



ENVISIONING LIFE LONG LEARNING AS AN INEVITABLE COMPETENCE FOR DEVELOPING POTENTIALITIES

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ABSTRACT

Lifelong learning is now recognized by educators, governing bodies, accreditation organizations, certification boards, employers, third-party payers, and the general public as one of the most important competencies that people must possess. Promoting lifelong learning as continuous, collaborative, self-directed, active, broad in domain, everlasting, positive and fulfilling, and applicable to one's profession as well as all aspects of one's life has emerged as a major global educational challenge. Meeting this challenge will require changes in the way teachers teach and learners learn, as teachers take on a more facilitative role and learners take more responsibility for setting goals, identifying resources for learning, and reflecting on and evaluating their learning. (Collins 2009:620) 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 (i.e. post-compulsory education).** (Delors 1996) Lifelong learning is a form of self-initiated education that is focused on personal development. While there is no standardized definition of lifelong learning, it has generally been taken to refer to the learning that occurs outside of a formal educational institute, such as a school, university or corporate training. This article traverses through the different aspects of lifelong learning, ways to engage in lifelong learning and Teachers' role in setting students to become lifelong learners.

Key-words: Lifelong learning, teacher, learner, personal development, professional development

INTRODUCTION

Most people associate learning with formal education at school, college, university etc. We are all told, from an early age, that we should '**get a good education**'. Generally speaking it is true that a formal education and the resulting qualifications are important. Education may maximise our potential to find better, more satisfying jobs, earn more and, perhaps, become more successful in our chosen career. However, 'schooling' is only one type of learning. There are many other opportunities to further your knowledge and develop the skills you need throughout life.

Knowledge can be acquired and skill-sets developed anywhere – learning is unavoidable and happens all the time. However, lifelong learning is about creating and maintaining a positive attitude to learning both for personal and professional development. Lifelong learners are motivated to learn and develop because they want to: it is a deliberate and voluntary act. Lifelong learning can enhance our understanding of the world around us, provide us with more and better opportunities and improve our quality of life.

There are two main reasons for learning throughout life: for personal development and for professional development. These reasons may not necessarily be distinct as personal development can improve your employment opportunities and professional development can enable personal growth.

Learning for Personal Development

There does not need to be a specific reason for learning since learning for the sake of learning can in itself be a rewarding experience.

There is a common view that continuous learning and having an active mind throughout life may delay or halt the progress of some forms of dementia, although there is actually very little scientific evidence to support these claims. However, keeping the brain active does have advantages since learning can prevent you from becoming bored and thus enable a more fulfilling life at any age.

There are, of course, **many reasons why people learn for personal development.**

You may want to increase your knowledge or skills around a particular hobby or pastime that you enjoy.

1. Perhaps you want to develop some entirely new skill that will in some way enhance your life – take a pottery or car mechanic course for example.
2. Perhaps you want to research a medical condition or your ancestry.
3. Perhaps you're planning a trip and want to learn more about the history and culture of your destination.
4. Maybe you will decide to take a degree course later in life simply because you enjoy your chosen subject and the challenges of academic study.

Learning for Professional Development

Being well-educated is not necessarily the key to employment. Although qualifications may get you an interview, actually getting the job can take a lot more. Employers are looking for well-balanced people with transferable skills. This includes the ability to be able to demonstrate that you are keen to learn and develop.

If you do find yourself unemployed then use the time wisely. Learning something new can pay-off with new opportunities which might not otherwise have arisen.

While you are employed, take advantage of training, coaching or mentoring opportunities and work on your continuous professional development as you will likely become better at what you do and more indispensable to your current or future employer.

Putting the time in for extra learning brings its own rewards.

It means we can get more personal satisfaction from our lives and jobs as we understand more about who we are and what we do. This can lead to better results and a more rewarding working day in turn. If you choose to learn about another complementary sector, this enables opportunities to specialize and potentially earn more or move to a connected industry. In turn this gives us wider experience on which to build our knowledge and more transferable skills in readiness for your next move.

From a financial point of view, a more highly skilled and knowledgeable worker is an asset to organisation and can lead to faster promotion with associated salary increases.

Someone who can offer more expertise will be of more value not just to employers but also to customers. Expertise is also, often, a key quality of an effective leader.

If you are frustrated with your job, continuing to hone your skills will make it easier to find new ways out of a potentially stressful work situation. Keeping an open mind to learning and giving yourself room for flexibility is key to job satisfaction. Furthermore, potentially staying ahead of competitors for jobs by being more experienced or knowledgeable can give you an edge.

Learning for its own sake brings its own advantages. For example, learning in whatever context:

- Boosts our confidence and self-esteem
- Makes us less risk averse and more adaptable to change when it happens
- Helps us achieve a more satisfying personal life
- Challenges our ideas and beliefs
- Can be fun

Lifelong Learning- Broader Perspective

The Australian National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) in a review of higher education defines a **lifelong learner as a person who takes responsibility for his/her own learning and who is prepared to invest “time, money and effort” in education or training on a continuous basis.** And it continues:

The individuals most likely to participate in learning, either formally or informally throughout their lives, (have) acquired:

- the necessary skills and attitudes for learning, especially literacy and numeracy skills;
- the confidence to learn, including a sense of engagement with the education and training system; and • willingness and motivation to learn. (1996: 3).

Learning is about reaching your full potential and can help you achieve self-actualization, the highest need identified by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. However, traditional education generally has a beginning and an end which culminates in taking tests.

Lifelong learning preserves an individual’s desire to obtain new knowledge outside of the formal education system. Developing an attitude where you constantly learn is the only way to succeed in the dynamic environment which we live in today.

There is so much technology at your fingertips which you can take advantage of to help you learn throughout your life. This means you can follow your passion for languages, improve your craft skills, and even develop a mobile app using resources you can find online.

Ten Simple Ways to Engage In Lifelong Learning

There are countless ways you can follow your goal of becoming a lifelong learner. They are given as under:

1. Read widely and often

Buy newspapers, search for things online you want to know more about, ask your friends for books they found helpful; above all else, be curious. If you want to find research on a topic, use Google Scholar to find academic research. Delve into a topic and don’t stop until you have exhausted it!

2. Keep smart company

Reach out to contacts that you admire. Get talking to some influencers on Twitter and organize to meet up to explore some ideas and learning topics. Make sure to keep in touch with people you have come into contact with who have inspired you to learn on your journey.

3. Teach others

You don't need to join the teaching profession to help people learn. Teaching others what you know will also help ensure that you really understand something; it's a real test of your knowledge.

4. Keep a list of things you want to explore

This is a good way to help you get started. Before you jump right into an area, spend some time researching topics and keeping notes. Once you have developed a list then you can decide what the best option to follow for you is.

5. Start your own project

If you're a teacher, encourage students to plan out their own projects starting with goals and objectives. This will help them to cultivate an idea of how they would be able to follow this process in the future which could be applied to various scenarios.

6. Use a personal learning environment

Understanding how to learn is an invaluable skill. Using personal learning environments can help you adopt proven learning techniques that students can use throughout their journey to discovering new knowledge.

7. Experiment with new ways to learn

Trying a variety of ways to learn will help you to find the way that sticks. Drawing diagrams, watching documentaries, creating mind maps, and using music to study are some alternative ways students can approach learning.

8. Join a study group

Find virtual study groups online where you can collaborate and learn from people with varying experiences. Take insight on board from a variety of sources and apply it to your own knowledge search.

9. Find a job that encourages learning and collaboration

Most professional roles include some degree of learning whether it's on-the-job training, workshops, or other educational encouragement. Pursuing a career in an evolving area will ensure that you are constantly learning and developing your skills.

10. Make it a priority!

Don't just keep saying 'one day.' Make today that day. Whether you're a teacher, student, professional, or other – make learning a priority in your life. If you wait for it to find you, you will limit the amount of information you know plus your ability to attain this knowledge over the long-term. It may even help to understand the characteristics of lifelong learning, including curiosity, skepticism, creativity, initiative, perseverance, and 'perfectionism,' among other habits.

Teachers' role in setting students to become lifelong learners

Develop innovation skills

New technology and business models have brought with them a need for [innovative thinkers](#) and employees with a growth mindset. Encouraging the development of innovation skills in the classroom should be on every

teacher's agenda as a way to help equip students with the 21st century skills they'll need to succeed in the future.

One way of incorporating these skills into the classroom is by implementing project-based learning.

More and more students are concerning themselves with how to make a positive impact on society. Channel this energy and get your students to work on a project that deals with a current societal problem. This way, you'll be encouraging students to think innovatively about how they can solve this issue. Furthermore, they'll learn how to collaborate effectively with peers, gather and present ideas and pick up some basic design skills.

Here's one idea for creating a class based on a project:

- As a whole class, ask your students to think of some important societal problems in their local area. Write their ideas on the board as they call them out. Use your judgement to filter out sensitive or inappropriate ideas.
- Put students in groups of three or four and ask them to them choose an issue on the board.
- In their groups, task them to go online and research the issue they have chosen, thinking about who it affects, why it affects them, how bad the problem is, etc.
- Next they should brainstorm as many solutions as they can in 15 minutes.
- Then they should discuss their ideas and decide which one or which combination of ideas is the best.

In the next class, they should then create a poster, presentation, web page or article outlining how they will solve their issue. You could then ask each group to present their solution to the class in a follow-up lesson.

Encourage critical thinking

[Encouraging students to think critically](#) can influence them to become lifelong learners. Exposing students to an array of ideas and information, and asking them to consider their opinion, will inspire their interest and curiosity and give their inner critic food for thought for a lifetime.

One idea – topical in the media right now – is the concept of fake news. Increasingly people are turning to social media as a source of news. Yet, the amount of fake news and propaganda being posted on social media networks is also increasing. It is important that you encourage your students to think critically about what they find on the internet.

Bring in some newspaper articles, either showing news stories or opinion writer columns. Ask your students to question the source of the news, discuss whether any accompanying images are real or have been edited and invite them to research the topic.

Ask if your students think the news is real, fake or edited in some way to make the reader feel something and then encourage them to search for alternative points of view. This exercise can work with younger learners too – you could simply ask them to decide whether a story is opinion-based or fact-based.

Encourage independent learning

The traditional classroom is being turned upside down, with many teachers now placing more emphasis on students' independent learning. Building your students' autonomy will provide them with the tools and confidence needed for lifelong learning.

An effective way of doing this is by reducing 'teacher talk'. It is common for teachers to stand at the front of the class and give feedback and reflection on the day's learning. Yet this can sometimes encourage students to sit back and not engage with the class.

Try reducing the amount of time you spend doing this. Instead, encourage your students to reflective on their own learning. They can do this by keeping a 'learner's diary', which they fill in at home and you review regularly. Not only will this give you an insight into their learning habits, and perceived strengths and

weaknesses, but it will also help them to reflect on their day, their learning process, and what they think they need to do to make progress.

Older students can write freely, but you could encourage younger students to answer a series of regular questions. For example:

What was the topic of today's lesson?

What did I find challenging about it?

What did I find easy?

What was the most interesting thing I learned?

Finally, when teaching online, a great way to engage students independently is by preparing quizzes. Quizzing students at home helps increase learner engagement and influences your students to think independently.

Set SMART goals

To have value, learning must be a meaningful process with clear objectives. Setting objectives, or goals, in the classroom is a great way to motivate and engage your students in the learning process.

SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. They help both you and your student keep learning on track. The following five questions can help you make sure the goals you agree are SMART:

Specific: what do I need to do?

Measurable: how will I know I have been successful?

Achievable: can I do it on my own or with a little help?

Relevant: will it help me be better at (subject)?

Time-bound: when do I need to complete it?

Asking your students to set their own learning goals will help to motivate them and focus on their learning.

One way of getting students to follow these goals is by using a variety of visual tools. Goals could be presented to the class as a chart or graph showing student progress and clear targets. And individual students could track their goals with a worksheet or notebook.

By visualising their targets, students will be more likely to engage with them and continue this practice long after finishing education.

Use technology

Lifelong learning is about gaining and developing abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications from school to retirement. From the moment your students enter the workforce, they will constantly be learning to keep up to date with the latest technological developments.

One way to bring technology into the classroom is through the use of apps. There are plenty of apps directed at student learning. For example, these include iMovie for students to get creative making their own videos, Quizlet for creating flashcards and games, Duolingo for language learning and Edmodo for teachers to offer student feedback.

Above all, doing this will help provide students with a range of technological skills, vital for developing their 21st century skill set.

Master your learning

In his book, **Master it Faster**, **Colin Rose** uses the mnemonic **MASTER** to describe the six stages he believes are key to becoming an effective learner. These stages can be applied to any type of learning, either formal or informal.

Motivation

Acquire

Search

Trigger

Examine

Reflect

Let us see one by one

Motivation

Lifelong learning requires self-motivation. You need to feel positive about learning and about your ability to learn. If you struggle to see the point of learning what you are learning, you are unlikely to do well.

Acquire

Effective learning requires that you acquire information through reading, listening, observing, practising, experimenting and experience. Information is all around you: the trick is to acquire relevant and meaningful information and develop this into knowledge and skills.

Search

Learning is successful when we can search for a personal meaning in the information we're acquiring. We find it hard to remember facts without understanding them or being able to put them into context.

Learning is about applying what you acquire and asking yourself questions such as: 'How does this idea help in my life?' or 'What has this experience taught me about myself?'

Trigger

Human beings are notoriously bad at retaining information. You cannot and will not remember all that you read, hear and experience. You can help to trigger recollection in a variety of ways. For example, you can take notes, practice, discuss and experiment with new ideas and skills to help you learn and develop.

Examine

You should regularly examine your knowledge to help reinforce in your mind what you have learned. You should always try to keep an open-mind, question your understanding and be open to new information.

Talking to others and seeing their point of view can be a powerful way of examining your own perception and understanding of a subject.

Reflect

Finally, you should reflect on your learning. Think about how and why you learned, including how you felt about a particular topic or situation, before and after you developed your knowledge.

Learn from your mistakes as well as from your successes and always try to remain positive.

Conclusion

The concept of lifelong learning has wide connotations. It does not necessarily have to restrict itself to informal learning, however. It is best described as being voluntary with the purpose of achieving personal fulfillment. Personal fulfillment and development refer to natural interests, curiosity, and motivations that lead us to learn new things. We learn for ourselves, not for someone else. Lifelong learning is about you, not other people and what they want. Reflect on what you're passionate about and what you envision for your own future.

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