

## Teachers becoming lifelong learners

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### Key Words

Lifelong learners, Maintenance learning, Shock learning

### Abstract

*The term lifelong learning was intended to embody the need for democracy, equal opportunity, and individual self-fulfillment, which would only be possible if the tools for learning were available to all, and not restricted to a privileged elite. Not only should learning be lifelong, it should also be "life-wide": meaning that learning cannot be confined to formal educational institutions, but rather is seen to take place in a wide variety of settings – including the workplace and in social and recreational contexts. A lifelong learner teacher is strongly aware of the relationship between learning and real life, recognizes the need for lifelong learning and is highly motivated to engage in the process, and has the necessary confidence and learning skills. Control of educational goals and decisions needs to be shared between teacher and students. With the advent of information technology, there is an urgent need to revisit not only the pedagogical methods, but also to update ourselves as teachers with the recent developments. The Lifelong Learning aims to bridge the gaps in the learning teaching process using various modern methods of dissemination of knowledge, across the age group of individual learners.*

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### Introduction

A teacher is a person who tries to share with his pupils, what is learnt by him in pursuit of learning. The teachers who are able to continuously acquire new and better forms of knowledge that they can apply to their teaching and to their lives are the true teachers. A teacher has to try acquiring knowledge in his life to be able to disseminate it in the best of the possible ways to his students. For a Teacher, to quote Albert Einstein, "Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death." Hence, it is imperative for any good teacher to be lifelong learner. But, it is really unnerving to see the quality of such options available for a teacher. Since teachers today have to learn, unlearn and then relearn a lot of approaches of teaching-learning process. Without belittling the earlier methods of teaching, it can be stated that traditional methods of teaching-learning are undergoing major changes in today's world of easy information availability. Crucial to effective learning is the need to first understand. For teachers to be effective, they first need to understand those they would wish to teach.

While lifelong learning has increasingly been cited as one of the key principles in the educational and development fields, there is no shared understanding of its usage at the global level. The diversity of discourses on this concept has been shaped by historical and geographical factors and at certain historical moments. Many Asian countries, for example, have followed this line of thinking and have developed modern policy discourses on lifelong learning, transforming in the process their own traditional philosophies (e.g., Confucianism, Buddhism) which have for centuries promoted continuous learning. Every individual must be in a position to keep learning throughout his life. The idea of lifelong education is the keystone of the learning society. The lifelong concept covers all aspects of education, embracing everything in it, with the whole being more than the sum of its parts. There is no such thing as a separate "permanent" part of education which is not lifelong. In other words, lifelong education is not an educational system but the principle in which the over-all organization of a system is founded,

and which accordingly underlies the development of each of its component parts (Carolyn *et al.*, 2001).

The underlying precept of lifelong learning is that learning is too important to be left to schools and universities, and that the responsibility for learning *throughout* life and *from* life lies with individuals. In this sense lifelong learning is sustainable learning – in that it relies on self-directed individual initiatives rather than handing down of knowledge from experts or a central authority (Knapper, 2006).

A teacher is leader of the future who develops capabilities of a person to act or respond. Such a teacher is not necessarily a knowing all person, but one who probably has pupils with better knowledge. The one quality, which distinguishes a teacher, is the trust in her to weigh various competing claims of students. The best leaders have the courage to act on what they know right now and the humility to change their actions when they encounter new evidence. Teachers love what they're doing; love to learn new things, meet new people and share what they know, so wind up creating the new economic value in this world. They are the most generous with their knowledge and their expertise, as a result, creating life of quality for themselves and all the people they connect to.

*We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn.* – Peter Drucker.

It is accepted fact that we learn what we care about, from people we care about and who, we know, care about us. The paradigm shift to self help process of learning has initiated the need to improve, innovate and integrate the tools of learning and teaching. In order to teach effectively, we must understand what a pupil understands and in the way he understands it. To understand better we should learn to keep questioning. Like Sir Rudyard Kipling, we must keep six honest serving men: What, Why, When, How, Where and Who.

### **Lifelong Learning**

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 (ie 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.

Lifelong learning can instill creativity, initiative and responsiveness in people thereby enabling them to show adaptability in post-industrial society through enhancing skills to manage uncertainty, communicate across and within cultures, sub-cultures, families and communities, negotiate conflicts.

The European Commission (2001: 9) found that lifelong learning has “Four broad and mutually supporting objectives: personal recognition, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability/adaptability”. In this regard, lifelong learning has wide dimensions that

transcend narrow economic and vocational aspects. The European Lifelong Learning Initiative defines lifelong learning as "...a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment, in all roles circumstances, and environments" (Watson, 2003:3).

Lifelong learning is seen as a holistic view of education and recognizes learning from different environments. The emphasis is on learning to learn and the ability to keep learning for a lifetime (Skolverket, 2000). Lifelong learning is the continued educational experience that utilizes non-credit academic courses, educational travel, and community service and volunteerism to fully engage the brain, heighten physical activity, and maintain healthy social relationships. As we enter into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the information age, your ability to expand your mind and strive for continuous education is critical to your success. There are three different kinds of education that you can acquire, maintenance learning, growth learning and shock learning.

### **Maintenance Learning**

Maintenance learning refers to your keeping current with your field. But this merely keeps you even or stops you from falling behind at a rapid rate. Lifelong learning is being recognized by traditional colleges and universities as valid in addition to degree attainment. The economic impact of educational institutions at all levels will continue to be significant into the future as formal courses of study continue and interest-based subjects are pursued. The lifelong learners, including persons with academic or professional credentials, tend to find higher-paying occupations, leaving monetary, cultural, and entrepreneurial impressions on communities, according to educator Cassandra B. Whyte.

### **Growth Learning**

The second type of learning is growth learning. This is the kind of learning that adds knowledge and skills to your repertoire that you did not have before. Growth learning helps you expand your mind and you are acquiring information that you did not have before that enables you to do things that you could not do before.

### **Shock Learning**

The third type of learning is called shock learning. This is where something happens that contradicts or reverses a piece of knowledge or understanding that you already have. Shock learning can be extremely valuable if you act upon it. Peter Drucker, in his book *Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, says that the primary sources of innovation in a company are the unexpected success or the unexpected failure.

The concept of lifelong learning stresses that learning and education are related to life as a whole not just to work – and that learning throughout life is a continuum that should run from cradle to grave. This learning does not need to be linked to the attainment of formal qualifications.

Eggin(1999) has posed a number of rhetorical questions: Why [do] many schools ignore the lifelong learning goal for their teaching staff's professional development? Has it been decided that teachers will not be in the profession long enough to warrant teaching them how to survive their future? Have we made the assumption that teachers have already learnt how to learn?

The thrust of his argument is that teachers need to be shown how to learn so that they can not only stay abreast of technological advances in a rapidly changing world, but become self-starters so that they can learn on their own rather than having to wait for the next time release to attend a staged professional learning course or program about a specific skill, tool or

ways to embed tools into the curriculum. Utilizing the skills of high performance teachers to lead and act as role models as well as establishing team based approaches in which groups of teachers can brainstorm together, were his two main solutions.

These suggestions can also be adopted as the basis of formal school wide professional learning programs.

- **Creating time:** Being able to take time within the working week to learn, play and explore is essential. The need for teachers to keep up with technological advances in our rapidly changing world is essential. Expecting teachers to master new skills and figure out how to incorporate these new skills and approaches into their day-to-day teaching should be within the confines of the working week for teachers to develop new skills.
- **Developing Personal Learning Networks (PLNs):** Learning from and with others is a most powerful learning experience. The value and importance of a PLN inspiring teachers to become lifelong learners cannot be overstated. Developing an understanding of what a PLN is and how a PLN can benefit the long term learning of teachers needs to become a goal for those of us who have already mastered this understanding.
- **Social Networking:** The sharing and collaboration occurring in cyberspace is phenomenal. Without a doubt, Social Networking is revolutionizing how teachers interact with each other and how thoughts and ideas are shared. Teachers need to not only be skilled in using Social Networking tools such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ but to see the incredible value they offer in sharing, problem solving, learning and collaborating with teachers across the globe.
- **Partnering with students:** In order to learn, teachers need to let go of the belief that they know more than their students. By acknowledging the skills and knowledge of their students, teachers can gain much. Developing a mutual respect for the knowledge of our students is an important path to explore. How better to inspire our own learning than to be infected by the knowledge and learning of our students.
- **Reflecting:** In addition to being exposed to new ideas, new tools and new ways of teaching with these tools, teachers need to have a time and place to reflect on their learning. Reflections could be in the form of regular face to face chats or be written reflections in a blog which can then be shared in either an open or closed professional group. Sharing thoughts is a powerful way to ignite a passion and love of learning.
- **Professional Reading:** Whether by magazines and journals or by digital resources such as blogs, websites or other online sources, teachers need to be encouraged to read on a daily basis.
- **Online Conferences:** Having the opportunity to participate in a conference is a fabulous experience. Understanding that online conferencing can be a powerful source of learning and sharing with other teachers is an important step on the path of lifelong learning.
- **Online Learning:** Discovering that one can learn anything, anytime and anywhere by participating in online learning programs is a fantastic boost to one's feeling of mastering new knowledge and new skills at one's own pace. With so many online learning programs available, many of them at no cost, teachers can freely learn what they like, when they like, at their own pace.
- **Online Networking:** Participation in a range of online professional networks is also a powerful way to learn, share and collaborate. While emails were a common format of the past, today thoughts and ideas are commonly shared in cyberspace via Nings, Blogs and Wikis.

- **Time to share:** By providing opportunities for teachers to share with each other, standards can be raised, knowledge can be gained and inspiration can be spread. Creating a learning community which is fired by the enthusiasm of others is a powerful way to move a staff of teachers forward on the path of knowledge ([www.Novanews19.wordpress.com](http://www.Novanews19.wordpress.com)).

From a lifelong learning perspective, business, the community and the university must combine in a mutuality of benefit for individual cognitive advance, for economic development and for community welfare. One of the vital parts of such relationships will be the acknowledgment of the need for clearly defined and flexibly articulated pathways of interaction and connection between them. Teachers are at the heart of the educational process. The greater the importance attached to education as a whole whether for cultural transmission, for social cohesion and justice, or for human resource development so critical in modern, technology-based economies the higher is the priority that must be accorded to the teachers responsible for that education. (OECD,1989).

The need for a new approach to the building of partnerships between educational institutions and the business, industrial and commercial sectors arises from the increasing recognition on the part of both the business and education sectors that education and training is now the critical resource for any kind of growth and development for the economy, society, community and the individual. Business and industry will play an increasing role, not only in training their own staff, but also in funding research and development and advanced professional development at the university level. Increasingly corporate education will play an important part in the “climbing frame” of learning, along with more traditional education providers. One of the commonplaces of the movement for lifelong learning is that the knowledge and skills of a nation’s workforce will be foremost among the chief factors in making a country economically competitive. New demands for lifelong learning are being generated by new government priorities, the demands of a global, knowledge economy, social changes and by the expansion of and proliferation in the range of knowledge and competencies, which each individual is expected to come to possess throughout their lifespan (B-Hert, 2001).

There are persuasive arguments for targeting particular learning opportunities formal and informal at teachers at ‘landmark’ phases of intellectual, experience and career or role development. Such teachers are most likely to be in high states of readiness to reflect systematically on their thinking and practice and on the contexts in which they occur. They may wish to prepare for a new role; refresh themselves by more in-depth learning about their pedagogic or subject knowledge; or gain a greater sense of vision or direction for their careers. However, in all of these circumstances, success or failure will be influenced also by other factors (Day, 1999).

The Lifelong learning aims to stimulate support and sustain a university-wide transformation of educational and lifelong learning curricula & content and capacity building for greater awareness, acceptance and participation in and practice of the ethos of lifelong learning and ICT enabled instruction, learning and assessment. It intends to fulfill the following goals-

- Development of curriculum based multimedia content for its seamless availability to all the teachers and the students.
- Setting up of a collaborative virtual learning environment for hosting content for interactions on various academic topics and issues.
- Organizing innovative and intellectually stimulating programme of faculty development and for administrators and staff of Universities and institutions of higher education.

- Fostering institutional collaborations- national as well as international.
- Organizing life enriching, employability enhancing and career-oriented courses for the students. Steady improvement in the portfolio, content and reach of such programmes for all.
- Education, research and training on best practices and innovations in the areas of lifelong learning and ICT-enabled instruction, learning and assessments.
- Undertaking and promoting any initiative, activity or programme either on own or in collaboration with any institution- public or private, Indian or foreign- engaged in similar activities ([www.illl.du.ac.in](http://www.illl.du.ac.in)).

## Conclusion

Lifelong learning should aim to promote the art of human maturity – a prerequisite to becoming a good citizen, actively involved in local, national and international issues and problems. On a final note, it is good to remember what the early writers dreamed of as they examined the importance of lifelong learning: If learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both timespan and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economics well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of a learning society". And what better way to do so, than making the teachers is part of this lifelong learning process.

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