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Libraries: A Potential Catalyst for Lifelong Learning

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<h1 style="text-align:center">Libraries: A Potential Catalyst for Lifelong Learning</h1>

Introduction

Within today's information society, the most important learning outcome for all individuals is their being able to function as independent lifelong learners through lifelong learning. But what is "Lifelong Learning", actually? Lifelong learning refers to the continuous acquisition of knowledge, skills and understandings from the "cradle to the grave" (Delors, 1998). This ongoing concept of learning includes: the development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding that they will require through their lifetimes and to apply them with confidence, creativity and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances and environments (UNESCO, 1995:5). Similarly, according to the European Commission, "~~[L~~lifelong learning, "~~]~~ promotes the development of knowledge and competences that will enable each citizen to adapt to the knowledge-based society and actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life, taking more control of his or her future." To Häggström (2004), lifelong learning can be defined as all purposeful learning activity undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence. It contains various forms of education and training; formal, non-formal and informal. Häggström's definition is attested by the EU Memorandum (2000) on Lifelong learning, e.g. "all kinds of teaching and learning should be brought together". Among other things, lifelong learning dissolves boundaries between traditional policy sectors; educational policy, labour market policy, industrial policy, regional policy, social policy and cultural policy (Häggström, 2004).

Consequently, libraries have been a part of our community development since the Neo-Assyrian Empire period (2600 A.D.) regardless of race, creed, culture or color. They are the wonderful gathering places to pursue knowledge, whether you are a student, teacher, parent, laborer, employed or unemployed. Libraries assist in finding, using and interpreting appropriate information that opens up opportunities for lifelong learning, literacy enhancement, informed citizenship, recreation, creative imagination, individual research, critical thinking, and ultimately, empowerment in an increasingly complex world (Krolak, 2005). In addition, libraries are one of the best places that preserve reading resources and by using those resources we become literate and civilized, the main ingredients of a Lifelong Learning Society (Zakir, 2013). Therefore, libraries have become the essential element of a civilized society and their contribution is towards education, research and training.

Libraries are also one of the most perfect places for "beyond the classroom learning." It is the place where students are, or should be encouraged to explore other worlds, to develop their imagination, to think about the impossible (White, 2012). There are not many alternatives to a good library for the enrichment of lifelong learners. All over the world libraries are dedicated to providing free and equitable access to information for all in print, electronic and audiovisual formats. For various reasons, libraries are the ideal place to provide adult and family literacy classes with service-oriented opening hours and approachable staff. They have, ideally, easy access to all the resources needed to run literacy programs. Most libraries can provide space for students and tutors. They are usually centrally located and accessible by public transport. Libraries, and uniquely public libraries, provide support for lifelong learning from early childhood, and throughout adult life. Generally speaking there is a strong connection between, on

one hand a well developed public library system, and on the other hand, high literacy rates, high level of education, a high standard of living and a developed democracy (Thomas, 2009). In the US, for instance, over 96% of public libraries reported that they provide assistance to patrons seeking e-government services in the form of computer and Internet access, website navigation and even in completing applications for government financial assistance (Hoffman, Bertot & Davis, 2012). For a long time, the library has the natural advantage of providing an excellent learning environment and good services; it is the best place to enhance reading habits and to nurture the "Lifelong Learning Society" model (Zakir, forthcoming). Therefore, libraries not only bring development opportunities for society, but propel a new generation of lifelong learners.

Role of Libraries in Lifelong Learning
The role of libraries in promoting lifelong learning is especially critical in developing scientific, reflective thinking and innovation. Essentially, libraries are at the front line of developing and promoting lifelong learning. "School libraries and public libraries should be pivotal to the 21st century educational experience, and the basis for a positive attitude by young people towards information skills development, lifelong learning and enhancing their life chances" (Bandy, 2006). If it is agreed that the educational process must continue throughout the life of the individual, then it is impossible to argue the roles of libraries in this concern. The prospect of instituting lifelong learning and the need for it are to be judged not in relation to other people or to a given body of knowledge external to the pupil, but in relation to the personal development of all individuals. Lifelong learning also emerges as a possible solution to one of the critical problems of our modern societies i.e. relations between different generations and their way of thinking. Libraries however can greatly help them to overcome such a modern critical troubles by welcoming and guarantee equal access to information and equal opportunities for all regardless of income, age etc (Thomas,2009). Libraries have put their time, energy and expertise into supporting those who find reading more of a challenge, encouraging them to take their first steps towards reading for enjoyment through lifelong learning programs.

In 2003 The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) as an umbrella organization in the field of librarianship, published a report entitled, "The Role of Libraries in Lifelong Learning" where it clearly emphasizes the need for strengthening the educational role of libraries and principles based on UNESCO's Manifest. According to the Manifest, a library should become a place of learning and provide minimum conditions for lifelong learning. Three years later, the IFLA's Section on Information Literacy issued Guidelines for Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning in which it emphasizes that information literacy, i.e. possibility of access, search, use and evaluation of information, is a 6 necessary pre-condition and a key factor for making a lifelong reading culture in a society today.

In a society of lifelong learning, libraries, and especially public libraries, will be nodes connecting the local learning setting – whether it is of a formal or informal kind – with the global resources of information and knowledge. Public libraries can therefore play a role of fundamental importance in the development of future systems of lifelong learning. The development of the information and communication technology (ICT) has already laid the basis for the creation of information networks, giving users, even of small local public libraries, access to the world wide sources of information. As mentioned, public libraries offer guidance and

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training in how to search and use this information and rate the quality of information sources. Thus, libraries can be said to qualify as important prerequisites for an informed, democratic, knowledgeable, lifelong learning society.

There is no doubt about the fact that development is a product of education and education is a process through which people are formally and informally trained to acquire knowledge and skills. 'Education' and 'Library' are two inseparable, indivisible concepts, both being fundamentally and synchronically related to and co-existent with each other. One cannot be separated from the other […]. One dies as soon as the other perishes. One survives as long as the other exists (Adio & Olasina, 2010). Lifelong learning must go hand-in-hand with a capacity for self-learning. Today, education is not limited to the path from kindergarten to higher education. People must continue learning beyond that. Therefore, libraries are the crucial factor for educational development and creating lifelong learners for building a lifelong learning society.

Libraries and Librarians as Partners in a Lifelong Learning Team
Libraries should always be directed towards the empowerment of societies. "The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision–making and cultural development of the individual and social groups" (UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 2004). Today's librarians are highly educated professionals and information experts. As online and other forms of distance education are becoming mainstream at educational institutions and places of business, the librarian often becomes the technology as well as the literacy guide (George & Frank, 2004). As teachers and information specialists, librarians make an impact by developing library collections to suit the curriculum, and enabling an effective use of the resources in that collection to support learning (Lance & Loertscher, 2005). They also offer library-based, free lifelong learning classes that support adult and family literacy in everyday life. The aforesaid statements are attested by a study conducted by Spears, Ramos Jr., and Lee (2013) that identified five major types of lifelong learning classes offer by librarians, through libraries: (i) Computer- and ICT-related classes included introductions to basic software applications, Internet searching, email basics, and social media, as well as how to use e-books, iPads and Kindle e-readers, and most importantly, instruction on avoiding online identity theft and scams; (ii) ESL classes including English language tutoring programs and regular lectures; (iii) Government-related classes included social security, food stamps, tax refund assistance and citizenship testing; (iv) Health-related classes featuring Medicare and health insurance, and talks on breast cancer, strokes, cardiovascular diseases and more; and, (v) Workforce readiness classes included resume writing workshops, interview skills, job-searching and seeking skills, and GED testing assistance and tutoring. Hence, libraries and librarians can obviously be stakeholders of lifelong and life-wide learning as we need a continuum of libraries; a lifelong vision for library services and library programs that will continue the library's traditional role of organizing and storing information, providing access to that information, but also helping users make informed decisions, be information problem-solvers and generally make effective use of the information. This continuum of libraries is conceptualized as a support to lifelong learning with "lifelong libraries" (Doiron, ….).

However, we should have more research and knowledge about how libraries and the professional profiles of librarians should be designed in order to improve their preparation to meet the new needs and demands directed towards lifelong leaning. An ongoing challenge for libraries is to

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make visible to local learners the wide variety of programs, services and resources for lifelong learning available for free to the community in local neighborhood libraries (Spears, Ramos Jr. & Lee, 2013). Putting an information literacy/lifelong learning program in place cannot only be done exclusively by librarians in libraries. This enormous task is the responsibility of all the learning community: teachers, faculty, parents, students and society in general. A team must be formed, and partners identified who can work with librarians. For example, in the context of school libraries, the partnership team might include one or more teachers, an outside expert, a school counselor and possibly others. In a public library context the partnership team mix would be somewhat different. In this situation, public libraries and professional librarians will have to change and adapt to new demands, professional tasks and working conditions.

A very good development of the idea of lifelong learning libraries and their role in lifelong learning and modern societies. You now need maybe two concluding sentences here, "wrapping up" you main point and pointing to the future.

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