

Education as Encounter

By John Ozolins, Australian Catholic University

Abstract

This paper revives the idea that what is central to education is not facilitating the acquisition of information or skills to use in the marketplace, but the encounter between teacher and learner which enables the student to acquire a richer and deeper appreciation of the human world which he or she inhabits. Knowledge is a human artefact which is created in the initiation of a learner into a common form of life and this is not something which can be carried out without the involvement of other human beings. It is argued that teaching is a vocation, where this implies a love of truth and of learning for its own sake. A passionate regard for these will not be imparted by the use of technology, but through the experience of sharing in a journey of discovery with other human beings. Moreover, lifelong learning conceived as a postmodern replacement for education in which there are no distinctions between what is worthwhile knowledge and what is not is to be rejected, as is the commodification of education to which such a conception leads.

Education as Encounter

I Introduction

It is fashionable today to say that we now have a new understanding of education and that schools and universities today are endeavouring to teach their students how to be lifelong learners. What this can be construed to mean is that it is no longer sufficient for teachers to impart knowledge to students, or to inculcate them into their society, that is, to pass on to them all that is rich and beautiful about their cultural inheritance during their formal education. In retrospect, it was the former view that R.S. Peters espoused, quaintly and now old-fashionedly, proposing that the purpose of education was to develop desirable states of mind, where this involved the transmission of knowledge.¹ Peters also argued for the importance of passing on to students all that is rich and beautiful about their cultural inheritance.² Robust critical reflection on this view suggested that students should also have the capacity to critique their culture, so that they not only have their culture and traditions transmitted to them, but also the capacity to change what is mean and ugly in it. Thus, through emancipatory critical reflection they were called upon to be agents of change. However, coupling this with Peters' view³ that the essence of education is the capacity to travel with a different view of the world, then all of this, it seems to me, fits more closely the model of what is involved in being lifelong learners than what is generally proposed. An

¹Peters, R.S. *Ethics and Education*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966, 27

²Peters, R.S. *Op. cit.*, 49ff. Peters talks here about the initiation of the individual into the public life of the community.

³Peters, R.S. "What is an Educational Process?" in Peters, R.S. (ed.) *The Concept of Education*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, 6-7

educated person enjoys a critical perspective on the world which remains with him or her for the rest of his or her life. In this brief paper, I want to revive the idea that what is central to education is the interaction between two human protagonists, a teacher and a learner and to assert that newer views of education, such as those represented by market driven models, lose sight of this. Moreover, what this means is that technology based and alternative learning paradigms which ignore this fundamental relationship rob the student, as well as the teacher, of perhaps the most important element in the process of education. Just as knowledge is not just the acquisition of information, neither is education just the development of skills in manipulating information.

The one important and crucial assumption of that the view of education which I advocate and which I suggest is largely a classical one is that what is significant in the process of education is the encounter between teacher and learner. Herbst, for example, says that education is a meeting of two intellects, and therefore of two persons, and this requires a common life.⁴ That is, successful learning and teaching depends crucially on the relationship between teacher and learner. A moments reflection on one's own schooldays is enough to establish the truth of this. But this is hardly surprising, for what is crucial in all our growth as human beings is the encounter with the Other, who we meet, as Levinas says, face to face, without artifice and without mask.⁵ In almost every person's life there is someone who acts as mentor, enriching our lives and who inspires and motivates us, if only briefly, to learn something which he or she regards as precious and worthwhile to pass on to us. This could be

⁴Herbst, P. "Work, Labour and University Education" in Peters, R.S. (Ed.) *The Philosophy of Education*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, 72

⁵Levinas, E. *Outside the Subject*, tr. Michael B. Smith, Stanford, California: Standford

a maths teacher, who despite featuring depressingly regularly in the list of ten worst dressed teachers in the school, nevertheless through his or her own passionate devotion to the subject inspired us for a brief time with the same intense sense of its importance. It could be the physical education teacher who taught us how to succeed in sport and so raised our self esteem enough to encourage us to risk trying to succeed in other areas of our school life. Still other teachers and lecturers are remembered for their patient explanations of subject matter which to us appeared completely mystifying or who awoke in us a sense of adventure and of venturing into uncharted territory, developing in us a thirst for knowledge and the confidence to seek it out for ourselves. This is not just sentimental reflection on one's schooldays seen through the fog of selective recall of happy memories, for just as important in our formation as human persons are those teachers who had a negative impact on us, robbing us of opportunities now never to be realised or, more happily, who despite their best efforts, did not sway us from our course. In all of these human narratives, the most important element is the encounter between teacher and learner.

Scheffler warns us not to regard the teacher as a mere technician, arguing that he or she influences students not just by the basic teaching tasks he or she carries out, but by what he or she is.⁶ The teacher is not just a cog in an industrial machine charged with the task of realising national goals by preparing skilled workers for a role in business or industry. Increasingly, modern curricula are driven by values and imperatives which have strayed from their proper place in industry and business and in the haste to adopt a technicist, economic rationalist model of education, the primary purpose of education, which is to humanise and

University Press, 1993

⁶ Scheffler, I. *Reason and Teaching*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, 61

civilise is lost. The stress on sorting and sifting students through examinations with measurable outcomes, the increasing penchant for quantification of teacher efficiency and productivity and the attempt to reduce complex areas of human knowledge to increasingly detailed objectives alienates both student and teacher. Moreover, in its attempt to somehow capture and confine the spirit of spontaneity and creativity, the industrialist model destroys the very things it claims to nurture. Reid warns us about being too preoccupied with emphasising the importance of earning a living and thus losing sight of life itself.⁷ What is important in life is not measurable, nor neatly defined and packaged. An education which emphasises the gathering of information and the attainment of skills without the sometimes slow and haphazard encounter with a human dimension that opens up a window to the riches of human culture is no education at all. Human beings are social creatures after all and so it is the relationship between teacher and learner in a process of mutual discovery that provides the catalyst for the attainment of an understanding and appreciation of treasures of civilization.

If this is so, then we need to be very critical of any erosion of the partnership between teacher and learner and the displacement of the teacher by learning technologies or learning paradigms in which the encounter between teacher and learner does not have a central role. It is important that the role of technology, particularly computer technology in schools and universities is subjected to thorough scrutiny and we ought not be beguiled by the latest in multimedia or information technology. The Internet, for example, is a two-edged sword, for, while it contains much that is of value, there is also much dross and increasingly so. We need to use it critically and this means teaching our students how to distinguish between what is

⁷ Reid, L.A. *Philosophy and Education*, London: Heinemann, 1962, 161

valuable and what is not.⁸ Moreover, we cannot engage in the kind of face to face encounter of intellects sketched above, with a computer.

It is possible to conjecture that technology rather than decreasing the necessity for teacher-student contact increases the need for teacher-student interaction. Technology does not replace teachers, but places greater demands on them. The emphasis in current curriculum of process (the 'learning how to learn' model, never mind the content view) and of treating students as independent learners, sending them off to do what are grandly called research projects, perhaps unwittingly reduces the opportunities for students to interact with their teachers and exposes them to all the baneful influences of what is able to be found online or available on CD-ROM. In the latter case, hopefully teachers and librarians have had a role in the choice of material. The point here is that students do not have inbuilt ways of discriminating between what is material which can be treated as authoritative and what is not. They need their teachers to guide them and to engage with them in the great voyage of discovery.

Lyotard offers us a challenge when he says that knowledge is being transformed by the computer age, that what is now held to be valuable is what can be translated into computer

⁸ Dreyfus argues that the huge amount of information available on the Web is not organised with any sense of what is important and what is not. There is a vast amount of knowledge and information, but often its provenance is difficult to determine. It is enormously difficult for a student to make sense of all the information and furthermore to achieve mastery of discipline without engagement with others. We can take him to mean here those with the expertise to act as guides. Dreyfus, H. L. "Anonymity versus Commitment: the dangers of education in the Internet" *Ed. Phil. and Th.*, Vol. 34, 4, 2002, 370-373

language and that furthermore it is produced in order to be sold.⁹ This suggests that the central plank of education, namely the encounter between teacher and learner and the view that it is in this interaction that knowledge is created both in the learner and teacher no longer holds and is replaced by an uncritical transfer of information, which is more efficiently accomplished via computer. Knowledge, as Wittgenstein reminds us, is not independent of the form of life that we are and is bound up with our cultural practices, experiences and traditions. If we cannot understand a man when he says, “I don’t know that there are physical objects” it is not because we don’t understand the sentence he has uttered, but because we don’t know what he could mean.¹⁰ What we take to be knowledge is not just what can be stored and retrieved from a computer, but is the living heritage of our culture and capturing this requires human interaction. It is this which illuminates and assists the growth of understanding which transforms information into knowledge. A student can be sent away to do a project on, say, the Kokoda Trail and assiduously transcribe facts and stories from books, encyclopedias and CD ROMs, but what brings the narratives to life is the encounter with a grandfather or great uncle who was on the Kokoda Trail.¹¹ What lessons the child learns are learnt from the personal encounter.

Bound up with this conception of what is important in education is a revival of the

⁹Lyotard, J-F. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, 4

¹⁰Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972

¹¹The importance of the personal encounter is perhaps highlighted by the Professor of Information Technology, Open University, UK, Diane Laurillard’s comment that the uncritical use of computer technology has resulted in students focussing on the process of acquiring information ignoring the actual content almost completely. (*Lecture, Swinburne University, 17th August, 1999*)

understanding of teaching as a vocation, where this is not just a job that someone engages in until she or he retires. Understood as a scholarly vocation, teaching demands a genuine love of truth and a concern for not just the intellectual growth of students, but also with their spiritual development, where this means a development of a genuine love of learning for its own sake.¹² It is this idea, that there is something intrinsically valuable about learning¹³, which is missing in much of the rhetoric about lifelong learning and education in values. It is as if values are somehow external and abstract ideas which are so much data to be acquired. What is deep and important about learning is the internalisation of a way of life in which love of truth, of honesty, of concern for the other, and the virtues in general are central. Where a teacher understands that whatever it is they are charged to teach is concerned with these values, then they are engaged in the practice of a vocation, one which cannot be replaced by a computer or by a formulaic adherence to an instructional model.

Technology should be at the service of the teacher and learner, aiding and supporting the educational experience, enhancing the likelihood that the joint quest for knowledge is successful. Strategies which seek to reduce the extent and discount the importance of the personal encounter between teacher and learner should be avoided, for they militate against the formation of human persons nurtured in human relationships with others. One should not be a Luddite about technology, for it can enhance educational experiences and be a marvellous tool, but we have to remember it cannot replace what is at the core of education - the encounter between persons. In arguing for this as central, economic rationalist models of

¹² See for example, Gaita's discussion in "Truth and the Responsibility of Intellectuals" in Gaita, R. *A Common Humanity*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999, 187-213

¹³ I don't mean by this any kind of learning, but scholarly learning in the traditional areas of knowledge – humanities, sciences, social sciences, etc.

education which rely on measurable outcomes and which focus teaching and learning on the attainment of strictly defined objectives should be abandoned.

Learning paradigms which seek to marginalise the teacher will do little to promote a genuine commitment to a pursuit of knowledge and understanding for its own sake. Important values such as those represented by deep religious faith and by secular humanist values are not learnt over the Internet or by distance. These have to be learnt through an engagement with other persons. This is not to suggest that there are not great benefits to be gained through the provision of educational units and courses in various modes, such as, on-line, distance, and CD-ROM, but rather to argue that for all the benefits to be gained, one ought not lose sight of what has been lost, namely the face to face encounter with a teacher. This encounter is irreplaceable and we should be reminded that we are not solitary beings and what is most valuable about education in a discipline is not necessarily what is supplied by a distance learning package, for example. Teacher centred education may have its faults, but an education conceived of as idiosyncratic lifelong learning whose only purpose is utilitarian information gathering is far worse.

II Lifelong Learning

At the beginning of this paper it was observed that schools and universities are now fashionably concerned with teaching students how to be lifelong learners and it was proposed that education which enabled students to see things from a different perspective was a much thicker notion of education than what is suggested by the phrase 'lifelong learning'. It will be argued here that the conception of education as lifelong learning trivialises education and

through its postmodern conception of knowledge and truth is self-defeating. Understood as the gaining of knowledge, learning in the postmodern milieu can never actually occur, since knowledge is provisional and worse, truth defeasible, so what is learned today is unlearned tomorrow. Worst of all, one perspective is as good as any other. One can avoid this unwelcome conclusion if one is prepared to accept that learning is no longer concerned with gaining knowledge, but this is too high a price to pay. If knowledge itself is always provisional, our learning is not about gaining knowledge, since yesterday's knowledge is today's false opinion, but about a process of constantly adjusting to an ever changing epistemological landscape. If we accept this, then, tragically, the whole enterprise is doomed, since there is no reason to suppose that one opinion is better than another and so what counts as education is what is expedient and what has a temporary use.¹⁴ There are no recognizable norms of truth or of beauty or of the good in such a Protagorean environment. On the other hand, learning construed as lifelong could be understood as implying an open-endedness which means that its task is never complete, so that there is no final achievement of knowledge and understanding. That is, we never reach the end of what we can learn, but this view of learning is a classical one, since part of what it is to be educated is to humbly recognise the limitations of what one knows.

The concept of lifelong learning emerges out of the remark that for human beings, living and

¹⁴ Usher, for example, says that lifelong learning can be understood as a metaphor that foregrounds the simultaneous boundlessness of learning and moreover, it is not bounded by what educators would traditionally define as the transmission of knowledge. See Usher, R. "Lifelong learning in the postmodern" in Aspin, D., Chapman, J., Hatton, M. and Sawano, Y. (eds.) *International Handbook of Lifelong Learning*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001 166

learning are nearly synonymous¹⁵, which is to say that learning is not restricted to formal education, but occurs in a myriad ways throughout one's life. Formal education, it was assumed, prepared the individual for work, but learning continued informally in the workplace. As Beckett and Hager say, workers learned by doing and this informal learning has until recently been ignored by theorists.¹⁶ It is evident that with a massive shift to mass education with a vocational focus, that the older view of education as initiation, of developing desirable states of mind (where this included moral character) has been supplanted by a new view of education which is centred on the development of skills and capacities which can be utilised in the workplace, for the employer is no longer willing to pay for the training of the young worker nor for the reskilling of the older worker. It is apparent that with rapid technological change and an increasingly mobile workforce, that workers need to be encouraged to ensure that their skills are periodically updated. From the worker's point of view, with the emphasis on increasing efficiencies in the workplace and massive downsizing, there is some imperative to maintain one's employability.¹⁷

Aspin, et al. deny that lifelong learning should be so narrowly construed, though they acknowledge that one way of conceptualising it is to hold that it is primarily concerned with the promotion of skills and competencies related to economic goals. However, in making this claim, they shift to a new concept, namely that of lifelong education, which is defined largely

¹⁵ Aspin, D., Chapman, J., Hatton, M. and Sawano, Y. "Introduction and Overview" in Aspin, D., Chapman, J., Hatton, M. and Sawano, Y. (eds.) *International Handbook of Lifelong Learning*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001, xvii

¹⁶ Beckett, D. and Hager, P. *Life, Work and Learning: Practice in Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 2002, 4

¹⁷ Field says that the British government sees lifelong learning as involving the development of a more productive and efficient workforce. See Field, J. *Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order*, London: Trentham Books, 2002, viii

in terms of the old concept of education. That is, lifelong education is seen as intrinsically valuable in itself and so those engaging in educational activities have a richer, deeper appreciation of the world and are able to engage in a variety of worthwhile activities.

Lifelong learning, then, is seen as having three components: education for a more highly skilled work force, personal development leading to a more rewarding life and the creation of a stronger and more inclusive society.¹⁸ These are, of course, worthy aims, but they are not all necessarily the aims of education. Not everything is education, though it may well be instructive, experiential, and result in one's maturation.

To include everything under the heading of lifelong learning (or lifelong education¹⁹, which is a completely different concept) is to run the risk of rendering the concept meaningless. It is

¹⁸ Aspin, et al., *Op. cit.*, xix-xxi

¹⁹ Aspin and Chapman spends some time arguing that there is no consensus to be found on what lifelong education means and in any case, that to look for a definition is wrong-headed because it is an essentially contested concept (just as education was once thought to be – see for example, Wilson, J. *Preface to the Philosophy of Education*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, 34). In reply to their contention, Aspin and Chapman fight a strawman here, since few would want to argue that there is a definition of the essentialist type that they reject. Aspin and Chapman believe the term lifelong education has gradually been replaced by lifelong learning in usage and think that in many ways this is to be preferred. Their argument for this is that learning is neutral with respect to questions of value – that is, for someone on the verge of retirement, learning to play bridge is a worthwhile activity, whereas it may not be for someone who is young. This I think, is a fallacious argument which gives insufficient weight to the reasons for valuing, say, studies in science, mathematics, history, etc, rather than past-times such as bingo, billiards and bridge. Moreover, their argument begs the question concerning choice – a student needs to be educated about what is important – he or she cannot make considered choices and commitments without being provided with the capacity to do so. While what is important and valuable will depend on the culture and community one is initiated into, these cultural norms will not be arbitrarily available for acceptance or rejection. Hence, while one might be able to choose whether to play billiards or bridge as a past-time, one cannot choose not to learn about the history and politics of one's society if one wants to be initiated into that society. Moreover, this is not just a preference for an intellectual life, some things simply go deeper. See Aspin and Chapman, "Towards a Philosophy of Lifelong Learning" in Aspin, et al. *Op.cit.*, 6-10.

this danger which Aspin, et al. run, for they claim that lifelong learning is a complex and multifaceted process which is actualised through the provision of learning experiences and activities in the home, the workplace, in universities and colleges, and in other educational, social and cultural agencies, institutions and settings – both formal and informal – within the community.²⁰ There is very little left out here and much more needs to be said about the types of learning experiences envisaged here. For example, we might sensibly include experiences of racism, of rejection, of suffering, of betrayal and so on as experiences from which we can learn something about the nature of the human condition, but experiences of flatulence, quenching one's thirst, of ringing a doorbell are not of the same kind. What counts as learning has to have its limits otherwise we are left with a concept which is unusable.

Of course, the view that Aspin et al. have fits very well with a postmodernist critique of education which is highly suspicious of 'grand narratives'. Postmodernism is marked by an increasing fragmentation of the ways in which human experience is characterized – there are feminist, gay, postcolonial, patriarchal, etc. discourses each of which is held to be equally valid in organising experience. One of the main ways in which we can get a firm idea of the nature of post-modernity is to realize that a key idea seems to lie in the view that there can be no bedrock of certainty for our knowledge and our beliefs. That is, where once our ideas could be fixed with reference to an absolute Newtonian world, this is no longer tenable. Beginning with the overthrow of Euclidean geometry in the nineteenth century and the declaration of the death of God by Nietzsche ('*Gott ist tot*'), the rapidity of change within the modern world has led to post-modernity, the view that there is nothing fixed and that

²⁰ Aspin, et. al., *Op. cit.*, xxi

everything must be contextualized. Bauman²¹ remarks that incoherence is one of the most distinctive features of postmodernity, so even an attempt to characterize postmodernity itself is flawed. The contrast with modernity - the view that through the use of reason and the methods of science we can arrive at the truth about the world - is stark. Postmodernity rejects the possibility of one universalizable understanding of the nature of truth, of aesthetics, of judgement and of knowledge. Education, understood as 'grand narrative' is replaced by lifelong learning, where it is the individual who decides what he or she will learn. Moreover, the concept of lifelong learning considerably lessens the power of the educator to define what is worthwhile knowledge and so we sink into a miasma of individually chosen pursuits driven, not by what is understood as universally valuable, but by fashion, expediency and market forces.²²

There can be little argument that post-modernism has alerted us to the fact that our experiences will determine the way in which we see the world and, given that each person's experiences will be different, that there is no justification for privileging one way of interpreting a set of experiences of the world over another. Nevertheless, we recognize that objectivity arises from intersubjective agreement and while this does not give us a conception of reality which is absolute, it provides us with a foundation for our knowledge.²³ Peirce argued that our firmest foundation rested on having the widest possible agreement amongst the widest possible community. That is, we approach more closely to the truth when we gain

²¹ Bauman, Z. *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1992, xxiv

²² See Usher, R. *Op. cit.*, 180-181. Also, see Field, who says that the old boundaries between real learning and trivial learning become blurred in postmodernism. Field, J. *Op. cit.*, 65

²³ Of course we demand more than just intersubjective agreement, there are other conditions which we attach to a proposition before we are prepared to say that we know it.

agreement in the widest possible and most diverse audience.²⁴

It is this view, that there are standards of truth, of values which some proponents of lifelong learning seem to reject. It is one thing to say that there are different forms of learning, it is another to say that these are all much the same and have the same status. Moreover, the blurring of boundaries between various spheres of human activity, especially, as Walzer²⁵ observes, where one sphere dominates another, leads to inequalities and, arguably, in the case where the financial sphere dominates, to the commodification of the goods of other spheres. Thus, where education becomes dominated by the marketplace, it becomes a commodity. In institutions, knowledge is packaged in various ways so that it is attractive to the consumer and competes well with other suppliers. As a commodity, it only has value insofar as it is marketable and generates income and profit for the education 'business'. Seen as a commodity, knowledge, or more properly, a dominant discourse, is valuable if it is what the consumer wants to buy and valueless if there are no takers for it in the marketplace. So we might offer a unit in gay-feminist-Afro-Celtic-Spirituality and Philosophy because there is a market for it. Alternatively, we might design a vocationally oriented course with an eye to capturing a professional market by concentrating on enhancing particular skills. In this way, knowledge which once would have been seen as deep and valuable for its own sake is seen as on a par with a recreational unit²⁶ or a vocational unit which enhances one's skill in a

²⁴Peirce, C. "How To Make Ideas Clear" in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, selected and edited with an introduction by Justus Buchler, New York: Dover, 1955, pp.38ff.

²⁵ Walzer, M. *Spheres of Justice*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1983, 18ff.

²⁶ This accords with one of the aims of lifelong learning that Aspin et al. mention, namely, personal development.

particular area.²⁷

The commodification of knowledge in this way means that the learner as consumer can pick and choose whatever takes his or her fancy without making any commitments to whatever the knowledge is concerned with. Thus, once he or she has finished with a particular interest, he or she can move on to something else which has struck his or her fancy. Packaged, marketed and indistinguishable from entertainment, knowledge is no longer taken seriously as expressing anything demanding respect and having universal value. Fragmentation of knowledge into neat, digestible chunks can be seen as a direct outcome of the postmodern conviction²⁸ that what is to be considered worthwhile is contingent and so there are no moral imperatives to do one thing rather than another.

The difficulty with this position is that there can be no growth to maturation for anyone if there are no commitments which he or she needs to make and this will have serious consequences both for the individual and for the community in which he or she lives. If what is worthwhile is contingent, then one's commitment to someone one loves need only last for as long as one feels like it. Similarly one's religious and moral commitments are only to be held temporarily, to be discarded if they become inconvenient, or if one spots better

²⁷ The predilection for handing out certificates for even the most trivial training course is perhaps an indication of the levelling process. Should someone proudly display their Basic Wordprocessing certificate alongside their Ph.D. testamur? These are both the result of learning after all. Someone who, for example, does a single unit of Philosophy at a University, for example, might feel cheated if they do not get a certificate showing that they have completed the unit. (I do not mean here a statement of results.)

²⁸ Conviction may be the wrong term here – since postmodernism eschews convictions of any kind. Perhaps it can be understood as a temporary attention paid to a particular commitment. We ought to expect coherence here either.

options.²⁹ Values of loyalty, trust and friendship meet with the same lack of commitment. In the postmodern world one changes one's friends as often as one changes one shirt.

III Teaching and Lifelong Learning

It should not be concluded from the foregoing that there is no value in lifelong learning nor that one ought not pursue activities which one enjoys or those which improve one's employability. What is argued for is a recognition that education is not episodic in the way postmodernism seems to imply and that it is not replaceable by the new concept of lifelong learning. Education, involving the encounter between teacher and learner, recognises that though learning can take place without a teacher, and sometimes in spite of a teacher. However, since there are values which cannot be learnt except through a commitment by someone to another, the exchange between teacher and learner remains central in education.

It remains central even for lifelong learning because despite the commodification of knowledge and its largely contingent nature in postmodernism, not everything can be learnt either over the Net or by distance. There are skills and competencies which require the presence of a teacher. Some things have to be illustrated by actions, rather than by lengthy description; but there is more than this. Some disciplines are not able to be mastered without the constant attention of a teacher and the more difficult the discipline the longer a student will have to spend in the company of a teacher acquiring the necessary skills and competencies. Critical discernment of what is important and what is not is learnt through

²⁹ There is evidence, for example, that people now 'shop around' for religions until they find one that suits them. One theory to account for the growth of Buddhism in Western society

discussion with others. The learner and teacher are in partnership and it is through dialogue that values are clarified and ideas refined.

If lifelong learning aims to develop the same qualities as education then there is little to quarrel with, but if the concept implies a shift from a commitment to truth, beauty, justice, knowledge and other important human values, then it needs to be rejected. There can be little disagreement with its practical side for not only should individuals be able to improve their skills, but also enjoy their leisure time in the pursuit of their interests. The pursuit of these can be justified in terms of what is good for the individual, where this is understood as pointing to universal values, rather than to contingently held beliefs.

suggests that because it is individualistic that it requires little commitment to shared values.