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An International Perspective on Reorienting Traditional Higher Education Institutions toward Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

This paper provides thoughts on how an international conception came about and moved forward regarding reorienting Higher Education Institutions toward Lifelong Learning (LLL). The background of LLL in ancient times and its emergence in recent times is presented. My involvement is described in bringing this about as a concept, and doing the research to flesh-out the specific elements. My research includes: Developing a definition of LLL; bringing together the international partners from 19 countries to identify the seven major elements of a LLL Higher Education Institution; engaging two universities from opposite sides of the globe in articulating and listing the 78 measurable performance indicators [MPI] for LLL; bringing together participants for discussing the MPI, from 13 nations at an International Lifelong Learning Conference; and, actively involving a major International University (Chulalongkorn – Bangkok, Thailand) to go through the steps for setting in place and implementing its being a global player on the stage in moving forward that idea for the future of the world in general and the world of lifelong learning [LLL] – its length, height, depth, and breadth.

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1. Introduction

From ancient times learning was to be life-long – in breadth, depth, height, and length. During Moses' day he actively engaged Israel in learning to love God and their neighbor and to diligently help their children learn the same when sitting in the house, walking by the way, lying down and rising up (Deuteronomy 6:4-6). Joshua, the successor to Moses, was to learn God's message by speaking it and meditating on it day and night while observing to do what it said, with the accompanying promise that if he did, his life would become prosperous and successful (Joshua 1:8-9). King David used a tree metaphor and declared that whoever learned, enacted and meditated day and night on God's message would be like a tree planted by rivers of water, with no withering leaves, but bringing forth seasonal fruit and being prosperous (Psalm 1:1-3). Jesus asserted that whoever continued learning his message would be his learner/disciple, thus resulting in her/his knowing the truth which gives freedom (John 8:31-32). Shaul of Tarsus [later renamed Paul, the apostle] was all inclusive in his letter to Timothy, saying that all learned and applied scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, thus equipping and furnishing a person for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Cyril Houle was to have made the sweeping statement that all the ancient teachers were teachers of adults and that learning was to be lifelong. This included Confucius, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero, Hebrew Prophets, Jesus, and many others. (Knowles, 1989).

However, in more recent times, LLL emerged on the scene from adult education through UNESCO (Dave, 1973; Knowles, 1973) with such concepts as the characteristics of lifelong education and developing learning communities; and, the pillars of the treasure within – adults' and others' learning (Delors, 1998) to know, do, be, work together, change, and develop sustainability.

I began this educational work in the last few years of the 20th century on extending research aimed toward helping higher educational institutions and other institutions in various countries to re-orient themselves toward a lifelong learning focus, and placing this within the support and context of lifelong learning (LLL) and education around the globe (Henschke, 2011).

I adapted what I call 'a living lecture' for helping a higher education institution reorient toward lifelong learning. I refer to this 'living lecture' as one 'best practice' I have used frequently in various situations and to great benefit. The living lecture for reorienting toward lifelong learning is described as follows. Before a presentation on lifelong learning the audience may be asked to serve as "listening teams" according to the section of the room they are sitting in – one section to listen to the presentation for points requiring clarification [the clarification team], another for points with which they disagree [the rebuttal team], another for points they wish to have elaborated on [the elaboration team], and a fourth for problems of practical application they wish the speaker to address [the application team]. After the 'living lecture' presentation the teams are asked to "buzz" in groups of four or five to pool their thinking about the points they want raised, following which one member of each group in turn presents one point at a time, which they want addressed and the speaker responds until all items are discussed or time runs out.

I was not the originator of this adult education "best practice." There is no doubt that I borrowed it from Knowles (1970), who contributed to it, not only by his texts, but with his spoken word and lectures. Savicevic (2008, p. 375) called Knowles "a 'masovik', i.e. a lecturer on mass events in 10,000 visitor stadiums, as if he was inspired by an ancient agonistic spirituality!" This kind of spirituality could be described as: tough, gung-ho, sporting, contending, grappling, challenging, vying, surpassing – all reflections of the very positive way that Knowles was committed to and conducted his work in adult education. He used this learning/teaching technique during our doctoral program at Boston University. It 'caught-on' with me. Consequently, Knowles' contribution to the dissemination of the 'living lecture' ideas is huge. My involvement in the living lecture for lifelong learning has been quite modest by comparison (Henschke, 1975, 2009, 2011); especially in helping to encourage higher education and other institutions to reorient their purpose toward lifelong learning.

My research on LLL has moved through four major phases: [1] Developing a current definition of LLL; [2] helping 95 people from 19 countries in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres identify seven characteristic elements of LLL; [3] engaging faculty from two universities (the University of Missouri, USA, and The University of The Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa) half a world apart to focus on reorienting toward LLL, and instituting measureable performance indicators (MPI) for LLL; and, [4] helping a major Asian Institution

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