



**EDUCATION
FOR PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT
AND WELL-BEING**

Report

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EDUCATION FOR **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT** & **WELL-BEING**

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

WELCOME WORDS

by MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen, Chair of the Interest Group, Gina Ebner, EAEA Secretary General and Audrey Frith, Lifelong Learning Platform (EUCIS-LLL) Director

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT: LEARNING TO BE

Keynote Speech by Jean Gordon, International consultant on lifelong learning and learning for well-being

EXCHANGING IDEAS

- Well-being: an urgent issue for formal learning
- Lifelong learning: a second chance for personal development
- Assessment: a key to improve frameworks and reach our goal



Education is a lifelong empowerment process, which should help citizens in their intra and interpersonal understanding, achieving personal development and becoming empathic individuals. The UNESCO has possibly summarised it best as “learning to be” - to enable individuals to develop to their fullest potential psycho-socially, affectively as well as physically, for an all-round “complete person.”

Personal development, creativity and well-being have the potential of becoming the key outcomes of a learning system that follows the right track. This “right track” involves the use of innovative pedagogical methods, enjoyable and inspirational environments, collaborative learning that rests on a competence-based and learner-centred approach. And because we are all different, education needs to take into account the rich diversity of individuals. Only by being open to and accepting our differences will we manage to reach out to disadvantaged groups, will we succeed in keeping learners in the learning pathway and encourage a positive attitude towards learning throughout life.

Nevertheless, personal development and well-being are finding it hard to make their way into policy frameworks, probably because they are perceived as individual outcomes rather than social or economic ones.

The debate that gathered educators, learners, stakeholders and policy-makers on 16 February 2016 aimed to clear the field in order to understand how the concept is perceived at European level, what initiatives exist on the ground and how to channel best practices up to the decision-making level.

WELCOME WORDS

The third meeting of the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning, held on 16 February 2016 in the European Parliament was opened by the partners representing MEP Sirpa Pietikainen, Chair of the Interest Group, and civil society organisations LLLPlatform and EAEA.



MEP Sirpa Pietikainen
EPP, Finland
Chair of the Lifelong Learning Interest Group

What are the needs of our society and what role does the concept and implementation of lifelong learning have to play in providing them? Who are the different actors and what kind of cooperation is needed to tackle the challenges regarding lifelong learning? These are some of the main questions that were raised during the LLL Interest Group Meeting that took place in the European Parliament on 16 February 2016, opened by MEP Sirpa Pietikainen (EPP, FI), chair of the Group.

When assessing the challenges and needs, such as preventing early school leaving or promoting active citizenship, putting learning for well-being and personal development at the heart of the solution finding process appears the most convincing way out of the problem.

What's more, it paves the way to ensuring equal access to quality education for all. "Even from a purely economic perspective, studies show people are more efficient when doing things they really like," stated MEP Pietikainen. So how do we link our different stages in learning, from childhood to adulthood? And how do we convince people that well-being constitutes one of the most important roles of learning?

The LLL Interest Group first met in April 2015, where it decided the main topic of discussions should be inclusive education. Talking about personal development and well-being thus seemed an obvious aspect to explore.

Audrey Frith, LLLPlatform Director, underlined the work done by the member organisations seeking to create safe and

open environments in which learners can develop their full potential. "Some have combined health and education; others have searched the emotional aspects of learning." More and more research has also been undertaken on happiness, proving the positive effects of collaborative learning environments on preventing early school leaving for instance. "In spite of this, educational systems do not reflect this evidence," she regretted. The questions of how we promote solidarity in schools, or how we promote active citizenship via education by engaging learners in the governance of their educational institution, thus remain salient for those who believe learners' well-being and personal development are key to building more cohesive and peaceful societies. "To give these ideas a reality and providing universal and equal access to education" she said, "we must look at competences, governance and assessment methods in their broad context."

Gina Ebner, EAEA Secretary General, reminded participants that the European Commission's Skills Agenda will be launched in April 2016, a high point for the educational world. Ensuring education is not merely about acquiring skills therefore remains central to the message sent out by civil society organisations such as the LLLPlatform or EAEA at this time.

"Learners' well-being and personal development are key to building more cohesive and peaceful societies".



Gina Ebner
EAEA Secretary General

"How do we convince people that well-being constitutes one of the most important roles of learning?"

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Audrey Frith
Lifelong Learning Platform Director

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT: LEARNING TO BE

Jean Gordon was invited to hold the keynote speech as introduction to the debate on the personal dimension of learning as enounced in the UNESCO Report from 1996, "The Treasure Within", namely learning to be.



Jean Gordon

International consultant in lifelong learning and learning for well-being

Europe is facing a number of big and complex issues, one of the most significant ones being the "refugee crisis". In this case like many others, education and lifelong learning are keys to unlock these challenges we are faced with. But remedies need to address root causes, not just symptoms. A step forward is taken in that direction thanks to the growing awareness of the need for a multi-sector, multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach, of the need for trans-sectoral cooperation. A second step consists in measuring our efforts and assess their impact. This seems to present more difficulty, and it is legitimate to question whether this is what we are doing.

The European Union is seeking to go in this direction, following wide cooperative approach. The recent joint reports and the key strategy documents are there for analysis, supporting what is one of the EU's main *raison-d'être*. Indeed, does Article 21 of the Treaty on the European Union not stipulate: "The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples."

The Union's aim is thus, as described in its founding treaties, to provide the well-being of its citizens, but the meaning of well-being is holistic, taking account manifold parameters.

This kaleidoscopic nature of learning was fully embraced in the UNESCO Report "The Treasure within in". Learning should be adopt "a broad encompassing view" aiming "to enable each individual to discover, unearth and enrich his or her creative potential, to reveal the treasure within each of us." It is not about creating new curricula but about getting the fundamentals right. Learning, Lifelong and life wide is in the context of the community but also contributes to the community. This is why a whole-school approach should be encouraged, one that individuals can later transpose into the whole-system they live in. Indeed, "school must first help them [children & young people] discover who they are. Only then will they genuinely be able to put themselves in other people's shoes and understand their reactions. Developing empathy at school bears fruit in terms of social behaviour throughout life."

"The Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples."

1. *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, UNESCO Publishing, 1996.

"Diversity should not only be perceived from an external point of view".

The **CATS Project** (Children as Actors for Transforming Society) is an example of this broad understanding of the learning process, by bringing together children, young people and adults who work hand-in-hand with the aim to lead to a more inclusive society. Including children in decision-making processes reflects the role they were recognised in United Nations statutes. As follow-up to CATS, a group of them were invited to the European Parliament, where they met MEPs and EU Commission representatives. The objective of this project was also to prove how personal development takes place in non-formal environments, and why these methods should be transferred to the formal learning environment.



People are very different regarding the type of information they need in order to start and finish a task. This fact has implications far beyond learning, since it will also determine the way in which they perform at work. Diversity should not only be perceived from an external point of view. Of course, diversity is expressed in the variety of nationalities, social backgrounds, beliefs..., but it also in holds an internal dimension: one that distinguishes individuals within one group. Unfortunately, still today, assessment in education predominantly measures cognitive skills does not take into account the diversity.

In order to seek the treasure within, the learning process and its final assessments needs to envisage the person as a whole. This means looking at what a learner's needs are, and thus, accepting the diversity of learning, what a learner's specific potential and interests are... Only by learning how to learn and understanding who you can you build the foundation for understanding others.

If we wish to overcome these obstacles, the key questions we need to answer are: who decides what are valuable outcomes for learners and how should they be defined. If we wish to overcome these obstacles, we must bring together different actors and sectors, of all ages, including children. Only by doing so will we succeed in supporting people in all aspects of their life.◆

"Assessments needs to envisage the person as a whole".



EXCHANGING IDEAS

The second part of the Interest Group meeting allowed participants to voice a certain number of concerns, starting with the implementation of educational strategies aimed at well-being and personal development within formal learning. In light of the deficit that exists in that field, participants called for the recognition of lifelong learning not only as means to compensate for lacks, but also as carrying concrete solutions to the issue.

Well-being: an urgent issue in formal learning

"A real holistic approach regarding lifelong learning should not omit the formal education provided in schools, since that is where children spend most of their days. Yet a majority of parents across Europe feel that there is something wrong in formal educational systems," said Eszter Salamon, President of the European Parents Association (EPA).

Studies have shown that there are many different types of intelligence. Howard Gardner defined 8 different types: musical-rhythmic and harmonic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and the "8 and a half" existential intelligence. "Despite this variety, European schools tend to only support three of them (different societies support different intelligences), thus limiting personal development to three options." She urged civil society to make it its goal to open educational systems to the five other options, in order to give all a chance to personal development, by accepting the diversity within individuals in our society.

"We talk about change, but never proceed with experimentation."

Following up on Ms Salamon, Joke Van der Leeuw-Roord, LLLPlatform Secretary General, reminded participants of how long these discussions have been going on, and yet, after 40 years, education is still at *status quo*. "We talk about changes but never proceed to experimentation. No one dares and would rather hide behind the security of this status quo. Then teachers are blamed for that, but the truth is that even though many of them are ready and eager to experiment, policy makers' insecurity translated in immobility blocks any move forward. And raising the status of teachers is only a part of the solution to this problem.

To overcome this, we have managed to wiggle in change through peer learning. By building a community of interest, teachers and trainers are given a chance to discover new approaches they can familiarise themselves with and then, at best, use with learners. It is a long and slow process, as all learning and education is, but still very crucial process."

Another problem is diversity in schools, said Audrey Frith. "There is no diversity in schools as parents naturally take individualistic decisions regarding their children, a fact that is not inverted by school leaders." This leads to segregation among schools and boroughs, in contradiction with the principle of equal access to education. There are however good examples of school leaders leaning towards innovation, "namely in Belgium, where schools in disadvantaged areas seem more innovative, giving a prominent role to cultural activities for instance."

"Instead of speaking about learning for well-being, should we not talk about well-being for education?"

"An issue that is rarely dealt with is the one of hidden costs in education, although these are one of the main reasons for students not to necessarily associate learning with well-being," said Ela Jakubek from the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU). "Indeed, formal education is not free in Europe when you consider the costs that inevitably surround it. So instead of speaking about learning for well-being, should we not talk about well-being for education? What's more, many learners are unable to "learn how to learn", since so many are forced to follow an orderly path that will ensure they gain professional competences, but a path that leads to a profession they haven't chosen. This is amplified by the fact that the theoretical approach to learning restricts their capacity to acquire knowledge independently, a situation that will actually constitute an obstacle in their future learning and professional pathway."

Lifelong learning: a second chance for personal development

"One of the main qualities of adult education is to compensate for lacks in life, it is about catching up or gaining competences that people might have missed out on," said Gina Ebner. "Nonetheless, it is also, in spite of its importance, the part of education that does not benefit from the recognition it deserves. The benefits of lifelong learning are numerous: not only do studies show it increases happiness, but it also largely contributes to their social inclusion. As education is a solid pedestal for personal development and well-being, one of the challenges is thus to frame adult education in order to help it gain the recognition that will benefit to all."

"Teachers are a good example of the need for lifelong learning," added Jean Gordon. "Indeed, they are expected to help their students develop competences, but it seems no one considers their own competences can be enhanced during their career; when teacher trainings are put in place, they are often more academic than practical, and thus allow to question their value to improve pedagogy."

"Finding a solution for employability and social inclusion will not happen without equality of access to education."

Assessment: a key to improve the frameworks and reach our goal

MEP Julie Ward, Vice-Chair of the Interest Group, gave the example one of the follow-up projects to CATS. "When the children came to the Parliament the experience was disappointing because very few MEPs attended. There is a real job to be done across our peers and colleagues. "Investing in Children" is an organisation from Northern England that tries to promote the participation of children in policy. It is really important to speak up and overcome the limitations of the existing frameworks."

Indeed, "there is still a contradiction today between what really happens on the ground and what Member States expect education and learning to produce," said David Lopez, LLLPlatform President. "The situation today is not much different from the situation ten years ago. In the Paris Declaration for instance, inclusive learning for inclusive societies is highlighted as top-priority, but this is a problem we have known about for decades, and yet, there are, in France for example, very few mixed schools. The contradiction lies in the fact that finding a solution for employability and social inclusion will not happen without equality of access to education."

"The European Key Competence Framework and the shift in learning outcomes has spread across all levels of education and across many countries. Regarding learning outcomes, educational systems across Europe use different words, but nonetheless share certain common qualities and attributes," said Jean Gordon. The discussion about measuring what matters is very relevant in this case: assessment in formal learning is decided at a policy level, but what about non formal and informal learning? "Steps have been taken but they are still scarce and timid." Our approach to assessment is therefore crucial. "The wide variety of actors that intervene in education should be involved - parents, teachers, and children themselves, because learners should play a role in their personal assessment. For adults one of the biggest barriers to learning is psychological. All these key issues are linked to each other." The LLLPlatform therefore opens a huge door to all these stakeholders, since it brings together all the elements, approaches and actors that are needed in order to grasp and implement a holistic vision of education. "The key is planning for a learner to learn," she concluded.



LIFELONG LEARNING INTEREST GROUP

Initiated by EAEA and EUCIS-LLL together with a number of MEPs, the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning brings together civil society representatives and MEPs to discuss key issues connected to lifelong learning with strong emphasis on adult education.

An important reason to form the Interest Group on Lifelong Learning is the new European Commission and its priorities. We stand for a comprehensive and trans-sectorial lifelong learning approach, and want to stress that education is not only about employment, but is linked to personal development, social inclusion, active citizenship, and much more. The interest group works as a «watchdog» to what the European Union is doing.

The focus of 2015–2016 is «Inclusive education for inclusive societies». The group aims to fight inequalities and discrimination in education in order to reach the Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020 headline targets and contribute to the EU growth strategy this way.

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