

## Introduction

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The term “lifelong learning” first gained currency following the Second World War. It grew from notions such as “fundamental education”, “continuing education”, “basic education”, “lifelong education” and “recurrent education”. It recognises explicitly that learning is not confined to childhood or the classroom, but takes place throughout life and in a variety of situations; and implicitly that the pursuit of knowledge is as much about social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, as it is about professional development and employability. There is nothing terribly novel about this concept. Many ancient institutions of education, from the academies of ancient Greece and Chinese *shūyuàn*<sup>1</sup> to the medieval religious schools of Europe, the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, promoted scholarship and learning as a way of life. Starting in the 19th century, as the state, rather than private or religious organisations, became the main provider of education in Europe and North America – a trend that was exported throughout the world during the 20th century – education came increasingly to be seen in utilitarian terms, as preparing children and youth for economic activity.

The utilitarian approach still plays a dominant role in education policy, but has been tempered by the re-emergence of the lifelong learning paradigm and a more humanistic approach to education. Two UNESCO documents played a key role in this process: the report of the International Commission on the Development of Education, chaired by Edgar Faure, entitled *Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* (Faure et al. 1972) and the report of the Delors Commission

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<sup>1</sup> Academies of Classical Learning.

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on Education for the Twenty-first Century, entitled *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Delors et al. 1996).

The Faure Commission was convened by UNESCO in the wake of the student protests of 1967 and 1968. Its report advocated lifelong education as the master concept of education policies for both developed and developing countries. It emphasised that education was no longer the privilege of an elite, or a matter for one age group only; instead, it should be both universal and lifelong. This entailed moving to a humanistic, rights-based view of education. It was seen as a turning point and the start of a period of optimism in international education policy. The preamble of *Learning to Be* states:

If learning involves all of one's life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, including its social and economic as well as its educational resources, then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of 'educational systems' until we reach the stage of a learning society (Faure et al. 1972, p. xxxiii).

By the mid-1990s, a clear preference had emerged in favour of the term "lifelong learning" rather than "lifelong education". It was generally felt that the latter term reflected a view of education as a prescriptive and normative process, while "lifelong learning" put the emphasis on learner demand and individual choice. At the same time, in light of the seismic political, economic and social changes that had occurred in the previous decade, UNESCO decided to convene a new commission to advance the humanistic agenda for education into the new century. The result, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, also known simply as the Delors report, emphasised the fundamental role of education in personal and social development, and its capacity

to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war (Delors et al. 1996, p. 13).

It captured widespread attention with its apprehension of four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Among the fundamental legacies of this document is the notion of education throughout life as both a public and individual right and good. "It presented an education that favours the emergence of the individual talents of each, preparing people for life as citizens, family and community members, and also economic agents" (Carneiro and Draxler 2008, p. 152). The Delors report differs quite strongly from most other reports on education and human development: As educationist Collin Power observes, it is not a blueprint for educational reform but a framework for reflection and debate about the choices which must be made in formulating policies. It shows that learning is both a vision and a practice beyond formal schooling (Power 1997, p. 189).

As Jacques Delors remarked (Delors et al. 1996), education is about transmitting what humanity has learned about itself. At the same time, it is about innovation, giving learners the tools to push the boundaries of what is known, to invent new realities or to seek new understanding within the existing realities. Following the

publication of the Delors report, the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), which took place in Hamburg in 1997, welcomed the concept of lifelong learning and tied it to the achievement of “a learning society committed to social justice and general well-being” (UIE 1997). It proposed that the principle of lifelong learning should guide educational policymakers everywhere, not just in highly industrialised or developed societies. The conference underlined the importance of skills, competences and knowledge for social transformation and empowerment, and sustainable human development.

Subsequent initiatives, such as the *Dakar Framework for Action* (UNESCO 2000), the United Nations Literacy Decade and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, have all stressed the importance of lifelong learning and the humanistic approach to education. In December 2009, CONFINTEA VI took place in Belém, Brazil, under the title “Living and Learning for a Viable Future – The Power of Adult Learning”. The outcome document, the *Belém Framework for Action*, stressed once more the role of lifelong learning in addressing global educational challenges and reaffirmed Delors’ four pillars of learning (UIL 2009).

Some of the biggest educational challenges facing modern societies are demographic, environmental, technological and economic.

### Demographic challenges

Today’s world population of 7.1 billion people is expected to grow to 9.3 billion by 2050. Perhaps even more challenging than overall population growth is the demographic shift towards older populations (UN DESA POP 2011). According to recent data from the World Health Organization, the number of people aged 60 and older has doubled since 1980 and is expected to reach 2 billion by 2050. Up to now, this issue has mostly concerned highly developed societies, such as Japan and Germany. By 2050, however, 80 per cent of older people will live in what are now low- or middle-income countries, and nations like China and Brazil are likely to have a greater proportion of older people than the United States of America (WHO 2012a). These developments have implications for the design and implementation of learning modalities, and for the relationship between formal and non-formal education. The significance of expecting initial schooling to prepare young people “for life” changes considerably if average life expectancy is 80–90 years rather than 60–70 years.

Global progress in human health has been impressive in recent decades, but also deeply unequal. While many new forms of medical treatment have been developed, stable provision of basic healthcare is far from a reality for many in the global North and most in the global South. Malaria, though easily preventable and highly treatable, is still the number one fatal disease in Africa. Thirty-four million people currently live with HIV worldwide, the vast majority in low- and middle-income countries (WHO 2012b). Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, are the leading cause of mortality in the global North. The global mortality rates for malaria, HIV/

AIDS and NCDs represent not only a challenge for healthcare provision, but also for education. The provision of broad access to education for all adults, youth and children represents one of the most effective ways to combat disease. There is ample evidence showing that education contributes positively to individual, family and public health. The right combination of investment in health and education – human capital endowments – is therefore fundamental in building a sustainably successful society (World Bank 2012).

The world is on track to meet the first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): to reduce by half the number of people living in extreme poverty between 1990 and 2015. This shows what focused and concerted action can achieve, but gives little cause for complacency, as 1.3 billion still live in extreme poverty, subsisting on an income of USD 1.25 or less per day (World Bank 2013). Education plays a vital role in alleviating poverty. Studies suggest that each additional year of schooling raises the average annual gross domestic product (GDP) by 0.37 per cent (UNDP 2005), that one extra year of schooling potentially increases an individual's earnings by up to 10 per cent, and 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills (UNESCO 2010).

More people live outside their country of origin today than at any other time in history; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that there are currently about 214 million international migrants worldwide (OECD CERI 2013). In addition, while rural development has produced higher rural standards of living in many countries, rural-urban migration remains the dominant trend of migration within countries. The United Nations (UN) forecasts that over 85 per cent of people in OECD countries and nearly 70 per cent worldwide will be living in urban areas by 2050 (OECD CERI 2010). Consequently, there is an urgent need to anticipate the learning needs of citizens in fast-growing urban communities. More than 1,000 cities and urban regions in the world have already become or are in the process of becoming learning cities. Meanwhile, many cities are keen to benefit from participating in international policy dialogue, action research, capacity building and peer learning, and to use learning city approaches to promote lifelong learning for their citizens.

## **Environmental challenges**

Over the past fifty years, human activity has changed the global environment more extensively than ever before. The current model of economic growth has been shown to be unsustainable, causing profound and adverse effects to the global climate system. According to the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), there will be irreversible impacts on water, ecosystems, food, coastal zones and human health if global average temperatures increase by more than 2 °C. The IPCC estimates that humanity can avoid crossing the 2 °C threshold, but only if we start reducing emissions radically now. Such a change in behaviour requires a change of attitude and understanding, which in turn requires education (IPCC 2007). Lifelong learning is the only educational model that can address the complex

relationships between climate change and social and economic change. Because the impacts of climate change will vary from region to region, the approach of education for climate change and sustainable development should also vary to suit local circumstances.

### **Technological development**

Thanks to the spread of mobile phones and the Internet, more people have access to information technology than ever before. In 1998, only 20 per cent of people in developed countries and about one per cent of those in the developing world had a mobile phone subscription (ITU 2010). By 2013, these shares had climbed to 128 and 89 per cent respectively (ITU 2013). There are now 6.8 billion mobile phone subscriptions in the world, almost one per person. Internet access and use have also grown dramatically. In developed countries, the number of internet users increased from 40 per cent of the population in 2003 to 77 per cent in 2013, and from about 3 to 31 per cent in developing countries (ibid.). Technology and information skills are becoming a key element of basic education. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in education can increase access to learning opportunities. Moreover, their use is very likely to provide opportunities to improve and facilitate teaching as well as learning.

### **Economic challenges**

In economic terms, the world of today is characterised by, among others, three factors: rapid flows of goods, services, capital, technology, ideas, information and people; a shifting of the global economic balance; and increasing unemployment, especially among youth. Globalisation has transformed the world, internationalising most economic activity. China, India and Brazil, considered to be among the poorest nations until quite recently, are now among the world's ten largest economies.<sup>2</sup> The deepest economic downturn since the Great Depression has led to severe unemployment, unstable levels of debt and economic stagnation. The International Labor Organization (ILO) predicts a global unemployment rate of 6.2 per cent in 2013, an increase of 0.1 per cent over 2012 (ILO 2013, p. 3). The youth unemployment rate – 12.6 per cent in 2012 – is expected to reach 12.9 per cent by 2017. These trends have a bearing on education systems and approaches; they increase the demand for learning, diversify the types and styles of learning needed to meet this demand, require constant updating of knowledge and skills, and demand greater flexibility of educators. They suggest that learning and education need to be conceived as a lifelong process, and that current public and private expenditure on education is unsustainable.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the world's ten largest economies (by GDP) in 2012 were, in order, the United States of America, China, Japan, Germany, France, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Italy, India and Russia (UNSD 2012).

## Lifelong learning: more relevant than ever

In the context of the global challenges discussed above, the concept and practice of lifelong learning are more important than ever. Lifelong learning, after all, is about embracing and responding to change. It is about fostering social inclusion, empowering women and men, correcting disadvantage, and promoting diverse modes of learning. It fosters not only employability, but also participation in society as a whole. It respects context, history, heritage and culture. Lifelong learning represents an opportunity to build inclusive and sustainable societies that open up learning opportunities to all. Lifelong learning benefits everyone: young and old, poor and rich, women and men; of all nationalities, cultures and languages. Through its potential to build human capacities at all levels and throughout life, it is a vital driver of human and socioeconomic development, and a means of turning current challenges into opportunities.

With the 2015 deadline for achievement of the Education for All (EFA) targets and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) just two years away, there is an increasing need for the international community to discover a new strategic vision. It is imperative to develop an agenda for education that is dynamic and visionary; that is lifelong and life-wide. As the late Jarl Bengtsson writes in this issue, “Most economists today agree that we are moving fast to a knowledge-based economy, in which each country’s knowledge stock becomes its most important asset”.

The desired legacy of value-based education and lifelong learning is the empowerment of individuals to make more informed life choices, to better cope with change, and to take greater ownership of personal and professional development. Against this background, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) decided to publish the present IRE special issue of the *International Review of Education* (IRE) on “Lifelong Learning”. Our intention in doing so is to review where the concept and practice of lifelong learning has come from, where it may lead, and what can be done to pave the way.

The issue begins, appropriately, with a speech delivered by *Jacques Delors* in November 2011, fifteen years after the publication of his ground-breaking report. Published for the first time in English, this speech considers how basic education and continuing education may be combined in a lifelong learning approach. The second article in this issue, by *Georges Haddad* and *Jean-Pierre Aubin*, considers the legacy of the Faure and Delors reports, and how the developments in information technology that have occurred since 1996 have reinforced humanistic arguments and strengthened the imperative to ensure lifelong education for all. I feel especially honoured to include an article by my former colleague at the Danish School of Education, *Jarl Bengtsson*, who sadly passed away at the end of last year. He traces the evolution of the concept of lifelong learning within OECD countries, identifies six common challenges to establishing successful lifelong learning policies, and proposes four possible scenarios for lifelong learning in the medium-term future.

*Roberto Carneiro* served as a member of the Delors Commission in 1993–1996. In his contribution to this special issue, he argues that we must build on the vision of learning that Delors espoused. Without a holistic and human-centred approach to learning, he argues, we risk making an orphan of human consciousness, for which

the search for meaning is the ultimate aim. He identifies the learning city as the most promising future locus of a genuine culture of learning. Several of the contributors to this issue grapple with the question why the gap between policy and practice, between rhetoric and action on lifelong learning remains so wide. *Lynne Chisholm* identifies a systemic barrier to implementation; namely that the indicators and benchmarks currently used in education policymaking are difficult to apply to a transversal and holistic agenda such as lifelong learning. She identifies the ecological footprint – developed in 1992 by Canadian ecologist William Rees – as an example of a composite indicator which has caught the imagination of policymakers and the general public, and which is both simple and complex enough to satisfy researchers and advocates. This issue concludes with an article by *Alan Tuckett*, in which the author considers how lifelong learning may contribute to a post-2015 agenda for sustainable development and climate change.

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