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Lifelong learning: What does it mean?

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Abstract

This review article seeks to prepare the ground of lifelong learning (LLL) realization, enabling one to understand its concept and plan processes in learning lifetime. It is made by a survey among scientific works on the topic. LLL comprises all phases of learning, from pre-school to post-retirement, and covers the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning. It means that learning is a process occurs at all times in all places. It should be a process of continuous learning that directed towards not only providing the individual needs, also that of the relevant community.

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1.1. Introduction

The issue of defining learning is a complex one. The survey illustrated that each Member State has its own definition. It also shows that they frequently use different concepts to capture the same activities. Different definitions may coexist in a country. At European level, the challenge is to adopt definitions that are wide enough to embrace national and regional specifics and cultures, but at the same time focused enough to make exchange of experiences possible (Colardyn, D. & Bjornavold, J., 2005).

No doubt is about a dearth of information as applied to the meanings and values of LLL. To think that one can find an essential, basic or uncontested definition of LLL is to embark upon a search for a chimera. Despite the term of LLL has a wide currency and great practice in contexts, its meaning is often uncertain (Aspin, D. N. & Chapman, J. D., 2000). Gelpi stated a lack of conceptual clarity for the term LLL and a need for a clear definition of it. He continued that although there is a clear meaning and definition for such terms as nurse education, lack of clarity is about the definition of LLL (Gelpi, E., 1984).

Globalization and the growth of the fast-changing knowledge economy mean that people require upgrading their skills throughout their adult lives to cope with modern life, both in their work and in their private lives. Nowadays, there is an increasingly important basic skill in ever-changing technological universe: ability to learn and adapt to the needed new skills and training (OECD, 2007).

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 (Green, A., 2002).

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.

There is an important point to be made when one is considering the positions that have been taken in the past in respect to the concept of LLL and the arguments put forward by various proponents of these positions. This article attempts to offer an applicable concept of the term which is possible and conceivable.

1.2. Material and Method

This review article begins with some robust definitions and conceptions of LLL, sets out the main lines articulated in them, grappling with the concept of LLL and trying to prepare the ground for its realization. Key issues related to the topic, were identified through reviews of the literature on LLL.

1.3. Results

The learning is a process of becoming aware of the frame of reference within which we think, feel, and act, becoming critical of its adequacy with conscious of where it comes, developing newer more adequate frames of reference which are more inclusive, and discriminating of experience (the experience of old age) and finally acting out of this frame of reference. This is the most important kind of adult learning and it is lifelong (Fleming, T., 1997).

Various forms of learning including: Formal, informal and non-formal learning unify to form LLL. The Cedefop glossary (Tissot, P., 2004) defines core concepts, as follows:

- Formal learning consists of learning that occurs within an organized and structured context (formal education, in-company training), and that is designed as learning. It may lead to formal recognition (diploma, certificate), (p. 70);
- Non-formal learning consists of learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain an important learning element such as vocational skills acquired at the workplace, (p. 112);
- Informal learning is defined as learning resulting from daily life activities related to family, work or leisure. It is often referred to as experiential learning and can, to a degree, be understood as accidental learning (p. 76).

The different perspectives, by the point of structure and intention, in these three types of learning are: Formal learning is an intentionally planned learning activity; Non-formal learning forms by intentionally planned activities; and the Informal one is non-intentional with no planning. The learner is considered at the core of the learning process within the perspective of LLL (Colardyn D. & Bjonavold J., 2004).

LLL literally means that learning should take place at all stages of life cycle (from the cradle to the grave) and, in more recent versions that it should be life-wide; that is embedded in all life contexts from the school to the workplace, the home and the community. The learning society therefore, 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 (Green, A., 2002). LLL is the continuous building of skills and knowledge during one's life, that occurs through experiences faced lifetime.

Besides, LLL is about providing second chances to update basic skills and also offering learning opportunities at more advanced levels. All this means that formal systems of provision need to become much more open and flexible, so that such opportunities can truly be tailored to the needs of the learner, or indeed the potential learner (European Commission, 2007).

LLL concept refers to the activities people perform throughout their life to improve their knowledge, skills and competence in a particular field, given some personal, societal or employment related motives (Field, J., 2001; Aspin, D. N. & Chapman, J. D., 2000).

1.4. Discussion

LLL means that education is diverse, adapted to the individual and available throughout our lives. From Harper Collins Dictionary: LLL is the provision or use of both formal and informal learning opportunities throughout people's lives in order to foster the continuous development and improvement of the knowledge and skills needed for employment and personal fulfillment.

There are some definitions for LLL on the Web in the following:

- LLL is the process of constant learning and development that incorporates continuous professional development, in which all individuals need to engage in a time of rapid change (WCPT, 2009).
- Idea that learning can and does occur beyond the formal structure of an educational institution and occurs throughout one's lifetime (TeAchnology, 2010).
- A broad concept where education that is flexible, diverse and available at different times and places is pursued throughout life. Four 'pillars' of education for the future were identified by the Delors report in 1996: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together (and with others), and learning to be (Evaluate IT, 2004).
- Continuing education, including in company schemes - an essential means of accelerating assimilation of new technologies (Tempus, 2002).
- Learning in which a person engages throughout his or her life. It includes but is not limited to learning that occurs in schools and formal educational programs (Idahoe, 2009).
- Ongoing learning in formal, non-formal and informal ways, cradle to grave learning and knowledge building (CANDO, 2011).
- The continuous development of skills and knowledge to enhance quality of life and employment prospects (CSEP, 2011).

LLL takes place at all times and in all places, as:

- Age 0-5 years: A lot of learning takes place during this age group to provide a foundation for future learning habits and talents. This is probably the age with the highest amount of informal learning as children imitate almost everything from parents, peers and their environment.
- Age 6-24 years: Learning at this age group primarily takes place in educational institutions, from primary and secondary to tertiary levels. Family life, social organizations, religious institutions, and mass media have a role in learning during this time.
- Age 25-60 years: This age group can learn informally through the use of instructional media, mostly from their occupations, work-places, colleagues, touring, mass media, information technologies, environment and nature. Adults learn from experiences and problem solving. They therefore need continuous development of intellect, capability and integrity.
- Age 60+ years: Elderly people can learn a great deal from activities suitable to their age e.g. art, music, sports for the elderly, handicrafts and social work. They can also carry out voluntary work in community organizations, clubs and associations (Rojvithee, A., 2005).

In various attempts to produce a clear account of the topic, it may be perceived the presence and operation of a particular preconception. In many scientific works on LLL, there seems to be an implicit acceptance of the notion that it is possible to arrive at some uniform descriptive definition of the term LLL. The common assumption particularly the earlier ones, seems to be that a clear agreement on the meaning and applicability of the term is conceivable, possible and attainable (Aspin, D. N. & Chapman, J. D. 2007).

LLL is viewed as involving all strategies that are put in place to create opportunities for people to learn throughout life. It therefore should be a process of conscious continuous learning that goes throughout life and directed towards providing both the individual needs and that of the relevant community (Abukari, A., 2004).

The implementation of this idea will be facilitated by bringing together education and vocational education in central aspects of different policies such as education, youth, employment and research. A LLL framework is to be developed to enable each individual to choose among learning environments, jobs, regions and countries in order to improve one's knowledge, skills and competencies and to use them optimally (Harvey, L., 2004-9).

The search for who we are goes on in this new context and these new agendas for our growth and development constantly emerge. Just as children and adolescents have developmental needs which are learning needs, so too do older adults. One difference is that there are not as many facilitators about who can, from their own experience, facilitate the transitional changes of later life. These are LLL needs; lifelong developmental needs (Fleming, T., 1997).

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).

Educational institutions must offer facilities that meet the needs of learners at various levels of competence throughout their lives. Individuals must acquire a new mindset; Learners are no longer passive receivers of knowledge, but need to be active researchers, constructors, and communicators of knowledge. Knowledge is no longer handed down from above (either from specialists in design, from managers in organizations, or from teachers in courses), but is constructed collaboratively in the context of work. Learners must be able to use LLL facilities to upgrade their knowledge, skills and competence in a discipline as required. They can also contribute to the facilities by sharing knowledge and supporting other learners. Lifelong learners are not merely consumers of learning facilities, but can be asked to actively contribute to the facilities themselves (Fischer, G., & Ostwald, J., 2002; Fischer, G., & Ostwald, J., 2002).

Certainly, the reports from international organisations all reflected the kinds of global trends upon which LLL and the learning society are postulated. The Commission of the European Communities (2000, pp. 3, 4) states in its memorandum on LLL: LLL is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts. The coming decade must see the implementation of this vision. LLL is the common umbrella under which all kinds of teaching and learning should be united. Putting LLL into practice demands that everyone work together effectively, both as individuals and in organizations.

1.5. Conclusion

LLL results from integration of formal, non-formal, and informal learning to create ability for continuous lifelong development of quality of life. Definitions highlight that the context within which learning takes place, occurs at all times in each place, through one's life. People need to upgrade their skills throughout their adult lives to cope with modern life, both in their work and in their private lives. The issue will be achievable through learning.

LLL will not only develop individuals to become responsible to themselves and their communities, but understand and involve actively at all levels of their societies. If countries are to see LLL develop further, then everyone's patterns of behaviour, needs to change including: individuals, employers, and the providers of learning and qualifications.

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