

Lifelong Learning: Using Libraries as an Extension of Traditional Education

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When one takes on the task of lifelong learning, they are making a commitment. Lifelong learning is about more than ‘making it through the next test’ and more about learning new skills to compete in a changing world both mentally and economically. Lifelong learning does not have to be part of a structured setting. Simply acting on the will to learn more and making that commitment to learning beyond the classroom is an act of lifelong learning. This can be achieved through personal decision or some outside force, but people want to learn more when they’re talking to people in their peer group. Even taking the effort to learn a foreign language, perhaps for work or for being able to communicate better with foreign family members or friends, is part of lifelong learning. Looking up personal genealogical history for personal reasons is another example of lifelong learning, through the library or services like ancestry.com provided by the library. By using programs provided by public libraries, individuals can develop their knowledge on a subject or build on important skills that might otherwise be difficult for them to obtain.

A familiar method of education through a library is the traditional library program. Programs can be simple, such a cultural exploration through a presentation from an individual or be more geared toward gaining a specific goal. In the joint article by Wendy Butcher and Patsy Ann-Street, Butcher and Ann-Street cite several examples of adult learners. They break the types of adult learners into age groups known as “phases”. These individuals range from a woman in her 40s, looking to learn computer skills so she can effectively re-enter the work force to a man in his late 70s looking to get a better grasp of technology so he could collect all of the pictures he had taken in his life and place them into CDs for his family (Ann-Street and Butcher, 2009). Part of lifelong

learning is being able to adapt to new trends. In a world where technology is such a major part of our world, elder people taking computer courses for personal reasons or middle-aged people trying to stay in a competitive job market are practical examples of lifelong learning. By actively educating themselves about something they are unfamiliar with, lifelong learning becomes able to thrive and use unknown technologies in a highly technological world. At the Guilford Free Library where I work, we offer classes for older locals to learn how to use their tablet devices (specifically iPads). But lifelong learning isn't limited to technological skills.

When living in a large community, it is important to educate the community at large through the use of library programs. In his article examining the Brimbank Library's strategies to encourage lifelong learning, Chris Kelly explains that the Brimbank's "library programs are targeted to support the community's learning and enhance social and economic outcomes for individuals and the community" (Kelly, 2012). Kelly describes partnerships the library takes part of to increase the communities learning. Rosetta Stone, for example, teams up with the St. Albans Library. The resulting program provides resources for English language learning classes and encourages the classes to use the library resources outside of class. Other programs that Kelly cites include an employment assistance program partnered with local resume writing and interview skill developing firms and a partnership with Mambourin Enterprises for adults with disabilities (Mambourin promotes independent living for adults with a disability). By joining with these larger efforts, libraries can take part in a much larger collection of programs to educate the community in programs that they might need. Lifelong learning doesn't have to come from a structured program. It could

just as easily come from a larger social group presented by the library. The Guilford Library offers several parenting guides for every age group that are easy for new parents to connect to. The Guilford Library also offers social events for children of all ages, where more experienced parents can exchange resources to new parents who are struggling with aspects of raising their first child. This is a less formal type of education, but experienced individuals can still offer

Lifelong learning is also a function of individuals educating themselves in traditionally classroom material outside of the traditional classroom. The idea of lifelong learning can be traced back to Victorian times when libraries were used as effective modes of self-education. In his article in *Information for Social Change*, Andrew Hudson explains that when libraries strive to encourage lifelong learning they are, essentially, working back toward the traditions of free educational purposes of Victorian libraries. With this shift in thinking, social mobility was able to occur in Victorian times and information was readily available for free. The modern library's goal of lifelong learning can be connected to similar feelings by allowing individuals to educate themselves who might otherwise not be able to. Libraries play an important role in lifelong learning in the way that they offer information that might otherwise be difficult to track down. In the world of education, most structured courses require people to pay for the services of the professor. At the public library, an individual interested in learning more about medieval history can borrow books, documentaries and lectures on CD so that they can learn at their own pace without the tight structure of tests that give so many people anxiety. While this education may mean less than taking a course at a local college, it is still an acceptable way of an individual to learn something that they are

interested in, but may not have the funds to go back to school for it. Public libraries provide resources that make this type of learning possible for people who might not be able to take a class on a subject that interests them due to time or economic constraints.

The public library is no longer just a learning arena for active students. With access to the public library, anyone can become a lifelong learner by actively pursuing their interests for their own purposes or to compete in a constantly changing culture. By offering programs and services to those who have moved on from school, public librarians can provide adults with tools to continue learning so that they can compete in an ever-changing world.

References

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