

Ideology and 'lifelong learning'

The combination of the concepts 'lifelong guidance' and 'lifelong learning' corresponds well to today's transformation of working life and the effects of globalization. Increased uncertainty at the individual level, as well as on the organizational- and global levels, influences ideas as well practices. To aid our understanding and to allow us to navigate in this uncertainty, this mini-lecture will examine a number of ideologies that influence policy for lifelong learning on a global level, thereby providing us with information about the contexts of lifelong learning that also are of relevance to and influence the area of 'guidance'.

My lecture is based on an article about the ideologies that are articulated in UNESCO's lifelong learning policy. The article, entitled "Continuously reaffirmed, subtly accommodated, obviously missing and fallaciously critiqued: Ideologies in UNESCO's lifelong learning policy", was written by Moosung Lee and Tom Friedrich, and was published in the *International Journal of Lifelong Education* in 2011.

Since this is a mini-lecture, the description that I provide here will be a very brief overview of the ideologies in play, and if you are interested in this aspect of 'lifelong learning' and 'lifelong guidance', I encourage you to read the full article by Lee and Friedrich. It provides an overview of the different relevant ideologies and an in-depth analysis of the ideological influences on UNESCO's lifelong learning policy.

There are a number of international organizations that address social problems on a global scale. In the field of global educational development, UNESCO is a leading authority. As many will know, 'UNESCO' stands for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation. A milestone in establishing lifelong learning policy as such was UNESCO's so-called 'Faure Report' from 1972. The report has since taken up a central position in lifelong learning policy. In summary, the report emphasized the fact that: (1) learning was not only for children but continued throughout a person's life; and (2) learning takes place in all areas of life, not only in formal education. Note that the second point thus includes 'working life' as a central arena for learning.

In addition to UNESCO, there are three other central policy actors who influence educational development at a global level. These are: (1) the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); (2) the European Union (EU); and (3) the World Bank. All of these four policy actors entertain visions of 'human freedom', but 'human freedom' is interpreted in different ways by these organisations.

There are two general representations of what 'human freedom' is. The first view of 'human freedom' emphasizes the idea that individuals can earn their daily existence by accepting the rule of capital and its goals. With regards to education, this implies that each individual has the opportunity to participate in courses that provide the skills that are demanded by the labour market. The second view of 'human freedom' emphasizes the provision of freedom for community members to grow in pursuit of their own goals by promoting popular rule. In the context of education, this may include the development of basic skills so that a person can contribute to society as a democratic citizen, especially with regards to the development of the person's community and society.

In general terms, UNESCO represents an approach that is based on *the individual as a democratic citizen*, while the other three policy actors focus on *a market-oriented system*. In practice, however, things are not as simple as this dichotomy might suggest. Each individual policy actor does not equate to a single ideology. Instead, different ideological positions are interwoven in policy texts, because there are many dimensions that an actor must consider when working on a global level.

With respect to the various ideologies that have influenced lifelong learning policy, Lee and Friedrich identify the presence of four ideological stances: (1) classical liberalism; (2) social liberalism; (3) neoliberalism; and (4) Marxism. I will describe the central tenets of these four ideologies, so as to provide you with a brief introduction to the underlying assumptions made by proponents of each of the ideologies. This introduction should then function as a starting point for the participants on this course to reflect over what significance ideology has for guidance practice and guidance research in context of lifelong learning policy.

- **Classical liberalism** regards individuals as ‘self-interest maximizers’. Education is a means to strengthen the individual’s competitiveness. Education should be provided in a private education system guided by a supply–demand logic.
- **Social liberalism** regards education as a way of promoting a ‘society for all’, where individuals are educated based on their own interests, but in relation to a collective for the purpose of creating a strong society. The State is expected provide a national infrastructure for education.
- **Neoliberalism** regards individuals as ‘self-interest maximizers’ who by means of education can strengthen their competitiveness. Individuals are expected to do so in relation to the prevailing labour market. Education can be financed by the State, but should be governed by the market.
- **Marxism** regards education as a means which is used to liberate and transform individuals who are oppressed by a capitalist society. This is performed by addressing issues of gender, class, ethnicity, colonialism, culture, language, and environmental issues. Education is a tool for structural change.

So, why should we consider ideologies on a course about guidance? Isn’t ideology just words? A theoretical distraction when we have more concrete problems to address? Well, it is important to understand ideologies because they influence the design of systems and structures in society. Ideologies present ideas that influence our norms and values. They are, therefore, anything but innocent words and text formulations. Next time you read a policy paper, think about how an ideology may be tacitly articulated, between the lines as it were, and consider what ramification this has.

To encourage continued reflection on this topic, I will end this lecture by asking the following questions:

- How do ideologies help you understand the rules of working life?
- What ideologies are dominant in guidance practice?
- How can insights into different ideologies be of value to your research?

Thank you!

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References

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