Key necessities for lifelong learning

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Abstract

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. Lifelong learning is viewed as involving all strategies that are put in place to created opportunities for people to learn throughout life. Lifelong learning 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. In order to stimulate learning and to establish a learning society, one has to define the fundamental elements relevant to it.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, necessities, elements;

1. Introduction

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).

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). 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 recent focus on lifelong learning (LLL) is a reflection of the realization that learning must be more active than passive, more structured and long term, all the pieces must interlock (Luker, P., 1996). The United Kingdom government published a Green Paper on LLL in 1998, which states:

We stand on the brink of a new age. Familiar certainties and old ways of doing things are disappearing. Jobs are changing and with them the skills needed for the world of tomorrow. In our hearts we know we have no choice but to prepare for this new age, in which the key to success will be the education, knowledge and skills of our people. Learning is the key to prosperity, for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. This is why the
Government has put learning at the heart of its ambition. The fostering of an enquiring mind and the love of learning are essential for our future success. To achieve stable and sustainable growth, we will need a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable workforce. To cope with rapid change we must ensure that people can return to learning throughout their lives. We cannot rely on a small elite: we will need the creativity, enterprise and scholarship of all our people (DfEE 1998). This article attempts to describe the essential elements needed to establish LLL.

2.1. Material and method

This article reviews the key necessities for establishing LLL. The paper begins with a brief description of LLL, presenting the concept of the term and continues with characterizing its basic elements. Key issues were identified through review of literature on LLL and through review of literature on the fundamental elements thereof.

2.1.1. Results

In 1980, father of adult learning, Malcolm Shepherd Knowles stated 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). LLL encompasses learning that takes place at all stages of life, whether formal learning at school or in daily life (Maruyama, H., 2009). LLL comprises two main aspects: the concept to comprehensively review various systems including education, in order to create a LLL society; and the concept of learning at all stages of life. In other words, the concept of learning in the context of LLL encompasses not only structured learning through school and social education but also learning through involvement in such areas as sports, cultural activities, hobbies, recreation and volunteer activities. The places for conducting learning activities are also diverse, including elementary and secondary schools, universities and other institutions of higher education, citizens’ public halls, libraries, museums, cultural facilities, sports facilities, LLL program facilities in the private sector, companies, and offices. LLL is about acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from the pre-school years to post-retirement. It promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable each citizen to adapt to the knowledge-based society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life, taking more control of his or her future (Harvey, L., 2009).

While the developed countries are advocating the phrase of expanding lifelong education, moving toward a learning society, we should realize that LLL would be the best medicine guiding people to deal with these challenges. The book titled Learning: The treasure within, published by the UNESCO (1996, p.37) indicates that lifelong education works as a key to let people into the 21st century, that lifelong education has become the core of the future society. The book also points out four basic learning, as four educational pillars, for people to deal with social changes:

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{Learning to know;} \\
&\text{Learning to do;} \\
&\text{Learning to live together, and;} \\
&\text{Learning to be.}
\end{align*}\]

Learning to know has been over-emphasized for the past years, and the other three, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be, have been overlooked. In the learning society, all four of them will deserve equal emphasis. Learning is considered as a panacea for coping with the various challenges brought by the changes. As a vision of the future society, the establishment of the learning society is to offer everyone an effective means in learning to know, to do, to live together, and to be (Ministry of education, 2006).

The European Community has identified six essential elements of LLL strategies (Kendall, M., Samways, B., Wibe, J., 2002):

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{Partnership working,}
\end{align*}\]
Insight into the demand for learning,
Adequate resourcing,
Facilitating access to learning opportunities,
Creating a learning culture
Striving for excellence.

A lot has been written about the theory of partnership working. However, translating theory into practice is not always easy. Partnerships can be formed between a number of individuals, agencies or organizations with a shared interest. There is usually an overarching purpose for partners to work together and a range of specific objectives. Partnerships are often formed to address specific issues and may be short or long term. The key principles of partnership working are, openness, trust and honesty, agreed shared goals and values and regular communication between partners (Communities Scotland, 2008). Insight into demand for learning is defined as the identification of learning needs in accordance with existing expectations of the level of skills and competences which learners, organisations, society and the labour market want or need to develop (Helling, K. & Ertl, B., 2010). In effect, the resource theory maintains that if adequate resources are brought together in one place, member learning and development will occur (Astin, A. W., 1999). There is also another way to look at increased access, flexibility and learning opportunities. The growth of open educational resources provides opportunities for potential learners to access knowledge that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to access any other way (Bates, T., 2009). Today it seems that organizations need to be able to do more than just adapt; they must be able to do so quickly, in the face of ever changing conditions. And if organizations are to adapt quickly and intelligently, they must make learning a central part of their strategy for survival and growth (Conner, M.L. & Clawson, J.G., 2005). Striving for excellence should be achieved through the introduction of quality control and indicators to measure progress.

2.1.1.1. Discussion

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 (OECD, 2007). The term lifelong, as applied to education or learning, has been in circulation for more than a quarter of a century (Friesen, N. & Anderson, T., 2004). LLL, it is asserted, requires that learning outcomes from different settings and contexts can be linked together. Sinel T. (2011) notes that; 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.

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). LLL covers the whole range of learning that includes: formal, informal and non-formal learning. Tissot (2004) defines the core concepts of various forms of learning 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).
Whether it's in schools, at home, on the job or in the community, people are always gaining new knowledge and skills. This is LLL (Crowe, B.E., 2010; CanLearn, 2011). It's essential to recognize and value all forms of learning, because we live in a world where people must have the skills to understand, interpret and process different information (CanLearn, 2009).

First element of LLL is partnership working. Partnership working should be not only between decision-making levels (e.g. national, regional and local) but also between public authorities and education service providers (schools, universities, etc.), the business sector and the social partners, local associations, vocational guidance services, research centers, etc. Insight into the demand for learning should be in the knowledge-based society which will entail redefining basic skills, to include for instance the new information and communication technologies. Analyses should take into account foreseeable labor market trends. Adequate resourcing, should involve a substantial increase in public and private investment in learning. This does not only imply substantially increasing public budgets, but also ensuring the effective allocation of existing resources and encouraging new forms of investment. Investment in human capital is important at all points in the economic cycle; skills gaps and shortages can certainly co-exist with unemployment. Facilitating access to learning opportunities should be through making them more visible, introducing new provision and removing obstacles to access, for example through the creation of more local learning centers. Special efforts are necessary in this context for different groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities or people living in rural areas. Creating a learning culture should be by giving learning a higher profile, both in terms of image and by providing incentives for the people most reticent to opt for learning. For striving for excellence, provision must be made for standards, guidelines and mechanisms whereby achievements can be recognized and rewarded (Kendall, M., Samways, B., Weert, T.J.V., et al., 2004).

In seeking to implement strategies for LLL for all, OECD suggests action in the following five areas of the LLL system (OECD, 2001):

1. Recognizing all forms of learning, not just formal courses of study;
2. Developing foundation skills that are wider than those traditionally identified as central, including in particular motivation and the capacity for self-directed learning; The international evidence clearly shows that those people without an upper secondary qualification and without strong literacy skills are among the least likely to participate in further education and training as adults, or as adults to take part in training within enterprises. A culture of learning is important for promoting adult learning; and that an important determinant is the degree to which governments and the social partners are convinced of the need to refresh and upgrade adult skills.
3. Reformulating access and equity priorities in a lifelong context – by looking at opportunities available to individuals across their life-cycle and different learning settings; where learning can occur. It is argued that knowledge-based economies and societies cannot afford to exclude a large part of their population from access to education and learning resources. Furthermore, inequalities in society often raise problems of mutual understanding and adjustment within organizations, in society at large and in the democratic process.
4. Considering resource allocation across all sectors and settings; including – one might add – the incentives facing the various participants and the likely effect of such incentives on outcomes in terms of LLL.
5. Ensuring collaboration among a wide range of partners including ministries other than education.

2.1.1.1. Conclusion

LLL is all learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. It values all forms of learning, including: formal learning, such as a degree course followed at university; non-formal learning, such as vocational skills acquired at the workplace; and informal learning, such as inter-generational learning. To establish LLL, a partnership approach is stipulated as the first building block. All relevant actors, in and outside the formal systems, must collaborate for strategies to work on the ground. Gaining insight into the needs of the learner, or the potential learner, along with learning needs of organizations, communities, wider society and the labor market is the next
step. Adequate resourcing, in terms of financing and the effective and transparent allocation of resources, can then be addressed. The analysis then proceeds to how to match learning opportunities to learners’ needs and interests and how to facilitate access by developing the supply side to enable learning by anyone, anywhere, at any time. There is a clear need here for the formal sector to recognize and value non-formal and informal learning. Creating a culture of learning depends ultimately on increasing learning opportunities, raising participation levels and stimulating demand for learning. Finally, mechanisms for quality assurance, evaluation and monitoring are suggested, with a view to striving for excellence on an ongoing basis.

References


