ABSTRACT. The current dominant concept of lifelong learning has arisen from the pressures of globalisation, economic change and the needs of the “knowledge economy”. Its importance is not disputed in this paper. However, its proponents often advocate it in a form which places unrealistic demands on the individual without at the same time addressing their learning needs. The paper suggests that much of lifelong learning in fact amounts to a “pedagogy of the self” whereby individuals are supposed to learn and imbibe certain pedagogic prescriptions so that they adopt a particular identity of the “learner”. The article suggests that this way of looking at lifelong learning misses the point in so far as learning is only as good as the knowledge-in-use which the individual can deploy and for this to happen situational awareness and situational understanding are vital components of lifelong learning. To this end, the article draws attention, by way of an amalgam of certain ideas of Heidegger and Aristotle, to certain structural features of situations which need to be reflected in the curricula of learning programme, the upshot of which is to emphasise both the social and ethical dimensions of lifelong learning. Finally the article suggests that some of the ideas of Stenhouse could be usefully employed in order to suggest not so much a pedagogy of lifelong learning as a pedagogy of critical learning.

KEY WORDS: Lifelong learning, situational awareness, situational understanding

CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFELONG LEARNING: THE CURRENT PEDAGOGY

Lifelong learning has undergone a number of interpretations over the years, and it has always been a contested domain (see Wain, 1987 for an earlier philosophical survey of these). In recent years, lifelong learning has been espoused by individual governments and the EU and this process has given rise to a dominant version of lifelong learning. The current pedagogy of lifelong learning has been driven by a focus on the individual as a learning agent who must develop certain skills and knowledge in order to succeed in a rapidly changing world. This approach places a heavy burden on the individual, who is expected to acquire and apply new knowledge independently. However, this approach misses the point in so far as learning is only as good as the knowledge-in-use which the individual can deploy and for this to happen situational awareness and situational understanding are vital components of lifelong learning.

To address this gap, the article draws attention, by way of an amalgam of certain ideas of Heidegger and Aristotle, to certain structural features of situations which need to be reflected in the curricula of learning programme. The upshot of this is to emphasise both the social and ethical dimensions of lifelong learning. Finally the article suggests that some of the ideas of Stenhouse could be usefully employed in order to suggest not so much a pedagogy of lifelong learning as a pedagogy of critical learning.
learning. It is this dominant version that I wish to explore. For it has, as a pedagogy, a number of certain distinctive features. First of all, it has a self-admitted clear economic and even political role, which aims at positioning persons in an uncertain labour market (Field, p. 92, also EC, p. 9). Thus it is markedly different from traditional notions of self-improvement through learning – the autodidact, for example, could never be a “lifelong learner”. Nor is it motivated by a Socratic quest for wisdom based on an assumption of ignorance. Its advocates self-consciously differentiate it from the usual concerns of adult education – which have traditionally involved the idea of extending liberal learning beyond the university into the community. Nor does it have much in common with those community education movements first associated with Grundtwig and his followers, since its focus is primarily on the discrete individual. It has something in common with the concept of androgogy in so far as it emphasises the idea of the self-directedness of the learner and the importance of experiential learning but seems to go beyond androgogy in the attentions given to transferability of skills and knowledge as well as performativity.

The key driver of the development of lifelong learning is thus the emergence of the knowledge economy in an era of globalisation. The salient point, of course, is not simply that a greater depth of knowledge and skills are needed but that the precise requirement for these is subject to continual change. It might be supposed that the learning of skills and knowledge appropriate to a certain economic sector might form the background against which more specific skills are developed and discarded in turn. But the claim is more radical than this. First, it is assumed that both the organisation of sectors and the basic technologies underpinning them are subject to radical overhaul – thus there are no “basic” sectoral knowledge requirements which can be assumed to be stable. Second, whilst the requirement for specific knowledge and skills may remain relatively unchanged, the knowledge worker may need to learn features of a new sector as the context in which skills are deployed changes. The knowledge worker is thus faced with the possibility of either having to re-learn the context of skills or to develop new skills and it cannot be predicted which of these may be salient at any one time or indeed whether he/she may have to relearn both context and skills. Hence Fryer (1997) is typical in emphasising the need for individuals to acquire “generic, core and transferable skills which will strengthen their position in the marketplace” – there seems not much left to learn if one has all this.