Lifelong learning after the Leitch Report: education throughout life or training for skills? (Symposium)

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Paper 1 outlines EU policy on lifelong learning and explores the extent to which policy based on the Lisbon Strategy has led to an overemphasis on lifelong learning as vocational training at the expense of liberal adult education. It acknowledges the arguments of those emphasising that lifelong learning policy has increasingly become a vehicle for human capital development. However, without denying the predominance of economic drivers in contemporary educational policy formation, this paper suggests such accounts underplay the significance of the 'social dimension' in EU lifelong learning policy, and of its potential for development. Amid an 'economism' shared across international lifelong learning, EU institutions have nurtured programmes emphasising citizenship and social cohesion. Vocational concerns inevitably predominate; but the space it provides for a 'social agenda' is a distinguishing feature of EU lifelong learning policy.

The second paper draws on data from an EU 6th framework funded project and examines the motives for engaging with lifelong learning of adult learners in a range of Scottish educational settings. The term and concept of lifelong learning has been criticised; however, it is now used widely. Field (2006) argues that the term is useful for a number of reasons; one of these is that it reflects changes in society that are evident in the ways that people nowadays acquire new skills and capacities but that it can become a mechanism for exclusion and social control. Field also notes that the discourse emphasises individual agency and that learners are expected to take control of their own learning. This paper uses survey data to examine the role that human capital, social capital and personal development plays in motivating learners. It also considers the extent to which learners are compelled or chose to engage in learning.

The third paper focuses specifically on the implications of a narrow focus on skills for the provision of literacy and numeracy education. It starts with an examination of relevant policies before considering the ways in which employers view the contribution of work-based learning, how participating learners experience the provision offered to them and how far work-based programmes can contribute to changing the literacy discourse from one of deficit to one of strengths.

We draw on two research projects: a study of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Scotland (Ahlgren et al., 2007) that aimed to raise awareness and enhance understanding of workplace learning and the role of literacies in the development of individual employees and organisational sustainability; an investigation of the experiences of learners (Tett et al., 2006) from a variety of literacy programmes in Scotland that used structured individual interviews at the beginning of their programmes and one year later to map the changes reported on by learners.

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