

Lifelong Learning (History)

The origins of the concept of Lifelong Learning can be traced back to authors such as Basil Yeaxlee and Eduard Lindeman in England in the 1920's. They understood education as an ongoing process, affecting mainly adults, and certainly not restricted to formal school. They also introduced the concepts of "life-as-education", and the valuing of individual's experiences as much as their formal education (Faris:2004). These two authors helped to define the limits and the basic principles of adult education, and therefore Lifelong Learning.

From the 1930's and up until the 1970's, Lifelong Learning was closely linked to adult/popular education and the worker's education movement (Kearns et al: 1999). The focus at the this time was on training workers, linking them to formal education and increasing the influence of the trade union movement by building their activist base.

The post-World War II period saw the decolonisation of African and Asian nations and the rise of national - liberation movements in other Third World countries. Newly elected governments were required to implement literacy campaigns and massive expansion of education to build nationhood and incorporate new groups into the political process (Kearns at al:1999). In response to the needs of these emerging nations, UNESCO took the lead in developing the concept of Lifelong Learning as a cultural policy which promoted social change. In 1972, UNESCO released the Faure report titled "Learning To Be". In this report, UNESCO outlines their vision of what they titled "education permanente", or permanent (i.e. lifelong) education, as encompassing the whole life span, being inclusive of different social sectors, occurring across different formal and informal settings (home, communities, workplaces), and addressing a broad range of social, cultural, and economic purposes (cited in Kearns: 2005).

The 1970's saw a number of important reports outlining policy directions regarding education in this broad sense. The OECD contributed to the debate with their own reports: "Recurrent Education: a Strategy for Lifelong Learning" (1973) and, later, the "Lifelong Learning for All" report (1996) (Faris: 2004). The first (1973) report was quite similar in spirit to UNESCO's contribution. However, by the time their second (1996), the view of the OECD (and, to some extent, the views of UNESCO) had shifted.

The OECD's "Lifelong Learning for All (or Delors) report represented a major shift in the focus of lifelong learning. This report claims that lifelong learning is based on four pillars: learning to live together, learning to be, learning to know, and learning to do (cited in Robinson: 2000 and Kearns: 1999). The concepts of "learning to live together" and "learning to be" attempt to address social goals such as civic participation, social cohesion and democratic processes. On the other hand, the concepts of "Learning to know" and learning to do" address economic

imperatives such as building a highly skilled and competitive workforce (Noonan: 2005). These last two “pillars” were given the most emphasis in the OECD report.

The OECD’s 1996 report highlighted the socio-economic purpose of Lifelong Learning, and recommended increasing early childhood education, explicitly linking learning and work, assessing and recognising skills and competencies, developing new Lifelong Learning opportunities, and rethinking the roles and responsibilities of unions, employer organisations, civil society and governments (Kearnes, McDonald, Candy, Knights and Papadopoulos: 1999).

The European Union joined the debate in the 1990s, building on the OECD’s report and attempted to combine economic (international competitiveness) and social (social cohesion) outcomes as the main goals of their lifelong learning policy, with a slightly stronger emphasis on the economic advantages.

These milestone documents produced by UNESCO, OECD and the European Union have highlighted the recognition of formal and informal learning, the importance of self-motivated learning, and the universal participation in Lifelong Learning (Watson: 2003). Over the years, the economic prosperity and social stability have become more prominent than inclusion or some of the other original social ideas, and has come to embrace the idea of self-funded learning as key element of Lifelong Learning policy.

In the next e-flash issue we will be covering the current drivers of Lifelong Learning. If you have any comment, you can send them to Miguel to miguelf@wscf.org.au