

## Introduction and Overview

DAVID ASPIN, JUDITH CHAPMAN, MICHAEL HATTON AND YUKIKO SAWANO

“Lifelong Learning” is a concept whose time has come. The notion that education and learning are activities and processes that do not begin and end with the commencement and closure of people’s attendance at formal institutions of schooling goes back in some cultural contexts as far as Plato and was given repeated expression in the writings of his successors – Augustine, Quintilian, Aquinas, Locke, Rousseau, Comenius, Kant and so on – finding its strongest emphasis in the twentieth century work of John Dewey. Different cultures have similar discourses on lifelong learning originating from their own thinkers or traditions such as Confucius. Such thinkers and writers were well aware that one of the chief characteristics by which human beings may be distinguished from other forms of organic entities and sentient creatures is their endless curiosity, their desire to have their questions answered, their awareness of the need to cope with and master change, and their propensity always to seek improvement in their situation. Human beings are endowed with these tendencies from the time of their birth and exercise them throughout their lives. For human beings, living and learning are nearly synonymous.

Of course there are times when that learning seems to be particularly rapid and pressing: the first five years of life are the times when the greatest cognitive gains are made, that equip individuals with the competencies, capacities and qualities that enable them to face and begin to master the enormous amounts of information and the complex kinds of skill which their living will require. Since the earliest times societies have determined this process should be carried out, at least initially and during these years of accelerating development in childhood, adolescence and youth, in institutions devoted to the purpose and under the direction and guidance of specially qualified and committed people serving the community’s interest in developing the learning of its coming generation.

It seems to have been and still is widely accepted that attendance at such institutions and for such purposes should be compulsory until such a time as a society’s young people may be deemed to have gained adequate information, mastered enough skills and developed into a state of sufficient maturity to be able to go on “under their own steam”, so to speak, and to make decisions as to their own continuing patterns and pathways of development. At that point – when individuals may be regarded as having attained a degree of autonomy – comes the end of most of the compulsion. Learning after that becomes a matter of self-selection, with varying degrees of external prescription. Both require individuals to be aware of facts and possibilities about their situation in the world, to weigh the necessities or desirability of further learning, and to have the informed judgment and the settled disposition to make choices for themselves. All these capacities will come about as a result of further learning.

There was never a time when this was not true and it is to their credit that educational thinkers and writers such as those named realised this from the first. There were others, of course, who confused “learning” with mere “maturation” and “education” with schooling. The “New Romantics” (D.H. Hargreaves 1972, 1975) for example claimed that “the first impulses of Nature are always right” and believed that individuals, if left to themselves and without the “officious” interference of others, would tend to grow and learn “naturally” all those things that their existence required: learning would come about simply as an accretion of growth. Others – those “free thinkers”, who believed in the kind of education that befitted the free person, the free mind and the free spirit, – held that there was a paradox inherent in a situation in which individuals were required to attend a “teaching and learning” institution on a compulsory basis; in this way, some held, individuals were being subjected to the contradiction of being “forced to be free”; for them, schools were inimical to the real enterprise of “education” and were analogous to “prison houses” whose shades, descending upon growing young people, would actually produce the contrary of the outcomes at which societies aimed in setting them up in the first place.

One similarity between such groups of thinkers was often to be found in the view that there came a time when such processes were complete: when people’s natures had come to full fruition, when the education of people’s minds and spirits had brought them to full and final maturity. For such thinkers, any formal attempt at education after such a “terminus ad quem” had been reached was redundant and otiose: people had reached a point when all further educational work was unnecessary, superfluous, and fruitless. There might, of course, be some occasional need for supplementary training in the acquisition of further skills or additional instruction in the knowledge required for application in the workplace. But these needs were very much “ad hoc” and could readily be provided and acquired on a piece-meal “need to know” basis.

In recent times, however, such views have changed. A harbinger of the rapid changes such thinking was about to undergo was the appearance in 1972 of the Report to UNESCO of the Committee chaired by M. Edgar Fauré entitled *Learning To Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, the main point of which was, in the words of Wain’s summary (Wain 1993), as follows:-

“Lifelong education” stands for a program to reconceptualise education totally according to the principle that education is a lifelong process. ... for a complete overhaul of our way of thinking about education, for a new philosophy of education and ... for a *program of action*... as the “master concept” for all educational planning, policy-making, and practice ... The[ir] ambition was that the word education would eventually become synonymous with lifelong education in people’s minds ... (today’s) world ... requires a lifelong education which is a “constant reorganising or reconstructing of experience”.’

The Fauré Report was instrumental in creating a climate that was consonant with the times. Education and learning were becoming increasingly important throughout the lifespan as people were facing the increasing plethora of changes bearing in upon them as the twentieth century unfolded: change in the world of industry and commerce;

increasingly global patterns of economic development; the almost exponential increase in the growth and extension of knowledge; the revolutionary transformations of communication and interaction brought about by the revolution of information technology; the needs of indigenous peoples to experience culturally relevant lifelong learning. The Fauré report provided the site for a passionate argument that the only way that people could hope to face and deal with such changes was a state in which they would be involved in the activities of an “education permanente”.

These arguments began to be articulated with all the greater force as those changes and developments began to exert such force on countries and communities that all experienced a kind of all encompassing transformation – in economy, in culture and in identity. It is not too much to say that the changes in the world effected by these transformations over the last thirty years have been no less radical and fundamental as the changes that came about as the result of the invention of the wheel and of the printing press. We are now living in a new age in which the demands are so complex, so multifarious and so rapidly changing that the only way in which we shall be able to survive them is by committing to a process of individual, communal and global learning throughout the lifespan of all of us.

A number of international bodies and agencies have taken cognisance of these transformations and the demands they impose upon societies and communities of the twenty first century and have developed and articulated policies that will, it is hoped, bid fair to enable citizens of the world in the twenty first century to face these challenges. It is now a declared policy of international bodies, such as OECD, UNESCO and APEC, and national governments such as those of Australia, China, Finland, Japan, Korea, Norway, Sweden, Taiwan and the United Kingdom that education has to be a lifelong undertaking and an investment in the future that is not restricted merely to the domain of economic advancement.

As we approach the turn of the century, policy-makers and educationalists across the international arena are grappling with the need to move from systems that emphasise a “front end” approach to education and training to the radically more unworked construct of lifelong learning. At this point in our history, then, as editors we have thought it useful in this volume to examine, from the discourse already available, some examples of the different forms, focuses and nexuses of thinking on this topic and offer some suggestions as to a way forward.

## THE CONCEPT

It will become clear in this volume that one approach to conceptualising lifelong learning holds that it is concerned primarily with the promotion of skills and competences necessary for the development of general capabilities and specific performance in roles, activities and tasks that relate primarily, or in some cases entirely, to economic development and performance. Skills and competencies developed through programs of lifelong learning, using this approach, will have a bearing on questions of how workers perform their job responsibilities, as well as how they can adapt general and particular knowledge and competences to new functions. Taking this view, a more

highly educated and skilled workforce will contribute to a more advanced and competitive economy.

This economic justification for lifelong learning is highly dependent upon two prior assumptions: one, that “lifelong education” is *instrumental for* and *anterior to* some more ultimate goal; and secondly, that the purpose of lifelong learning is highly job-related and economic-policy-dependent. This approach, as we have seen from discussions at OECD (1996), UNESCO (1996), the European Parliament (1995) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (1995), has now been rejected as presenting too narrow and limited an understanding of the nature, aims and purpose of “lifelong education”.

A second perspective rests upon different assumptions. Instead of “lifelong learning” being seen as *instrumental* to the achievement of an extrinsic goal, “education” is seen equally as an intrinsically valuable activity, something that is good in and for itself. Incorporated in this perspective is the belief that those engaging in lifelong education do so, not so much to arrive at a new place but “to travel with a different view” (Peters, 1965) and in that way to travel with a qualitatively better, richer and more elevated perspective from which to view the world. There is wide acceptance of the view that people engaging in educational activities generally are enriched by having their view of the world and their capacity for rational choice continually expanded and transformed by having access to the increased ranges and varieties of experiences and cognitive achievements, that the lifelong learning experience offers. Importantly, the benefits accrue at the individual and societal levels. This second view has been adopted by a variety of community groups.

In addition to opportunities for lifelong learning through traditional institutions and agencies in the community, there is a growing trend for lifelong learning activities to be offered by and through a host of non-traditional community initiatives. For indigenous peoples and many members of developing economies, these non-traditional community initiatives may in fact represent a return to tradition, rather than the creation of a new paradigm. In these cases, the transformation may reflect a return to lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning conceived of and offered through these channels, new or traditional, often offers people the opportunity to bring up to date their knowledge and enjoyment of activities which they had either long since laid aside or always wanted to do but were previously unable to pursue; to try their hands at activities and pursuits that they had previously imagined were outside their available time or competence; or extend their intellectual horizons by seeking to understand and engage with some of the more significant cognitive advances of recent times.

This is not to suggest that lifelong learning is an activity restricted or even primarily directed towards those who have passed the age when education in formal or institutional settings may be largely complete. In fact cognitive and skill development begins early and can continue throughout one's life. This is an indispensable part of one's growth and development as a human being, as well as a foundation for social and economic participation more broadly in society. Individual and community welfare is protected and promoted when communities arrange for lifelong learning to be available to the widest range of constituencies, through as many channels as possible and in as many forms as are viable. Smethurst (1995) puts this well:

Is education a public or a private good? The answer is, neither: it is both. There is some education which is overwhelmingly a public good in that its benefits accrue very widely, to society at large as well as to the individual. Equally there is some education which, while benefiting society, confers overwhelming benefits on the individual learner. But much of education sits annoyingly between these two extremes, leading us, correctly, to want to influence the amount and type of it supplied and demanded, because society has an interest in the outcome, but also to note that it confers benefits on the individual above those societal benefits.

The argument that education is a public good supports the third version of lifelong learning, a notion held these days by an increasing number of institutions and organisations. It is widely agreed that the availability of educational opportunities over the whole of people's lifespans is a pre-requisite for informed and effective participation in society by all citizens (see Grace, 1994; McLaughlin, 1994; Smethurst, 1995). Similarly, such services as health, housing, welfare, and the legal system, along with education, constitute the infra-structure which people need in order to construct and realise a satisfying and fulfilling life in a society that is mutually supportive, inclusive and just.

For our part as educators, in conceptualising this volume, we have operated from the belief that there is a complex relationship between three major elements or outcomes of lifelong learning: education for a more highly skilled work force; personal development leading to a more rewarding life; and the creation of a stronger and more inclusive society. It is the interplay between these elements that differentiates and animates lifelong learning and this is in part why lifelong learning is a complex and multi-faceted process. The process itself begins in pre-school, continues through compulsory and post-compulsory periods of formal education and training, and is then carried on through the rest of the lifespan. It is actualised through provision of learning experiences and activities in the home, the work place, in universities and colleges, and in other educational, social and cultural agencies, institutions and settings – both formal and informal – within the community. This is the perspective that informs this publication.

## THE POLICY CHALLENGE

The central elements in the triadic nature of lifelong learning, we believe, are inter-related and are fundamental pre-requisites for a wide range of benefits that governments and peoples widely across the international arena regard as important goals related to economic, personal and social policies. The adoption of policies for lifelong learning, we hope to show in this volume, will help achieve a variety of policy goals that include building a strong, adaptable and competitive economy, providing a fertile range of opportunities for personal growth and development, and developing a richer social fabric where principles and ideals of social inclusiveness, justice and equity are practised and promoted.

We need to point out, however, that, for the effective development of educational policies and lifelong learning practices widely across, in and through national and

<http://www.springer.com/978-0-7923-6815-1>

International Handbook of Lifelong Learning

Aspin, D.N.; Chapman, J.D.; Hatton, M.; Sawano, Y.  
(Eds.)

2001, LVIII, 820 p. In 2 volumes, not available  
separately., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-7923-6815-1