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# What's happened to the 'liberal' in education?

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Education is the process by which planned and relatively organised learning occurs and the knowledge, wisdom, skills and mainstream values of a society are passed on to the next generation. The gaining of knowledge and skills through the curriculum involves individuals and their attainment. The inculcation of values calls for learners to internalise the prevailing culture, which in turn supports social cohesion (Kantzara, 2011). Despite this apparent functionality, a dynamic education also seeks to question both the accepted knowledge and values of society and to develop new perspectives.

Education also prepares people for employment which is vital for both the individual and the market. Since the late 1970s, however, with the advent of Youth Training Programmes, vocational education has come to dominate almost anything which might be deemed 'non-vocational'. Important as the economy is for our survival in an increasingly globalised competitive market there is more to education than just obtaining technical skills.

Defining the term 'education' more specifically gives rise to controversy because it is open to different interpretations. Many people initially think of education in institutional terms, namely what happens in schools, colleges and universities. It is after all to educational institutions that we entrust the major function of laying the foundations of an educated life. The main thrust of this formal education occurs early in an individual's life through programmes specially designed for the purpose. However, this need not be the end of the matter. Formal programmes of study are also available later in life through FE, Adult Education (AE), the Open University (OU) and other types of provision for mature students.

Thinking about education simply in institutional terms is problematic because it merely scratches the surface. Not everything that occurs in these establishments is actually educational. For example, cramming knowledge to improve exam grades undermines the true nature of a challenging and thoughtful curriculum. This reduces the enterprise to mere reproduction rather than constituting a real learning process. Individuals also

have experiences outside these institutions which contribute to their development, such as the informal learning encouraged by new technology.

There is a deeper meaning which soon emerges when we consider not so much what education 'is' but what it 'ought to be'. This is the crux of the matter, directing us to the values that underpin what initially appears fairly consensual. These values are a combination of individual conviction, group interests and shared culturally-imbued traditions. In a multicultural society such as ours there will inevitably be tension within and between these different sets of values and therefore any definitions based upon them. Nevertheless there seems to be enough common ground for us to set out a number of propositions for a balanced and liberal curriculum which embraces various value differences.

We contend that education, within the British / Western tradition, is the synthesis of certain experiences, not solely institutionally based, which the individual acquires throughout life. These experiences need to fulfil a number of key requirements if they are to constitute a sound and balanced education. Up-dating R. S. Peters et al (1967), we would expect to find:

1. A breadth of knowledge rather than a narrow and limited field of vision. This may seem obvious, but not to Sir Mike Tomlinson, former chief inspector of schools, who was widely reported in the press in 2015 as calling GCSEs 'wasted time associated with a large expenditure', and who advocated re-focusing on the 'core' subjects of English and communication, maths and numeracy, science and IT.
  2. A depth of knowledge in a varied number of fields, with a clear understanding of the relevant concepts and principles, and also an ability to make links between apparently discrete bodies of knowledge. Which fields of study are worthwhile is a matter of some conjecture and raises the issue of how to accommodate different underlying value systems. The traditional humanities and sciences, once generally thought to be the basis of a sound curriculum, have had to make way for new developments in knowledge like Social Sciences
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and New Technology. This momentum will intensify as advances in fields such as artificial intelligence and medicine alter the nature of society. A different issue which has recently intensified concerns the place of religious belief within an educational framework. Clearly, the curriculum must reflect the range of beliefs – and non-belief – within society, as well as addressing significant social development and change.

3. A place in the curriculum for imagination and creativity to be fostered, and the emotional content of life to be examined in a principled and coherent way.

4. Support for students in examining their own personal and social development. There will be recognition that the education of the 'whole person' cannot occur on the basis of academic disciplines alone.

5. A concern for the value of truth, whilst recognising the difficulty of attaining certainty in this quest. It is a mark of the educated mind that it can distinguish between different approaches to claims of truth, for example: philosophical argument, religious belief, scientific theory, and personal opinion. Of course, there are also times when paradoxically the pursuit of truth calls for acknowledgement of one's ignorance.

6. Searching for truth is under-pinned by a willingness to think critically, not taking information or value positions simply on trust. This calls for the questioning of one's own and others' assumptions, experiences and judgements, with a view to a better understanding of the wider picture. There is also an accompanying need to develop the ability to state and defend one's own view and to respect the right of others to articulate their position. Given the difficulties inherent in establishing what is true, we would expect students to consider a range of perspectives with an open mind before rushing to any conclusions.

7. A positive attitude to learning is to be encouraged. This is most likely to come about when there is acknowledgement by the educator of individual needs, particularly in relation to student access, choice, experience, independent judgement and increasing self-direction. As persons, students must be treated as equals, without discrimination, whilst full recognition is given to their differing degrees of academic and personal development.

It should be apparent from these criteria that education is predominantly a *liberating* experience. As Peters (in: Billington, 2003) reminds us: 'To be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view'. Even so, we must recognise that the education of the individual is always taking place within a cultural context and that account has to be taken of this.

### The 'System'

Many sociologists, like Kantzara (2011), see education essentially as a system that transmits dominant values and norms and therefore supports stability in society whilst also maintaining inequality. Contemporary societies, however, are a mass of complex institutional, group and individual relationships and so values are often ranged in contest or outright conflict. The recent hot debate instigated by a previous Education Secretary concerning the interpretation of the history relating to the First World War, and how it impinges on the teaching of history generally in the National Curriculum, clearly demonstrates this problem (Gove, 2014).

Our society also uses education to steer its young people towards qualifications and related jobs in the commercial market. Within the English system this begins when students move from the primary to the secondary sector and parents attempt to choose a school they think appropriate to their child's abilities and aspirations. What choices are available depends very much on location, government policy at the time and, often, parental affluence. During secondary education students choose, generally with advice, the specialisms which will lead them towards career possibilities. At this point they may decide to leave school for a different kind of educational establishment, for example a Sixth Form or FE college.

However, there is a problem here. In the drive for greater functionality, governments and employers, emphasising the nation's place in competitive international markets, have called upon educators to ensure a steady supply of suitably qualified workers. It is this socio-economic demand which increasingly overlooks the broader needs and interests of the individual and emphasises instrumentality, particularly through technical education.

Despite the proliferation of specific technical courses for vocational and practical groups in recent years the employment market contracted after the financial crash of 2008. The apparent functionality of matching jobs and qualifications has been seriously compromised by the tension between job placement and contemporary lack of available or suitable opportunities. This is particularly pertinent given the prolific increase in the number of graduates from 108,487 in 1990 to 545,070 in 2011 (Tonkin, 2015), at a time when only limited casual and low-skilled jobs may be on offer. 'Almost half of recent graduates in the UK are in non-graduate jobs, according to official data that has underscored the challenges facing young people entering the labour market', says Allen (2013). In fact most young people are now overqualified and underemployed.

One can see why a simple functional formula is preferred by those with specific but covert agendas. Politicians often want to ensure that education is used to bolster their own ideologies whilst employers want a qualified but pliable workforce. This apparently uncontroversial convenience is challenged appositely by Basil Bernstein (2003): 'How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and principles of social control'. This concise statement neatly encapsulates the hidden agenda.

### The liberal tradition

The traditional medieval 'grammar' curriculum (named after the Latin grammar required by the Church) comprised the seven 'liberal arts' of grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. The emphasis was upon developing thinking skills in these areas. This curriculum gradually developed into the more recognisable contemporary subject-based grammar school curriculum which became the predominant model and was directly linked to the new GCE examination system in 1951.

Since the introduction of GCE, education has suffered from major swings of policy, such as the drive for comprehensive education, kicked around by the party politicians little better than a football, based on their differing ideological values. Even more problematic is the differential nature of the curriculum, namely the division between the academic / liberal and the vocational / general study areas. This distinction has been exacerbated in the tertiary technical sector, and it is this issue that now leads us back to the term 'liberal education' in the title.

Though content is important, the liberal nature of education is more than just that, emphasising a way of learning as much as *what* is learned. By definition it is non-selective, non-specialist, non-vocational and non-professional but premised upon the idea that learning to think can occur through and across any knowledge area. It may sound rather like the traditional liberal arts curriculum but it is distinctive because it is not restricted by subject boundaries. A liberal education encourages students to address the complexity and diversity of ideas and social arrangements which in turn helps them deal with and contribute to change in society.

A recent instant of the need for this approach has been highlighted by Dr Saltman of the Institute of Strategic Dialogue in addressing the problem of the radicalisation of young Muslims. In addition to the

role of the family to moderate opinions, he comments: 'Education programmes are also imperative . . . in teaching young people critical consumption skills online so they have a natural resilience to extremist content' (Saltman, 2015). Of course education alone cannot tackle larger social problems.

### Education and training

In any subject area there are common denominators: the acquisition of knowledge, the development of relevant skills and the assimilation of attitudes appropriate to the area of study. There are however differences as to how this enterprise is to be conducted and to what end. We can contrast education in a wider *liberal* sense with conditioning and indoctrination, in terms both of what and how the material is conveyed. For instance, a tight, teacher-centred delivery of the curriculum will limit the possibilities for broadening the students' potential to include alternative views.

Training stands in relation to liberal education in a different way. The knowledge called for in training is more constrained, technical and its skills more tightly focused. 'Skil' is an ancient Norse word for discernment and the ability to discriminate. A trained person is able to demonstrate this to a high degree within a specialist, limited area.

What then might be the difference between a trained and educated person? If we take plumbers, for instance, obviously they will have specialised practical skills to apply to the required tasks. However, there is also a requirement for essential underlying knowledge, covering such aspects as the properties of water, heat and electricity. The skills are specific to training but the wider principles are an indication of an education.

Let us take an historian as a contrast. Is there a sense in which we can speak of a trained historian? We would expect historians to have a detailed knowledge of their specialist area and also to have the skills to add to this knowledge, for example by researching and interpreting archival documents. These days we might also expect them to be able to put in a good turn on TV documentary programmes! Their skills are professionally validated, although innovation is always possible, contributing to an open-ended enquiry into historical events and even to a working theory of history itself. Both the skills and the knowledge form contributory parts of the historian's overall education. Ryle's (1949) distinction between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' is neatly bridged.

Similarly, think of the change implied by the switch from Physical Training to Physical Education

or Teacher Training to Teacher Education and back again. In FE and AE teacher training there is clearly a requirement to ensure the development of relevant skills, eg planning for learning, managing the classroom, how to use interactive strategies and techniques to assist learning. There also used to be a concern with the theoretical background to learning which involved various disciplines of knowledge, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and how these impinge on the application of the teacher’s skills. There was briefly a period in which self-directed teacher-trainee course planning prevailed, based on the view that adults were best capable of determining for themselves what their own needs were, of sharing relevant experiences, of selecting appropriate methods for extending their understanding, and of identifying the directions in which they needed to be progressing. Malcolm Knowles’s (1990) theory of *andragogy* was influential in these developments, which were ultimately seen by administrators as getting too far away from tight, centralised policy directives. The concept of the reflective practitioner still survives but with the focus on technical expertise rather than on purpose. Donald Schon (1983) saw things differently: ‘Reflection-in-action tends to surface not only the assumptions and techniques but the values and purposes embedded in organizational knowledge’.

The concept of ‘education’ for teachers has now been largely lost in the quest for functionality, which places the emphasis on technical aspects of how students learn rather than what is worth learning, and on what educational policy is rather than what its values might be. Ofsted regards the ‘wider view’ as out of date. Teacher education has been stripped back to a learning skills-based approach verified by tightly organised certificate courses which have replaced the less prescriptive model. Yet a truly liberal education for intending and practising teachers and their students is far more complex than can be encompassed by some simple skill-sets.

In the present economic climate with its ideological driver, fundamental differences between the liberal and technical aspects of education are frequently being overlooked in the all-consuming drive for market competitiveness. In the light of this trend, the whole purpose of technical education is cast as increasing the vocational skills of students and altering their behaviour, not least by lowering

expectations with a view to inculcating compliant employability. On this basis, what currently passes for ‘education’ is seen by some commentators (including us) as being too close to conditioning and even as a form of indoctrination.

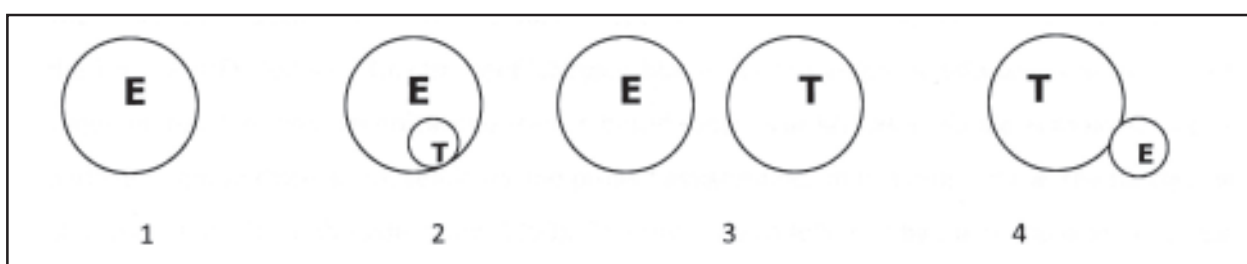
Although not directly pertinent to the FE or AE sector, the shifting relationship between work and education is clearly reflected in the changing titles of the education ministry: the Department for Education (DfE) in 1995 became the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and then from 2001 until 2007 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and then back to the DfE after the 2010 election.

To insist, as is often the case, that there is no difference between education and training is too simplistic, because it overlooks the essential differences between them. Whilst these categories overlap they are also distinct. They also compete for resources in the current climate. The relationship between education and training may be visually represented as in the box below.

In diagram 1, education stands alone as the dominant form of learning; in diagram 2 training is now a constituent part of education; in diagram 3 training competes with education as a unity in its own right and finally, in diagram 4 training dominates and has dwarfed education. Nowhere is this more apparent in contemporary society than in the burgeoning role of information technology (IT) which has become something of a world in itself. Who needs education if you can invent and sell the Social Network, ask computer specialists? Meanwhile, graduates with computing degrees are so inarticulate as to be unemployable, say the employers (Jenkins, 2014).

Nevertheless, some educators conceive the diagrammatic sequence as being more than just an illustration of the relationship between education and training, but also as a reflection of a specific historical development spanning the post-war period, namely the increasing primacy of narrow government-driven and funded programmes of learning for employment.

Training, then, is a relatively limited activity which may or may not take place within the wider activity we call education. Technical skills tightly orientated to a job do not qualify as education in the widest sense. If we are solely concerned with preparing



people for their working lives, any learning is confined to the narrow tramlines of specified skills as demanded by the labour market, and probably accompanied by equivalent attitudes, eg developing a dynamic sales ethos. It is certainly not liberal in the sense we have been discussing. Attached to this underlying ideology are immediate curricular implications which directly impinge upon any attempt to maintain the presence of liberal education within the technical education sphere.

### Liberal studies

In the 1950s, the long-standing historical liberal / technical dichotomy caused increasing concern, particularly after C. P. Snow's (1959) 'Two Cultures' lecture pointed to the polarisation between the Arts (now Humanities) and Science. In summary, it was felt that those engaged in the arts received a proper education and greater social recognition whereas scientists and technicians needed to be given a wider, more liberal education, to counteract the limitations of their specialist subjects. Certainly, the FE curriculum was clearly demarcated in an historical reflection of the traditional social divide. Teaching of technical subjects was often characterised by a didactic and authoritarian approach as opposed to the more discursive techniques adopted in more liberal programmes (Cantor and Roberts, 1972).

Therefore it was decided to revive the liberal education tradition in a revised form as modern 'Liberal Studies' in the technical / FE colleges (Government *Circular 323*, 1957). This emphasised a broad range of content with a wider approach to both technical and science based subjects as well as guidance as to preferred methods, in particular: group discussions, seminars and project assignments. In this programme, the teacher would be more of a tutor, a 'guide on the side' (King, 1993). The circular was followed by the better known *General Studies in Technical Colleges* (1962) booklet that put this approach into more detail, emphasising communication skills, personal development and so on.

There was criticism of this venture by some social commentators who thought introducing Liberal Studies only for scientists, technicians and engineers was a patronising, one-sided attempt to give real education to mainly working-class students in FE colleges, a kind of civilising process (Simmons, 2014). Interestingly, humanities students were not to be required to do mathematical or science-based subjects as part of their studies. 'Liberal' was a one-way street. This initial bias was to produce many problems further up the road.

It was however an acknowledgement that the FE curriculum had become differentiated along academic and technical lines of demarcation, which largely reflected the prevailing culture. Liberal Studies was a modern adaptation of the traditional liberal education.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1992) are helpful here as they draw attention to the role of home cultural background and knowledge – cultural capital – and how it is reproduced during formal education and afterwards. Students carry this capital with them and 'cash it in' to advantage during that process. This theory contends that there is often a mismatch which, whilst not obstructing the progress of some, obviates against those not so culturally well-versed. The Liberal Studies programme in FE was an attempt to offset this disparity. Of course, harking back to the philosophical debate reviewed above, there is no *real* education that isn't both liberal *and*, to a degree, technical: liberal education is implicit in the term education and 'to educate someone is to liberate him (sic)' (Lawson, 1979).

### Content and context

Unlike the current American 'Liberal Arts', the curriculum of which is based upon the pursuit of a liberal approach within disciplines, Liberal Studies does not *intrinsically* require any specific subject content. Thus the teaching has to be adaptable to college and departmental circumstances. Because the Liberal Studies curriculum is both liberal and general in scope as opposed to the 'specialist knowledge' of the academic or technical departments, it suffers from a perceived weakness in its knowledge base. This is not necessarily true if there are sound philosophical, psychological and sociological principles behind liberal programmes of study. In the 1970s the then 'new' sociology of education aimed at mature teachers returning to study proved to be a good theoretical basis for investigating knowledge itself and its implicit values (Vulliamy, 1973).

This raises the thorny question of what is legitimate for inclusion in the content of any Liberal Studies programme. In fact, a wide range of material is appropriate, provided it is thought out in such a way as to encourage the questioning of received, possibly biased, opinion in the most searching fashion.

A good example of how Liberal Studies can be effective today is the recent debate, initiated by a previous Education Secretary, about the nature of the First World War, referred to above. There seemed to be an implication that this was a matter that could be neatly packaged for National

Curriculum purposes. In fact, the study of this issue would require a far wider-ranging exploration of disparate source materials and the evaluation of different views on how the war started, who was to blame, how the war was conducted and what the outcomes were.

As regards context, Bernstein's (2003) concept of 'framing', which refers to the relative levels of control in the management and delivery of material, is useful here in arguing the case for a liberal approach with subject specialist colleagues. Liberal Studies is a much more loosely defined venture for both the teacher and students. It is not tightly controlled 'transmissible' knowledge in the traditional sense of collecting skills and leading to a specified qualification. King's (1993) paper identifies this type of approach as being what she calls the 'guide on the side' which is clearly challenging to both sceptical colleagues and to students who see education in more structured and teacher-directed terms. Needless to say, this paper has produced much intense discussion about teaching in the subsequent years.

There is nevertheless a deep structure which underwrites a greater potential for a negotiable and equitable approach. Paulo Freire's concepts of dialogue and praxis (1970) are crucial here. Dialogic interaction advocates starting from the students' own experience and getting them to explore and extend their knowledge into a wider world, in an experientially challenging but secure environment. Praxis involves fusing action with theory with a view to examining and effecting changes of values and attitudes. In this scenario the teacher needs a clear knowledge base, but this is applied carefully and discreetly in the shared communication. The resultant dialogue makes Liberal Studies an authentically radical enterprise but one which is difficult to measure in explicit terms.

Latterly, the increasingly urgent economic demands of the 'New Vocational' courses such as Communication Studies and Core Skills programmes have superseded the integrity of Liberal Studies programmes in technical colleges and more or less delivered the death knell to them.

As a result of these external pressures *Liberal Studies* often became *General Studies* and was inserted into programmes under the aegis of the newly formed Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC). These programmes were based on the tightly framed objectives of Benjamin Bloom (1956), possibly suitable as planning guidelines for trainee teachers but certainly not conducive to a thorough-going liberal education programme, involving negotiation of course content and methods with students.

In one Surrey college an attempt was made to

input the liberal 'ethos' into a structured complementary programme for Advanced Level and Ordinary National Diploma Technology students. Using both General Studies and subject specialist staff, it comprised a team-resourced and team-taught approach. It approached the wider worlds of nature and culture as processes rather than products and, as such, met the criteria of a truly open liberal studies programme in both content and delivery. The underlying concern was to equip the students with a rigorous, critical mode of thinking that would serve them in their future personal, occupational and social lives (Parkinson, 2004). Unfortunately, this approach proved very controversial among both academic and technical staff and needed regular defending against all odds, eventually being terminated in some inter-departmental conflict. This outcome reflected a deep-rooted, covertly conservative agenda that believed most technical students could not or would not really benefit from a liberal education.

So did that kind of climate mean goodbye to any realistic Liberal Studies programmes? Are there any alternatives? How truly liberal are contemporary Advanced Levels with their tight 'vocational' links to university entrance?

### Adult Liberal Education

Adult liberal education has a strong tradition in this country thanks to its early development by liberal thinkers such as Albert Mansbridge, founder of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), John Ruskin, inspirer of Ruskin College, Oxford, and Richard Tawney, a leading figure in the University Tutorial movement. From its beginnings, adult education escaped the worst aspects of the generalist / specialist dichotomy. In the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, scientific institutes were founded to meet growing interest in the burgeoning development of scientific knowledge. Expansion of industry led to the need for Mechanics' Institutes and Working Men's Colleges, which were not, however, solely vocationally-based. Interest in the debate of matters of cultural significance saw the founding of University Extra-Mural classes, the WEA and later the Open University which, since its foundation in 1969, stands as an exemplar of lifelong education, with nearly two million graduates (Tonkin, 2015). The University of the Third Age has endeavoured to continue these traditions with its self-help and self-directing ethos.

Alongside all these developments local authority AE institutes and services expanded to typically take care of the general educational needs of mature students, and to provide second chance and

continuing educational opportunities. Latterly, governmental policy has encouraged FE colleges to play a larger role in AE, particularly where vocational qualifications are concerned.

AE was seemingly the only area of true liberal education in the fullest sense of the word, developing 'individuation' over 'socialisation' (Wiltshire, 1966), emphasising what is valuable to the individual over specific preparation for future employment. However, this aspiration was dependent upon the range of choices available which, though broad, has tended since WW2 to exclude anything too controversial, political or scientific. The funding of innovative practice, such as Ken Coates's work with redundant miners researching the effects of pit closures on mining communities, and Chris Duke's action-based adult learning programmes in inner city communities, is now all too vulnerable to hard-nosed financial pragmatism.

A further limitation on the scope of AE is the tenuous integration of programmes of study, which are usually presented as a cornucopia of individual subjects, with no particular link between them. The underlying assumption is that the students will make links for themselves, as and when needed. Sometimes this works well but might be better not left so much to chance. There are inspiring instances of students starting from a seemingly narrow subject base, developing confidence along with the ability to study and, through fast-tracking, going on to take university degree courses and graduating with success. For the rest, we must respect the right of mature people to make choices against the background of their total life experience and previous education. If AE can be said to be 'pick and mix', this is not done in an experiential vacuum. Nevertheless, AE teachers have a key role in establishing links by setting study material in wider context. For instance, it is desirable that teachers of fashionable alternative therapies (such as aromatherapy and crystallography) discuss the evidence for their subject rather than just pitching to an already converted and potentially gullible audience.

In recent years the liberal scope of AE has diminished as governments have increasingly required the service to contribute to the job pool. Vocational subjects, particularly IT, are now a substantial part of the AE curriculum. Funding has also been provided to help students develop personal study plans. This has offered the potential for a balanced perspective to be given to a student's progress and further development, though the intention behind it is primarily utilitarian, namely to ensure that s/he takes a place in a more highly-skilled workforce. Intrinsically, there is nothing

wrong with this as long as the courses retain a truly strong 'liberal' element as well.

Correspondingly, the more obvious liberal aspects of the AE curriculum have been designated 'leisure' classes, with students required to pay cost-related fees. This has the overall effect of marginalising much valuable work in the minds of political decision-makers, as well as pushing AE back in the direction of provision for the affluent and already well educated.

AE was conceived as an essentially liberal concept, offering a second chance to those who had not previously had the opportunity to engage with a breadth of ideas. However, this whole sector has, like its Further Education cousin, been shifted towards a version of burgeoning vocationalism, a policy needing continued challenge rather than the pragmatic acceptance of centrally directed change that dominates educational thinking in the current climate.

## Conclusion

Liberal education in FE, as represented by Liberal Studies, has been almost completely superseded by a technical hegemony with its all-consuming drive for skills training, epitomised by the various levels of NVQ qualification. Obviously, by its very nature, one of the important functions of FE is an emphasis on this aspect of post-compulsory education, but does it have to be at the expense of a broader perspective? Even recent calls for scrapping GCSEs and replacing them with a 'relevant' curriculum appear to pay little attention to the thinking and questioning skills so valued by the liberal view of education (Wilby, 2014).

We are told by our politicians that we have to compete in the global race. Whilst this may seem obvious, this is economic hegemony. In the eyes of many experienced educators, some of whom were in the vanguard of the Liberal Studies era, the relentless march of technical training dressed up as 'progress' and inevitable competition at the expense of all else is threatening the essential liberal nature of true education. It is restricting the broader intellectual development of the individual student and sacrificing it to limited competency.

Doubtless those wanting to preserve the *liberal* in education will be criticised in some quarters as being out of touch and wishing to 'turn the clock back', a value judgement itself worthy of a Liberal Studies session! However, as Legge (1980) says, liberal education helps one 'to *learn*, rather than *earn*, one's living'.

It will be apparent from what we have said that we do not consider Liberal Studies a dead issue. On the

contrary, we think discussion of this form of study is timely in the current climate. What we propose is a two-fold approach.

Firstly, each subject in the FE (and AE) curriculum should be taught in a liberal way, ensuring that, as well as the fundamental concepts and problems of the subject being examined, it is considered in its widest perspective. This includes all aspects that are contestable, and is related to other relevant areas of knowledge. There would also be a concern to draw on and relate to the personal experience of students in this undertaking. Secondly, students of all subjects should be brought together in mixed subject groups to consider how their subjects relate to each other and to environmental, social and cultural development generally. This programme, which would involve presentations, group discussion and project work, we might call 'Open' or 'Integrated' Studies. Here again student experience would be seen as a significant resource, drawing on personal, social and new media dimensions.

Liberal Studies in English FE may be on hold for now but it is worth pointing out that interdisciplinary college and university graduate Liberal Arts programmes are thriving in the United States. Whilst the comparison with Liberal Studies here is not necessarily exact, the practice of one of our major competitors shows that the whole tradition of liberal education and its underlying values, far from being superseded, is in fact alive and highly prized as essential to a complete curriculum.

There are also Liberal Arts programmes in some UK and European universities, notably in Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany. At a recent liberal arts symposium Reisz (2014) recounts the advocacy of 'learning something about everything and everything about something', which captures the underpinning philosophy of this style of education perfectly. Though the English obsession with traditional academic subjects and technical skill remains for the moment the dominant model, it has recently come under severe criticism from many quarters, particularly employers complaining about the lack of a wider educational background amongst potential employees. The markets may now be beginning to sing a different tune.

In fact, as W. G. Bowen (2012), Emeritus President of Princeton University, says: 'The value of liberal education as traditionally understood has never been as great as it is today. As we think about the rapidly changing world our students face, in which fewer and fewer people spend anything approaching a lifetime following one career trajectory, learning how to do mundane, repetitive tasks is not the way to go. What counts is being able to take a new problem, parse it out, and make

headway solving it – all in the company of others'. Secretary of State for Education, please note!

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