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Lifelong learning; why do we need it?

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Abstract

Our world is changing around us in such a frantic pace that if we do not continue to grow and develop; we will soon be left behind. In the 21st century, we all need to be lifelong learners. We need to continually keep our skills sharp and up to date so that we have an edge in all we do. Of course, we all have a natural desire to learn for adapting to change, enriching and fulfilling our lives. This review article is an attempt to present the main advantages which follow lifelong learning.

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1.1. Introduction

The knowledge-based economy, new technologies, the growing speed of technological changes and globalization all influence the needs to improve the population's skills and competences. In Europe, this has been acknowledged for several years (Colardyn, D. & Bjornavold, J., 2004).

Lifelong learning (LLL) covers the whole range of learning that includes: formal, informal and non-formal learning. It also includes the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that people acquire in their day-to-day experiences (Dunn, E., 2003).

LLL is the continuous building of skills and knowledge throughout the life of an individual. It not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also competitiveness and employability (Wikipedia, LLL, 2011). 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.

The Cedefop glossary (Tissot, P., 2004) defines 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);

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- 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).

Nowadays, there is a draw more than ever to LLL to stay young, stay sharp mentality. It is important to note that LLL can take on many different forms and does not have to be what we think of when we think of the traditional learning classroom environment. One thing can not be disputed though; LLL is something we should all be participating in, having an obligation to ourselves to continue learning throughout the whole of our lives (Eggelmeyer, S., 2010).

LLL helps people to achieve other goals, such as taking an active part in civic life, leading a more sustainable lifestyle, and improving their health and wellbeing. It also benefits society, by reducing crime and encouraging community activities (Dunn, E., 2003).

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). This paper seeks to describe why we need LLL, giving an account of what we achieve through learning, and explains the reasons for we need to learn lifetime.

1.2. Material and Method

This review article begins with the definition of LLL, and then goes on with describing of what happens following learning. It sets out the main advantages of LLL. Key issues related to the topic, were identified through reviews of the literature on LLL and on the benefits thereof.

1.3. Results

LLL is 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 environment (Bryce, J., Frigo, T., McKenzie, P. & Withers, G., 2000; Longworth, N. & Davies, W. K., 1996). LLL is viewed as involving all strategies that are put in place to created 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, that will not only develop individuals to become responsible to themselves and their communities, but understand and involve actively at all levels of their societies (Abukari, A., 2004).

LLL is the process of acquiring and expanding knowledge, skills, and dispositions throughout one's life to foster well-being. It's much more than taking an adult pottery class or reading a nonfiction book occasionally. It's about the decisions one's make and the problems one's solve in everyday life. From enrolling in a structured, formal education program to considering whether to believe an infomercial's gimmick, LLL takes many forms (Lamb, A., 2005).

We live in a world where people must have the skills to understand, interpret and process different information. Because of that, it's essential to recognize and value all forms of learning. Continuing education benefits individuals, communities and the country's economy, as:

- It provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and understanding they'll need in life as individuals, citizens and workers.
- It makes communities more productive and innovative, as workers create and discover new abilities and ideas. In our knowledge-based economy and society, change is constant in the workplace. But people who embrace LLL, who constantly learn new skills and train for new challenges, can better cope with the demands of workplace changes.
- It strengthens the economy. The more skills, knowledge and ability that individuals develop, the greater the level of capacity in the economy. A stronger economy means citizens benefit from the chance to earn more, live better and contribute to the economic system (Canlearn, 2009).

Hildebrand D. S. (2008) noted 5 powerful benefits for LLL, as the following:

- Sharpens the mind
As getting older, continuous learning helps to keep the mind sharp and improve memory. It is a known fact that learning in general has beneficial effects on the brain. Research has shown that people with more education are less likely to have dementia in old age.
Sharpens the confidence
Sometimes, when someone has not stepped out of their routine for a while, they haven't taken on a new challenge or really applied themselves to learning something new, they may find the experience a bit daunting. With LLL this fear is more easily overcome. LLL helps to gain confidence in ability to learn and to share the information with others; gain confidence in who we are and what we have to offer.
- Sharpens the interpersonal skills
Opportunity to socialize can help to greatly improve our interpersonal skills. When we are learning, we are engaged in life; we are engaged in those around us. And when we share what we know, we help others learn and further enhance our relationships.
- Sharpens the career opportunities
For anyone who has aspirations of moving their career to the next level, LLL will very much need to be part of the package. Not only can learning enhance the skills we already have, it provides the opportunity to learn a new skill or trade and improve chances of career growth.
Sharpens the ability to communicate
Learning generally employs the skills of reading, listening and writing; skills essential to the ability to communicate. Enhancing these skills, improves our ability to write a business letter, compile a marketing report, give a department presentation or even speak one-on-one to the company president.

We all have a natural desire to learn. We really need to focus on this desire and nurture it to reap its many benefits. From quality of life, financial advantages to helping us to adapt in this crazy and chaotic world we live in, we must embrace these many benefits of LLL and make good use of the brief time we have on this planet (Eggelmeyer, S., 2010).

1.4. Discussion

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). The increasing pace of technological change in the knowledge economy, which means we need a flexible and adaptable workforce that is ready to reskill and retrain to keep pace with the economy's skills needs. LLL enables people to take an active part in society (Dunn, E., 2003). Masche, D. (2007), enumerates five great benefits for LLL that come to mind as the following:

- First is the prospect of a fatter paycheck. Job promotions go to smart people who keep up with the latest information and technology. It's just good sense to refresh and retrain for the workplace.
- Second is the enhanced self-esteem when reaching for new horizons, accepting tough challenges and arriving at a whole new level. New learning is not a picnic but the joys of accomplishment are real.
- Third is the freedom given to adult learners. Adult classmates share ideas and teach each other. Assignments may culminate in a group project or program rather than a graded exam. Memorizing facts is at a minimum; answers are not absolute. True, there are some studies where exactness counts and tests are mandatory. But a quick Internet search turned up references to the use of adult education theories in highly regimented disciplines, such as nursing and medicine. Getting ready to pass state boards did not prevent creative teaching where students' views are respected and acted on. It is possible to combine traditional methods with adult learning styles.
- Fourth is the shift of schooling to a 24/7 model and long-distance or online methods. Trading the classroom for the computer enables to stay home and study in the bathrobe. Earn a degree without ever stepping on campus. With time and space constraints removed anyone who truly wants to go on learning can do so. Further, some class enrollments are open with start dates at our convenience.
- Number five is making scholarship a habit. Education becomes second nature; it's who we are as much as what we do. People live longer now and their health stays robust.

LLL is about providing second chances to update basic skills and also offering learning opportunities at more advanced levels (European Commission, 2007). Nordstrom and his son (2006), offer the top ten benefits of LLL, as the following:

- LLL leads to an enriching life of self-fulfillment.
Nordstrom concludes that through academic learning, educational adventure travel and our renewed sense of volunteerism, we expand our awareness, embrace self-fulfillment, and truly create an exciting multi-dimensional life.
- LLL helps us make new friends and establish valuable relationships.
Through LLL, older adults are meeting new people, forging friendships and relationships with others, and enjoying an active social life. LLL is a brilliant way to keep in touch with people, meet new friends, and enjoy life surrounded by the company of folks who are truly embracing the excitement of our later years.
- LLL keeps us involved as active contributors to society.
We're taking part in educational programs, traveling all over the world, and offering our expertise to society through meaningful community involvement. We're not a strain on society, we're an incredible asset.
- LLL helps us find meaning in our lives.
Nordstrom says; sometimes it's difficult looking back on our lives, but LLL gives us the benefit of real perspective and enables us to find true meaning in the hills and valleys of our past.
- LLL helps us adapt to change.
Society is in a state of constant flux. LLL enables us to keep up with society's changes - especially the technological ones. A learning environment with our peers not only makes it possible to stay abreast of change, it also makes it fun.
- LLL makes the world a better place.
Through the community service aspect of LLL, older learners can give back to their communities and to the world. Nordstrom says; we've spent 30, 40 or more years interacting with the world, what we've learned during that time can be translated into real value for the betterment of society. Our wisdom, insight, it's all of tangible benefit to the world around us.
- LLL increases our wisdom.
LLL enables us to put our lives in perspective. It increases our understanding of previous successes and failures, and helps us understand ourselves better. We more fully develop the wisdom that can come with later life.
- LLL creates a curious, hungry mind.
The more older learners discover about history, current events, politics, or the culture of other countries, the more they want to learn. Our drive and desire to learn keep us going, constantly looking for more to feed our hungry minds.
- LLL opens the mind.
An integral part of LLL is the free exchange of ideas and viewpoints among older learners. Listening to or taking part in stimulating discussions help us to see the other side of an issue. That give-and-take opens our minds and brings us to a whole new level of enlightenment.
- LLL helps fully develop natural abilities.
We all have innate natural abilities. Once we're no longer working full time, we have the opportunity to fully explore and develop these abilities.

The demand for more flexible educational environments increases according to continuous learning which comes to be seen more and more as a necessity for almost everyone in our rapidly changing and increasingly global society (Chen, T., 2003). In the 21st century, we all need to be lifelong learners. Our world is changing around us in such a frantic pace that if we do not continue to grow and develop; we will soon be left behind. We need to continually keep our skills sharp and up to date so that we have an edge in all we do (Eggelmeyer, S. 2010).

1.5. Conclusion

There are numerous assumptions follow LLL, as noted former. We can summarize the greatest benefits of LLL as: First is the benefit of helping us to adapt to change. A lifelong learner will keep up with society by staying current and aware of changes in such areas as technology, news and political trends or finance and money issues. Our children adapt and grow and seem to thrive on staying up on the latest technology. Lifelong learners look for opportunities to embrace the new technologies. A second benefit of LLL is a bigger paycheck. Job promotions go to the employees who are the best versed and educated in their job fields. New jobs and positions are created all the time. New careers open up all the time. A viable applicant or employee is one who has the certifications and diplomas in place all ready. A lifelong learner stays on top of their field so that when opportunities come knocking, they can answer immediately. Lastly, a huge benefit of LLL is the enriching and fulfilling the life. To people for whom continuing education becomes second nature, they can look forward to active and meaningful lives instead of 20+ years of sitting around and watching life pass us by. We all have subjects in which we are interested in. A lifelong learner uses opportunities to explore these topics which they find compelling. The end result can be less stress on the body, in the home, or marriage.

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