Lifelong learning and training: a never ending challenge and choice for educational system

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Abstract

Nowadays people and societies are involved in a continuing changing process, so education has become crucial both for individual life, knowledge, work and for socio-economic well-being of societies. The aim of this paper is to stress pedagogical and political debate about the important role of every grade of educational system for realizing effectively lifelong learning & training; especially earlier grades of schools. In this regard, the international indicators by OECD offer a comparative framework. The data analyses seem to confirm that human capital is one of the most important factors for all countries growth and well-being.

2012 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Keywords: Education policies, Globalized economies and societies, Human capital, International education indicators, Lifelong learning, training and education.

1. Introduction

The aim of this reflection paper is to stress pedagogical and political debate about the important role of every grade of educational system for realizing effectively lifelong learning & training for all; especially earlier grades of schools. Reflections are deepened with a systemic-relational approach and hermeneutic, heuristic and critical method, suggesting university as possible key institution – not the only, of course – to think about & plan a educational/school system able of laying really and realizing effectively lifelong learning and training.

2. Reflections

In globalized economies’ countries, the concept of human capital/potential to create/develop/increase is taking ever greater importance; also, several data analyses – different approaches – confirm that human capital is one of the most important factors for all countries’ growth and well-being. Worldwide countries acknowledge that education, in a lifelong learning and training perspective, is a key matter to face today’s challenges concerning societies, cultures, economies, health and progress. Nowadays people and societies are involved in a continuing changing process, so education has become crucial both for individual life, knowledge, work and for socio-economic well-being of societies: it provides the essential to participate actively and to cooperate together in society.

In this regard, the international indicators by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) offer a comparative framework for analysis, useful for education policies and educational researchers to improve extent and quality in the educational offer. The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and
Development), furthermore, far from 1973, systematically publishes reports about international indicators of education systems. *Education at a Glance*, indeed, provides interesting data for internationally comparative analysis among countries, useful for politics and all stake-holders. We chose some charts and tables from “Education at a Glance 2010”, to show some indicators data, useful to “invite” reflection:

a) Tertiary-type A graduation

Tertiary-type A graduation (on ISCED scale) rates range from less than 10% in Luxembourg, more than 30% in Italy to 45% or more in Portugal, Ireland, Australia, Poland, Iceland, Denmark, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic and Finland. In the countries with available data on students’ age, mature people rise a relevant rate, close to 25% of the total graduation rate, in Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Sweden and the partner country Israel (Chart A3.1 – table 1). There are great disparities among countries and between gender (46% of females obtain a tertiary-type A qualification compared to 30% for males).

Table 1. OCDE DATA - Chart A3.1

**Chart A3.1. Tertiary-type A graduation rates in 2008 (first-time graduation)**

The chart shows the estimated percentage of a 2008 age cohort that will complete, for the first time, tertiary-type A education (based on current patterns of graduation); it also indicates how many young adults complete tertiary-type A education outside of the typical age of graduation.

Based on current patterns of graduation, on average 38% of an age cohort in 2008 is estimated to complete tertiary-type A education in the 26 OECD countries with comparable data. The proportion of students who complete tertiary-type A education outside the typical age of graduation is high in Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Sweden and the partner country Israel, where graduation rates for students aged over 30 account for one-quarter or more of the total graduation rate.

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>≥ 30 years old</th>
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Countries are ranked in descending order of the graduation rates for tertiary-type A education in 2008.

Source: OECD, Table A3.1. See Annex 3 for notes ([www.oecd.org/edu/eag2010](http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2010)).

StatLink: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310130](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310130)

b) Educational attainment

Adults with higher educational attainment participate in formal and/or non-formal education in a higher percentage than adults with lower attainment (Chart A5.2 – table 2).
c) Work chances

A special indicator examines the relation between educational degrees’ achievement and labour force Status and shows gender differences (Chart A6.1 – table 3). On average, people who attained a tertiary-level degree have more chances to find and stay at work than adults with lower degrees. On OECD average, 85% of individuals who achieved a tertiary level education is employed, even 90% in Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

The above showed data highlight the value and impact education and point out that it is very important to think about education policies able to increase beneficial effects both for individuals and for societies, to solve and avoid from cultural, social and economic disadvantages and to give a significant contribution to cooperating and social cohesion and stability. In this content, our reflection want to draw attention about the true/effective condition to Lifelong learning and education is a multidimensional concept, which describes attitudes and “habitus” to a continuous knowledge, skills and competencies development that go further than recurrent education and training, which covers both formal, non-formal and informal education from pre-school programs to young and adult education too. They rescue and improve the concept of whole person, who lives and who is in relationships with other members of society, who is involved in an integrated lifelong learning and education process in building his continuing growth, who cooperates each others and contributes to social and economic increase of his country.
need a conceptual understanding of complex concepts, and the ability to work with them. They need to be able critically to evaluate what they read, be able to express themselves clearly both verbally and in writing, and understand scientific and mathematical thinking. They need to learn integrated and usable knowledge, rather than the sets of compartmentalised and de-contextualised facts. They need to be able to take responsibility for their own continuing, lifelong learning” (OECD, 2008).

To achieve this goal, pre-primary, primary and secondary education play a strategic role laying the background – competencies, skills and attitudes – for lifelong learning. In this perspective, every grade of educational system has to be enhanced and improved, from early childhood to late teens, adulthood and so on. Of course, formal education takes an important part in lifelong learning process, however, non-formal (in the workplace, above all) and informal education takes an important role too.

About the possibility of “learning and education revolution” for a “learning and education culture”, the key is the school/education system, in particular the development of new models of schooling. For livening reflection and discussion, may be interesting to reflect on proposal made by R.K. Sawyer in OECD Report. In his opinion, the most effective learning environments will have “special” characteristics, including curriculum, teacher, assessment:
“• Curriculum: what seems simpler to an adult professional is not necessarily simpler to a learner; the curriculum has to take into account children’s theories and their (mis-) conceptions.
• The role of the teacher: teachers should be highly-trained professionals, comfortable with technology, with a deep pedagogical understanding of the subject matter, able to respond and improvise to the uniquely emerging flow of each classroom.
• Assessment: customised learning sits awkwardly with requirements for every student to learn the same thing at the same time and assessment is too often of the relatively superficial as compared with deep knowledge” (OECD, 2008).

So, a key question – in a middle-term or a long-term perspective, too – regards teachers and the quality of their teaching. It is very important that teacher education – especially primary teacher so as pre-primary ones too – enable teaching to develop lifelong learning, training educational attitudes and pedagogic skills. Must be added proposals for programs of teachers’ professional development in “style” and “matrix” of continuing education, promoting the professionalization of teaching from a culture of reflective practice and educational research. In each nation, these goals would risk clashing – and crashing – with “hard reality” of daily schooling and teaching. In Italy, for example, reflection cannot avoid addressing the following themes: history of school (figure 1), characteristics of the system (figure 2), age of teachers (figure 3).

Figure 1. Trends of public school in Italy 2000-2010
Figure 2. Italian Education and Training System

Figure 3. Age of Italian teachers (MIUR)
3. Conclusion

It’s crucial how policies, governments and societies are designing, conceiving, enforcing and, not least, funding to develop human capital from early childhood, during adolescence and adulthood till elder ages. University can play a strategic role for laying, promoting, developing a lifelong learning and education culture of in school system: universities train teachers, the protagonists of this Cultural Revolution. Lifelong learning and education idea/process/practice could be more effectively pursued in and by a university institution as a central place in a networking connection with earlier grades of schools, workplaces, other social institutions, national and international politics.

University could and should become, in this way, a crucial and strategic planning centre to collect personal and social or economic needs, to conceive education and training objectives and proposals, formal, non-formal and informal. So, university can become a reference point for individuals, families, groups, workers, employers, and companies, etc.

To achieve a deep-rooted lifelong learning and education culture, it’s important to increase education programs and activities at every span of life and it is strategic, nowadays, to develop early childhood education policies, activities and services and to consider university as a crucial institution, not only to offer an high-quality tertiary education, but also to plan programs, to collect needs, know-how, knowledge and human resources and to build an efficient and communicative network with politics, workplace, managers, companies, employers, workers, social communities, etc. universities can become a standing brain-storming centre which can involve all stake-holders in a continuing profitable and useful communication process and in closer contact and cooperation between working life and education.

Adult learning or education, indeed, too often and for long time was considered as a particular issue which was been separated from scholastic education. We think that pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary and post-tertiary, adult education can be thought as a continuum in a perspective of lifelong learning and education which will involve each life span and wide of a person: lifelong learning is and must be “a never ending” challenge and choice for educational/school system!

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