

The contribution of lifelong learning to development – personal and communal

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So axiomatic is the connection between education and development that we rarely question it. Though proving direct causation is more complex, the correlation between investment in education and economic development is indisputable – at personal as much as at communal levels. However, it is worth pausing to consider the various meanings of these two terms, and to ask ourselves: which kind of education promotes which kind of development? The United Nations calls on its Member States to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (Sustainable Development Goal 4) and regularly reminds governments that education is primarily a human right, not a marketable commodity. As we question the kind of development we wish to achieve, and refine our ideas of what comprises “sustainability”,¹ we ought to extend the same rigour to our ideas of education and learning.

The six articles contained in this year’s first issue of the *International Review of Education – Journal of Lifelong Learning* (IRE) remind us that the forms, uses and values of education are as diverse as the human societies on Earth. Not only is there no one size to fit all; the shapes and sizes of learning that best fit each individual or society are themselves constantly changing. This makes for a landscape of learning that can be bewildering and exhilarating; even both at the same time. If there is a

¹ The definition of sustainable development used by the 1987 Brundtland Report, namely “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” has been parsed and refined several times since then. Brundtland, G. H. (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our common future*. The Brundtland report. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Retrieved 15 January 2018 from <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>.

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single lesson we can draw from the contributions in this issue, it is that we must never cease to re-examine, re-evaluate and re-design the modes, forms and applications of learning. In this way, we demonstrate that inclusivity, equity and sustainability are not points of arrival, but lodestars to guide us.

Profiling adult literacy facilitators in development contexts: An ethnographic study in Ethiopia

Adult literacy is an important factor in development, both as a contributing factor to economic growth and (in the form of “literacy rates”) as a development indicator. It is therefore important that adult literacy programmes are as effective as possible. It is widely accepted that their effectiveness depends to a very large degree on the teachers who form the immediate interface with learners. However, although the literature relating to adult literacy programmes in development contexts is extensive, studies considering the literacy teachers, facilitators or tutors are relatively few. In their article entitled “Profiling adult literacy facilitators in development contexts: An ethnographic study in Ethiopia”, *Turuwark Zalalam Warkineh, Alan Rogers and Tolera Negassa Danki* take a step towards redressing this gap in the literature. They present case studies of five adult literacy facilitators (ALFs) in Ethiopia, exploring their backgrounds and how they increase their effectiveness as teachers. They found that all of the ALFs had high levels of commitment, but all reported insufficient training and an absence of professional support. The degree (and their own perception) of their own literacy practices also varied greatly among them. It emerged that while they had all fought very hard for their own education, one of the main common reasons for going into literacy teaching was not a general belief in the value of education but rather their need for regular income. The study also found that the female ALFs struggled more than their male counterparts to engage learners and were subject to more criticism than the men. This pilot study suggests that further research is needed to expose problems such as lack of professional development and to provide more supportive working environments for literacy facilitators.

An adult learner’s learning style should inform but not limit educational choices

Education is an investment in terms of personal development, and the learning process is most effective if the learner is able to undertake it with a sense of achievement. While younger learners tend to prefer supervision and guidance, adult learners have been shown to prefer to engage in learning that offers opportunity for self-direction and “freedom”, or a sense of control over various aspects of learning. In their research note entitled “An adult learner’s learning style should inform but not limit educational choices”, *Margot Barry and Arlene Egan* critically examine existing research on the usefulness of considering students’ learning styles in adult education. They discuss why assessment of learning styles continues to be popular despite the absence of rigorous research findings to support this practice. Factors discussed by the authors

include *confirmation bias* (making choices that confirm our prejudices) and *user qualification* (limiting availability to trained users, e.g. psychologists) as well as limited resources and skills in evaluating research, paired with educators' quest to implement evidence-focused techniques. The authors conclude that while learning styles assessments *can* be useful for the purpose of reflection on strengths and weaknesses, they should play a limited role in educational choices.

Education for peace through transformative dialogue: Perspectives from Kashmir

According to the United Nations team tasked with assessing the impact, strengths and weaknesses of the Millennium Development Goals, internal conflict and fragility comprise the single largest obstacle to economic and societal development (UN 2013).² The same report identified education as one of the most effective strategies to break the cycle of violence and build a sustainable peace. Few regions are in greater need of that remedy than the Kashmir Valley (the north-western division of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir), which has been in a state of intermittent unrest since 1989, resulting in severe disruption to the educational sector. Inhibiting problems include the destruction of school buildings, parents' fear of sending their children to school, the recruitment of youth into armed groups, the economic decline of households, and forced displacement. In her article entitled "Education for peace through transformative dialogue: Perspectives from Kashmir", *Shweta Singh* examines the challenge conditions of protracted conflict pose for young people and national education systems. Her article has a twofold objective: first, to analyse how ongoing conflicts such as that in Kashmir impinge on youth and consider how national educational systems can promote transformative dialogue and sustainable peace; and second, to explore how contact-based, participatory models of education for peace can play a transformative role in situations of protracted religious and cultural conflict, specifically in Kashmir. Importantly, this article supports the view that spaces for dialogue are critical for making and maintaining peace in conflict-affected societies.

Widening higher education participation in rural communities in England: An anchor institution model

In 2008, humanity reached a demographic milestone, with, for the first time, a majority residing in cities (World Bank 2017).³ One of the most important pull factors behind rural–urban migration is education. To ensure the continuation of

² UN (2013), *A renewed global partnership for development*. Report of the UN system task team on the post-2015 UN development agenda. New York: United Nations (UN). Retrieved 9 January 2018 from www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/glob_dev_rep_2013.pdf.

³ See: World Bank (2017). Urban population (% of total). The United Nations Population Division's World Urbanization Prospects [online resource]. Retrieved 15 January 2018 from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>.

vibrant and sustainable rural communities, it is vital that access to higher and continuing education is ensured not just across socio-economic groups, but also geographically. The United Kingdom was one of the world's first countries to have a majority-urban population (Scott 2017),⁴ and with just 17 per cent of its population now residing in rural areas, the need to preserve rural communities is particularly acute. Many universities in the UK have embraced Internet-based e-learning as well as the creation of smaller "satellite campuses". However, these strategies have had limited success. In his article entitled "Widening higher education participation in rural communities in England: An anchor institution model", *Geoffrey Elliott* analyses theory, policy and practice to understand why these past efforts have had limited success and to propose an alternative: an "anchor institution" model. A university and a private training provider were the principal partners in the venture he studied, known as the South-West Partnership [a pseudonym]; the model was developed by them to meet the particular needs of mature female students who want and/or need to study part-time in a rural, coastal and isolated area of south-west England. While the concept of "anchor institutions" has previously been included in government social policy, and in higher education to promote knowledge transfer, it has not yet been adopted as a method for widening participation. The research presented in this article investigated the effectiveness of the model in broadening participation in higher education. The study was conducted within an interpretivist theoretical framework, using semi-structured qualitative interviews on a range of topics identified from relevant theoretical literature. These included student aspirations and career destinations, motivations, access, learning experiences, and peer and tutor support. The author hopes the findings will inform the future development of adult vocational higher education provision in rural areas, where opportunities have been limited, and encourage further application of the anchor institution model for widening participation elsewhere.

Literacy skills gaps: A cross-level analysis of international and intergenerational variations

Literacy has long been regarded as an important indicator of economic and social development. Arguably that very acceptance has mitigated against the adoption of effective strategies to raise standards of adult literacy, as governments have tended to exaggerate national literacy rates and adopt simplistic methods of measurement as a way of boosting their standing in international statistics.⁵ In recent years, the international policy community has largely stepped back from a binary "in or out" definition of literacy, rather recognising it as a spectrum of multidimensional skills that are best assessed in relation to their application at work, home, school and in communities. Yet, the comparable measurement of learning skills, primarily literacy

⁴ This point was reached by the mid-nineteenth century (see: Scott, A.J. (2017). *Industrialization and urbanization in early capitalism*. In A. J. Scott, *The constitution of the city: Economy, society, and urbanization in the capitalist era* (pp. 39–59). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan).

⁵ Until 2010, the UN Human Development Index (HDI) weighted the adult literacy rate as the main indicator of education.

and numeracy, remains indispensable in tracking progress towards the achievement of international targets such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This article, entitled “Literacy skills gaps: A cross-level analysis on international and intergenerational variations”, examines international and intergenerational variations in literacy skills gaps. The author, *Suehye Kim*, studied literacy gaps in different countries using multilevel and multisource data from the OECD’s Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and survey data from UNESCO’s third *Global Report on Adult Learning and Education* (GRALE III; UIL 2016).⁶ She paid particular attention to the specific effects of education systems on literacy skills gaps among different age groups. Key findings indicate substantial intergenerational literacy gaps within countries as well as different patterns of literacy gaps across countries. This study also revealed that young adults tend to benefit from a system of Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) in closing literacy gaps. This implies a strong potential for an RVA system to tackle educational inequality in initial schooling. The article concludes with suggestions for integrating literacy skills as a foundation for lifelong learning into national RVA frameworks and mechanisms at system level.

***Almajiri* education: Policy and practice to meet the learning needs of the nomadic population in Nigeria**

The final article of this issue explores the provision of education opportunities to a disadvantaged group in Nigeria known as *Almajiris*. The word *Almajiri* derives from the Arabic word *Almuhajirun*, meaning emigrant. The nomadic pastoralists of northern Nigeria constitute a major socio-economic group. According to a recent report by the Food and Agricultural Organization, *Almajiris* own more than 90 per cent of Nigeria’s estimated 15.3 million heads of cattle, and the beef from their herds constitutes over 45 per cent of the animal protein consumed by Nigerians. However, despite their contribution to the economy of Nigeria, the *Almajiris* are highly disadvantaged in terms of access to education. To respond to the educational needs of this group, the Nigerian government established the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) in 1989 to coordinate programmes aimed at improving the lives and livelihood of the *Almajiris*. This article, entitled “*Almajiri* education: Policy and practice to meet the learning needs of the nomadic population in Nigeria” and authored by *Sunday Olawale Olaniran*, examines the strategies employed by the NCNE towards making education accessible to nomads. It also highlights some of the challenges facing the *Almajiris*, and suggests remedies to prioritise education for this and other disadvantaged groups.

⁶ UIL (2016). *3rd Global Report on Adult Learning and Education: The impact of adult learning and education on health and well-being; employment and the labour market; and social, civic and community life*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL).

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