

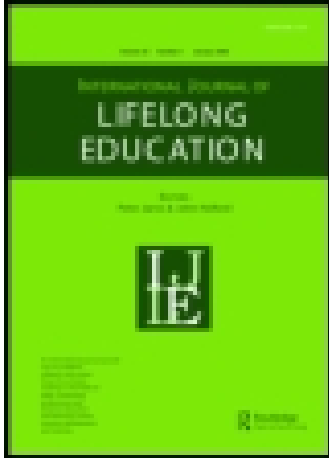
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Lifelong learning, higher education and active citizenship: from rhetoric to action

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This introductory paper provides the background to the Cape Town Statement on Characteristic Elements of a Lifelong Learning Higher Education Institution that appears in this Journal. It describes the journey of a network of adult educators and academics from the North, South, East and West through contested terrain from Hamburg, to Paris, Mumbai and Cape Town in 2000. At a conference held in Cape Town in October 2000, the delegates concluded that there were six essential characteristics of a higher education lifelong learning institution. This paper reviews the essential elements of these characteristics and comments on the journey of their development.

Introduction

Higher Education (HE) policy documents worldwide are increasingly using lifelong learning as a philosophical and conceptual framework for defining the role of education in global and national narratives of transformation. An understanding of what lifelong learning means, varies across the globe.

Anthony Giddens (2000) has suggested that ‘democracy’ was the most important word of the twentieth century. And yet democracy remains a highly contested concept, used by both radicals and neo-liberals. If lifelong learning is to be a term to be reckoned with in the twenty-first century, then we need to see it as similarly contested. Broadly speaking, lifelong learning is rooted in two traditions – one concerned with the development of human capital in this pursuit of profit; the other concerned with the promotion of social justice.

This means that lifelong learning is a concept that must continually be given contextual meaning. It is not automatically a ‘good thing’. While it is mainly used in relation to increasing the efficiency of the marketplace, we see value in challenging this hegemony and support the notion that its aim is to enhance active democratic citizenship which:

connects individuals and groups to the structures of social, political and economic activity in both local and global contexts. (It) highlights women

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and men as agents of their own history in all aspects of their lives. (UNESCO Institute 1998: 1)

Lifelong learning within this context assumes the need for major pedagogical, organizational and social changes to address equity, redress and economic concerns. Furthermore, in an institution such as a Higher Education Institution (HEI), all members of that institution are learners, including the rector, the professors, administrators and students.

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Lifelong learning higher education institutions (HEIs)

A conference of 100 higher education-based scholars and other specialists in the area of adult and lifelong learning from Africa, Asia, Australia, North and South America, and Europe, gathered at the University of Western Cape, South Africa, in October 2000. Their goal was to take forward the work started at the UNESCO International Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg, Germany, 1997, followed by a meeting at the University of Mumbai, India in 1998, and the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris in 1998. One of the Cape Town conference's goals was to develop a tool that could be used to help move institutions individually and collectively to imbed lifelong learning in practice.

The UNESCO Conference on Adult Education resolved 'to promote the transformation of post-secondary institutions into lifelong learning institutions', and *The Mumbai Statement on Lifelong learning, Active Citizenship and the Reform of Higher Education*, which was the result of the first step to activate the resolution, reflects an understanding of lifelong learning as having major organizational, pedagogical and political implications. This Statement was used successfully to lobby the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education held in Paris in 1998.

In the Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century there are several references to lifelong learning and at the last session of the Paris Conference, it was stated that 'the future of higher education lies in lifelong learning'. With this seeming international consensus, the question then is, what is a lifelong learning higher education institution that is concerned with 'active citizenship'?

Active citizenship

After much discussion at the Mumbai meeting on the social purposes of higher education in a lifelong learning framework, there was agreement that:

We see the purpose of lifelong learning as democratic citizenship, recognising that democratic citizenship depends on such factors as effective economic

development, attention to the demands of the least powerful in our societies, and on the impact of industrial processes on the caring capacity of our common home, the planet. The notion of citizenship is important in terms of connecting individuals and groups to the structures of social, political and economic activity in both local and global contexts. Democratic citizenship highlights the importance of women and men as agents of their own history in all aspects of their lives. (UNESCO Institute 1998: 1)

There was debate on the use of the qualifying terms of ‘active’ and ‘democratic’ when describing citizenship as these have different meanings in various regions of the world. The emphasis fell on the need to strengthen the roles of individuals and societies that develop, as Bron (2001: 9) points out, ‘virtues such as trust, solidarity, habits of cooperation and public spiritedness’. There was concern for active citizens to be working in the interests of the ‘public good’.

Citizenship is a socially constructed notion that is undergoing radical redefinition under pressure from globalizing economies on the one hand and social movements of, for example, ecologists and feminists on the other. (Korsgaard 1997: 116–9) Citizenship, as Wallis (2001), Korsgaard (2001) and Muller (2001) illustrate, is a ‘site of struggle’ where global and local interests try to influence its meaning within specific contexts. Therefore, education for citizenship will also be an area of contestation. According to Paolo Freire:

Citizenship is the exercise of being oneself in the context of the state. It is a social construction; it doesn’t appear by chance. Either the masses impose themselves through struggle or citizenship doesn’t exist. The dominated classes need to democratise citizenship. A literacy program must include political aims to build citizenship, the capacity to understand the world; to establish relations between fact and problems demands the politicisation of persons, the political comprehension of the world, permanent curiosity, the right to participate, mobilise, and organise grassroots groups. It demands going beyond common sense to change reality, to overcome domination and to invent solidarity. (quoted in Stromquist 1997: 217)

Higher education institutions, along with other institutions in the society, are intimately involved in the transformation of the society and have to make hard political and economic choices. They too are characterized by similar struggles as exist in the broader society as social forces vie for pre-eminence. As educators within higher education we do not work in isolated national contexts. (Walters 1999)

At the Cape Town conference we developed the Cape Town Statement on Characteristics Elements of a Lifelong Learning HEI for use by activists and academics as a way of capturing what lifelong learning for active democratic citizenship means in practice. We turn now to a discussion of these.

Characteristics of a lifelong learning HEI

The Conference concluded that the following six key categories are necessary to create and support a lifelong learning HEI. While these categories were seen as useful, participants agreed that the next stage in honing a useful organizational

tool would be to develop indicators within particular contexts in order to interpret what is meant more precisely in each category.

- Overarching Frameworks.
- Strategic partnerships and linkages.
- Research.
- Teaching and learning process.
- Administration policies and mechanisms.
- Student support systems.

These broad categories indicate a systemic awareness of the interconnections between the macro environment, the meso organizational structural context and the micro cognitive and affective learning interaction. A lifelong learning framework forces our gaze both inwards towards individual and organizational learning and outwards towards relationships in the broader society. (Volbrecht and Walters 2000) The quality of organizational learning internally will have major implications for the institution's ability to function in new ways externally. Not only does there need to be a recognition of the multiple layers at which the characteristics come into play, but the ability of organizations to function internally as learning organizations has major implications for their competence to function as flexible, collaborative networks, externally. The following section explores in more detail these six characteristic elements.

Overarching frameworks

'Overarching frameworks' was included as an essential component only after we had travelled some distance. We came to the realization that individual programmes, grounded in a lifelong learning framework, cannot exist in an 'alien' environment and need the support of an enabling system. For lifelong learning to succeed – measured in terms of establishing a learning nation of active citizens – a unified system needs to be in place. Enabling structures and supporting mechanisms are essential. HEI programmes geared to developing lifelong learners need to be flexible in terms of their entry requirements, financing, delivery mechanisms and their curricula. To establish this requires cooperation both across and within the institution, also with the national or regional higher education authorities.

Two specific characteristics address the concern for redress and equity:

A national framework facilitates vertical and lateral mobility of learners

There is a culture which supports learning for all, across differences regarding social class, caste, gender, 'race', religion, and at all stages in life (Cape Town Statement: 6).

There are examples of individual programmes initiated at a number of HEIs within South Africa where there has been an uphill battle because of a lack of internal coherence in the HEI. For example at the University of the Free State an alternative admission policy was not in place for 'mature' Business, Management

and Leadership programme students. At University of Western Cape (UWC) the external environment inhibits possibilities. The physical location has made transport for after hours learning a major issue which requires the support of the public transport system. Another example, if bursary schemes discriminate against older people, as many do, lifelong learning is inhibited.

Strategic Partnerships and Linkages

HEIs are increasingly seen as part of a matrix of interlinked agencies that are concerned with social and economic development within their local, regional or national contexts. Concepts of the 'learning city' or the 'learning region' are beginning to challenge the special place of HEIs as was manifest in a local seminar held to coincide with the international conference in Cape Town.¹ The need for networking both within the institutions and across institutions of civil society, the economy and government is being emphasized as the recognition of strong local integration is seen as complementing abilities to work effectively at global levels.

Again the change has implications both for how higher educators view their own knowledge and learning and for how they interact with students, the state, the economy and civil society.

At the conference the main concern of HEI educators was to find ways to balance the partnerships across the sectors and to prevent the dictation of market forces and the narrow concerns of the global economy. One of the delegates from Ireland, Pauline Murphy, crystallized the thinking of the delegates when she said,

The balancing of the interests of HEIs, employers and learners is an ongoing task, necessitating continuing dialogue, review, addressing anticipated future needs and changes as well as current contexts. The vocabulary of economic and social inclusion is increasingly used by employers in different countries – and not only by those like Anita Roddick. Enlightened self-interest is motivating many more. Nevertheless, educators must have strong political, advocacy and negotiating skills in these relationships. Social justice should be an underpinning value in all activities of the Lifelong Learning Institution. Students' involvement is part of their political education; linking with wider social movement networks via Internet etc. stimulates and sustains an awareness of social justice. Where possible and appropriate, concrete involvement – integrated into work or community development placements – in tackling local social and economic problems can be a rewarding learning experience for students. It is essential for a healthy global society in the twenty-first century.

To address these concerns the following elements were included:

A seminar was held in Cape Town linked to the international conference on 'The role of HEIs in the development of the "Learning Cape".' It brought together a range of prominent people from HEIs, civil society, business, government, labour. The imperative for HEIs to be far more integrated into the social and economic projects of the region was emphasized.

Under international partnerships and linkages:

...partnerships and alliances based on common interest, mutual respect and desire to attain social justice...

Under partnerships and linkages within institutions, the need for shared and equal responsibility was stressed by encouraging all stakeholders to be involved in all levels:

...decisions on choice of programme, assessment of learning outcomes, curriculum design and methods

...To foster interaction among learners, faculty, communities and the economy in order to encourage commitments to social justice both locally and globally.

Research

Understanding the role of research at a lifelong learning institution represents, in many ways, some of the core shifts required by an institution. Many at the conference believed that while HEIs should and can maintain their roles as generators of research, both the 'blue sky' and applied variety, they also believed that there should be far more collaboration with other sectors of society to ensure 'really useful knowledge'. They recognized that LLL presents new challenges for HEIs and this requires research into, for example, organizational, pedagogical or political dimensions. The following elements were also included to add strength to developing a new understanding of research

Research across disciplines and institutions...

Different paradigms of research are recognized...

...collaborative research with civil society, the economy and learners

Teaching and learning

With the focus on learner-centredness, which is enhanced by greater self-directed and resource based learning, some interesting issues were raised on how one deals with flexibility in the curriculum. The role of information technology was seen as important for development of lifelong learners who require information and computer literacy competencies.

In addition, as Professor Peter Jarvis observed, 'We need to recognise that the "world of work" has a lifelong learning curriculum and we need to respond to it as well as creating critical, thinking learners who are aware of social and economic processes'.

To capture these points and to emphasize the importance of inclusive curricula the statement includes:

build on resources and experiences of learners...

...Different 'ways of knowing' are valued which enable marginalized social groups to be full participants in the creation and dissemination of knowledge

...learning in higher education can take place according to flexible schedules and at different locations

Provision is made for self-paced independent study

Administration policies and mechanisms

How the institutions are effectively and efficiently administered is central to whether a LLL HEI can exist. It is in the institutional detail that lifelong learners are either encouraged or discouraged. Internal administration systems have to be in place to allow flexible access that relate to admissions, financing, or teaching and learning strategies. There needs to be close planning amongst the academics, administrators, and finance people. For example, small details like that of registration, if it occurs at inconvenient times and places, can chase potential learners away. Also

The institution needs to indicate in the mission statement its intention to be an open and lifelong learning institution

Student support services

Careful and appropriate career, study, physical, personal guidance and support for students are critically important. Services are often mainly geared to on campus, full time and younger students. The needs of women and men with children are seldom considered. In the situation where the majority of students are women in their late twenties, as is the situation at UWC, their needs should be the norm.

An interesting dimension that was raised at the conference revolved around whether to have the adult learner as a separate category. On the one hand, it was argued that lifelong learning must fight against the notion that it is only about 'adult education'. It is a much broader more inclusive framework. Delegates agreed that what is good for an adult learner is usually good for all students. On the other hand, it was seen as strategically important to ensure that adult learners' needs were taken care of as this is not the normal situation. All students and staff need to be seen as and encouraged to be active lifelong learners.

Concluding remarks

Lifelong learning is a project of the imagination as well as that of pedagogy, politics and organization. The concept is visionary, but it also challenges pedagogical and organizational understandings of the HEIs functioning in fundamental ways. It encourages us to look both inwards towards the inner workings of the institutions and outwards to build new relationships with civil society, the economy and the state. It questions again the social purposes of the HEIs locally and globally and

the ways in which the institution relates to its different communities. It is unsettling because it does allow the re-imagining of a higher education institution within holistic life-long and life-wide educational perspectives.

Organizing lifelong learning within the broader higher education system is not easy because it is about transformation. While there are strong arguments to justify major shifts to reorganizing resources and understandings to enable lifelong learning to provide a frame for higher education institutions' re-imagining, what are the obstacles, the resistances and the possibilities for this to happen? How does a HEI construct an identity as an effective lifelong learning institution?

One response we have had to the last question was to construct an organizational tool that we hope will be further developed within specific contexts. The idea is to develop indicators from The Cape Town Statement that will help institutions to concretize lifelong learning and so move from rhetorical commitment to action. The Cape Town Statement is currently being translated into Spanish, French, Arabic and Chinese and circulated around the world for further development. At UWC we are developing indicators with assistance from colleagues at University of Missouri, USA.

Debates on lifelong learning do remind us that higher education provision is an ethical project and the framework raises new possibilities on how to give meaning to it.

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