



6 June 2018

Report

21ST CENTURY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: WHERE IS NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN THE FUTURE OF LEARNING?

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by Yuri Devuyt

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Initiated by EAEA and Lifelong Learning Platform 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.

WELCOMING WORDS

Brikena Xhomaqi, LLLP opened the debate by pointing out the need to broaden the definition of what we understand by a learning environment, to value other types of learning beyond formal education, as well as assess to what extent EU policies are supporting this.

MEP Roberta Metsola, host, highlighted the **critical importance of non-formal and informal learning, particularly for gaining life skills such as media literacy and critical thinking**. Learning is a lifelong process and should be about more than just getting a job. Organisations such as youth and sports clubs and cultural centres have a crucial role in today's Europe.

MEP Julie Ward emphasised the diversity of learning types - e.g. peer-to-peer learning, learning through sport, intergenerational learning - and the benefit of finding synergies between these. She recalled the **need for transferable life skills** helping people to respond to different situations, skills that employers want and enable people to be active citizens. She was glad the European agenda for culture refers to STEAM, as arts and creativity are fundamental, bearing in mind scientists also need creative thinking to come up with innovative solutions.



BRIKENA XHOMAQI, LLLP, AND MEP JULIE WARD

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EUROPEAN EDUCATION AREA

Youri Devuyt, Senior Expert at DG EAC, outlined the **three main objectives of the new European Education Area**:

- 1) give a real boost to learning mobility
- 2) eliminate the barriers to the creation of a genuine European learning space
- 3) ensure that education systems are inclusive, lifelong-learning-based and innovation-driven.

He explained that the Area will address all ages and education sectors and *several recently released initiatives* will help to achieve the above aims.

Under the first objective, the new Erasmus proposal will seek to reach out to people of all social backgrounds and is underpinned by the lifelong learning concept. Other initiatives are the European Student Card and European University Networks.

Under the second objective, overcoming obstacles to free movement of learners, the Commission has proposed a Council recommendation on the automatic mutual recognition of diplomas and study periods abroad. We have an internal market with free movement of goods but still little recognition of formal education outcomes, although we should not forget importance of validating non-formal and informal learning. There is also the proposed Council recommendation on language learning, which is crucial for mobility and discovering Europe.

The third objective has mostly to do with the recently adopted revision of the key competences framework, where the lifelong learning element is particularly emphasised. It should be a part of national lifelong learning strategies and relates to the need at national level to reinforce collaboration between all sectors of learning and training systems.

Mr Devuyt recalled that bringing the European Education Area to life will require the essential input of all stakeholders, ranging from teachers and youth workers to adult education centres.



YOURI DEVUYST, DG EAC

BEST PRACTICES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Caroline Kearney, European Schoolnet, stressed the need to modernise learning environments by, for example, adapting the classroom environment in schools, which has in reality changed very little since the beginning of the last century. She referred to research about learning spaces, such as the *clever classrooms* initiative in the UK which showed that the level of light, temperature, air quality and type of furniture can have an impact on student learning - well-designed classrooms boost motivation and academic performance. Schoolnet's *Future Classroom Lab* is an initiative where the learning space can be easily adapted with mobile furniture, thus promoting active and customised learning. They are trying to encourage ministries and educational establishments to introduce this setting in schools. Ms Ward welcomed this initiative, but highlighted that the outdoors is also very important as a "classroom" or learning space.

Gina Ebner, EAEA, remarked that while the revised key competences document has strong focus on lifelong learning and how that works for all age groups, the Council recommendation on common values focuses heavily on young people. But civic learning for adults is also extremely important. She referred to the example of folk high schools in Sweden which serve as community learning centres accessible to everyone. She outlined the **benefit of family learning** - it helps and motivates children to see their parents learning and parents feel they can catch up. Improvement in basic skills of parents has also been shown to help students stay in school longer and avoid truancy. Learning can have a snowball effect. Commenting on the languages recommendation, Ms Ebner also called for more attention to adults - it underestimates the number of people who learn their second or third language much later in life.

Marguerite Potard, WOSM, explained that in the Scouts, even if the learning does not take place in a classroom, there is still a lot of attention to updating pedagogies and allowing each learner to create their own path and keep up with the needs of the world. She called for a more holistic approach in the EC policy with more support for opening up the formal system to complementarities with non-formal education. There are several examples of Scouts working with schools, for example, in after-school programmes in France and the UK. This holistic approach is missing at the policy level, there are still a lot of silos in education. She insisted on the need to give young people more time and possibilities to volunteer and so learn in a different, active way - for example, through credits for volunteering.



MICHEL HEIJNEN, ATEE, MARGUERITE POTARD, WOSM, ADAM GAJEK, ESU

Michiel Heijnen, ATEE, pointed out that education in many ways prepares children for an old paradigm, for professions that will soon no longer exist. Lifelong learning, learning at any time and anywhere, is crucial. We have to move from standardised to customising learning and need to open classrooms up to the informal learning that happens in society. This changes the role of teacher who will have to adapt to working in a system that is less content-driven and focused on just transferring knowledge. Teacher educators have to be in the lead for this, collaborating with institutions where informal learning takes place (such as artists, entrepreneurs, start-ups) and helping to prepare teachers

for different learning. Policymakers have to allow and support this kind of innovation.

Adam Gajek, ESU, called for the recognition of all prior learning, which not all students are currently able to benefit from. The main barriers, as shown by the 2018 Bologna With Student Eyes, are a lack of trust in the validation of qualifications and a lack of trust among the main stakeholders. He said that RPL should be included in national strategies which deal with higher education in order to promote an understanding of RPL as complementary to formal education at all levels (national and institutional). Moreover, the development of recognition should not only be limited only to formal education, but equally include qualifications gained through extracurricular activities and non-formal trainings, which will also empower the role of lifelong learning in society and improve access to education. Access to those non-formal trainings and extracurricular activities within the European Education Area should be ensured to all students.

STATEMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Georg Jürgens, ECSWE, asked the EC to what extent they are considering the Lisbon Recognition Convention in light of the initiative on mutual recognition. He also expressed doubt about digital education in early childhood or early primary education due to implications for the healthy development of the child. Direct world experience is most important and the digital can wait until later age.

Thérèse Zhang Pulkowski, EUA, noted with interest the many commonalities between all the stakeholders present and stressed the need for more collaboration between the formal sector and other actors in order to promote lifelong learning. Recognition is the main bridge between these different sectors.

Panagiotis Chatzimichail, YEU International, said that the European Education Area should take non-formal education into account and link with the 2012 Council recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Mr Devuyt recalled a visit to the Future Lab and that it is a very relevant initiative to the Digital Education Action Plan launched earlier this year. Regarding comments about the language learning recommendation, they considered it necessary to keep a specific scope and not lose focus or have watered down outcome by trying to address everything. On Erasmus+, he said it opens the possibility for innovative partnerships between different types of learning and the future programme will reinforce this. They encourage applications that seek to build these bridges.

Jacqueline Pacaud, DG EAC, explained that the budget for adult education will be increased and that the new small-scale partnerships will enhance access to the programme for adults.

Corinne Corinna Liersch, DG EAC, highlighted the potential of the DiscoverEU initiative as an informal learning experience and they are looking at how to frame that by linking up with local organisations.





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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.

Visit our website
<http://www.lll-interestgroup.eu/>

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An initiative coordinated by the European Association for Adult Education (EAEA) and the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP)



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS



EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION

and the financial support of the European Union



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union