



Pascal International Observatory

Briefing Paper 16

Learning to be as the core of learning in later life

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Executive Summary

Demographic change in many countries with ageing populations, in a context of accelerated technological change, has focussed attention on the question of what are the objectives of learning in later life. In answering this question, this paper returns to the concept of learning to be as set out in the UNESCO Faure (1972) and Delors (1996) reports, and takes the position that the contextual shifts discussed in this paper have given a new significance to the pursuit of personal fulfilment as a lifelong objective which assumes enhanced significance in later life when questions of meaning and purpose need to be addressed in this stage of the life journey. The role of lifelong learning and learning cities need to be redefined in this context with appropriate policies and strategies which support personal fulfilment for older people in learning cities and communities. Learning cities are confronted by the challenge of demographic change with ageing populations in a context marked by rapid change and turbulence. This challenges traditional ideas and social support systems with these challenges having particular impact in later life when traditional ideas of retirement are no longer relevant in this extended life span.

Questions of identity, meaning and purpose assume increased significance in this context, and need to be addressed in planning for lifelong learning and learning cities that offer quality of life for the residents of these cities. The concept of *learning to be*, articulated in the UNESCO Faure and Delors reports, is especially important in this context and is particularly relevant to learning in later life. The quest for personal fulfilment should be seen as the core of learning in later life. It gives meaning and purpose to lives while also enhancing the contribution that seniors make to good sustainable learning cities.

The UNESCO Faure Report

The 1972 report of the UNESCO Faure Commission made the link between lifelong learning and personal fulfilment.

Education from now can no longer be defined in relation to a fixed content which has to be assimilated, but must be conceived of as a process in the human being, who thereby learns to express himself, to communicate and to question the world, through his various experiences, and increasingly – all the time- to fulfil himself (Faure et al. 1972: 143).

This general framework set by the Faure Report linking lifelong learning and personal fulfilment was elaborated by the Delors Report which followed in 1996.

The UNESCO Delors Report

The Delors Report in 1996 retained the concept of *learning to be* as one of the four pillars of education for the twenty-first century. The four pillars – *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be* have been influential as a framework for education.

The inclusion of the concept of *learning to be* reflected the view of the Commission that education must contribute to the all-round development of each individual – mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values- with this development as a lifelong process.

Individual development which begins at birth and continues throughout life, is a dialectical process which starts with knowing oneself and opens out to relationships with others. In this sense, education is above all an inner journey whose stages correspond to those of the continuous maturing of the personality. (Delors et al. 1996: 95)

In addition to articulating this broad concept of education as a lifelong journey, the Delors Commission elaborated the concept of *learning to be* in its title “the treasure within”, arguing that in every person this has been left untapped. These untapped elements were seen as including memory, reasoning power, imagination, physical ability, aesthetic sense, and other qualities.

The new context of demographic change and rampant digital technologies

The impact of demographic change with ageing populations is paralleled by a digital revolution with artificial intelligence and robotics likely to change the world known to older people in dramatic ways. These shifts set the context for approaches to learning in later life,

Nobel-prize winning economist Robert Fogel has summed up the implications of this context in the following terms.

Now at the dawn of the new millennium, it is necessary to address such post-modern concerns as the struggle for self-realisation, the desire to find a deeper meaning in life than the endless accumulation of consumer durables and the pursuit of pleasure, access to the miracles of modern medicines, education not only for careers but for spiritual values (Fogel 2000: 176).

These views echo the idea of learning to be as articulated by Faure and Delors. They are given further shape in the views of the founder and CEO of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab, on the implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Schwab has suggested a way forward in responding to the impact of technology, and sees the need for four kinds of intelligence.

Contextual – how we understand and apply our knowledge.

Emotional - how we process and integrate our thoughts and feelings and relate to ourselves and to one another.

Inspired (the soul) - how we use a sense of individual and shared purpose, trust, and other virtues to effect change and act towards the common good.

Physical – how we cultivate and maintain our personal health and well-being and that of those around us to be in a position to apply the energy required for both individual and systems transformation. (Schwab 2016: 106)

These qualities may be seen as sharing much in common with the Delors four pillars. They provide a twenty first century gloss on the Delors approach and point the way to the need for transformative learning required in a context of on-going radical change. They also contribute to the quest for personal fulfilment in individuals in all stages of life, including in later life.

While the attributes cited by Schwab are important in all stages of life, they assume particular importance in later life in the quest for meaning and self-fulfilment when the traditional sources of identity, such as work and family, may have changed or largely disappeared.

In this context of the “machine age”, the challenge for learning cities is to adopt policies and strategies for lifelong learning that support self-fulfilment as a lifelong quest.

There is much that such cities can draw on. Developments in positive psychology and related disciplines provide ways in which meaning and purpose can be found through individual, family, and community activities (Seligman, 2002; Smith, 2017). These include activities such as volunteering where the individual is connected to larger purposes. Much can be achieved through intergenerational learning while libraries and museums also can make substantial contributions.

Smith (2017: 41-42) offers a useful approach to bringing meaning and purpose into lives with her comments on the “four pillars of meaning”: belonging, purpose, storytelling, transcendence.

While this paper argues for the quest for personal fulfilment as the core of learning in later life, I also recognise that other motives may lead to learning in these years. Istance (2015) links the idea of *learning to be* with active ageing. The quest for personal fulfilment may be the stimulus for other learning that contributes to active ageing and well-being in the senior years.

Cultural influences

There are cultural factors to be considered in devising strategies to support self-fulfilment in later life as World Happiness Reports are showing. There are developments in particular countries that build attitudes and habits that support well-being in all phases of the life cycle. These include *hygge* in Denmark (Wiking, 2016) and *lagom* in Sweden (Åkerström, 2017).

PASCAL Policy Brief 14: [Integrating happiness in sustainable learning cities](#) is also relevant to the subject of this paper. Useful international material on happiness continues to become available including World Happiness Reports.

Implications for policy and practice

- Personal fulfilment objectives should be built into lifelong learning provision and into learning community strategies as the core of learning in later life.

- Strategies should foster a broad approach to learning in later life that encompass intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.
- Intergenerational learning involving seniors can have a range of benefits.
- Collaborative community projects can have a particular value in bringing meaning and purpose to later life.
- Heritage research, including among groups, can be useful in bringing a sense of meaning and connection in later life.
- Comparative projects across countries involving seniors can be valuable with international meetings serving as the launching pad.
- Libraries and museums can make a useful contribution.

Key sources

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