

CIEA 2004

Introduction into the CIEA-Seminar 2004

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Lifelong learning for the rural area: An introduction to the CIEA-Seminar 2004

The title makes a statement summarises all our objectives: we placed three conceptions at the centre of the CIEA-Seminar 2004:

- learning
- lifelong
- the rural area.

What is the meaning of these three terms, which of these aspects is of most importance?

1. The definition of the term "learning" in the Standard Work from Gage und Berliner reads:

"Learning is a process by which an organism changes its behaviour as a result of experiences." (Quotation from: N. Gage and D. Berliner Pädagogische Psychologie 5. Auflage 1996 Belz Verlag, Weinheim)

I change my behaviour if I know something new, can do something better than before, and take a new attitude to a theme, etc. I feel that we can rapidly understand and agree on this very general definition. It is, however, somewhat more difficult when questions arise as to how learning works. You know that there are a multitude of theories concerning learning, which are aligned to different aspects. These aspects can be of a biological-, brain-biological-, psychological- or social nature. Following Wenger (1998), Isan et al (2000) have compiled an interesting summary, a section of which is shown below.

Themes and pedagogical focus of some learning theories

(Source: Following Wenger 1998, pp. 279-80)

Type of Theory	Description
Neurophysiological	Focus on the biological mechanisms of learning, particularly stimulation and optimisation of memory processes.
Behaviourist	Focus on behaviour modification via stimulus response pairs and selective reinforcement. They ignore issues of meaning, and their usefulness in areas involving social processes is doubtful.
Constructivist	Focus on the processes by which learners build their own mental structures when interacting with environment. They favour hands-on, self-directed activities oriented toward design and discovery and are useful for structuring learning environments where the aim is to afford the construction of certain conceptual structures through engagement in self-directed tasks.
Organisational	Concerned with individually learning in on organisational context and with the ways in which organisations can be said to learn in their own right. They focus on organisational systems, structures, and politics and on institutional forms of memory.
Experimental	Focus on how knowledge is produced through the transformation of experience. Learning is treated as a continuous process requiring the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed models of adaptation to the world and as involving transactions between the person and his/her environment. The dualisms between subjective and objective and personal and social knowledge are retained.
Systems/cybernetic	Focus depends on whether one is immersed in a first- or second order cybernetic tradition. In the latter, individuals are seen as structurally coupled to their environment and language and emotioning are constitutive of "our" worlds. This has given rise to "conversation theory" and to a rejection of the subjective/objective and mind/body dualisms.

It is not the objective of our Seminar to discuss all of these theories with yourselves. The table, however, illustrates the diversity of the spectrum with which the functioning of learning processes can be analysed and explained.

In this context, I feel that it is important for all the questions and related discussions in the Seminar over the next two weeks that we deal with conscious, controlled learning processes and not with coincidental learning. Despite this restriction, there are still plenty of topics and examples remaining for us to deal with. Lets direct our thoughts to a lesson in the south of Chile, to a consultancy meeting in the Peruvian Andes, to a workshop with teachers in Khirgisia or to Seminars involving farmers in Nigeria. In all these places, both teaching- and learning processes are being prepared and consciously put into effect. As a result, at the

end, participants are able to return home having acquired insights, knowledge, abilities or skills.

There are two more aspects I would like to discuss regarding the term “learning”:

The process of learning can take place at different levels. Clark (1998) suggests a model comprising three different levels, which I consider to be important and worthy of consideration. These three levels are shown in the table below:

<p>Cognition What resources did I use to run the meeting? How should these meetings be run? What is a suitable venue? Who attended?</p>
<p>Metacognition How did I feel the meeting ran? Did I facilitate well enough? Did I ask the right questions? Did people feel comfortable? How could I do this better next time? Did I target the right people?</p>
<p>Epistemic cognition Why do I want people to feel comfortable? What was I trying to achieve by running a meeting? What were the needs of the participants I was trying to satisfy? What are some of the theories and assumptions I based my actions on?</p>

Level 1 describes individual, cognitive learning processes using activities such as memorising, reading, and perception or learning a foreign language. On the second level the learners monitor the course of level 1. On the third level, the learners reflect on other matters related to the problems that have to be processed and on the thinking- and problem solving processes used. In combination, the three levels convey an insight for both learners and teachers into the possibilities and limitations of knowledge acquisition.

As a last aspect of this part of the lecture, in addition to **how** learning functions, I would like to briefly address **what** to learn. If we follow the current professional discussions relating to this aspect, among other things we are able to determine two different attitudes:

One, which endorses that education must only be measurable by its usefulness. This must become apparent as quickly as possible. All educational provisions have the purpose to prepare or train the learner for success in professional life.

The second attitude goes a step further and advocates: "It is self-evident that the school conveys practical (useful) abilities (...). The decisive factor is, however, that the school also communicates ideals and contexts". (Ref. Pope, 2004).

It is not my intention to involve all those present in a detailed education-philosophical discussion. In this context, my desire is that selection of our educational contents does not happen coincidentally but that we investigate, consider and appraise and thus make a consciously formed selection with a solid foundation. This selection can possibly have a lifelong, comprehensive influence on our way of thinking, on our behaviour and actions.

2. The term "lifelong"

Let us now refer to the second term, "lifelong". We sometimes have a tendency to closely associate our understanding of learning with the mental picture of a "class room" or lecture-hall.

This would imply that learning terminates, as soon as we leave these places or rooms. I feel sure that you will agree that, for several reasons, we must currently base our actions on a much more comprehensive learning term. I consider that there are two central reasons for this:

Firstly, there is the fact that learning as defined above, can take place at various locations and during the most diverse moments in time, e.g. ten farmers meeting on a field to assess the condition of the crops, two pupils exchanging results via the Internet during joint problem-solving tasks, a workshop meeting focussing on the planning of new projects between four advisors or a pupil who has to write an essay and is currently reading three subject related books. We meet such situations during all our life.

The second reason today is possibly even more crucial. We know the speed with which our economic-, technical- and social environment currently changes. We also know about the volume of new knowledge development and that, as a consequence, the knowledge we already possess will become outdated or superimposed. Agricultural crop-growing techniques change. Market conditions are adapted. Innovative processing methods are invented. Working methods are examined. New social-psychological realisations force us to change our approach when dealing with our co-workers. The new communication technologies allow us to also take note of know-how encountered in distant countries.

These examples only serve as an illustration. They show us both possibilities and challenges. We can only participate in these developments if we succeed in incessant learning during the entire life and succeed in comprehending and in changing our ways. The desire and ability for- and the challenge of lifelong learning will, therefore, always be with us.

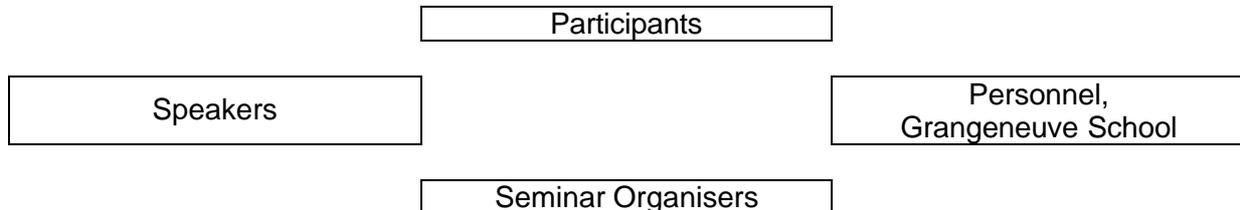
3. The term "rural area"

There remains the third term for discussion, i.e. for the rural area. Amongst other things, this is the factor that connects all the people that are present here. Some of us indeed work in large cities, others in regional centres and some in very remote rural areas. We all, however, share the fact that the final work objectives, considerations and activities are located somewhere in the rural area. Our support and help may well be directed at agricultural- or forestry production and may concern the population living in these areas or the rural area as a whole. This not only applies for today and tomorrow, but medium- to long term, and at best a lifelong.

A summary of all the expressed thoughts result in a very challenging prospect and virtually implies: We are responsible for lifelong learning in the rural area and the Seminar will now make us into super-human people, enabling us to better tackle this task and even more comprehensively. Don't worry, I am both demanding and realistic. I am demanding in the sense that I will not want to be satisfied with the smallest possible learning step. Quite the opposite, I sincerely hope that you can profit as much as possible from this Seminar within the scope of your potential, your respective background and your expectations. I am realistic from an awareness viewpoint that all of us are only a part of an entirety. We are government employees, directors or teachers at a school, or have responsible positions in projects. There are many people around us who must also contribute to the action process and to success.

By being an individual element, however, we have the possibilities to be influential: We can suggest and plan a project in our region, reconsider requests for the governmental department under new criteria or convey the impressions and realisations gained during the Seminar to colleagues in a purposeful and conscious way. In this sense for you, the Seminar 2004 should provide what the title promises: **A valuable stage in your process of lifelong learning for the benefit of the rural area.**

To ensure that the Seminar is successful, four different participants are required:



Each group of participants has its individual obligations and expectations. Within the lower three groups, preparations were carried out with optimum benefits in mind for the participants. We are not perfect, but we try our best. For us it is decisive and important to know that you all have the feeling of being cordially welcome. Your well being is close to our hearts and we hope that you will return home having gained a high learning yield, together with good and many impressions.

In particular, our expectations from you concern two different areas. First of all, we hope that you will communicate to ourselves any inadequacies or needs, or indeed if you feel that we should carry out changes. We will do anything within our scope to take remedial action. Secondly, we hope that you will actively participate in the Seminar, in particular regarding group work, plenum discussions, during the individual assimilation process and all informal moments such as, meals, excursions and during evenings in the bar. This is particularly well formulated in theory: "learning processes are particularly successful if we participate consciously and actively".

In this sense: Open the doors and open eyes, ears, mouth and heart for the CIEA-Seminar 2004!

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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Having finished compulsory schooling, Roland Stähli studied at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich and graduated in 1988 with a degree in agronomy specialised in 'Agricultural Economics'. He then worked as an assistant lecturer for the Institute of Agricultural Economics (ETH Zurich) in the centre for rural development in Château-d'Oex (VD, Switzerland). In the summer of 1989 he changed the job and worked as a teacher and adviser in the department of 'Farm Management' at the *Landwirtschaftliches Bildungs- und Beratungszentrum LBBZ Rütli*, Zollikofen (a centre where farmers are trained and advised). In 1996, he changed again and began to work for the Swiss College of Agriculture (SHL). Roland Stähli works as a lecturer in didactics and methodology in agricultural teaching and advising at the SHL. Apart from his main task as a lecturer, he is the director of the CIEA (International Centre for Agricultural Education). Furthermore, he teaches in the department of Agricultural Economics. In connection with his work, Roland Stähli enrolled in 1996/97 for different subjects in education and educational psychology at the university of Freiburg, Switzerland.

At the moment, Roland Stähli's activities are focussed on the methodical-didactic area and the area of further education/ adult education. One of his most important aims is to achieve a varied teaching/ learning culture both in classes and in different courses. A regular, critical reconsidering and reviewing of the role's played by the teacher are part of this culture. Additionally, his job at the CIEA allows him to get to know and to compare the different teaching and education models in an international context.
