

***Sum ergo disco*: The ubiquity of learning (in non-formal and informal settings)**

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Following the social, cultural and political upheavals of the 1960s, a radical new vision of education began to gain widespread currency, and by the early 1970s was ready “to penetrate the starved world of educational policy-making” (Field 2001, p. 6). Central to that vision was not only the reconceptualisation of education and learning as lifelong endeavours, but also the understanding that both may occur in a wide variety of contexts. UNESCO’s Faure Report, published in 1972, reflected the new zeitgeist in education. It brought learning out from behind the hard, wooden school desks that – metaphorically and literally – held unwilling wards within pedagogical institutions. Unlike traditional pedagogy, whose aim for generations was the socialisation of the young (in effect, the formation, variously, of pious, polite or productive adults), “lifelong education” offered both a gentler and a grander vision; the cultivation of “learning societies”, in which every individual could become an “agent of development and change”, a “promoter of democracy”, a “citizen of the world” and “author of his own fulfilment” (Faure et al. 1972, p. 158).

By the 1990s, lifelong learning had entered the mainstream of educational policymaking. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an organisation inimical to radicalism, adopted a functional definition of lifelong learning as “the continuation of conscious learning throughout the lifespan”, while emphasising that this must embrace learning undertaken “informally at work, by talking to others, by watching television and playing games, and through virtually every other form of human activity” (OECD 1996, p. 89). This rather neatly encapsulates the idea of “life-wide learning”; that we not only continue learning throughout life, but that the locus of learning is ... wherever we happen to be. Thus, at the risk of disturbing Descartes’ ghost, we might summarise

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this new conception of learning with the words *sum ergo disco* – I am, therefore I learn.

The very coinage of the terms *non-formal* and *informal* education suggests strongly that “formal” is the “default option” for education. Just as the term education is generally linked in the public mind to the first two-and-a-half decades of a person’s life, it is likewise bound to the idea of formal institutions; of desks and blackboards (and of course, their more modern equivalents). Yet it is worth reminding ourselves that formal education is a relatively recent innovation. The survival in British English of the term “public school” to denote elite private schools is a reminder that up until the nineteenth century, private schooling meant homeschooling. The late twentieth century saw a revival of this practice, especially in anglophone countries. In Canada and the United States, for example, the estimated number of homeschooled children grew from a few thousand in the 1970s to over 2 million in 2010 (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). Though far less common outside North America, partly due to legal restrictions, the number of families choosing to take their children out of school is nonetheless growing in several other countries. In light of the significance of the decision to homeschool, as well as the notable growth of this trend, it is important to obtain a clear picture of the factors that influence this choice. In their article entitled “Different reasons for one significant choice: Factors influencing homeschooling choice in Israel”, authors *Oz Guterman* and *Ari Neuman* examine the homeschooling landscape in Israel, where the practice is still quite rare, but on the increase.

A large body of research on the topic (especially from the United States) points to a variety of reasons, many of which are of a pedagogical nature, but some of which are family-related. What has not yet been investigated in depth is the relationship between the different reasons for choosing homeschooling and the way in which homeschooling is practised. In a mixed-methods study, the authors interviewed 62 homeschooling families in Israel. Their findings indicate that some parents chose to homeschool for pedagogical reasons only and others for both pedagogical and family-related reasons. The reasons for choosing homeschooling were also found to be associated with the character of the homeschooling practice, with families whose reasons were pedagogical only devoting more hours, on average, specifically to studying. The authors conclude with a call for further research into an area of informal education that has profound societal significance.

While the importance attributed to adult education in Europe has undoubtedly risen during the past 20 years, due in large part to the increasing focus on lifelong learning, policy and research have mainly focused on vocational adult education and training (VET), since this is more clearly connected to labour market objectives. However, recent findings of the Benefits of Lifelong Learning project (BeLL)¹ show that adult education undertaken for pleasure or personal development yields multiple benefits, including many that are work- or career-related. In his article entitled “Empirical and genealogical analysis of non-vocational adult education in

¹ The BeLL study was funded by the European Commission and conducted by a consortium of partner organisations from nine EU Member States plus Serbia from November 2011 to January 2014. For more information, see <http://www.bell-project.eu/> [accessed 23 May 2017].

Europe”, *Jyri Manninen* argues that non-formal, non-vocational adult education (NFNVAE) should play a more central role in educational policy. The challenge is that it lacks clear concepts and definitions and is, therefore, less systematically covered by research. This article addresses this problem by mapping NFNVAE courses in 10 European countries and providing a conceptual framework for NFNVAE. The mapping is based on survey data ($n = 8,646$) containing information on 14,063 courses, which were coded into 24 categories and three general types: civic, liberal and basic skills education. The genealogical analysis shows that ideological discourses and cultural practices should be taken into account when different concepts are used to describe NFNVAE. Especially the concept “popular” needs more clarification, since it is frequently used to refer to several different traditions, for example the Nordic “*folkbildning*”, which is a civic education system, and therefore differs from Latin American popular adult education, which is a radical, non-governmental movement.

Informal learning is often defined more in terms of what it *is not* rather than what it *is*; according to the Cedefop glossary, it is “learning resulting from daily activities ...[that is]... not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support” (Cedefop 2008, p. 93). This “definition by exclusion” risks presenting informal learning as an “also-ran”, when it arguably encompasses the most significant learning experiences of our lives, including early childhood learning, social and experiential learning, and a large amount of vocational learning. It is to the latter aspect that our next article turns.

In most developing countries, the “informal sector” forms a large, if not the largest, element of the labour market (UNESCO 2012). Here, the word *informal* refers mostly to the absence of a legal contractual basis and therefore of employment rights and job security. Yet, there is a close correlation between what the International Labour Organization (ILO) terms “vulnerable employment” and the informal context in which the workers concerned gained their skills. It has been acknowledged by most organisations working in the development sector that the informal economy is here to stay, and in fact is likely to grow with urbanisation. It is therefore imperative that we better understand this sector and the learning pathways that feed into it.

In their qualitative case study entitled “Technical knowledge and skills development in the informal sector in Kenya: The case of custom tailors”, authors *Edwinah Amondi Apunda*, *Helena M. de Klerk* and *Teresa Ogina* look at the technical skills and knowledge that informal tailoring apprentices develop. They found that apprentices do acquire basic technical *skills* for immediate application to ongoing tailoring activities (such as how to take body measurements, draft patterns, and cut, sew and finish constructed garments), but do not acquire the technical *knowledge* that underpins the trade. Moreover, most tailors who have completed traditional apprenticeships (TAs) lack technical knowledge and have no access to technical skills upgrading. This perpetuates a cycle of limited technical skills transfer to apprentices, poor performance and poverty among tailors. Both apprentices and master tailors expressed concern over knowledge limitations in TAs and a need to access further training to improve skills and acquire knowledge of the trade. The authors argue that, technically and pedagogically, the involvement

of these skilled master tailors is critical to improving training quality. Complementary training in theoretical knowledge is also important in improving apprentices' technical skills and understanding of the trade. The authors argue that inclusion of TAs in government policy may help to ensure a more sustainable improvement of skills.

Globalised economies have amplified the demand for workers who possess flexible, adaptive and transversal skills. Labour markets increasingly favour those who are able to deal with the unexpected, work both independently and in a group, and who are sociable, responsible and capable of taking initiative. Job applicants with such "soft skills" are frequently preferred over those who merely possess technical skills. This trend is also reflected in national and international policy; skills like "learning to learn", "social and civic competence" and a "sense of initiative and entrepreneurship" are now considered key competences in European education systems. It is also widely acknowledged that formal education is frequently unable to impart these "soft skills". In her article entitled "How volunteering helps students to develop soft skills", *Albina Khasanzyanova* discusses the involvement of French third-level students in voluntary activities and the skills they acquire as a result. The author presents the findings of a study involving a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. Results show that many students develop skills linked to their future professional career, that they reflect on this consciously and feel enriched by the experience. She argues that "non-professional" activities like volunteering can be actively incorporated into students' learning process, making their overall experience of higher education more active, enjoyable and relevant. Learning through action was found to be the most important factor in the acquisition of soft skills. This article aims to contribute to research on the educational dimension of volunteering, demonstrating that it benefits both personal and professional development.

The final two articles of this issue depart from the theme of non-formal and informal education, yet both concern an issue equally close to the heart of this journal: education for sustainable and equitable development. In her article entitled "A rights-based approach to science literacy using local languages: Contextualising inquiry-based learning in Africa" *Zehlia Babaci-Wilhite* argues for the recognition of local knowledge and the use of local languages in science education. She frames her arguments with the theory of inquiry, which draws on perspectives of both dominant and non-dominant cultures with a focus on science literacy as a human right. She first examines key assumptions about knowledge which inform mainstream educational research and practice, then argues for an emphasis on contextualised learning and resistance to the current trend towards de-contextualisation of curricula. This trend is reflected in Zanzibar's recent curriculum reform, in which English replaced Kiswahili as the language of instruction in the last two years of primary school. The author's own research during the initial stage of the reform (2010–2015) revealed that it has proven to be counterproductive, with educational quality deteriorating. Arguing that language is essential to inquiry-based learning, she introduces a didactic model which integrates alternative assumptions about the value of local knowledge and local languages in the teaching and learning of science subjects. She provides examples from educational research

and practice that illustrate this new model of teaching and learning science. The author argues that this model has the potential to improve learning while supporting local languages and culture, assuring local languages their rightful place in all aspects of education.

Our final article of this issue, a research note entitled “Regaining legitimacy in the context of global governance? UNESCO, Education for All coordination and the Global Monitoring Report”, presents insights from a larger study into how UNESCO, through its coordination of the post-Dakar Framework for Action, regained some of the influence it had lost in the preceding decades. The authors, *D. Brent Edwards Jr.*, *Taeko Okitsu*, *Romina da Costa* and *Yuto Kitamura*, focus on the role of both the Education for All follow-up and the production of the Global Monitoring Reports during the 2000s, because these were at the heart of UNESCO’s efforts to repair its image and renew its impact in the field of education for development. Findings are based on an analysis of documents, archives, and interviews ($n = 17$) with key actors inside and outside UNESCO, including representatives of UNESCO’s peer institutions.

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