

Compendium of Best Practice

Edited by Bente von Schindel



Learning Outcome of Amateur Culture



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Compendium of Best Practice  
**LOAC**  
- Learning Outcome of Amateur Culture

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# Lifelong Learning on the Agenda in the EU

■ By Hans Joergen Vodsgaard

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The idea of lifelong learning is not new. In the European history of ideas the humanistic tradition has always seen education and enlightenment as essential for human freedom and growth.

But the concept of “lifelong learning” has in the last decades mainly gained influence, because two important international organisations have been its advocates, namely UNESCO from the early 1970’ies and OECD from the 1980’ies, and they speak of lifelong learning from two very different understandings.

UNESCO links lifelong learning to human and democratic development. Here education is an end in itself, and not merely a mean for economic growth and government management. For example, the need for literacy was justified by each human beings need and right to gain access to knowledge and culture. The OECD on the contrary understands lifelong learning as an investment in ‘human capital’ and emphasizes the commercial advantages. The humanist and democratic values has here been replaced by the economic demands of the new global world market.

In recent decades there has been a gradual paradigm shift in the educational agenda from a humanistic discourse, focusing on democracy and personal fulfillment to an instrumental discourse, focusing on economics and global competitiveness. OECD’s paradigm became the new meta-narrative during the ’80s with a strong appeal to opinion formers, policy makers and businessmen, and it has very much shaped the educational understanding of the EU and its Member States.

Lifelong Learning in the understanding of OECD had a strong appeal to policy makers, politicians and business people, and it has influenced the understanding of education in the EU system very much, especially in the European Commission and subsequently in the EU member states.

The EU Commission’s primary objective in promoting “lifelong learning” was to strengthen the vocational adult education. In 1993, the Commission prepared the White Paper: Growth, Competitiveness and Employment. *Chal-*

*Challenges and Pathways to the 21st Century*. Education is seen here as the crucial means for promoting growth, competitiveness and employment. In 1996 it was followed by a second White Paper: *Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society*. At the Council meeting in Luxemburg in November 1997 a European employment strategy was launched, which included the definition of lifelong learning, which the Commission subsequently used in the Memorandum of 2000. In March 2000 the Lisbon European Council adopted as a strategic goal that the European Union was to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world. This decisive step was taken when the Commission in November 2000, detached the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning for consultation in all member states. After feedback from the extensive consultation processes including the adult education field and the associations in each country, the Commission issued interim reports<sup>1</sup> on the responses of countries and regions, and in November 2001 the Communication: *Making a European area for lifelong learning* was issued.

In the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* the European Commission introduced a new understanding of learning, where “the concept of competence” was at the center. The new learning discourse has - with minor adjustments - finally been determined in *the European reference framework on key competences for lifelong learning*, which the Parliament and the Council adopted in December 2006. This *recommendation* has the status of supranational law, and it affects virtually all policies in the member states.

## The European Qualifications Framework for Key Competences

The memorandum from 2000 provides lifelong learning with having both the lifelong aim, learning from cradle to grave and life-wide view that one can

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<sup>1</sup> *Jf. Summary and analysis of the feedback from the Member States and EEA Countries as part of the consultation on the Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong learning, European Commission, November 2001; Summary and analysis of the feedback from the Candidate Countries as part of the consultation on the Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong learning, Nov. 2001; Summary and analysis of the feedback from Civil Society as part of the consultation on the Commission's Memorandum on Lifelong learning, November 2001; Resolution adopted by the European Trade Union Confederation Executive Committee – 13/14 June 2001, Brussels – on the Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning*

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learn in all learning environments, both through formal learning, through non-formal learning, and especially informal learning in the associations of civil society, including the cultural associations.

The first key message of the memorandum is the launch of a catalog of 7 basic skills that should be prioritized. They include two basic competencies within 1) reading and writing in native language, and 2) reward. In addition five enhanced skills in 3) a foreign language, 4) ICT, 5) technological culture, 6) entrepreneurship and 7) social skills. Moreover, the memorandum mentions the ability to learn and get a sense of large amounts of information. The memorandum does not explain in details why precisely these skills are prioritized, and why the last five are so dominated by a vocational focus. Or why key aspects of citizenship such as development of personal autonomy, democratic formation, historical and cultural insight are not mentioned, nor why the musical, existential and the learning which makes you reflect on life do not belong in lifelong learning. The memorandum nor explains the underlying learning theory and the applied conceptual apparatus is unclear. There is no distinction between skills and qualifications, and it is unclear when talking of knowledge, skills and attitudes and the concept of skills is continuously changing meaning from just being synonymous with “attitudes” to include all learning.

But it is rather obvious that the discourse does not refer to the broad European tradition of humanistic pedagogical thinking, where concepts such as enlightenment, autonomy, personal formation and sovereignty of the people play a central role. A thinking which after all has characterized and still characterizes the legislation of education in many member states. The tradition from the pedagogical thinkers such as Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus, Comenius and Grundtvig, who came to name the EU lifelong learning programs are silent in the proposal of the Commission.

The general trend is that the learning qualities being encouraged and recognized are the ones that are important to the vocational education and the employers. When talking about promoting “lifelong learning”, the meaning is a specific subset of the overall learning potential, namely the subset to ensure the training of employees for business. Lifelong learning in order to become a wise person or to be a knowledgeable and engaged citizen, or to participate in learning activities to create art and beauty or simply to experience joy and happiness in company with other people are not included in the Commission’s concept of learning. It is the need for learning of the system and not of the hu-

man, which sets the agenda.

The memorandum does not refer to personal formation, which can be explained by the fact that the concept comes from the German cultural sphere and is not used in the Roman and Anglo-Saxon tradition, but it is a problem that its substantive meaning and purpose has been removed as well. The term “qualifications” have also disappeared and been replaced by the term “competences”, but “competences” are here defined equivalent to “qualifications” as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. “Qualifications” are instead defined as earlier “competences” in legal terms.

EU also launched a slightly different learning discourse, which follows from their more ambitious proposals for “a European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning (EQF)<sup>2</sup>. “Qualifications” here unchanged refer to competences in the legal sense, while the content in the reference frame is no longer composed of the components: knowledge, skills and attitudes (as in the reference framework for key competencies), but the components: knowledge, skills, and (personal and professional) competences. The reason why “attitudes” have been replaced by competencies, is that the latter exclusively assesses quality of learning based on learning outcome or output and it can be difficult to measure attitudes, whereas “competence” in this reference frame is defined, so that they more easily can be measured. The cost is however that “competencies” are more clearly being interpreted instrumentally, as means to ensure an output.

The main features of the learning discourse, which the two reference frames delineate, are firstly that the dimension regarding matters of purpose and meaning of the personal formation is out of focus, that the importance of knowledge is subject to a zweckrationell assessment of the yield, and thirdly, that the value of the soft personal qualifications also are viewed instrumentally.

## The Vague Theoretical Basis

There is one continuous ambiguity or inconsistency in the paper of the Commission. On one part it is mainly based on vocational terms, but on the other hand still highlights a double objective of both employability and citi

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<sup>2</sup> EQF, *European Qualification Framework. Adopted by the European Parliament and Council on 23 April 2008*

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zenship. It may in some way make sense because you designate the principal civil virtue of citizenship to be the one being at work. Only in this way you become a full member of the social community. This understanding is particularly evident in the first white papers and in the memorandum, but is toned down after widespread criticism during the consultation process in 2001.

In the subsequent Notice citizenship is given a more autonomous meaning with reference to civil society, and there's a division of "the aim of active citizenship" into the "personal fulfillment", "social inclusion", "cultural cohesion" and "active citizenship".

In The Memorandum and in the subsequent Announcements and Actions two main goals of all learning are highlighted: Partly the instrumental goal to promote employability for the benefit of the system world, and partly the humanistic aims to promote personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social inclusion and cultural cohesion for the benefit of the life world. The EU system has a foot in both camps, but with a preponderance of the OECD. The first and largest foot is in the system world and the aim is here to develop employability with a focus on people as employees. The second and minor foot is planted in the life world and the aim is here to develop active citizenship with a focus on people as fellow human beings and citizens. In this dual objective of lifelong learning is the recognition that a functioning society not only needs updated employees but also active citizens and formed fellowmen. For no one can realize himself fully in the work; an active, instructive and meaningful leisure time is a crucial part of the good life.

The problem with the EU objectives is that they are not anchored in a stated understanding of man and society. They float in the air, and therefore one cannot distinguish between the fact that the targets have different meanings in different spheres of life and the danger is that employability becomes the dominant goal. But the European system has nevertheless not unequivocally taken the side in the paradigm conflict, and although there is a clear predominance of the instrumental discourse, there is a theoretical and political opening for the fact that you can try to strengthen the minor foot in the life world.

In the Grundtvig project LOAC and hence through the following best practice we have tried to find a way to describe and assess the sides of the life world represented by the minor foot.