

Intergenerational solidarity and the need for lifelong and lifewide learning to enhance community wellbeing

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Introduction

Nowadays there is an increasing awareness among people and organizations of a change in demography in many countries around the world. At the same time this has impact on adult education and training. Adult education is now expected to include older people. There is mainly two reasons for this trend, on the one hand the economy and on the other hand the focus is also important for quality in life and health.

How will adult learning and training adapt to this new trend. Will the learning and training for older people be institutionalized or will it be positioned in the informal sector?

Intergenerational solidarity

Intergenerational learning is an integral part of lifelong learning. In the literature on intergenerational interventions, the concept of intergenerational transmission has been defined in a number of different ways. One such definition (Newman, 1997) targets specific programmes, namely intergenerational programmes. Another definition is derived from explorations of all intended intergenerational transmissions (Kaplan, 1998). In 1999 Toshio Ohsako from UNESCO organized a meeting in Dortmund, Germany, for researchers dealing with Intergenerational programmes from ten countries. They all contributed with a report about the situation in their country. There was an agreement of the importance of connecting generations rather than dividing them as well as restoring broken ties between generations. Therefore they agreed on the following definition:

“Intergenerational programmes are vehicles for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations.” (Boström, Hatton-Yeo, Toshio Ohsako and Yukiko Sawano, 2000, p3.)

This definition could incorporate the different status and cultural context of the participating countries. The researchers came from China, Cuba, Germany, Japan, The Netherlands, Palestine, South Africa and Sweden. One of the advices from participants

regarding future work with intergenerational programs was related to the importance for older and younger generations to learn from each other and together with each other. "Older experienced retired managers and workers can also offer their expertise and support to younger workers in developing countries (e.g. the Netherlands) or within their own industries (e.g. Cuba)." (ibid.p.4). One difference between the countries was related to the social policy on one side and volunteering on the other when the intergenerational programs were implemented.

The impact of intergenerational issues increased when more and more individuals, institutions and organizations have realized the importance of the changing demography in the world and how this relates to wellbeing for individuals but also for communities and countries.

Therefore also other organisations as the OECD and the EU have incorporated the concept of intergenerational learning. In the OECD publication "Demographic change and local development" it is argued that the intergenerational approach is narrowing gaps between different generations in the labour force. In connection to this the authors advocates for "promoting tailored quality employment for the populations over 65". This will be needed as many of the OECD member countries are becoming elderly societies. The word "silver economy" is used for the new technologies, products and services that are designed for the senior populations. Another concept that is used is also "Active aging". This was defined by the OECD (2000:126) as "the capacity of people, as they grow older, to lead productive lives in societies and the economy". As a result of more seniors working, there will be a need for both formal and informal education and training. Therefore the importance of intergenerational learning is stressed as this supports mature workers to learn from the young workers as well as the young workers to learn from their seniors. There are also other definitions of Active Aging for example WHO launched their framework for active aging in 2002 with the following words: "the process of optimising opportunities for participation, health, and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age" (WHO, 2002 in Hutchinson et al. 2006). WHO is more into the health aspects while OECD is more focused towards the economical issues of active aging. The term active aging can be traced back to the 1960s in the US and the definitions appeared in the different policy organisations when the consequences of the changing demography appeared as related to health issues and work related issues. Consequently the EU define active aging as follows:

"a coherent strategy to make ageing well possible in ageing societies. Active ageing is about adjusting life practices to the fact that we live longer and are more resourceful and in better health than ever before, and about seizing the opportunities offered by these improvements. In practice it means adopting healthy lifestyles, working longer, retiring later, and being active after retirement."

The European Union has incorporated both the aspect of health and the economic aspect in this definition. This is also evident in the Joint Healthcare report, (EU, 2009). Here the connection between health and economic growth on one side and education and labour market participation on the other side can contribute to the health of individuals and welfare through better jobs. The EU prognosis expects the ratio of people aged 65 and more as a percentage of the population aged 15-64 is to increase from 25% in 2007 to 54% in 2060. This has an impact both for individuals and societies. One suggestion regarding these issues was called "the compression of morbidity". The hypothesis is that

disability and ill-health is compressed towards the later period of life. When people live longer they can also expect better health.

Therefore the European Union celebrate the European Year for Active Ageing and solidarity between Generations this year.

There will be a need for more focus on intergenerational learning as a part of lifelong learning and social capital.

Lifelong and lifewide learning

One of the first researchers to envision and develop encompassing models of lifelong learning and lifewide learning was Arthur Cropley (1976; 1980). In the two studies cited, Cropley conceptualised and developed lifelong education in more detail, three important principles. The first of these is that lifelong learning refers to learning across the entire lifespan, from birth to death. The second principle is that the lifewide perspective refers to learning that takes place both in the form of formal education and in the form of other activities, non-organized and unsystematic, undertaken in various settings. The third principle is the statement that these first two principles are put into practice by individual people, and “... will thus depend upon their possession of the personal characteristics necessary for the process” (Cropley, 1980, p.5).

In more recent research, as reported by Aspin and Chapman (2001), lifelong learning is treated as a triadic concept, with three factors: economic progress and development, personal development and fulfilment, and social inclusiveness, democratic understanding and activity.

These different factors in lifelong learning, whether in the form of formal or informal education, are largely operative in those settings where relationships with other people, organisations or communities, are paramount. It is in this context that the concept of social capital links up with Cropley's (1980) third principle of lifelong learning, the importance of individuals possessing those personal characteristics necessary to the process of lifelong learning in practice. Further, with regard to the triadic concept proposed by Aspin and Chapman (2001), the first factor can be interpreted as representing the human capital perspective, the second both the social capital perspective and the human capital perspectives, whereas the third factor can be interpreted as being indicative of the social capital perspective with regard to the concept of lifelong learning.

Many of the changes in the workplaces in the Western world occur because of many technical innovations, an aging population and an increased segregation in society – i.e. between age groups, and between ethnic groups. Lifelong learning has since the 1970s been connected to human capital, which of course still is important but there is a new concept involved in learning and working life. Globally there is a now a focus on well-being and quality in life as an effect of using and appreciation of the concept social capital / social cohesion. Positive relationships within the workplace, professional integration and social integration can give improved motivation and higher satisfaction in life which also can increase productivity. Social capital is described by Coleman (1988) as composed by defined entities. These are: Good communication within the group, sharing values or having the same norms and structures and working towards a common goal that will be decided on by the group. Together these entities will give an

increased social capital in the workplace and will not give room for frustration, anxiety or disinterest.

According to Coleman (1988; 1990), social capital is not to be regarded as a single entity. The most important elements of the concept of social capital are trust, communications and norms and structure. These features can be found simultaneously in any context where individuals are working towards a common goal, one that is recognized as worthy and worthwhile by the group as a whole. Hence social capital may be nurtured and developed through co-operation between individuals. Further, social capital is found both at micro levels, in the form of personal relationships between people and, in democratic societies, at macro levels (Putnam, 1993).

The EU uses the word social cohesion, meaning the same as social capital but on an aggregated level in the system and in the different countries. In the European Commission briefing (December 2004) Education and Culture the recent historic about EU Lifelong learning was described like this:

“EU heads of government meeting in Lisbon in the year 2000 agreed to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based society and economy in the world by 2010, marked by social cohesion (usually referred to as the Lisbon Strategy)”.

As a result of this an Inquiry was set up in UK in order to evaluate how the goals were achieved. In the summary of the main report of the Inquiry into the future for lifelong learning (Schuller et al. 2009), made for the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (niace) the authors claim that the right to learn throughout life is a human right. The task for The inquiry was to formulate a longer-term strategy to achieve their vision. In this, lifelong learning is covering all ages, but their primary focus was on adult learning and on adults returning to learn. Learning takes place in education or training institutions, the workplace both on and off the job, in the family, or cultural and community settings. Therefore they used a broad definition:

“Lifelong learning includes people of all ages learning in a variety of contexts – in educational institutions, at work, at home and through leisure activities. It focuses mainly on adults returning to organised learning rather than on the initial period of education or on incidental learning” (ibid.p.4).

Boström (2002) has described a framework where learning and values can be found in the educational setting from an intergenerational perspective. Figure 1. shows the lifewide perspective where the formal parts of learning and values are situated on the left side of the continuum and the more informal learning and values can be found to the right side.

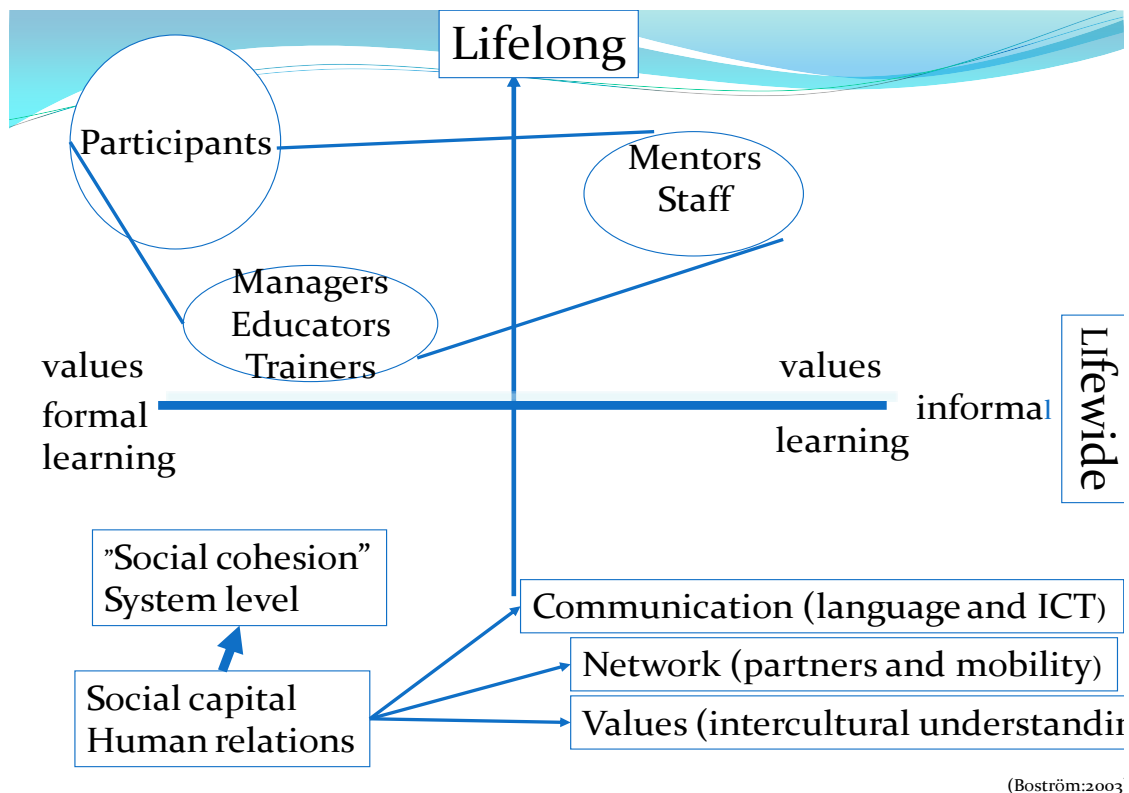


Figure 1. Developed from Boström 2002.

There is also the lifelong perspective and this figure shows a situation in adult education or training where the educators and trainers are younger than the participants. The educators and the participants can be found in the formal setting. Between these groups and individuals relationships can be created. According to Coleman (1988) social capital can be found in relationships between individuals when they are working towards the same goals, understand or share each others values and have networks that involve transparent information channels. These positive human relations create social capital. In figure 1 this is exemplified by respect for intercultural values, communication by ICT and knowing languages. This creates networks where social capital can be found in the educational setting. When these are aggregated in the system (country) level this leads to social cohesion and a foundation for solid forms of democracy by community well-being.

Community wellbeing

Community wellbeing is a concept that is being used differently as well. In this context it refers to aggregated social capital that can develop within different network in a community. This could be by intergenerational relationships in society or in workplaces and it could be found both within informal and formal settings organised by volunteers or are arranged as a result of a policy within the community official administration. This was made clear by Cropley (1980) where he put different learning experiences on a continuum of learning, from informal to formal, in this case, and including a barrier between his “two zones”.

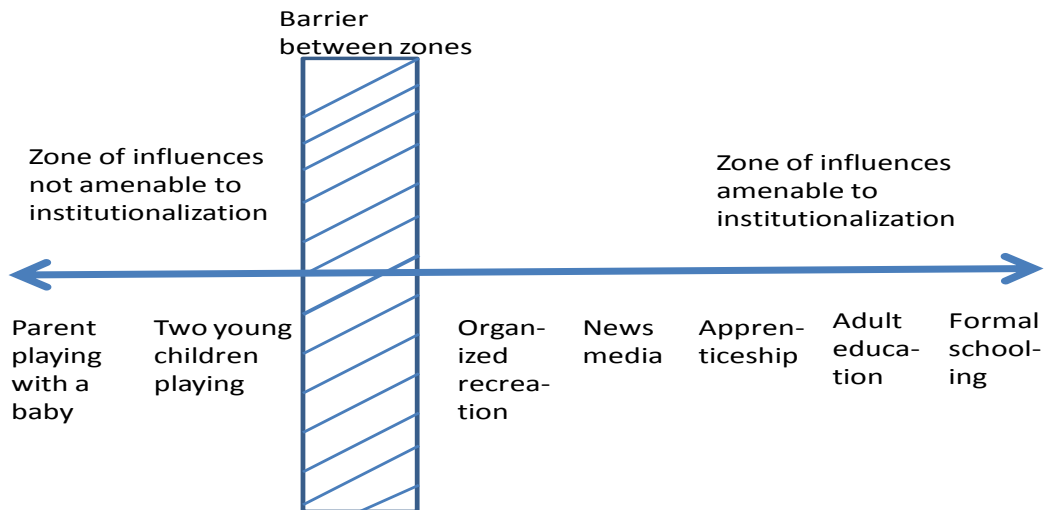


Figure 2. From Cropley (1980) the continuum of influences of learning

Cropley explained that people are exposed to different educational influences which can be institutionalized or not, as seen in Figure 2. At some point in the continuum there is a dividing line where a barrier separates private and personal learning experiences from those that can be institutionalized in society. States tolerate that the barrier moves to the left (totalitarian) or to the right (liberal) to a different degree. But Cropley also states that:

“...it is important to note that lifelong education does not imply organizing or “taking over” those educational influences which are on the left hand side of the barrier. This does not mean, however, that lifelong education is not concerned with them. On the contrary, one of its major principles is that learning is supported by a much wider range of influences than those provided by schools, and that the formal or institutionalized aspects of education.” (*ibid.*p.9)

To relate his proposal to practical life the model in figure 2 can be applied on the National Centre of Lifelong Learning, (Encell) in Jönköping.

There are different ways of cooperation between universities in Sweden and the surrounding region where they are situated. As an example the focus will be on Jönköping University and the surrounding region. Jönköping University is organized as a foundation and is characterized by three focused profiles. First there should be an international dimension in all activities, secondly there should be an entrepreneurial spirit and thirdly there should be collaboration with the surrounding society. The National Centre for Lifelong Learning, Encell, is situated in Jönköping University. Encell works in close collaboration with several other actors, nationally and internationally, in order to create research platforms and environments through partnerships and networks. Therefore Encell is an active partner in cooperation between regional bodies, trade and industry, educational actors, institutions etc.

The model can be applied today to explain the context of Encell as shown in figure 3.

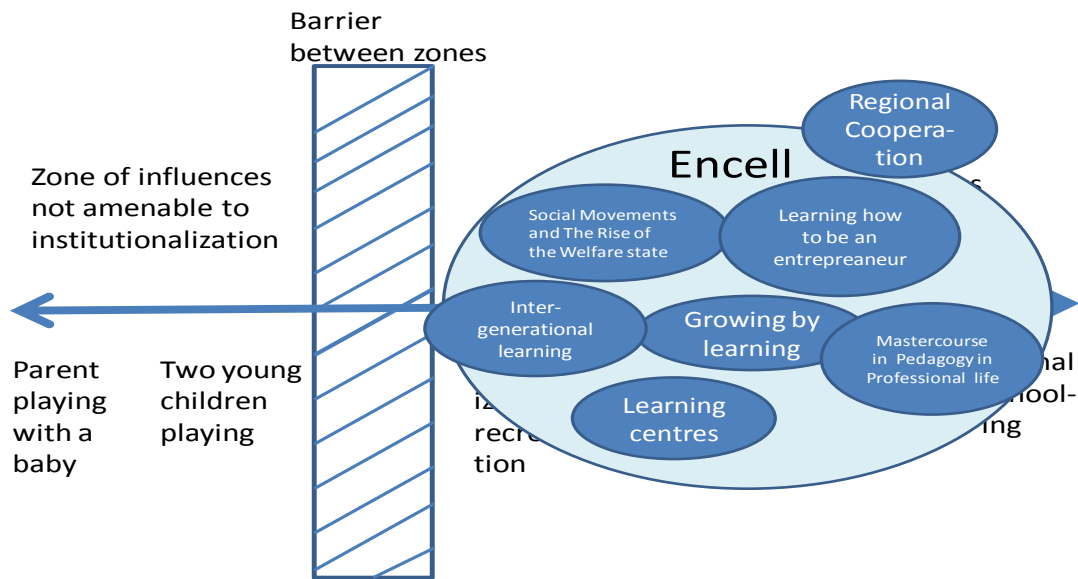


Figure 3. from Cropley (1980) the continuum of influences of learning, the example of Encell, from Boström et.al (2010)

One example is the cooperation between companies and Encell regarding competence development, both non formal and informal, in relation to the workplace. This model, called Growing-by-Learning is carried out in close relation to workplace activities, and is based on the company's operations, in terms of location as well as content. There is also cooperation with learning centres in the region and a Master education with a specialisation in pedagogy of professional life, aimed at people working in human resources, contiguous education and teachers. The example show alternative ways of cooperation organised between the University (Encell) and regional community regarding adult learning. In this case all learning that takes place is situated on the formal and nonformal side in the model which is more or less institutionalised. In the Swedish context the possibility to access adult learning is well provided for. There are also possibilities for intergenerational interactions and relationships. These are not directly organised rather it is part of the system. This could also contribute to community wellbeing as a result of adult learning and intergenerational relationships.

Conclusion

The concept as lifelong learning (LLL) has always been used depending on the context. This relates both to the policy and the economic context and the understanding differs therefore as described by Aspin and Chandler. At the same time the concept is easy to use for the big organizations as Unesco, OECD and the EU. The most common understanding by people in the education sector is to connect the concept with adult learning and training. That was also the target for the UK inquiry when they evaluated the status of lifelong learning in the UK. One of the guidelines for LLL has been that the individual should be responsible for his/her education. When this has been implemented the result has not always been the best for society. Some see a tendency of individualistic individuals that do not see the work for society important rather they

want to enjoy life by themselves. Therefore the human capital theory that was closely connected to LLL from the beginning is recently losing and the use of the social capital theory, building on relationships and network is growing internationally. Closely linked to this trend is also the intergenerational issue. It is needed for different generations to meet and learn from each other and work together. Adult education and training has impact on this area. The question is who will take the responsibility for the education and training of the older generations? Will this be institutionalized or will the individual take responsibility within a more informal agenda. Or will it be up to voluntary associations to arrange the training?

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