

# Lifelong learning and equal gender opportunities: a social justice approach

Camila Valenzuela Persico  
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid  
camivp18@gmail.com

*Abstract: This article reviews how lifelong learning has evolved and how it relates to social justice from the equal gender opportunities point of view. The first section summarises the development of lifelong learning and the second section provides an overview of the concept of social justice and its strong links to education. Throughout these theoretical sections, particular emphasis is placed on the essential role of lifelong learning and social justice in promoting equal gender opportunities.*

*Keywords: lifelong learning, gender, professional development, work based learning, recognition of prior learning, social justice.*

*Resumen: El siguiente artículo tiene por objetivo revisar la evolución del aprendizaje permanente y su vinculación al concepto de justicia social desde la perspectiva de la igualdad de oportunidades de género. Por lo cual, primeramente se hace una síntesis del desarrollo del concepto de aprendizaje permanente. Posteriormente, se da una mirada a los conceptos de justicia social y su vinculación a la educación. A lo largo de estos dos bloques teóricos, se resalta el papel fundamental que tienen a la hora de promover la igualdad de oportunidades de género.*

*Palabras clave: aprendizaje permanente, género, desarrollo profesional, aprendizaje en el puesto de trabajo, reconocimiento de aprendizajes previos, justicia social.*

# 1. Introduction

The lifelong learning paradigm is a fundamental component of the knowledge society characteristic of the post-industrial era. In this paradigm, learning is necessary for human beings and needs to be promoted throughout their lives. However, not everyone has the same opportunity to access learning and training, and these differences are particularly evident at the gender level. While some people are highly trained and belong to society's elite, others struggle to access basic education and develop their competences.

This has generated the need for specific plans and policies for women and men with little access to training programmes in order to promote lifelong learning as a mechanism for providing equal gender opportunities. However, as women tend to join the labour market in low-paid jobs that require only basic skills, it is necessary to review these programmes and evaluate other strategies proposed by the main actors and the target participants of lifelong learning programs.

These programmes, promoted by governments based on recommendations made by international organizations such as the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning, are mainly aimed at providing a second opportunity and do not take into account aspects of gender that are fundamental to the pursuance of more equal societies.

This highlights the need to develop continuous training plans from a gender perspective (both female and male standpoints) that promote lifelong learning as a real and effective dimension of social justice, which requires regulating social and economic inequality through a wide range of concepts and theories (including merit, entitlement, equality of outcome, equality of opportunity, need, etc.). In this regard, we should emphasise the educational purpose of social justice as a human right. The full capacity of the learning process should be utilised in order to empower not only the productive dimension but the social and personal ones too.

In this article we provide an overview of the concept of lifelong learning and its impact on equal gender opportunities through a social justice approach. The article is divided into two sections: the first section describes the development of lifelong learning and the second one discusses social justice and equal gender opportunities. The main conclusion drawn from this analysis is that promoting lifelong learning programmes with a gender perspective is crucial to achieving more equal and cohesive societies.

## 2. Lifelong learning

### 2.1. Conceptual evolution

Learning through existence and experience is a process inherent to human activity. The concept of lifelong learning (LLL) has been developed throughout the history of education but it reached its maximum level of propagation after the 1970s thanks to the work of international organisations.

In 1969 Philip H. Coombs, the Director of UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning, published "The World Educational Crisis", in which he proposed education as a continuous process throughout life. This opened up debate and acceptance on the topic, generated a large number of reports and publications both within his organization (from a broad and humanistic perspective) and other organizations, and had repercussions for educational policy at the regional, national, and international levels, before eventually becoming a supranational education policy (Jacobi, 2009).

In 1973, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defined recurrent education as the distribution of education throughout an individual's life in a recurrent way (OECD, 1973; Jarvis, 2010) and claimed that all people should have the right to education beyond compulsory education.

At first, the approach was to restructure the educational system and emphasize adult education and non-formal learning. However, in the last few years emphasis has been placed on the reform of formal educational systems through international evaluations conducted by OECD (such as PISA). This evolution and complementation of LLL—from adult education to international assessment—is due to the move towards the knowledge society, where it is necessary to strengthen competences from the bottom up.

In this way, LLL developed from the 1960s into today's Learning society, which is based on the LLL paradigm and on which all educational reforms must focus (Ven Der Zee, 2006).

Disseminating the concept is the responsibility of various social agents such as geographically limited regional organisms. One of these is the supranational organism that is the European Union (EU), whose educational activities were not so explicit at first but which over the last decade has generated an enormous number of documents and policies to illustrate the meanings of the concept. In coordination with these international and supranational organisms, invaluable activity has been conducted by non-governmental organisms and by the scientific community, whose research in this field has contributed greatly to the development of LLL activities. Greater coordination is perhaps required among

all these agents in order to create a more harmonious and coherent dynamic, although each agent, from their own sphere of construction, supports and depends on the other (Jacobi, 2009).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the European Union views LLL as the guiding principle of its transversal education policies, which are focused on creating the most competitive knowledge-based economy. The EU has defined LLL as all learning activity that takes place throughout one's life and is aimed at improving knowledge, skills and competences from a civic, social, professional and personal perspective (European Commission, 2001).

This definition has encompassed a range of activities conducted by the European Union in its committees for education, work and research, etc. and generated a comprehensive and global strategy for achieving both competitiveness and social cohesion.

The principles that support LLL and guide its effective implementation emphasize the central role of the learner, the importance of equal opportunities, and the quality and relevance of learning opportunities (European Commission, 2001). The guiding principles behind the development strategy have also been adopted by the educational policymakers of other countries. One of these is Chile, which belongs to the OECD and as such promotes and participates in international networks for knowledge and scientific development that enable experience in the success of the principles highlighted by the European Commission to be shared.

Other definitions of LLL originate from the academic sector. Jarvis (2010) defines LLL as the combination of processes throughout the life of the person as a whole—his or her body (the genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses)—experienced in a social situation. The perceived content is that which is then transformed cognitively, emotionally or practically (or by any combination of these) and integrated into that person's biography, resulting in an individual that is continually changing.

Garrido and Ejido (2006) view LLL as an ongoing process throughout one's life that provides and articulates formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. This process contemplates the acquisition of competences that include both knowledge and practical skills and are oriented towards personal, social and professional development so as to facilitate active participation and involvement in the knowledge society.

Both of these conceptual definitions, one of which focuses more on process and one of which is more comprehensive, are valid and give an idea of the

flexibility of the concept, which ultimately has one main objective: to improve people's quality of life by facilitating equal access to learning opportunities.

## 2.2 Types of learning situations and classification of the educational structure

According to Jarvis (2010) and Colley, Hodgkinson and Malcolm (2002), and based on the 1974 proposal by Coombs and Ahmed, different learning types exist depending on whether the learning situation is formal, non-formal or informal.

Formal learning is that which is typically provided by a recognized training institution; is structured (in terms of learning objectives, pace, and learning support); and leads to a certificate. From the learner's perspective it is intentional.

Non-formal learning is typically provided by an educational or training organization and is structured and intentional but does not lead to a certificate. Jarvis (2010) differentiates between two main types of non-formal learning. On one hand is Human Resource Development (HRD), which incorporated the concept of human capital and sought to increase people's knowledge and skills. Nowadays, training based on competencies and vocational qualifications is being developed. The latter involves learning based on work with mentoring systems and has led to the concept of social capital (Kilpatrick, Field and Falk, 2003). On the other hand is liberal adult education, which is stereotyped as middle-class spare time and which emphasises the idea of extending knowledge, skills and hobbies.

Informal learning is the outcome of daily activities related to work, family and leisure. This type of learning situation is not structured and does not lead to a certificate. In most cases it is not intentional.

However, distinguishing between these types of learning situations is quite complex and formal education scenarios are assumed to play an important role in informal learning. In this context, Colley et al. (2002) combined three approaches (the participative perspective of learning theories, community education and mentoring) and suggested that few learning situations do not entail a combination of formal and informal learning elements. Consequently, the boundaries between formal, non-formal and informal learning are significant in relation to the context and purposes involved. For specific situations, it is appropriate to examine the formal and informal dimensions and analyse how these interact, though the historical, social, political and economic context and the theoretical vision of learning held by society must also be taken into account.

With regard to these types of learning situations, a conceptual structure of learning has been developed. In the first stages of development, adult education

ruled. This later diversified into adult education from a liberal approach and profession-centred higher education. Lifelong learning as an idea became popular once it became clear that the formal school/university educational system was insufficient and that the provision of education had to be considerably wider.

The evolution that resulted from the learning systems in accordance with the learning situation led to Continuous Education, which combined professional education, diversified it into professional training (related to training within industry) and professional development (related to career development), and led to Human Resource Development (HRD). However, the advent of new learning opportunities—and the technologies that support them—underlines the fact that learning is an inherently collaborative activity that requires a great deal of exchange in and between communities and encompasses several disciplines that have a common objective or are related to a specific profession or problem. These opportunities may be found in one organization or among several organizations. Individual learning systems for work are therefore going to require social interaction in a virtual world (Carneiro, 2011). This is the case, for example, of work-based learning for schoolteachers and many other professions, or of mentoring in companies, or programmes for marginalised young people, all of which combine both formal and informal elements (Colley, Hodkinson y Malcolm, 2002).

### **2.3 Learning theory implicit in the concept of lifelong learning**

Different forms of understanding the concept of lifelong learning exist since the advent of community education, as reflected by Overwien (2000), who takes into account the educational dimension of social movements such as the Popular Economical Organizations (PEO) of Latin America in the 1970s. Weight is added by the incorporation of the non-formal and informal learning dimensions, all the more so when the temporal perspective is emphasized and the importance of continuity and permanence are highlighted. It is at this point that education turns towards the concept of lifelong learning.

In the last few years, LLL has become not just the organizing principle of many policies but the dominant one, encompassing all learning activities “from the cradle to the grave”, including community education, adult education, vocational education, work-based learning, distance learning and higher education (Francis and Leathwood, 2005). LLL blurs institutional boundaries, thus reconfiguring learning and its environment.

Today there is an important debate in which the concept acquires one meaning or another depending on where the focus lies in the learning-training

process. Some authors are critical of the development of the concept, regarding it as a tool of neoliberal discourse (Coffield, 1999; Field, 2001; Olssen, 2006). This appropriation of the neoliberal discourse emphasizes the idea of personal responsibility in educational development: “whereas learning refers to an autonomous person as a consumer, education requires public policies and deliberate actions” (Garrido y Ejido, 2006: 26), implying there is personal choice when taking advantage of educational and learning opportunities.

However, opportunities for accessing education are clearly unequal (Garrido, 2006), since barriers such as time, cost, gender and failure impact greatly on access (Jarvis, 2010). The category of gender cannot be understood without also contextualizing the categories of social class and race since within the construct of LLL is observed the hegemony of white middle class men and opportunities are denied to men from certain ethnic minorities and marginalized social classes (Francis and Leathwood, 2005).

This debate on the meaning of the concept helps to reconcile two dimensions of LLL: on the one hand, the instrumental dimension, which addresses professional life and competitiveness; and on the other hand, the humanistic and civic dimension, which addresses the enrichment of society and individual self-fulfilment (Garrido and Ejido, 2006). For UNESCO, LLL is the essential organizing principle for achieving the objective of a global knowledge-based economy that promotes formal, non-formal and informal learning and is complemented by the four pillars of learning proposed by the International Commission on Education for the 21st century: learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together (Carneiro, 2011).

This difference between education and learning has led studies to focus on learning, which implies that individuals are active in their acquisition of aptitudes, skills and competencies in an inherent process; and education is the result of policies that are implemented as interdependent processes that feed from each other (Garrido and Ejido, 2006).

With regard to the neoliberal discourse in the development of the LLL paradigm, Olsen (2006) applies Foucault’s governmentality concept to the interdependence between learning and education and invokes a movement towards a discourse of democratization and social justice, even during the conditioning and mutual adaptation of education and economic practices.

Both education and learning spring from a vision constructed from a three-dimensional system that encompasses the learning classroom, which involves students and teachers; the learning school, which incorporates inspectors, directors, administrators, and parents; and the learning community, which



extends to members of the community, lifelong learners, the mass media, and social and cultural institutions (Carneiro, 2011).

Carneiro (2011: 4) refers to the double role of education and connects the old to the new: “this penetrating duality of education comprises a rapidly changing society... as if the old order of thinking were being changed for new paradigms for understanding the reality... and this increase in the speed of change prevents us from stopping and reflecting”. In this way, knowledge and learning are two sides of the same coin. The real challenges are to understand a united world in which connectivity should be understood as greater proximity and to realise that in a global world minorities should be committed to their citizenship in deprived regions.

Consequently, learning occurs in diverse and non-academic scenarios, is less instructor-centred and more learner-centred, requires self-regulatory skills, and regains the essence of the training concept (*bildung*), which implies active, experiential and practical pedagogy. The instructor’s role needs to be reformulated as learning moves away from the acquisition of knowledge (*curriculum*) towards the development of skills. Biesta (2006) states that focusing on learning rather than on teaching presupposes that learners know what they want and that formal education is a component of the wide range of available learning opportunities (distance learning, non-formal learning, etc.).

The need to be constantly up-to-date—not only professionally but also socially and personally—due to the rapid changes of an interconnected society requires a new vision of learners as students in new environments (Barnett, 2006) permanently reconstructing their identities in accordance with the meaning bestowed by the context in which they find themselves.

This implies the development of new curricular styles that incorporate the potential for change of new educational policies for the learner’s new profile and trajectory that include and exceed the discourses superimposed in the establishment of those policies regarding deficit, disadvantage and diversity (Blundell, 2005; Rogers, 2005).

Another dimension to consider are forms of assessment, assuming that men and women differ in learning style and access to opportunities, since new models need to be constructed and revised in accordance with the gender continuum, thus changing established hegemonic androcentric patterns and fostering new forms of assessment that positively connect the adult learner to the adult teacher (Stalker, 2005). These are key quality factors for the relevance and impact of adult education (UNESCO, 1997, 2009).



According to Carneiro (2011), a completely comprehensive model takes into account three temporal variables (past, present and future), paradigm shifts (from industrialization to globalization and towards a new renaissance period), modes of delivery (from uniformity to segmented distribution and towards customization), and driving forces (from bureaucracy to the market leading to more empowered communities). Moreover, the teaching-learning process can be understood if one observes the route taken by the theories of learning from behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, and conectivism to today's generativism.

The latter approach derives from two philosophical approaches that deal with scientific knowledge and set a clear distinction between received vision, a passive recollection of existing knowledge, and the semantic vision, which involves a fully-fledged reconstruction of received knowledge and presupposes a constant quest for added-value meaning. This involves a chain that goes from data to information (meta data), from information to knowledge (meta information), from knowledge to learning (meta knowledge), and from learning to meaning-making (meta learning). Generativism is therefore between innovative learning and learning to innovate and directs the foundations of a creative society in which the challenge is to create new knowledge from knowledge that was previously codified (Carneiro, 2011).

In this way, the concept of learning is related to the constructivist paradigms and the learner's active participation, fostering creative skills, critical and analytical thinking, and problem solving strategies, all of which promote autonomy and innovation. This approach recalls authors such as Dewey and Rogers to address certain shortages in the current education systems and promote a knowledge-based society. Learning is done in a wide range of contexts and highlights different types of needs that are not always recognised or met by the formal system.

From this perspective, Jackson (2011) shows that the learning activities of migrant women in social environments provide them not only with skills—such as literacy and language proficiency—but also with relational capital that reveals the capacity to develop not only economically but also socially and personally, which is fundamental to human development. In this way, a sense of belonging is developed. Devos (2011) highlights gender inconsistencies in the transnational knowledge society in a study of women with higher education studies who, having moved geographically for various reasons, were unable to develop certain aspects of their identity because their identities were related to their land.

The concept of LLL has therefore had implications at the gender level with omission from neoliberal discourse (Francis and Leathwood, 2005; Rogers,

2006) and pressure from various theoretical and critical approaches (e.g. feminism, Marxism, etc.) to incorporate not only gender diversity but LLL for all, not through a unified discourse governed by the neoliberal hegemonic system but in accordance with specific local and individual needs and with the aim of connecting those who are disconnected.

The philosophy behind this LLL approach lies in addressing certain forms of social inequality in order to create a more just society that interacts on an interpersonal basis and that allows the locality to generate its own ethos. It will be the task of social policy and educational commitment to direct educational resources to the non-privileged (Jarvis, 2010). This makes it necessary for us now to reflect on the social justice paradigms and how they impact on the education process.

### 3. Social justice

Educational research from a gender perspective is not new. This trend, observed around the world in the last few decades, has been promoted by several international organizations, especially UNESCO, which has set up a specific body to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. In English-speaking countries social justice in education has recently become a powerful and highly relevant research topic with much scientific production.

The present study links social justice to lifelong learning from a gender approach. The concept will be developed from an equal opportunities perspective, the theoretical development will be continued, and both the capabilities approach proposed by Marta Nussbaum (2010, 2012) and the participation model proposed by Iris Marion Young (2006) will be emphasised. This is because the origin of the concept considers the distribution of material benefits and because over the years these other points of view have been adopted. These complement the model by recognizing the diversity of the abilities to develop and the procedures and freedoms available to develop them, as well as the possibility to be part of the society, considering the wide variety of identities that need to be represented and that need to participate in society.

Social justice is a concept with a wide and historical development that has thrived in a number of disciplines, including Philosophy, Politics, Sociology and Economics. In each of these disciplines, education is regarded as essential to the development of social justice.

The evolution of the term therefore incorporates several approaches. According to Murillo and Hernández-Castilla (2011), current approaches derive

from the paradigms of distribution, recognition and participation. Social justice as distribution is the way in which primary goods are distributed in society, in accordance with Rawl's theory of the 1970s, which was based on the philosophy of Aristotle. The later capabilities approach, created by the economist Amartya Sen and continued by Marta Nussbaum, proposes that the idea of justice is found in the real freedoms enjoyed by individuals. The importance of this approach lies in the fact that it requires us to examine the value of the procedures and capabilities rather than simply considering that means that are needed for achieving these freedoms.

Education is therefore a central element of the capabilities approach since the development programmes administered by non-governmental organisations shape learners' aptitudes, transforming them into inner capabilities, which then become a lifelong source of satisfaction. "People that have received an education enjoy much better employment, political participation and productive interaction options with other members of society at the local, national and global levels" (Nussbaum, 2012: 181).

The same author also affirms that women who can read and write have more opportunities to communicate and share with similar people, which leads to other advantages for the involvement of women in society, at home and at leisure, and encourages equal gender opportunities (Nussbaum, 2010, 2012).

These apparently conflicting approaches are summarized in the recognition approach developed mainly by Nancy Fraser, which involves devising a political orientation program that combines the best of the policies of redistribution and the best of the policies of recognition. The recognition model derives from Hegelian philosophy and the phenomenology of conscience, which points to an ideal reciprocal relationship between people in which each one views the other as both equal and detached. This relationship is composed of subjectivity, where each person becomes an individual only insofar as he or she recognizes the other and is recognized by him or her (Murillo and Hernández-Castilla, 2011).

Fraser (2006) has generated a large contribution to social justice theory through the development of an approach in which the dimensions of social justice interplay with regard to the distribution of resources, the recognition of diversity, and the representation of language. Consequently, this model proposes a dualistic perspective that maintains that class (distribution) and identity (recognition) policies are integrated from moral philosophy, social theory and political theory.

Iris Marion Young develops the concept further and makes it more complex out of the need to understand social justice as a procedure or process in that it

becomes a tool for achieving distributive justice and political recognition from a participative perspective (Murillo and Hernández-Castilla, 2011).

In “Responsibility for Justice” (2011), Iris Marion Young makes an extensive analysis of the concept with a series of theoretical developments illustrating that the entry of women into the workplace helps to introduce both greater competition into the labour markets and greater expectations about the appropriate roles for women. She also provides a more individualistic understanding of the social relationships that blur collective responsibility.

Young continues: “Through the structural processes of market relationships, how a person’s life goes depends partly on the fit between his or her talents, skills, and ambitions, on the one hand, and what an aggregate of what other people value enough to pay for, on the other. While the market demand for a person’s skills and what they produce is a circumstance conditioning a person’s life that is largely beyond her individual control, it is not usually a matter of brute luck. Market relationships are constituted by cultural traditions and changing fashions that influence preferences, by institutionalized relations of power that enable some people to have greater command over resources than others, and by other institutional missions and rules” (Young, 2011: 43). This situation may narrow conditions of participation for certain groups in society, especially minorities or non-dominant groups.

Young’s (2011) model articulates that few people today believe that social opportunities are equal. Huge differences exist regarding the quality of education and, shamefully, these depend on race and social class, largely because each community is expected to assume the costs of their own education.

It is accepted that the education system is unfair and this model suggests what would be needed to make it fair, but these are radical suggestions. During schooling, effort should always be compensated and the achievement of high levels of competence should be recognised. On the other hand, failures should not be punished. Those who fail to reach their educational objectives should always have another opportunity. Moreover, a failed attempt should not rule out the opportunity for them to try again (Young, 2011).

This philosophy maintains that anyone who wishes to learn something, improve their skills, and be better able to contribute to the social structure should have the opportunity to do so. The opportunity to learn something should not be closed even when the individual fails constantly. If we take this principle seriously, it is the task of society to collectively provide the lifelong opportunity for people to acquire a certain level of knowledge and skills. However, academic failure has a high cost in terms of social stigma and closed opportunities. Most societies offer just one chance in life to acquire the skills needed to develop well-being (Young, 2011).

The contributions made by social justice, both from the capabilities approach and the recognition and participation approach, express the need for opportunities throughout life to promote the development of skills and allow people to achieve their maximum potential at every moment and in every field. Social interplay and the speed of change make it necessary to find opportunities that enable everyone to reach their maximum development, especially if they belong to groups who have fewer environments in which to progress and participate. This is important when learned attributes become obsolete and opportunities to update skills or learn new ones are few.

Some European societies offer a system of recycling for workers but even the best programmes are limited. A fair society would not punish failure and would provide everyone with some opportunity for lifelong learning and the acquisition of new skills (Young, 2011).

Moreover, although the education and learning system is promoted as a universal right, some gender-, class- and race-related inequalities due to globalization have gone unrecognized. Although lifelong learning is seen as inseparable from the development of social justice, practices and policies are varied, have sometimes been segmented, and have even reproduced the imperialist order (Jackson, 2011).

An important current problem of the capabilities approach is gender since the inequality of women slows down the development of nations and shows certain development approaches to be inadequate. One of the main instigators of gender equality is access to education, which besides teaching “a wide range of skills” provides “exit options from traditional roles” (Nussbaum, 2012: 176).

In this sense, UNESCO and other international organizations have encouraged an increase in women's participation in education and the development of learning paths that allow them to live in better societies. This is a product of agreements reached at World Educational Forums (such as Jomtien 1990 and Dakar 2000) and the Millennium Declaration, which defined Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that should be attained by 2015. One programme making an effort to attain these goals is Education For All (EFA), whose Goal 5 refers to the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005. Goal 4 promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women. In accordance with these goals, UNESCO has published the “World Atlas of Gender Equality in Education” (2012), which highlights the fact that girls are still at a disadvantage in most regions and countries but tend to increase their retention rates and obtain better outcomes than boys once they are in the education system.

However, there is a horizontal and vertical segregation (where women do low-paid jobs and are absent from positions of high responsibility) in which roles are stereotyped and approaches to the evaluation of economic development focus largely on indicators that analyse the production of goods and services but ignore reproductive non-remunerated work. Raising and caring for children are not valued or considered when policies are implemented to bring about a more just and gender-equal society, despite the fact that these activities contribute to the knowledge society and the training and development of human resources (Ribas, 2005).

## 4. Conclusion

The evolution of lifelong learning, with approaches of contrasting ideological dimensions, has had an important impact on international and supranational policies. However, it is the powerful rise of the discourse of social justice that has criticised the gaps or deficits in the programmes implemented and highlighted the importance of providing educational opportunities at all levels in order to promote the inherent learning process of all people and develop their skills and competences to the full, irrespective of their socioeconomic background, ethnicity or gender.

In this way, initiatives to recognize previously acquired skills through non-formal and informal learning activities both in the work place and in diverse community practices are extremely important for validating the participation of people from various sectors of society who have not yet been represented in Lifelong Learning programmes.

Lifelong learning discourse must make an effort to value new learning styles and promote educational organisations that harness the potential of all the skills of human beings and create cohesive, productive and developed societies not only from the economic point of view but also from the points of view of citizen involvement, personal development, and social inclusion. Policymakers should bear in mind that society is fragmented, that learning occurs at all levels, and that policies should be implemented with recognition of prior learning so that talent is not wasted when innovation is developed. Therefore, policies should be flexible, based on programmes that are customized for each community, and used with generativist teaching strategies.

Policies should always be developed with the philosophy of equal gender opportunities in mind, aim to fight traditional gender stereotypes and increase the presence of women in positions of responsibility, and balance this with child

raising and caring, activities that are essential for the sustainable development of a growing and cohesive society.

At the learner level, much work is needed in sharing experiences and knowledge and discovering what it means to be a lifelong learner. All the organisations in which people interact and the differences in opportunities due to gender and social class should be addressed with a great awareness of the leading role that can be played by lifelong learning. This is especially important when the role of men and women in society is discussed in relation to their potential and skills for participating in the development of an equal, just and sustainable life.

The challenge throughout this research appears complex since it considers various areas that interplay and highlights the need to develop transversal policies. One of the main tools for improving equal gender opportunities is to promote lifelong learning activities with a social justice approach that enables the capability of every human being to be recognised and development to be improved by including women in positions of responsibility while sharing their historical child raising and caring role with men.

In general terms equal gender opportunities should be promoted using a transversal approach that encompasses all the learning activities that allow men and women to develop their capabilities and be fully represented in society. As learning occurs in everyday life and in every situation, a lifelong learning programme with a social justice approach will allow equal gender opportunities to be promoted using a participative methodology.

## 5. References

- BARNETT, R. (2006). "Being and becoming", in Peter JARVIS [editor]. *From adult education to the learning society: 21 years from the International journal of lifelong education*, p. 293–306. London: Routledge
- BIESTA, G. (2006). "What's the point of lifelong learning if lifelong learning has no point?, on the democratic deficit of policies for lifelong learning", *European Educational Research Journal*, 5(3), 12. Retrieved from: <[http://www.worlds.co.uk/pdf/freetoview.asp?j=eerj&vol=5&issue=3&year=2006&article=2\\_Biesta\\_EERJ\\_5\\_3-4\\_web](http://www.worlds.co.uk/pdf/freetoview.asp?j=eerj&vol=5&issue=3&year=2006&article=2_Biesta_EERJ_5_3-4_web)>.
- BISQUERRA, R. (2004). *Metodología de la investigación educativa*. Madrid. Editorial: La Muralla.
- BLUNDELL, S. (2006). "Gender and the curriculum of adult education", in Peter JARVIS [editor]. *From adult education to the learning society: 21 years from the International journal of lifelong education*, p. 82–100. London: Routledge.



- CARNEIRO, R. (2011). "Discovering the treasure of learning", in J. YANG, R. VALDÉS-COTERA (eds.). *Conceptual evolution and policy developments in lifelong learning* (p. 3–23). Hamburgo: UIL. UNESCO.
- COFFIELD, F. (1999). "Breaking the consensus: lifelong learning as social control", *British educational research journal*, 25(4), 479–499. Retrieved from: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0141192990250405#.Uduf0zv2a3E>>.
- COLLEY, H., HODKINSON, P. & MALCOLM, J. (2002). "Non-formal learning: Mapping the conceptual terrain", *Consultation Report, Leeds: University of Leeds Lifelong Learning Institute*. Retrieved from: <[http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/TALE-Documentation/Documents/Phase\\_3/ELU\\_5/Tale\\_ELU5\\_NFL\\_Mapping\\_the\\_conceptual\\_terrain.pdf](http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/export/sites/default/youth-partnership/TALE-Documentation/Documents/Phase_3/ELU_5/Tale_ELU5_NFL_Mapping_the_conceptual_terrain.pdf)>.
- DEVOS, A. (2011). "Learning to labour in regional Australia: Gender, identity and place in lifelong learning", *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 30(4), 437–450. Retrieved from: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02601370.2011.588460#.Udthjzv2a3E>>.
- EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2001). *Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality: communication from the Commission*. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- FIELD, J. (2001). "Lifelong education", *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20 (1-2), 3–15. Retrieved from: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09638280010008291#.UdugODv2a3E>>.
- FISKE, E. B. (2012). *World atlas of gender equality in education*. Hamburgo. Unesco.
- FRASER, N.; HONNETH, A. (2006). *¿Redistribución o reconocimiento?* Madrid: Fundación Paideia Galiza.
- GARCIA GARRIDO, J.L y EGIDO GÁLVEZ, I. (2006). *Aprendizaje Permanente*. Pamplona. Eunsa.
- HERNÁNDEZ, R.; FERNÁNDEZ, C.; BAPTISTA, P. (1991). *Metodología de la investigación*. México: McGraw-Hill.
- JACKSON, S. (2010). "Learning through social spaces: Migrant women and lifelong learning in post-colonial London", *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29(2), 237–253. Retrieved from: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02601371003616657#.UdthWzv2a3E>>.
- (2011). "Lifelong learning and social justice", *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 30:4, 431–436.

- JACOBI, A. (2009). *International Organizations and lifelong learning*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- JARVIS, P. (2010). *Adult education and lifelong learning: Theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- (2006). *From adult education to learning society. 21 years from the educational Journal of Lifelong Education*. London: Routledge.
- KILPATRICK, S.; FIELD, J. & FALK, I. (2003). "Social capital: An analytical tool for exploring lifelong learning and community development", *British educational research journal*, 29(3), 417–433. Retrieved from: <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/01411920301859/abstract>>.
- LEATHWOOD, C.; FRANCIS, B. (2006). *Gender and Lifelong Learning. Critical feminist engagements*. London: Routledge.
- MINISTERIO FEDERAL DE COOPERACIÓN ECONÓMICA Y DESARROLLO (2007). *Especial 153: Desarrollo de Capacidades para la Educación para Todos: De la Política a la Práctica*. Bonn. Germany. Retrieved from: <<http://www.bmz.de/en/publications/languages/spanish/Esp153CS2.pdf>>.
- MURILLO JAVIER, F. & HERNÁNDEZ-CASTILLA, R. (2011). "Hacia un concepto de justicia social", *REICE: Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana Sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio En Educación*, 9(4), 7–23.
- NUSSBAUM, M. C. (2012). *Creating capabilities. The human development approach*. Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós.
- NUSSBAUM, M. C. & RODIL, M. V. (2010). *Sin fines de lucro: Por qué la democracia necesita de las humanidades*. Barcelona: Katz.
- OLSEN, M. (2006). "Understanding the mechanisms of neoliberal control: Lifelong learning, flexibility and knowledge capitalism", *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 25(3), 213–230. Retrieved from: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02601370600697045#.UdtgDDv2a3E>>.
- OVERWIEN, B. (2000). "Informal learning and the role of social movements", *International Review of Education*, 46(6), 621–640. Retrieved from: <<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1026578928141#page-1>>.
- RIBAS, M.A. (2005). *Mujer y trabajo en la economía social*. Madrid: Consejo Económico y Social.
- ROGERS, A. (2006). "Escaping the slums or changing the slums? Lifelong learning and social transformation", *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 25(2), 125–137. Retrieved from: <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02601370500510736#.Udtf5Tv2a3E>>.

- ROGERS, A. (2006). "Lifelong learning and the absence of gender", *International Journal of Educational Development*, 26(2), 189–208. Retrieved from: <<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738059305000970>>.
- (2005). *Non-formal Education. Flexible schooling or participatory education?* China: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- STALKER, J. (2006). "Athene in academe: Women mentoring in the academy", in *From adult education to the learning society: 21 years from the International journal of lifelong education*, p. 210–223. Peter Jarvis [editor]. London: Routledge.
- TEJADA FERNÁNDEZ, J. (1997). *El proceso de investigación científica*. Barcelona: Fundación La Caixa.
- UNESCO (2009). *Global report on adult learning and education*. Hamburgo: Unesco Institute of education.
- UNESCO (1997). "Raising gender issues" in *CONFITEA VI*. Hamburgo: Unesco Institute of education.
- VAN DER ZEE, H. (2006). "The learning society", in *From adult education to the learning society: 21 years from the International journal of lifelong education*, p. 331–353. Peter Jarvis [editor]. London: Routledge
- YOUNG, I. M.; BREMÓN, C. M.; ROC FILELLA ESCOLÀ (2011). *Responsability for justice*. Madrid: Fundación Paideia Galiza.