

The future for lifelong learning: call for evidence on the impact of lifelong learning on happiness and well-being.

In terms of the understanding of how Lifelong Learning impacts upon the mental health and happiness of people there may be several key points to consider:

- (a) This is primarily an individual focus relating to a range of issues:
 - (i) the evidence should therefore overwhelmingly be qualitative in nature: possibly via (indicative) case studies;
 - (ii) the criteria for judgment of "happiness" are broadly subjective and therefore care is needed in extrapolating general trends from any apparent emerging patterns;
 - (iii) the distance traveled by such individuals in relation to these criteria may be of greater interest than measuring their position relative to any norms.
- (b) Beyond the individual, impact upon groups and communities may be more susceptible to quantitative analysis although data beyond such existing material as incidence of mental ill health would need prior definition before attempted collection.

Specifically therefore it is arguable that the evidence needs first splitting into two discrete strands for research purposes and once each has been examined, any convergent aspects looked at.

As noted above, since incidence of mental ill health is currently both recorded and related to a number of geographic and other ethnographic contexts, a baseline is in existence. A study therefore into the impact of lifelong learning experiences upon mental health situations could therefore proceed along the lines of how far each person's perception of their development in relation to their original problem had moved and to what extent the learning experience had contributed.

Since this is a subjective concept at each level, it is difficult to see how this could be carried out otherwise than in the form of a series of case studies (although by definition the majority of willing participants would tend to be those whose experiences were broadly positive) with any validation of the data possibly being derived from professionals who had taught, treated or otherwise supported the subject as well as possibly peer or family evidence. The sample for selecting subjects for case studies for such a project could be derived from Mental Health statistics and reflect other social categories.

The "happiness" element does not however benefit from any such existing data and therefore it is tempting to carry it out with the same subjects in the absence of any other clear criteria for

sampling. The questions would however need to be clearly distinguished from that relating to those connected with mental health issues and clearly defined.

Possible definitions might include elements of:

- (Self) Esteem
- (Self) Confidence
- (Self) Actualisation
- Realisation of goals
- Approbation of achievement from peers/family/professionals etc
- Material circumstances
- Emotional circumstances

and certainly reflect movement along a spectrum of "happiness" from any other previous perceived point for each criterion rather than in relation to any normative benchmark (if one could be defined).

It would seem desirable that any definition used was (a) clear and simple (b) universally accepted.

Two possible starting models spring to mind. The traditional type of categorization as exemplified by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs could certainly form a basis for a system. A more recent source to plausibly utilize might be the criteria from "Every Child Matters":

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

It is worth noting that these criteria relate to the affective domain of teaching and learning as hitherto this aspect has tended to have been marginalised by many schemas. Funded activity has tended to have been defined by cognitive and psychomotor outcomes and consequently OFSTED and ALI Inspection criteria have reflected this. In turn this has affected classroom planning and other practice as most developed *pro formas* tend to focus on the funded aspects of the curriculum and hence do not prompt teachers to focus on planning the affective aspects of their sessions or syllabi: which is shortsighted as these underpin the cognitive and psychomotor outcomes: indeed teaching and learning in these domains cannot successfully begin until affective domain issues have been addressed and appropriate strategies put into place. It is to be hoped that the current focus might address this potentially dangerous imbalance.

Equally it is timely in that it is being accepted more widely that if one is to look for accurate predictors of success for an individual, then previous accepted measures such as IQ rate much less favourably than indicators of a person's emotional intelligence. This latter conceptual area of course has many congruencies with the idea of happiness and mental well being as it concerns self awareness, ability to self assess, motivational levels etc. By working to develop a learner's emotional intelligence, a teacher may be able to create the right conditions for greater success in cognitive and associated areas of study.

I have conducted research at doctoral level into learners at the college where I work, in respect of the efficacy of widening participation strategies. It is interesting to pick out from the

evidence collected, learner responses which reflect senses of increased happiness through learning experiences at the college.

"It's phenomenal, it's absolutely phenomenal, when you ask for help at college they throw so many people at you, you are like 'wow, people who actually care that I've got a problem', even if it is something silly..... I just think that education is so underestimated, of what it does for people".

(Adult Basic Skills learner)

"...(a) totally different approach, it was to try and help you learn rather than 'you are stupid and you can't do it', and I had one time when I had done something good and one teacher went to get another teacher to show that I could do what I could do, I was so surprised".. (A learner from same group)

"I am really, really grateful to these people, words cannot describe the teachers here in this centre and everywhere where I studied, the number one is (name of tutor) which I really will remember for the rest of my life. The help we got from her is just unbelievable, not just for me but for everyone who surrounded me"

(An ESOL learner).

Equally some learners made it clear that previous negative learning experiences were characterised by problems in the affective domain:

"...the school actually had a visit from an education psychologist from Worthing and he came out to schools for problems with children at school to see if he could work them and he came to my school and spoke to the headmaster and he said "yes, I've got a boy for you he's only good for gardening"."

(Adult Basic Skills learner).

If material of this nature could be collected from representative sources then some very valuable evidence could help to resolve the enquiry.

Dr Andrew Holdcroft PhD MEd LLb (Hons) PGCE FIfl
Head of School of Community Services
City College Coventry