



## LEARNING IS LIFE-LONG

There is much advocating about the importance and value of 'life-long learning'. It is seen as vital and desirable; and I suspect that there are many who believe that not enough of us engage with 'it'. As I turned my attention to the topic, I saw myself caught in that assumption and began to get curious. Surely it can't be true that only some of us learn throughout our lives? A Buddhist saying pops into my mind: *'to know and not act, is yet not to know'*. I love this quote and use it often in my work. To me it challenges the notion that learning is simply newly acquired information or knowledge. To me, in a world that is buckling under the pressures of man-made crises, having information or knowledge is useless unless it is, in some way or other, acted upon. On reflection, I see that the quote fits MY beliefs and perspectives – *'learning ain't learning if it does not lead to change or to the creation of something that improves what is already present'*. I am overlaying a value judgement that relates to MY purpose, MY values and MY desired outcomes. So, what if people unconsciously change what they do in ways that, insofar as I can see, do not 'improve' what is already present? Is that kind of change NOT a result of learning? And if it is not learning, then what is it? How do we define learning? Does 'learning' mean different things depending on context?

The Oxford dictionary defines learning as: *the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught*

This definition, needless to say, does not wholly fit the worldview according to Madame LouieG! In my interpretation, I recognise my somewhat utilitarian nature; I find it hard to engage in taking in information if I cannot see that it might be useful or in service to a (my) purpose (which can be as grandiose - as embarking on my PhD; OR miniscule, in terms of finding out times for the next train from Caux to Montreux). Being utilitarian is why I struggled with the way history was taught to me in school. I couldn't see the point; and I was not helped to see the point. So I dumped the subject. But, if information promises to help me do something new or different, then I am a sucker for it. I'll do research. I'll read and take notes; I'll talk ad nauseam about my new fascination to anyone who will listen; I'll try out ideas and practise; and then I'll reflect and dissect and digest until it becomes embedded in me; and I'll use and pass on what I have discovered because I want to make a difference.

But not all 'learning' fits into this frame of reference. As human beings, we learn as we move through our own ages and stages in life; we adapt to technological, social and environmental changes around us. We learn how to raise children; engage with others; take on new functions at work; deal with trauma and challenge; falling in and out of love; we adjust to people leaving or dying and others coming into our lives; we adapt to the impact and limitations that getting older brings upon us. We would not remain alive on this planet if we were not learning how to survive global metamorphoses. We don't sit and cogitate about whether or not we will choose to learn; we get on with it. Arguably, all of us are engaging in life-long learning and not all of it makes things better for ourselves, others or the world.

Learning in and of itself is neither inherently good nor bad. Over time, to a greater or lesser extent, we all learn. What becomes more important in my mind, then, is how conscious we are about what we are learning and to what end. We can simply carry on blindly unaware that we are adapting to all sorts of conditions around us with no thought to the potential wider impact; or we can begin to engage with ourselves as conscious decision-makers and actors. What do I want to learn and why? This question invites us to notice what it is we are or have been learning, and challenges us to call a halt to subconsciously moving through life, adapting to whatever circumstances in which we find ourselves. When we become proactive, we have a chance of changing the context around us for the better.

Perhaps the focus on 'life-long learning' is a call for us to move beyond the state of: *'I live; de facto I learn!'* which places us 'at effect' rather than 'at cause' in our own lives? Perhaps a twist on words might invite a little more playful proactivity: *'I learn to live; and live to learn'*.

And if this is so, it means we are at liberty to choose our own personal 'curriculum'. What is yours going to be?

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