

**IN MEMORIAM**  
**Obituary: Ravindra Dave (1929-2023)**

**UNESCO's Humanist 'Lifelong Education' Pioneer**

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Ravindra H. Dave was born in Ahmedabad, India, in 1929. He studied education at the Universities of Bombay and Gujarat in India, and at the University of Chicago. His doctoral dissertation examined alternative models of education evaluation, beyond the traditional outcome-oriented schemes (Dave, 1963) – a topic he remained interested in and published on throughout his life. Before entering the realm of international organizations, he held the position as Professor and Dean of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and served as Head of the Departments of Curriculum and Evaluation, Textbooks, and Teacher Education in India. Given his contacts with the UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE)<sup>6</sup>, he was invited to join the institute and served as UIE's Technical Director from 1972 to 1976. From 1976 to 1979, he worked at UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning in Paris, before returning to UIE as Director from 1979 to 1989 (Elfert, 2002; 2013).

Dave joined UIE at a time when the institute's Governing Board determined that UIE's programme should focus on lifelong education (Elfert, 2013). This thematic orientation followed the publication of UNESCO's report *Learning to be* (aka the *Faure Report*) in 1972, which proclaimed lifelong education as the new global "master concept". During the 1970s and under Dave's leadership, UIE engaged in numerous research projects, organized seminars, and published a series of publications with the aim of conceptualizing lifelong education from an interdisciplinary perspective. Two of the key publications that emerged from this work were coordinated and authored by Dave (1973, 1976). For the purposes of the 1973 study, Dave and the team he gathered at UIE developed 20 "concept characteristics" of lifelong education, which

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<sup>6</sup> UIE was renamed in 2007 to UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL).

covered all stages of education; the formal, nonformal, and informal patterns of education, and the vertical and horizontal dimensions. The 1976 book was the result of a major study on the 'Foundations of Lifelong Education' coordinated by Dave, compiling contributions by international experts. The "Advances in Lifelong Education Series", published by Pergamon Press in collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education, and edited by Dave, made a groundbreaking contribution to the conceptual, operational, strategic and methodological study of lifelong education. In a reflection piece that he contributed to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institute, Dave wrote that his "active involvement in this global future development aimed at the lifelong pursuit of human empowerment, enlightenment and transformation brought a sense of great professional fulfilment" (Dave, 2002, pp. 68-69).

After Dave returned to UIE as director in October 1979, he initiated, against the background of "large numbers of neo-literates relapsing into illiteracy" (Dave, 2002, p. 69), a major initiative for the development of learning strategies of post-literacy and continuing education within the broader framework of lifelong education, which dominated the institute's work during the 1980s (Dave, Ouane, & Sutton, 1989). With funding from the German government, the initiative involved a series of research-oriented training seminars held between 1981 and 1986 in Hamburg, Caracas, New Delhi and Nairobi (UIE, 2002). The post-literacy programme yielded the Literacy Exchange Network, which allowed the institute to build up a unique collection of more than 7000 examples of teaching and learning materials in the field of literacy and out-of-school education from over 120 countries and in 160 languages. This collection is still available at the institute today.

After his term as director of UIE, Ravindra Dave returned to India, where – among other things – he was invited by Anil Bordia to lead a committee to determine Minimum Levels of Learning (MLLs) in India soon after the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien (Ayyar, 2016). He stayed active in retirement and extended honorary services to various governmental and nongovernmental education agencies. He served, for example, as Chief Advisor to the Indian Council of Board of School Education, and Visiting Professor at Mahatma Gandhi's Gujarat University.

Ravindra Dave was one of the leading figures of the humanist lifelong learning movement. In an interview I conducted with him in 2014, he impressed me with his deep knowledge of educational issues and philosophy and his unique perspective on lifelong learning that derived from the combination of his Indian heritage (he referred to lifelong learning as "a very old concept in the Indian culture") and an idealistic-universalist worldview (he also referred to lifelong learning as "a dream....a dream of the whole humanity"). He was a

true internationalist who self-identified as a “soldier of UNESCO” (cited in Elfert, 2018, p. 230) and treasured working in an international context with colleagues from all around the world. During his time as director of UIE, Dave, who was affectionately referred to as “Ravi” by UIE’s staff, regularly invited staff members and visitors to the institute to his home, “for a social evening and an informal chat over a dinner with Indian curries” (Dave, 2002, p. 72).

Former collaborators remember him for his exceptional analytical skills and his capacity to synthesize complex, diverse and at times conflicting contributions, never losing sight of the objective.<sup>7</sup> I was particularly inspired by the way he always saw the big picture and looked at history from a long-term perspective. When we talked about the economistic takeover of lifelong learning, he explained that the “economics of education”, while not wrong, had a “lopsided and truncated view of totality”. He considered the period of “economic globalization” only a temporary moment in history and assured me that it was not going to last:

This is a sort of struggle. And such struggles have always happened in history...The struggle at the moment is between the economic angle of life – and the humanistic angle of life. The economic angle has grown in the past decades in such a manner that the economists have taken the hold of education...they have developed what is called ‘economics of education’...But it is a temporary phenomenon. (cited in Elfert, 2018, pp. 227-228).

Ravindra Dave died in April 2023 at the age of 94 (UNESCO, 2023).

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<sup>7</sup> Personal communication with Adama Ouane, April 2024.

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