habits of retired and elderly students.

Despite being a long-standing contributor to the international lifelong learning community, it is not clear to me that 'lifelong learning' is the best way to advance the agenda of promoting learning and education for older adults. One reason is because it considers the learning needs of all age groups, which can dilute the focus on older adults and the elderly. Another reason is that lifelong learning is often associated with the education sector when some of the most important areas for development of 'active ageing' are likely to be non-formal and include community work and 'serious leisure'.

I do not take issue with the broad philosophical vision of lifelong learning – that learning needs to be present in the lives of as many citizens as possible right into old age. But for numerous strategic reasons, I see the agenda of 'active ageing' as able to connect with audiences, partners and strategies that are fully focused on ageing and older citizens themselves, not beginning with a broad learning strategy viewed as something desirable in itself. ■

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