

## Lifelong Learning: A Review

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### ABSTRACT

“Lifelong learning” has become a popular topic over the past several years. A Google search of the term “lifelong learning” resulted in 11,000,000 hits. There have been thousands of papers on lifelong learning published in recent years and there are several journals devoted either entirely or in part on lifelong learning (Fischer, 2000). Learning can no longer be dichotomized into a place and time to acquire knowledge (school) and a place and time to apply knowledge (the workplace). Today’s citizens are flooded with more information than they can handle, and tomorrow’s workers will need to know far more than any individual can retain (Bosco, 2007). Our world is changing around us in such a frantic pace that if we do not continue to grow and develop, we will soon be left behind. In the 21st century, we all need to be lifelong learners. We need to continually keep our skills sharp and up to date so that we have an edge in all we do. Of course, we all have a natural desire to learn for adapting to change, enriching and fulfilling our lives (Claxton and Lucas, 2009). This review article is an attempt to present the main advantages which follow lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** *Life, Learning*

Lifelong learning is currently one of the mostly used concepts to achieve the objective to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. A theory of lifelong learning must investigate new frameworks to learning required by the profound and accelerating changes in the nature of work and education. These changes include:

- (1) an increasing prevalence of “high-technology” jobs requiring support for learning on demand because coverage of all concepts is impossible;
- (2) the inevitability of change in the course of a professional lifetime, which necessitates lifelong learning; and
- (3) the deepening (and disquieting) division between the opportunities offered to the educated and to the uneducated (Basic Education Coalition, 2013).

Learning needs to be examined across the lifespan because previous notions of a divided lifetime—education followed by work—are no longer tenable (Gardner, 1991). In the emerging

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knowledge society, an educated person will be someone who is willing to consider learning as a lifelong process. More and more knowledge, especially advanced knowledge, is acquired well past the age of formal schooling, and in many situations through educational processes that do not center on the traditional school (Illich, 1971).

Learning should be part of living, a natural consequence of being alive and in touch with the world, and not a process separate from the rest of life (Rogoff and Lave, 1984). What learners need, therefore, is not only instruction but access to the world (in order to connect the knowledge in their head with the knowledge in the world [Norman, 1993]) and a chance to play a meaningful part in it. Education should be a distributed lifelong process by which one learns material as one needs it. School learning and workplace learning need to be integrated (Bosco, 2007).

But what do we really mean when we use the word “learn”? It is something we all do from the moment of birth, so most of us likely take this very complex process for granted. How many of you have spent time trying to understand the meaning of learning, or how it occurs? Although many of us have a general sense of what it means to learn, there are often many assumptions involved. What should we expect to learn from a college education? What are the roles of students and teachers in the learning process? Are certain kinds of learning and thinking more valuable than others? What does sophisticated thinking look like and what are the developmental stages for getting there? What kinds of skills and knowledge do employers desire in their perspective employees? How do grades reflect a student’s thinking and learning? What role does higher education play in modern society? These are but a few questions to consider while reflecting on the purpose of a college education (Wirth and Perkins, 2007).

The past few decades have seen considerable advances in understanding the brain and learning. These new findings have significant implications for what instructors teach and how students learn (Wirth and Perkins, 2007).

The term ‘lifelong learning’ reminds us that learning is not something solely associated with childhood or with school. Babies learn their mother’s smell. Toddlers learn to walk. Children learn the layout of their new schools and the habits of their teachers. Teenagers experiment with a range of ‘possible selves’ – they throw out exploratory tendrils of identity into which they might want to grow. Adults learn new skills and vocational forms of speech, the rigours of parenthood and the regulation of their emotions. The elderly learn how to enjoy slower pleasures, to cope with infirmity and to face their own death (Claxton and Lucas, 2009).

The information explosion and continual changes in the means of accessing information have reinforced the importance of preparing graduates to direct their own learning throughout their careers. Increasingly, medical schools are turning to problem-based curricula to develop in graduates the capacity to ‘self-direct’ further learning (Mifflin, et al, 2000).

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*Four themes that will organize our discussion:*

- the relationship between lifelong learning and the current interest in happiness and well-being;
- the attempt to identify key personal characteristics that underlie a positive or 'healthy' disposition towards lifelong learning;
- the implications for schooling that arise when the development of these aspects of 'the lifelong learning character' is placed at the heart of their purpose; and
- the implicit shifts in the ways schools are positioned and understood within their wider communities (Claxton and Lucas, 2009).

There have been remarkable gains in human development and well-being over the last few decades. Most people today are healthier, live longer, are more educated, and have more access to goods and services (World Education Report, 2000).

Lifelong learning is an essential challenge for inventing the future of our societies; it is a necessity rather than a possibility or a luxury to be considered. Lifelong learning creates the challenge to understand, explore, and support new essential dimensions of learning such as:

- (1) self-directed learning,
- (2) learning on demand,
- (3) collaborative learning, and
- (4) organizational learning.

These approaches need new media and innovative technologies to be adequately supported (Fischer, 2000). The knowledge-based economy, new technologies, the growing speed of technological changes and globalization all influence the needs to improve the population's skills and competences. In Europe, this has been acknowledged for several years (Colardynand Bjornavold, 2004).

### **HISTORY**

The concept first came into prominence in the 1960s (Illich, 1971). Although lifelong learning has become a particularly popular concept in the last several years, it is as old as human history. Lifelong learning was embodied in the works of the ancient Greeks. Plato and Aristotle described a process of learning for philosophers which extended over a lifetime. The Greek idea of a "paideia" comprised the development of a set of dispositions and capabilities which enabled and motivated the individual to continuous scholarship (Bosco, 2007).

It was UNESCO's commitment to post-war Germany, expressed during its 5<sup>th</sup> General Conference held in Florence in June 1950, which led to the creation of the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE). The first meeting of the Governing Board was held from 17 to 19 June 1951 in Wiesbaden, Germany, and was attended by Maria Montessori and Jean Piaget. In its early years, UIE's work covered a wide range of topics, from pre-school to adult education, and from formal

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to non-formal education. However, the Institute's very first international seminar, "adult education as a means of developing and strengthening social and political responsibility", already signalled its core task – adult education. In 1972, with the publication of the "Faure report", Learning to be, lifelong education became the focus of the Institute's work and publications on the concept, content and evaluation of lifelong education were brought out in the landmark series "Advances in Lifelong Education, The conceptualization and organization of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in 1997, was a UIE high-point (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2010).

In 2007, the Institute was transformed into a fully-fledged international UNESCO Institute. The change of legal status was preceded by a name change to UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in 2006, reflecting the Institute's long-standing focus on adult learning as well as out-of-school and non-formal education within a lifelong learning perspective. UIE is one of the six UNESCO Education Institutes. It promotes lifelong learning policy and practice, with a focus on adult education, literacy and non-formal education. It publishes the oldest international journal of comparative education, the *International Review of Education* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2010).

Ancient societies all over the world have emphasized the need to learn from the cradle to the grave. Historical developmental stages (Gishti, 2009):

1. Post-World War I: The 1919 Report of the Adult Education Committee of the British Ministry of Reconstruction.
2. Post-World War II: Lifelong learning was framed within a model that emphasized:
  - strengthening individualism,
  - coping with technological and cultural change forces, and
  - fortifying democracy.
3. 1960s and 1970s: Lifelong education, a more critical and sociopolitical term, emerged in discussions within UNESCO.
4. During the 1970s, vocationalism eclipsed lifelong education. In his 1972 report, *Learning to Be*, Edgar Faure linked lifelong education to building a learning society.
5. 1980s: The process of globalization and the emergence of the knowledge economy influenced the emergence of lifelong learning.
6. 1990s: There was revitalized international interest in lifelong learning in educational policy and practice. On the other hand, the more dominant interpretation of lifelong learning in the nineties was linked to retraining and learning new skills that would enable individuals to cope with the demands of the rapidly changing workplace. In 1996, the UNESCO-sponsored Delors Report (Delors, 1996) (*The Treasure Within*) identified four pillars enabling individual development: learning to do, learning to be, learning to understand, and learning to live together.

### DISCUSSION

Lifelong learning may be broadly defined as learning that is pursued throughout life: learning that is flexible, diverse and available at different times and in different places. Lifelong learning crosses sectors, promoting learning beyond traditional schooling and throughout adult life (i.e., post-compulsory education). This definition is based on Delors' (1996) four 'pillars' of education for the future.

- Learning to know - mastering learning tools rather than acquisition of structured knowledge.
- Learning to do – equipping people for the types of work needed now and in the future including innovation and adaptation of learning to future work environments.
- Learning to live together, and with others – peacefully resolving conflict, discovering other people and their cultures, fostering community capability, individual competence and capacity, economic resilience, and social inclusion.
- Learning to be – education contributing to a person's complete development: mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality.

The learning society is the vision of a society where there are recognized opportunities for learning for every person wherever they are and however old they should be (Delors, 1996). The increasing pace of technological change in the knowledge economy, which means we need a flexible and adaptable workforce that is ready to re skill and retrain to keep pace with the economy's skills needs. Lifelong learning enables people to take an active part in society (green, 2002).

#### ***Why is lifelong learning important?***

The big increase in interest in lifelong learning in the past several years is largely a consequence of the changes in society which have been caused by information technology. Knowledge is being produced at an increasingly rapid rate and technologies become increasing complex (Bosco, 2002).

#### ***How can lifelong learning be made a reality?***

It serves no good purpose to understate the challenges that are faced in making lifelong a reality but it is not foolish optimism to recognize that live at a time when the opportunities for lifelong learning are great and growing quickly. In the past several decades there have been developments which have led to incredible advances in devising practical solutions to widespread and effective lifelong learning. The resources which have resulted from the use of information technology – and in particular the Internet - are playing a very important role in expanding opportunities for lifelong learning (Bosco, 2002).

#### ***Problems in the information age:***

- Lack of creativity and innovation
- Coping with change
- Information is not a scarce resource

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“Ease of use” is not the greatest challenge or the most desirable goal for new technologies. Computers by themselves will not change education. The single or most important objective of computational media is not reducing the cost of Education. The ‘super-couch potato’ consumers should not be the targets for the educated and informed citizens of the future. School-to-work transition is insufficiently supported. The “Gift Wrapping” approach dominates educational reform, and quality employment (Fischer, 2000).

Experience shows that, to achieve this goal, there needs to be consistency in interpretation of the goal and faculty-wide agreement about the way the problem-based curriculum fosters self-direction. It may be useful for others who are experiencing difficulties with implementing problem-based curricula, and for those who are contemplating changing to problem-based models (Mifflin, et al. 2000).

### *Training and lifelong learning*

Lifelong learning is more than training or continuing education. It must support multiple learning opportunities including exploring conceptual understanding as well as narrowing to practical application of knowledge, ranging over different settings such as academic education, informal lifelong learning, and professional and industrial training (Fischer, 2000).

### *Environments in support of lifelong learning*

One of the major roles for new media and new technology is not to deliver predigested information to individuals but to provide the opportunity and resources for engaging in meaningful activity, for social debate and discussion, for creating shared understanding among stakeholders, and for framing and solving authentic problems (Fischer, 2000).

## **CONCLUSION**

The opportunity is now at hand to launch the next wave of global education efforts to bring quality basic education to all children and youth, expand lifelong learning, and realize the true promise of education to transform lives and lift people out of poverty (Basic Education Coalition, 2013). Training and lifelong learning are essential problems for our current and future information societies. Unfortunately there are no simple answers and no simple facts that would allow enumerating briefly failures and successes. To acknowledge the complexity of these issues implies that we rethink, reinvent and redesign the way how we think, work, learn, and collaborate in the future. A lifelong learning perspective is more than training and continuing education: it forces us to rethink and reinvent our schools and universities (Brown and Duguid, 1995; Noam, 1995).

## **SUMMARY**

All children and youth throughout the world should receive a quality basic education. No child should be deprived of the opportunity to read, learn math, develop critical thinking, and acquire important life skills. A quality basic education is the foundation for learning in school,

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developing a stable livelihood, and becoming a responsible, productive member of society (Basic Education Coalition, 2013).

### RECOMMENDATION

By 2030, all children and youth should complete primary and lower secondary education which enables them to meet measurable learning standards and acquire relevant skills so that they may become responsible, productive members of the society.

Progress toward this goal would be tracked by four indicators:

1. Availability of and enrollment in pre-primary and other early childhood care and education programs.
2. Completion of primary and lower secondary education, including non-formal education, with completion based on fulfillment of measurable learning standards at each grade or level.
3. Adult literacy rates, and rates of participation in and completion of continuing education and training.
4. Percentage of countries whose national education plans and policies are standards-based and effectively track and measure learning outcomes, skills acquisition, and teacher and other educational staff's certification and professional development (Basic Education Coalition, 2013).

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