Barriers to lifelong learning

Article · January 2011

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WCETR 2011

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Abstract

Globalization and growth of fast-changing knowledge economy mean that people need to upgrade their skills throughout their adult lives. The article provides an overview of barriers and problems that have followed the growth of learning. Key issues were identified through reviews of literature on lifelong learning (LLL) obstacles. Identifying barriers will imply choice of training methods. In training situation there is a limit to actions can be taken but, once characteristics of learners are identified, a number of training methods can be selected. In order to stimulate LLL, one has to analyze its barriers to overcome them where possible.
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Keywords: learning; lifelong; barrier.

1.1. Introduction

Worldwide, education was not approached as a lifelong process, until 1980s (Collins, J., 2009). In 1980, Malcolm Shepherd Knowles, the father of adult learning, predicted that LLL would become the organizing principle of all education, and the term of LLL is now a part of everyday conversation in educational parlance (Duyff, R. L., 1999).

If we start to think about what we have learnt over the period of our lives, we find that a great deal of learning takes place outside of the school system. The term for this type of learning is LLL (Lewis-Fitzgerald, C., 2005).

LLL encompasses learning that takes place at all stages of life, whether formal learning at school or in daily life (Maruyama, H., 2009). Consequently, this includes all types of social education activities (Ogden, A. C., 2010).

The concept of LLL refers to the activities people carry out during their life to improve their knowledge, skills and competence in a particular field, given some personal, social or work related motives (Field, J., 2001; Aspin D. N. & Chapman, J. D., 2000; Griffin, C., 1999).

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There is one basic skill that is becoming increasingly important in today's fast-changing technological universe: being able to learn and adapt to the new skills and training that will be required. Globalization and the growth of the fast-changing knowledge economy mean that people need to upgrade their skills throughout their adult lives to cope with modern life, not just in the area of work but also in their private lives (OECD, 2007).

Even though this kind of learning does not necessarily lead to specific vocational or professional qualifications, participants are motivated by intellectual curiosity, improvement in quality of life, or fun and pleasure. LLL is about acquiring skills that enable us to survive (continue to live or exist). This may sound a bit dramatic, but it is about learning to help us through our daily lives (Lewis-Fitzgerald, C., 2005; Sinel, T., 2011).

As Walters S. (2010) claims; our planet won't survive, if it is not a learning planet, and sustainable development will be achieved by learning through life.

In order to stimulate LLL, one has to analyze barriers to it and to develop measures to overcome these barriers where possible (Koper, E.J.R. & Tattersall, C., 2004). Identifying various barriers to learning will have implications for the choice of training methods.

This paper strives to weave its own particular take on this topic and, is commissioned with the aim of providing a greater understanding of barriers and motivations to accessing learning and training opportunities.

1.2. Material and Method

The article provides an overview of barriers and problems that have followed the growth of learning. Key issues were identified through reviews of literature on lifelong learning (LLL) obstacles.

1.3. Results

As Sinel T. (2011) writes; Learning as a Way of Being, likens LLL to survival, particularly outside of one's own comfort zone. It is a dynamic process that happens both inside and outside the classroom, helping us to manage uncertainty in the face of the "perpetual whitewater", find ways to communicate across and within cultures, sub-cultures, families and communities, and negotiate conflicts. It is also an exercise in exploration, a discovery process for finding those truths that bring meaning to our lives, and continues:

 "To successfully navigate the permanent whitewater of today's work world, managerial learning cannot be left to training courses and degree programs. It must become a day-by-day, integrated discipline practiced on the job, a journey of exploration that corrects its course as it proceeds" - Peter Vaill, former dean of the school of Business and Public Management at George Washington University.

Learning often comes from confusion, problems, the uneasy realization of lacking adequate skills and knowledge, and discomfort (Joyce, B. R., Weil, M. & Showers, B. 1992).

Barriers which people might face, differs from someone to another. For instance; for one person, it may be a financial issue that bars them from taking on a learning opportunity, and for another, it may be cutbacks at the office that prevent any kind of structured learning from happening in the workplace (Sinel, T., 2011).

Cross K. P. (1981), identifies three main barriers to adult participation:
- Situational--those that arise from one's situation or environment at a given point;
- Institutional--those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage adults from participating in organized learning activities; and
- Dispositional--those related to the attitudes and self-perceptions about one-self as a learner

She uses a chain-of-response model to highlight how individuals respond to internal and external variables associated with participation in learning activities.

In a report commissioned by LSDA and prepared by the Institute of Employment Studies, Hillage and Aston (2001), split the barriers to LLL into 3 groups, as follows;

- Attitudinal barriers: negative attitudes to learning, lack of confidence or lack of motivation;
- Physical and material barriers; costs of learning (direct – fees, and indirect – transport, books, equipment, childcare), lack of time, lack of information, geographical, and;
- Structural barriers: lack of appropriate education or training opportunities, constraints of the benefit system.

LLL is fraught with economic, personal, social, foundational, technological, access, and motivational barriers that affect all of us in different ways. Identifying various barriers to learning will have implications for the choice of training methods. In a group-training situation there is a limit to actions can be taken but, once characteristics of learners are identified, a number of training methods can be selected that help fulfilling the needs. Longworth (2003) gives a summing up of barriers to LLL as the following:

- Poor family culture of learning, low aspiration, low self-esteem, bad childhood experience of learning (mental barriers).
- Lack of finance to participate and lack of study facilities at home (financial barriers).
- Distance to educational provision for a large number of students (access barriers).
- Learning provision which not geared to the needs and characteristics of lifelong learners and does not sufficiently take into account the individual differences and circumstances of learners during life (learning design barriers).
- Learning providers who supply information which is inadequate in attracting people to learning and fail to ensure that people have access to good-quality advice about learning opportunities throughout their lives (information barriers).

1.4. Discussion

LLL is fraught with economic, personal, social, foundational, technological, access, and motivational barriers that affect all of us in different ways. Identifying various barriers to learning will have implications for the choice of training methods. In a group-training situation there is a limit to actions can be taken but, once characteristics of learners are identified, a number of training methods can be selected that help fulfilling the needs.

Many of the barriers to learning are inextricably linked to one another, particularly in the case of non-learners, whom policy makers are particularly keen to engage. For example, those who have not learned since they left school face the barriers of attitude, confidence, funding, basic skills and lack of time or childcare issues, all of which would need to be addressed before they would be willing and able to participate in learning. Hence many initiatives, especially those targeted on particular groups or individuals, aim to impact on more than one barrier at once (Hillage J, Aston J., 2001).

The first set of barriers reflects issues that are in the minds of people, and the second barriers are economical and political issues, but the last three barriers can be surmounted by appropriate use of new networked learning technologies. The third barrier can be overcome by providing more and better access to distance education exploiting new information and communication technologies (ICT). These technologies, especially those with mobile access, offer the potential of reaching everyone, everywhere, and have many characteristics that can be used to create flexible, rich and interactive learning environments.

However, making ICT facilities available is not enough to ensure that these facilities are applied effectively to overcome the two remaining barriers to LLL. The facilities have to be arranged, designed in an appropriate way to

meet the specific requirements for LLL, including individual differences in needs, learning preferences, prior-knowledge and situational circumstances. However, well-designed learning events and courses do not guarantee the successful attraction of target learner groups. Measures have to be taken to attract the appropriate people to the appropriate learning facilities by providing information about the complete offering available in order to give sound and suitable advice for learners. Each institute typically sets up its own information and advice service. However, lifelong learners need an overview of the offerings of all institutes that are accessible.

Barriers to learning—whether they are categorized as cultural, structural and personal (Maxted 1999) or situational, institutional and dispositional (Harrison 1993)—are now seen as resolvable through the use of technology.

There is much work to be done. Practical solutions need to be found informed by the developmental needs of older adults; addressing the barriers and putting in place a learning society where LLL for all is a reality (Fleming, T. 1997).

Older adults have fears too about returning to learn and there are well documented barriers: of being seen as too old, having poor health, lack of time, cost, out at night, transportation, absence of a companion, lack of information about what is available, fear of competition with younger adults, fear of exposure of their background, fear of the unknown and location. Older adults are more likely to attend institutions which are accessible and familiar (Price, W. F. & Lyon, L. B., 1982).

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