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**Special Issue on Later Life Learning**

**Guest Editors Brian Findsen and Diana Amundsen**

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## Message from PIMA President

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This is a Special Issue on Later Life Learning. Thank you to Brian Findsen and Diana Amundsen for taking on the guest editorship. It makes compelling reading.

The PIMA Bulletin is entering a period of change. Chris Duke, the founding editor, is stepping down. We know that it will be impossible to ‘replace’ Chris – his experience, networks, energy, intellectual and activist acuity, are extraordinary. Fortunately, he will remain as a ‘wise elder’. The PIMA Committee has decided on two aspects. Firstly, we are inviting PIMA members to respond to a call to become one of two new Bulletin co-editors. Ideally, we’d like to have co-editors of different generations. Please will you consider this invitation. Secondly, a proposal to change aspects of the format of the Bulletin has been adopted and we will be transitioning in the next while. We are inviting a member to assist in the short term with this transition to a web-based format. If you have an interest and experience, please be in touch. The Bulletin is an important vehicle for ‘out of the box’ thinking in relation to ALE, human development and socio-ecological justice. We look forward to new energies and inspirations helping give it shape. Thank you for considering these invitations.

There were various involvements of PIMA members during the past six or more weeks. There was another successful webinar in the series on 24 May 2022: *Climate Justice Education: Weaving Together Our Stories of Nature and Place*. This was organised by Shauna Butterwick, Joy Polanco O’Neil and Darlene Clover. The report was circulated to members on the 10 June 2022 and is on the website along with the recording.

The United Nations Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) was held in Marrakech from 15-17 June, with a Civil Society Forum organised by the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) on 14 June. Several PIMA members were very involved whether as members of national delegations, organisers of workshops or panels. The outcome was the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA) which has been circulated to PIMA members. Warm congratulations to all involved and particularly to the leadership of ICAE whose presence was everywhere! The next Special Issue of the Bulletin will focus on CONFINTEA VII.

Thank you to all PIMA members who are working hard in various ways and spheres of influence to promote, interrogate, and mobilise adult learning and education.

## Editorial Introduction

### Brian Findsen

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*Brian has worked in several countries (especially New Zealand, the USA, Scotland), recently specializing in the Asia Pacific (e.g. Taiwan) in lifelong learning and adult education. He was a professor of adult education at the University of Glasgow (2006-2008) and the University of Waikato (2008-2019). Brian has published extensively in educational gerontology and taught many courses on varied topics in adult education. He is now chair of the Age Friendly Hamilton Steering Group.*

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This special issue is co-edited by Emeritus Professor Brian Findsen and Dr Diana Amundsen, both associated with the University of Waikato, New Zealand. As adult educators, we are pleased to be able to focus on the plight of older people in our societies, especially their learning aspirations and achievements. We are always cognizant that any learning is best understood when the context of the learners is acknowledged, a context operating at a macro level of economic-cultural-social conditions as well as more localized dynamics of social relationships and the physical environment.

In the 14 vignettes that follow authors from diverse backgrounds have opted to choose whatever they have felt significant in their own localities pertaining to learning in later life. In effect, we have adopted an inductive approach. Some writers will be well known to PIMA members; others will be fresh to the readership. We have deliberately included a short bio, photo and e-mail address for future communication. The order of presentation is somewhat arbitrary, but we have decided to cluster the articles according to thematic areas: policy and broader societal issues; human development and life-course concerns; exemplars of institutional provision; community development initiatives involving older learners.

The first section begins with a pithy commentary from Alan Tuckett on the relative invisibility of older people in public narratives. Changing demography is expressed by many authors in this bulletin but is more pronounced in John Field's analysis, coupled with migration as a major global issue, with an emphasis on what happens to older people when they are forced or elect to migrate. The third in this section features Maria Slowey's perspectives on inter-generational learning related to public policy. As the President of the Active Ageing Consortium Asia-Pacific (ACAP), Kathryn Braun discusses current understandings of what constitutes active ageing, with ramifications for lifelong learning. In effect, these articles provide a broad context illustrating some of the major global issues of our time affecting older adults.

The second section begins with an innovative piece by our Japanese colleague, Atsushi Makino, which challenges us to consider developments in his country towards a 100-year society where "being old" is nothing out of the ordinary and where the quality of life is enhanced via the "small society". Dovetailing in well with Makino's concepts, in the next article Tom Schuller challenges the existing major paradigm for the lifecourse and argues for a new model, accentuating a holistic approach, in which time-bound conceptions of the lifecourse are largely redundant. Peggy Wei from Taiwan uses a personal/professional approach to consider how she might live "the second half of life" and the issues she is facing in her planning. To round off this section, the issues of learning in the fourth age are discussed by Marvin Formosa, emphasizing societal neglect of people living and still learning in this phase of life.

In the third section we focus on renditions of effective institutional strategies at a more formal level to meet the day-to-day learning needs of seniors where the importance of social relationships is explicit in learning conditions. Ana Krajnc provides an inside view of the development of the Slovenian Third Age University where liberal education holds sway. From Tanzania, Mohamed Msoroka outlines the important work of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT), emphasizing the challenges ahead to make equality of (educational) opportunity much more than a slogan in a developing country context. Finally, Maureen Tam discusses how learning for elders during COVID has been handled by the Education University of Hong Kong.

In the final section of articles, we draw attention to more community development-oriented agencies. These items point to the significance of non-formal education approaches to helping to meet learning desires of older people. In the bi-cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Colleen Tuuta explains how the intentions for a Wisdom Village are now much closer to realization via co-operation from several organizations where kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophy/purposes) is paramount. This housing theme is also prominent in the final two contributions. Trace Ollis, Chief Editor for the journal *Adult Learning Australia* (ALA), discusses how neighbourhood houses have embraced a learner-led social movement where

local people, inclusive of seniors, can collectively assist one another in learning. Finally, Barry Golding, known in many countries for his support for (men's) sheds and their potential for collaborative learning directly related to immediate needs, explains how conceptions of sheds have changed, defying simplistic categorizing of their work.

Taken together, this collection of 14 items contributed by prominent adult educators from around the globe highlights the challenges, successes, and positive later life learning initiatives in response to our changing world. We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we have enjoyed compiling them.

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## Overcoming Invisibility

Alan Tuckett

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*Professor Sir Alan John Tuckett, OBE is a British adult education specialist and campaigner. He is currently Professor of Education at the University of Wolverhampton.*

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It is impossible to overstate how little serious governmental policy attention there is for the education of older people – certainly in the UK but also in much international discourse. Aaron Benavot argued at the 2015 World Education Conference in Suwon, Korea that the poverty of attention and resources committed to adult education was the direct result of the poverty of comparative data available. If that is true of adult education more widely it is doubly so of education for older adults. Data on adult participation, in and out of the workforce stops at 64 – scarcely two thirds of the way through many people’s current lifespan. Policies overwhelmingly shaped by neo-liberal and managerialist thinking focus on labour market preparation for young adults, and to a much lesser extent on the development of the existing labour force give a lie to the rhetorical commitment to lifelong learning for all. Since post-school education has become more and more a handmaiden of economic policy, opportunities for liberal education have withered – with more than two million adults lost from publicly funded provision in the last decade.

Yet the UK’s 2009 Government Foresight report on Mental Wellbeing argued that learning was one of five key ingredients to wellbeing, especially in later life. When I worked at NIACE we consciously worked to counteract this policy drift, perhaps most notably when we sought out the oldest active learner in England as part of Adult Learners’ Week – Fred Moore, 108, later the oldest man in England, studied art and French at his retirement home in Hampshire, and was celebrated with a half page photograph on the back page of The Times newspaper, but we found a plethora of centenarians studying everything from philosophy to political history, yoga to ballroom dancing. We backed their stories with survey evidence to show that from the age of fifty onwards adults seek studies focused on creativity, and on making sense of the world and of their own lives. But it is often some small and vivid anecdote that seizes the attention of decision makers.

## Migration, demography, and skills: challenges for social justice and adult learning

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*John Field is Professor Emeritus at the University of Stirling, UK. He has written widely about adult learning and skills. He was co-editor of the Fourth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) and was an adviser to the Fifth GRALE. John's research interests encompass research interests encompass the social and economic contexts of adult learning, policy in lifelong learning, and the history of adult education and training.*

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Migration has become one of the defining themes of our times. Human mobility is a phenomenon as old as time, of course, but its political prominence has rocketed in recent years, to the extent that in many countries it has become a highly contentious and divisive issue. In practice, it is a complex and multi-dimensional issue which in political debate tends to be simplified and sometimes subject to disinformation and myth.

Migration covers a multitude of human movement, from people who work abroad through those who are displaced by conflict or disaster and those fleeing persecution or famine, to those who are enslaved or trafficked. While the United Nations reckons that around two-thirds of 2020's 281 million international migrants are moving for work, that leaves significant numbers in the other categories.

When we think of migrants, it isn't usually the older adult that springs to mind. Most migrants are young and male. That at least is the stereotype (think of the images of boats crammed with young men), and there is some truth in it, at least as far as those who are moving are concerned. Migration increasingly involves women as well as men; the UN judges that 135 million women and 146 million men moved internationally in 2020. The large majority were of working age, with a peak among people aged 30-34, with only around one migrant in ten aged over 60.

These patterns make a lot of sense. Seen from the side of those moving, the young are more mobile than the middle aged or elderly, and the risks of migration are lower for men than for women. As for education, younger people have a particular incentive to move to countries where the opportunities for upskilling are better. Seen from the side of host countries, young immigrant workers are often more attractive than older migrants with a shorter working 'shelf life', particularly if they already have skills or other qualities that are in short supply in the host country.



But migration and population aging are tightly bound together through a number of common threads. First, an exodus of people of working age means that countries are left with disproportionately large numbers of children and older adults. Second, emigrants tend to have higher levels of schooling than those who are left behind. Third, while many migrants initially plan to return to their home country, over time they come to build a settled life in their host country, and become older as they age in place. Fourth, migrants are often attractive to the richer nations that face demographic aging; in many rich nations, it is particularly common to find workers with a migrant background working in health and elder care.

Each of these trends brings educational challenges for those involved. Once in place, many migrants and refugees face significant barriers to education and training. While many countries offer specialised second language programmes, or even more holistic integration initiatives, quite often there are legal or other administrative preconditions for participation. In the labour market, migrants tend to be channelled into jobs that are below their skill levels; lacking access to quality jobs, they are unlikely to be able to invest in developing their technical and vocational skills. With limited networks in the host country, migrants may find it hard to identify and access appropriate learning opportunities.

What about older migrants? This is a highly varied group which includes people who migrated in later life as well as those who have aged in place; and each of these groups again is diverse. Older migrants include returning emigrants, people displaced by conflict, people joining younger family members, and those who choose to retire abroad. It follows that different older migrants face different life challenges, and bring different resources with them, and may have very dissimilar educational backgrounds and needs. People also migrate from very different contexts; for example, attitudes towards women's participation in education vary widely across the world. We cannot treat people with migrant backgrounds as a homogeneous whole.

Nevertheless, there are some clear messages about what can be done. One pressing area of need is simply informational: we do not know nearly enough about the diverse situations of older migrants. This reflects a wider policy neglect of the educational experiences and needs of older migrants. We haven't given enough thought to the learning that host communities must undertake when welcoming new arrivals, though the UK Open University has recently developed some relevant materials for those supporting Ukrainian refugees. And our understanding of people's varied needs has to be both holistic and asset based.

Participation in adult education is best understood when seen in its wider ecology of social relationships and cultural capital. Rather than focusing solely on barriers and deficits, we should also recognise the resources that people bring with them, not only by acknowledging their prior learning and skills but also the rich body of experiences and networks that they have built. And finally, it helps if people in host societies are encouraged to understand and appreciate the value of diversity, rather than merely being treated as passive subjects who must simply accept globalising trends.

Fortunately, there is a growing body of experience of educational work with migrants and refugees, much of it freely available through the publications of UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning or the German Adult Education Association's Institute for International Cooperation. While we so far have less experience of work with host communities there are some examples, as in the widespread involvement of local volunteers (often older adults themselves) in integration programmes in Germany, and these deserve to be better known. We already know a great deal about how to support migrants'

learning, and we now need to adapt that to the needs of older migrants, ideally with an underpinning of ideals of equity and social justice.

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## A New Vision for Policy Development in Intergenerational Learning

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In 2020, responsibility for co-ordination of the ASEM (Asia-Europe) Lifelong Learning Hub (ASEM LLL-Hub) transferred from Denmark to Ireland (<https://asemlllhub.org/>). I had the honour of being invited to speak at the inaugural event on the theme “Lifelong Learning Challenged: 2020 and Beyond”. In this, I addressed three dimensions which exacerbate socio-economic inequalities: generational; gender; and geography (global south and north).

Arising from the subsequent discussion, one of the ASEM LLL Hub Research Networks (Research Network 4, Lifelong Learning Policies) undertook a consultative exercise with colleagues in different parts of Europe and Asia. The objective was to explore current trends, and the potential for developments in intergenerational learning which might help address some of these challenges.

Many parts of the world- notably, Asia and Europe- are experiencing a combined pattern of increasing longevity coupled with declining fertility rates. UN and other data sources, for example, indicate that: people 65 years of age will soon comprise the fastest growing age group globally; it is estimated that by 2050, one in six people in the world will be over 65 years of age (in contrast to less than 10% in 2019); and, how the situation in Europe is accelerating even more quickly, so that by 2050, it is estimated that approximately 25% of people are projected to be in this age group. These trends carry significant implications for individuals and wider societies, as, for example, it means in relation to work, many people either wish to, or are forced by circumstances to, work beyond ‘traditional’ retirement ages (see for example, Slowey and Zubrzycki 2020 and 2018 below).

From a public policy perspective, such trends are all too often perceived in a negative light, with an emphasis, for example, on demands on health services and pensions. However, from a lifelong learning perspective, many colleagues make the case that such demographic trends can offer rich opportunities for educational innovation and inclusion, based on deeper engagement and mutual learning between different generations.

The ASEM LLL-Hub Research Network report comprises short case studies of developments in eight countries: Cyprus (Eleftheria Atta); Germany (Alexandra Ioannidou); Ireland (Trudy Corrigan); New Zealand (Brian Findsen); Philippines (Zenaida Reyes); Taiwan (Hui-Chuan Wei and An-Ti Lin); Thailand (Chusak Prescott and Sumalee Sungsi); and the United Kingdom (Tom Schuller). In working through these papers, four themes emerged with implications for lifelong policy development across the wider international community.

- First:** The importance of history and culture in appreciating the role of older people in our societies.
- Second:** The need to replace traditional linear views of the life course with more flexible, dynamic models with implications for resource distribution.
- Third:** The importance of adopting a proactive stance in promoting greater equality of access to lifelong learning opportunities - particularly for older women and those from poorer backgrounds.
- Fourth:** The need for independent research for strengthening the evidence base in order to support lifelong learning strategies.

The case is well made by Tom Schuller in the UK report. We should avoid simplistic linear models of the life course. People do not develop in a two-dimensional staged trajectory or move cleanly from one phase to the next. We need a more colourful palette of models and images in order to capture the complex set of relationships that characterise different generations: their identities, interdependencies, and interactions, and how these change overtime.

The current distribution of resources for learning is heavily weighted towards initial education. It is inevitable that the system should be ‘front-loaded’, i.e., that it will concentrate primarily on equipping young people with the values, competences and attitudes needed to give them the best foundation for life. But the weighting is too strong. So, a first challenge is to lay the basis for agreeing on a sensible and equitable distribution of educational resources across the full life course. In the UK, for example, it has been estimated that 86% of the total resource invested in education goes to the age group 18-24, 12% to those aged 25-50, c1.5% to 50-75, and barely anything to the 75+ age group. Obviously, this is not an argument against investment in education for children and younger adults. It is, however, strong argument in favour of increasing equality over the life course by investing more in education overall, with some potential redistribution in proportion to population profile.

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## A Global Perspective on Active Aging

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Population ageing is happening quickly. Worldwide, the absolute number of people aged 60 years and older is expected to double between 2017 and 2050, when it is projected to exceed two billion people, about 21% of the global population. The Asia-Pacific region is particularly affected by population ageing. The United Nations (UN) projects that, by 2050, the percentage of population age 60 and older will be 40% or greater in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore (UN, 2017a; 2017b).

This rapid population aging requires new thinking around aging. Policy makers and thought leaders have proposed several paradigms to frame the development of social policy to prepare for super-aged societies. One of these is the 2002 Active Ageing Policy Framework of the World Health Organization (WHO), which underpins the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) adapted at the UN Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid, Spain (WHO, 2002). Guided by the UN Principles for Older People, the framework outlined policy recommendations in three areas--health, participation and security.

In 2012, the European Union (EU) declared 2012 as the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. EU-level events included major conferences, awards for best practices, and dissemination of information about active ageing through reports, education campaigns, and multimedia. Also hosted were more than 748 national and regional initiatives on active ageing. Activities and policy development during the year aligned with European Council policy related to ageing - for example, the European Council's 2010 call for policies to promote active ageing, raise employment rates of older workers, and increase elders' employability through training and education, as well as its 2010 Digital Agenda for Europe to promote digital literacy for all ages (Tymowski, 2015).

The active ageing paradigm also became popular in Asia, especially following the establishment of the Active Aging Consortium Asia Pacific (ACAP) in 2005. ACAP is an unincorporated, voluntary organization, with no dues structure. Activities focus on information sharing, including a bimonthly newsletter and participation in conferences and webinars throughout the region. ACAP is dedicated to empowering older adults to maintain their physical, social, psychological, civic, economic, and

environmental wellbeing so that they can continue to contribute to their families, their communities, and society at large (Figure 1). Members believe that achieving an active ageing society requires a partnership of individuals, families, and social policy leaders. Specifically, individuals and families must prepare for old age and adopt positive practices for long life. Social policy must offer protections, encourage participation, promote lifelong learning, make healthy choices the easy choices, and lead to the building of age-friendly environments. As individual behaviours and social policy change, so will societal norms about the value of ageing and older adults.

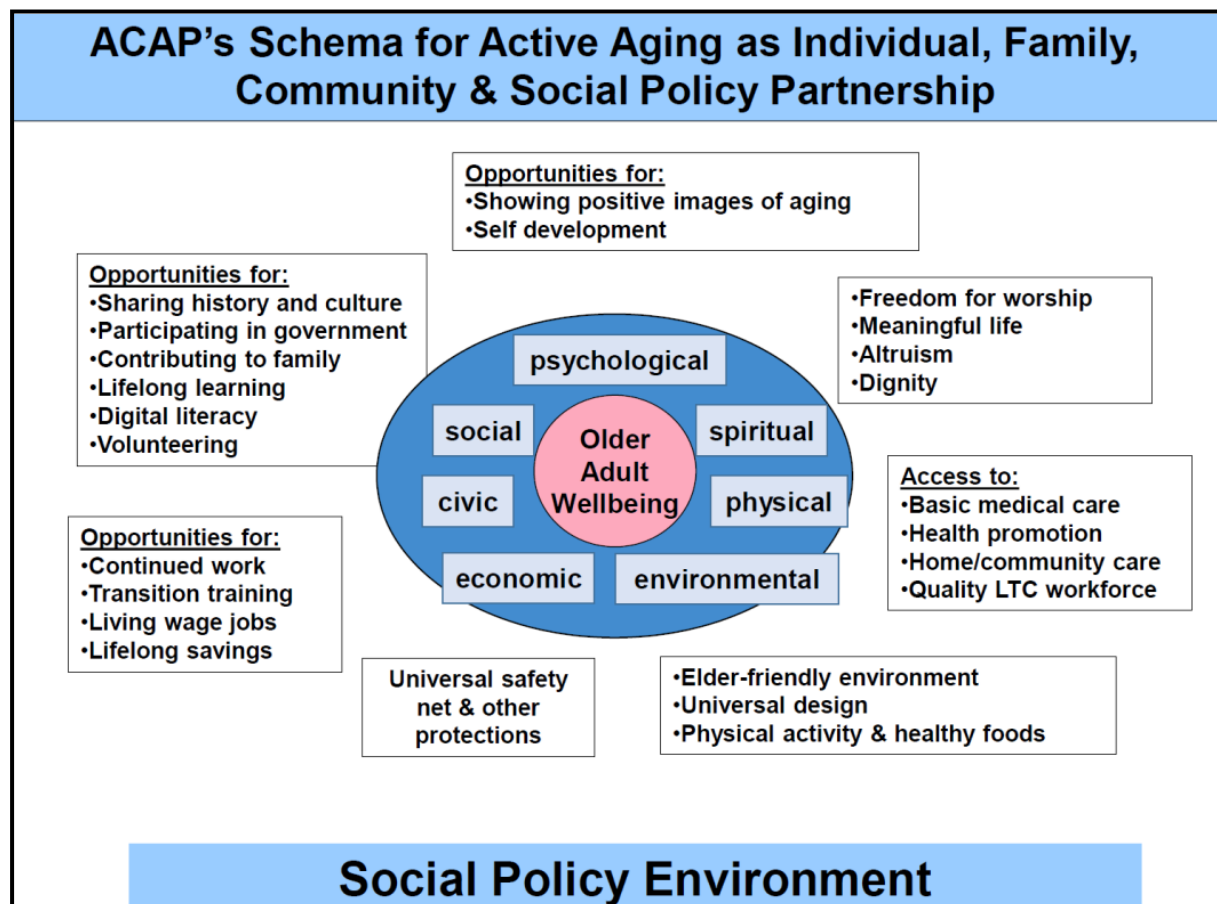


Figure 1: ACAP's Scheme for Active Aging as an individual, family, community, and social policy partnership

While active ageing remains a popular concept, different international institutions have started to focus on different aspects of the active ageing framework. Perhaps not unexpectedly, WHO began attending more to the health aspects of the 2002 Active Ageing Framework. For example, in 2016, WHO members adopted the Global Strategy and Action Plan on Ageing and Health (WHO, 2017). This plan defined healthy ageing as “the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables wellbeing in older age” (p. 4). In 2020, the UN declared 2021-2030 as the Decade of Healthy Ageing.

While the WHO turned its attention to healthy ageing, the EU and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) began focusing on the economic aspects of the 2002 Active Ageing Framework. The term *productive ageing* emphasizes the positive contributions elders can make to their own lives, their communities, organizations, and society as a whole. However, the term has a distinct connection to employment, emphasizing policy recommendations to raise the retirement age, to limit access to early retirement schemes, and to more strongly link pension contributions to pension benefits as an incentive to delay retirement (European Council, 2009).

In 2021, the European Commission released its Green Paper on Ageing, which calls for action to support healthy ageing, active ageing, and productive ageing (European Commission, 2021). Under the domain of healthy and active aging, policies are needed to promote healthy lifestyles and reduce differences in the provision of health care within and across countries. Under lifelong education and training, countries are urged to invest in people’s knowledge, skills, and competencies across the lifespan. Under the domain of bringing more people into the workforce, policies should support high labour-market participation and longer working lives of women as well as men. This would require expanded availability of quality childcare and long-term care options, as well as policies that support legal migration to fill skill shortages. The fourth domain—staying active—includes policies that support expansion of work, volunteer, caregiving, and learning opportunities in old age. The final category focuses on meeting the growing needs for long-term care, with policy recommendations around affordable, quality services, cross-border mobility for eldercare, and intergenerational solidarity.

Lifelong learning is essential for active ageing. For example, education is needed to assure that older people understand factors associated with disease and disability so they can make healthy lifestyle choices and engage in preventive health services. Individuals providing social, health, and long-term care services need continuing education and training on ageing and eldercare. Programmers and policy makers need continuing education on best practices.

Additionally, basic education needs to be available to all across the life course. This includes expanding training in new and rapidly evolving areas, including digital modes of finding information and communicating with agencies, friends, and family. Continuing education is needed to better engage older people in work, both to delay retirement age and to reduce poverty often associated with old age, especially in countries with inadequate pension systems. Older adults also need education to protect themselves from unscrupulous marketing practices and scams, as well as continuing education on their rights as human beings and how to join with others to advocate for better protections under the law.

The active ageing movement is dedicated to helping countries better tap the potential of older adults in the context of global ageing. Because the active ageing framework is broad, it can encompass other popular models of ageing, including healthy aging and productive aging. This comprehensive framework can help guide individual action, policy development, and efforts to change norms about aging and the older adults. Lifelong learning as a key tenet of active aging.

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# Creating the 100-year life society based on grassroots communities in Japan

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## The Coming of the 100-Year Life Era

As the result of the rapid aging of population and the fast-declining birth-rate in Japanese society, the era of 100-year life has arrived. Looking at average life expectancy, in 2020, men live 81.64 years and women live 87.74 years, making Japan the world's leading country in terms of longevity. It is not the case that people live longer because they have exceeded the average life expectancy. The most frequent death age in Japan is 88 years for men and 92 years for women in 2020. (MHLWJ, 2021)

In the 75 years since the end of World War II, the average life expectancy in Japan has increased by about 35 years. (ibid). The current infant mortality rate (this takes the number per 1,000 babies who die before the age of one) is 1.9, the lowest in the world. 100 years ago, two in 10 babies died before the age of one. That is 1/100th of what it was 100 years ago. (MHLWJ 1998).

The reason life expectancy has increased so much since the end of World War II is that the economy has developed and nutrition has become more plentiful, sanitation and medical care have improved, and there has been no war. Therefore, the increase in average life expectancy is the result of the creation of a peaceful and good society.

## Three Transition Stages of Population Structure

Next, let us look at the transition of the population structure over the 250 years since the Meiji Restoration. Look at Figure 1. This shows the transition of the age ratio of the population.

## 人口構造の遷移 Japan's demographic structure & transition

- There has been a **major shift in the population structure** from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- It will be **impossible** to maintain the **social security systems** established in 1960-80s.

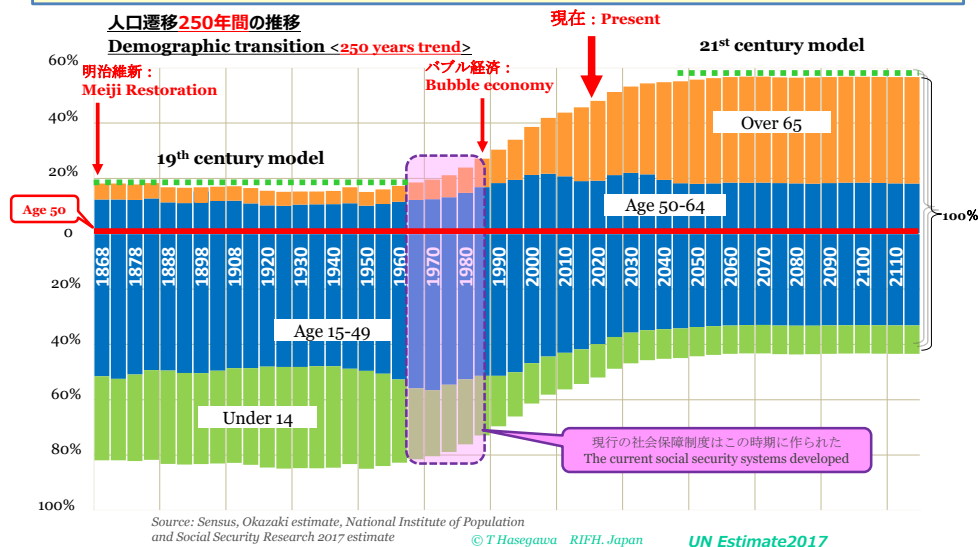


Figure 1: Japan's demographic structure and transition. Source: Provided by Ministry of Economy, Trade & Industry

As you can see, it is roughly divided into the left third, the middle third, and the right third. We know that the middle third is called the period of population fluctuation. The left third is called the 19th century model, when many children were born but life expectancy was short. The coming society is a society with fewer children but longer life expectancy, which we call the 21st century model.

What does a low birthrate mean to us? I will use myself as an example. I am already in a generation with a declining birthrate. I was born in 1960. My parents were born in 1930, and together they had 15 siblings. My grandparents were fertile. On the other hand, my parents had only two children: my sister and me. They have come to realize that children can live properly without having many children, which is the main reason for the declining birthrate.

When my mother was alive and well, I once asked her. "Why did you have only two children when you had nine siblings?" My mother replied, "You have grown up well, haven't you?" And she continued, "You think I have nine siblings, but your grandmother had eleven. I had two older brothers, but they died before they were one year old. At the time, people wanted a boy. Nowadays, you might think that having one boy is all you need, but back then, children were prone to death. Parents could not feel secure unless they had three boys. If the girls were born between the boys, they had a lot of children."

By the time my mother gave birth to me and my sister, the economy had already developed, everyone was having children in hospitals, and everyone knew that the children would grow up well. My mother said, "Everyone believed that children were born and would naturally become adults. Furthermore, the policy at that time was to take the measure of the nuclear family, four people in one package, which meant that if you had one son and one daughter, you came to a happy family."

## **Life in Two Generations**

What is lifelike in the 19th and 21st century models? First, the 19th century model. Let me tell you about my maternal grandmother. She married at age 15, started having children at age 16, and had her 11th child and finished giving birth at age 33. The line for age 50 is drawn in Figure 1, meaning that by the time women reached age 50, their last child would be either an adult or married. Yet, as Figure 1 shows, not many people survive beyond age 50 in that society. Simply put, this was an era when, after completing childhood, people were forced to have families and spend the rest of their lives working hard to give birth, raise children, and maintain a household.

What about the 21st century model of life? Today, women usually have the first or second child at about age 35, and they are done with childbearing. At age 50, it is usually when the first or second child enters high school or college and begins to be independent. As Figure 1 shows, there is still a lot of life left in people.

In this way, we can think of the 21st century model society as one in which there are so many people who can use their time and money for themselves and for society. It would be better to create a society in which these people are more active in society and can live more vibrant lives and nurture the next generation.

## **Seniors and Social Relationships**

There is a study on mortality among seniors. In a 10-year follow-up study, the mortality rate of seniors who lived without attention to “exercise, nutrition, and social participation” was calculated as 100, and the mortality rate of seniors who paid attention to exercise and nutrition was 30% lower, and add participating in social activities, the mortality rate is 50% lower than that of seniors who do not. Studies have continued to show that social relationships are the common denominator among these three factors (Hirayama et al., 2012). The results show that people with good relationships live longer.

A geriatrician who has been studying pulmonary aspiration at my university hospital says that it is defined by the relationship between people. People who eat meals in a relationship in which they say “delicious” to each other, and because they like the food, they try their best to chew it and eat it, so pulmonary aspiration is low. On the other hand, people who don't have such a relationship eat their meals in a careless manner, which leads to more pulmonary aspiration.

It means that when we have a proper interactive relationship, we all stay well. A community called a “small society”, is the basis of a mutually accepting relationship.

## **Creating a Grassroots “Small Society”**

Against the backdrop of the above situation, various policies and project activities in Japanese society are currently shifting toward building good human relations, targeting grassroots communities.



Figure 2: Scene of "Ma'am Oka's House" activity

One of our projects is the utilization of vacant houses. It is called "Ma'am Oka's House" in Tokyo. This is a practice in which residents utilize vacant houses to create a base for reconnecting local relationships, where people are loosely connected to each other.

First, we took my students to this vacant house and invited the residents to join us to build a relationship of mutual recognition. Soon, various relationships were formed, and more and more residents came in and began to manage this

practice of utilizing vacant houses by themselves.

Since many families now have both parents earning money, some children's parents cannot come home after dark, and it is not safe for them to be alone at home or to wander around the town, so to create a place for them to stay, this vacant house utilization is operated at night as well. I think it is very important.

Children want to do workshops and residents also bring in various workshops to promote their own activities. Some of the people involved in this project have various special skills, have published its newspapers and designed its websites.

When seniors, people care about children and form their own watch groups to watch over them, children will feel that they are cared for by adults other than their own parents. In this way, various people bring in various things and the activities expand.

### **The Meaning of Creating a "Small Society"**

What exactly is the creation of a "small society"? It is the creation of a relationship based on acceptance and dialogue. The creation of "small society" is to continue to create an AAR cycle (anticipation-action-reflection cycle) based on people's involvement, mutual interest, and acceptance of each other (OECD, 2019) AAR is an open trial-and-error system in which people create new relationships through dialogue and mutual recognition. The grassroots community is the place that create this cycle further.

This relationship-building process is what "learning" is all about. The creation of "small society" is a grassroots movement to realize a society of "learning." It is also a movement to create a society in which we can live out our 100 years of life with vigour and vitality.

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# Increased Longevity and the Need for a New Model of the Life Course

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## A new conception of the lifecourse

Ageing is a cause for both celebration and alarm. All across the world people are living longer in far greater numbers than any previous historical period, a tribute to human ingenuity and persistence. Much of the increase in longevity is in reasonable health. On the other hand, the prospect of greatly increased numbers of older people has rung bells of alarm: for individuals who do not relish years of dependency and ill-health, and for those concerned about the economic and social implications of this for public policy.

What do we mean by 'ageing'? In the simple numerical sense, it's clear that for individuals, it is living more years. But for populations it signals a shift in the relative proportions of different age groups. In some parts of the world there are more old people but the population is not ageing because youth numbers are still growing. I'm less interested in the demographics as such than in what these trends mean for our understanding of the shape of the life course. In this short piece I want to argue that using simple numbers to measure change in the life course is misleading and unhelpful. This is true not only in the obvious sense that people of the same chronological age vary enormously in their levels of physical and mental health and wellbeing. It is the way we think about ages and stages that matters. My point is that we are to a great extent prisoners of a highly linear conception of the life course. This prevents us from understanding the complexities of ageing, for the population as a whole but in particular for older people.

A linear approach suggests that lives simply stretch out in front and behind us; that more ageing means the line is longer; and that any changes to our understanding of the life course basically entail chopping the line at different points and giving the resulting periods new labels: late middle age, or Third Age/Fourth Age, or senescence; and so on. Even the sophisticated life course models of Erikson and others are generally linear in the sense the stages follow each other sequentially and unidirectionally, albeit sometimes with overlap. Chronological ages are attached more or less precisely to the different stages. Such models lack dynamism, and a sense of the recurrences and interactions which occur between the different components of growth and decline over the life course. Naturally, generalisations are needed in order to show the prevailing patterns. But much of our thinking reflects assumptions

which obscure the variety of experience, often with quite significant implications, for our capacity to make the best of longer lives and for how we approach making the best of them.

An example demonstrates my own culpability in this respect. I'm proud to have been associated with the OECD's work on recurrent education in the 1970s and subsequently. But our analysis simply suggested inserting periods of education along the life course – 'alternance' in the parlance. We sliced the line up into multiple segments, pleased with our innovative patterns. We paid little attention to the gendered nature of this model, with large numbers of women moving in and out of the labour force and were largely indifferent to variations in biological development. Although the model was in its own terms radical and challenging, it lacked the dynamism needed to accommodate social and personal change.

### **A triple helix**

So what might a non-linear model look like, one that emphasises dynamic interaction across the life course? I want to offer, as just one model, a triple helix.

The 'triple helix' - a simple analogy with the great discovery of DNA and its double helix – comprises three strands which weave round each other: the biological; the psychological; and the social. The biological strand refers to changes in our bodies – large ones such as puberty and the menopause but also smaller ones such as cellular senescence. It includes the general patterns of physiological growth and decline. The psychological strand refers to established pathways of maturation, such as achieving personal identity or intimacy. Erikson's model, for example, gives well-known prominence to generativity as a feature of late life. The social strand covers those cultural and economic markers which divide one stage from another, such as moving out of the parental home, or retiring.

The triple helix as a metaphorical image allows us to explore *the changing relationships between these three strands*. It is not original; the so-called biopsychosocial model describes exactly these three strands and has been around since the 1970s<sup>1</sup>. But this version has been predominantly used only in a medical context. I am – as I imagine most PIMA members are – primarily interested in the social and psychological strands. It is important to look at these in relationship to each other and to the biological strand, in order to capture the dynamics of change over time, and variation across cultures and groups. Individual patterns on any one strand will be a function of the *interactions* with the other two.<sup>2</sup>

What lines are appropriate for demarcating a population's older members? The traditional neat markers of congruent retirement and pension ages are dissolving into a confusing myriad of practice, even within a single country such as the UK. Attachment to the labour market may be only loosely related to age; moreover, some people leave the labour market and then re-enter, perhaps on a part-time basis, or as 'self-employed'. Physically older people are on average fitter, but the averaging disguises massive health inequalities. Rigid age-based categories are helpful for bureaucratic purposes but hardly reflect the complex realities of people's lives. Change is not unidirectional; the arrow of time is not a helpful image in this context.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.physio-pedia.com/Biopsychosocial\\_Model](https://www.physio-pedia.com/Biopsychosocial_Model)

<sup>2</sup> For a sophisticated argument in favour generally of interaction in the way we think, I recommend Iain McGilchrist's extraordinary work *The Matter with Things*, which covers an amazing range of scholarship.

## **Applying the helix model: Death and dying**

The triple helix model enables us to explore a range of issues stemming from the changing shape of the life course. How is it relevant to learning throughout life? I focus here briefly on the educational implications of death and dying, a phase which quite precisely illustrates some of the key challenges in life course analysis: the transition to being dead is becoming fuzzier and more uncertain; the process of dying involves new concepts and categories; and the passage at the end of life throws up important normative issues and perhaps calls for different markers and procedures.

Here I want here simply to suggest that we think about ‘facts of death’ as a parallel to the kinds of ‘facts of life’ conversations which happen at the other end of the life course. Such conversations could be informal and intra-familial or might extend to more structured episodes with a wider range of interlocutors. They should help us learn alongside others about the issues we are likely to confront in preparing for death.

There is, I think, very little sense that understanding these issues is part of a citizen’s normal development. Such an understanding cannot be a process of rapid factual assimilation. Even for the most down-to-earth of us, dealing with dying requires time to absorb its implications and, above all, the opportunity to talk them through, perhaps several times over. Children and young people are offered facts-of-life discussions because they are considered to need help in understanding the complexities of human development: what is going on in their bodies; about their personal development; and how they should behave towards other people. I see exactly the same arguments holding at the other end, unless you take the view that being an adult means by definition that you should be able to find your own way through this complex thicket.

Learning about one’s body is obviously important: what is likely to happen to it as you age, and how to raise the chances of avoiding ill-health and, more positively, to sustain an active life (however that is interpreted). The likely development of health-related apps makes this kind of learning highly topical, so that people can gain the most benefit from such technological innovations. On the psychological strand there is much to learn about how to come to terms with mortality – even how to talk about it with family and friends. There is a host of other less dramatic aspects of ageing where a better understanding of one’s own psychological state is of enormous potential benefit as one enters the final phase or phases. This is not only a matter of one’s own future; learning to understand how others feel about death and dying is equally significant – and often still taboo. When it comes to the third strand we can usefully reflect on the social markers which define and characterise the final phase. We can help ourselves, and each other, to contribute to public thinking and debate on how to make these as constructive and positive as possible. As with the other two dimensions, this offers itself as a suitable topic for adult learning of various kinds.

If we accept that facts-of-death conversations might in principle be a good idea, it prompts a number of questions. Who should initiate this? When? How? The field is wide open.



# My Personal and Professional Growth in the Second Half of Life: The Impact on My Active Aging Learning Experiences

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I am a professor at the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at the National Chung-Cheng University in Taiwan. Our top-notch department offers comprehensive programs in adult education and lifelong learning. We offer both undergraduate and graduate training in adult education and senior education. My expertise and professional experiences in the field include promoting and implementing the Active Aging Learning Program (AALP) across Taiwan. The purpose of this article is to illustrate the impact of our work and my own life learning stories.

## **Taiwan’s senior learning movement and its impact**

Since 2008, the aging population has been growing in Taiwan. My colleagues and I decided to improve the quality of life of the aging population by coming up with educational strategies tailored to evolving aging society. After 14 years of research, we have confirmed that Active Aging (or Le-Ling) is a popular concept and a necessary direction. The detailed information and framework of the active aging learning program can be found in chapters 8-11 in the book *Taiwan’s Senior Learning Movement* (see references).

## **Taiwanese Active Aging Learning experience inspires my own second half of life design**

Starting in 2008, I worked as the Principal Investigator of Taiwan's AALP and related research projects. The goal of AALP is to use a proactive approach to prepare for aging. As time passed, I realized that I neither had much imagination about my older age nor had I started preparing for it. My own realization struck me as I despise the idea of words without action. I believe that if I teach seniors about “Active Aging” and how to prepare for aging, I must exemplify it through my own practice. However, I had no clue about what my second half of life would look like. This realization motivates me to become interested in exploring the concept and practice of post-aging learning.

## **Beginning to offer post-aging learning courses**

I applied for grants from the Ministry of Science and Technology in 2013 to research topics related to active aging learning. Our research findings have been used as a guideline for the Taiwanese government's senior citizen learning curriculum. At the same time, I also conducted experimental workshops on the topic of "preparation for aging" within the communities. Therefore, I am interested in books related to future preparation. Some books on practical experiences are especially helpful, such as *The encore career handbook* by Marci Alboher, *50+: disrupt aging: A bold new path to living your best life at every age* by Jo Ann Jenkins, *Being 50 is good* and *It's never too late to begin again* by Julia Cameron & Emma Lively.

These books offer practical and useful ideas and tips, enlightening my research ideas and my own second half of life. I realized that many 50+ people have been at a loss for the second half of their lives. They explore next steps. Particularly, Bill Burnett and Dave Evans, two professors at Stanford University, opened the course "Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life" in 2016 based on planning and design. This course offered me more inspiration and I started offering post-aging learning courses.

## **From Active Aging Learning to Life Design**

Since I started working on the AALP and the Active Aging Life Design courses, I have found myself learning and changing on three levels over the past ten years. The first change: I broke the "age" limit, and after retirement, I will reset to zero and will start counting from year One.

In the past, giving advice based on age was commonplace, such as "You're in your 30s, so you should get married soon," or "You're almost 40 years old. If you don't have children, you won't have children." After the age of 50, people will continue to ask, "When will you retire?" Traditional Chinese culture is always accustomed to referring to ages for people to decide what should be, whether it is good or not, and whether it is possible or not. I am inevitably affected, but now I have become more aware that age is not the limit.

Breaking the age limit will allow me to have a more fulfilled second half of life. In 2025, it is estimated that 20% of the total population in Taiwan will be over the age of 65. There is a growing trend of living until 100 years old; thus, it is unreasonable for most industries to still use the age of 65 as the retirement cut-off. Before the policy is changed, it is better to change my mindset first. I will reset my age to zero starting from the age of 65, so that my future after retirement may be at least 30 years (my mother is 96 years old this year).

I became free of the shackles of age and established a new habit, that is, regardless of age, to think carefully about what I truly wanted. This habit has made for an interesting change in my daily life. For example, I became more willing to support my husband's wishes. My husband likes gardening and landscape design. He is both a dreamer and a doer. After changing my mindset, I realized that I prioritized all my living arrangements for family and work, sacrificing my own desires. Now that I have a clear awareness of what I want and don't want, I am able to truly appreciate my husband's creative works (see Images 1 and 2) and can fully enjoy my family life. Life turns out to be even more beautiful.



*Image 1: My husband and our loyal watchdog, Oma.*



*Image 2: My husband and the designer of the farm*

## **I have a blueprint for the second half of my life**

There are still more than 30 years after retirement. If I don't plan well, my life after retirement will be a disaster. I teach students to come up with life blueprints to clarify their values, work and life outlook and think about how these aspects affect their choices. Through teaching, I am also able to think carefully about my blueprint. When I examined my blueprint through Bill Burnett and Dave Evans's design of the four major life blocks, I realized that my life had been filled with "work", completely ignoring the need for "leisure activities" (one of the blocks). I am very fortunate that I could discover and begin to clarify the important issues of life design in time after the age of 50 and draw the life I want with my own hands. I also followed the advice of Julia Cameron and Emma Lively and created a file on my computer called the "morning page," which helped me establish a habit of reviewing and reflecting.

I also follow James Clear's advice stated in his book, *Atomic Habits* (2020). He advised that once you figure out whom you want to be, start taking small steps to strengthen what you want to get and create "small victories," beginning with a change of 0.01. For example, I am willing to open up one of the buildings (called the Ark) on our farm to the community's senior citizens. Once a week, senior citizens come to the farm for classes, meals, and leisure activities. This initiative created a win-win situation. My graduate students gain first-hand experience in teaching seniors, while seniors in the community get quality services from the students (see Images 3-5). When it first opened in 2019, the Ark was reported as a Six-Star Learning Center.



*Image 3: The Ark. The building on our farm where we offer community senior citizens lifelong learning courses*



*Image 4: Our graduate students teaching senior citizens simple exercise moves during a session*



*Image 5: Our teaching team consisting of faculty and graduate students*

## **No need to wait until retirement.**

My husband and I both teach at universities. We haven't retired yet. However, I feel like my retirement march has started. I began to follow the revelation of *The Second Curve* by Charles Handy in the 1980s and started drawing our second life curve. In March 2021, we joined a health-related business that "allows ordinary people to have extraordinary lives" (business motto). Though the business idea was foreign to me, I took a bold step to be a part of this business partnership. As a result, we not only became healthier, more energetic, but also have achieved a higher monthly income than the average income in the past 30 years.

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# Breaking new ground? Emergence of fourth age learning

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## Introduction

The post-Millennium years witnessed an unprecedented number of older persons enrolling in traditional universities and non-formal learning. This is highly promising since in the not-so-distant past provisions for lifelong learning were exclusively appropriated for young and middle-aged adults to engage in continuing and adult education. However, most avenues of late-life learning remain located in cities, and hence, at the centre of the daily lives of community-dwelling older persons who are generally mobile and cognitively healthy (Formosa & Galea, 2020). Late-life learning remains steadfastly hinged upon the 'active' and 'successful' ageing paradigms which neglect to identify the cumulative disadvantages, status divisions and life chances that marginalise and devalue the lives of older people. Hence, people in the 'fourth age' in lifelong learning are rendered *personae non gratae* (Formosa & Cassar, 2019).

## The fourth age

The concept of the fourth age was, for a long time, applied to those persons where the combination of acute and chronic illnesses betoken a terminal phase in the life course, and makes direct reference to the growing segment of the older population aged over 85 who tend to be frail and thus experience limited lifeworlds. Such understandings of the final phase of old age share a common position in seeking some line of distinction between those who are physically and cognitively fit and living in the community, and others who are weak, have disabilities and are either homebound or living in residential long-term care facilities. However, critical educational gerontologists have distanced themselves from such a chronologically aged standpoint and instead support Gilleard and Higgs' (2021) cultural turn which perceives the fourth age as a collectively imagined final phase of being rather than a distinct life stage. In other words, if the third age is to be defined by the hallmarks of healthy and productive ageing, then the fourth age emerges as its opposite, as an 'old' old age, characterised by dependency. Acting as a metaphorical 'black hole', the fourth age, similar to its astronomical equivalent, sucks in

everything in its direct vicinity. For Gilleard and Higgs (2021), its key characteristics include a lack of social reflexivity, frailty (and hence, processes of ‘othering’) and abjection.

## **Geragogy**

The comparative lack of interest in fourth age learning means that there have been virtually no attempts to develop any kind of geragogical perspective on this aspect of older adult learning. Exceptions are, however, found in Maderer and Skiba’s (2006a, 2006b) concept of ‘integrative geragogy’, and more recently, Quinn and Blandon’s (2017, 2020) application of post-humanist theory to lifelong learning and dementia. Maderer and Skiba’s (2006a, 2006b) line of reasoning is that learning is not dependent on healthy cognitive processes. Irrespective of a person’s level of functioning, they still hold a combination of psychological and physical abilities, as well as a subjective biography linked with social relationships that are, in turn, influenced by emotional feelings, personal memories and interpretations of historical events. The aim of integrative geragogy, consequently, is to ensure that older persons who are dependent on others for activities of daily living, often in institutional care and who tend to show evidence of cognitive disabilities can maximise their individual abilities in different areas of their lives and are enabled to live as independently as possible.

Quinn and Blandon’s (2017, 2020) approach takes a different theoretical route, not solely from Maderer and Skiba’s phenomenological position, but also from liberal, critical and transcendental theories in older adult learning. Quinn and Blandon (2017, 2020) question the humanist binaries of body/mind, theory/practice, self/other, emotion/reason, human/nature, and human/animal and challenge traditional convictions regarding identity and subjectivity, and language and representation to advocate new ways of finding out how learning can take place even when cognitive impairments, such as dementia, render people post-verbal. Through music and singing activities, Quinn and Blandon showed that persons living with dementia (PLWD) who may have a few words left can still communicate with their eyes and bodies to create deep emotional connections.

## **Learning and people living with dementia**

The last decade witnessed a shift in learning programmes for PLWD from an excessive preoccupation with ‘care’ to addressing the potential of learning to maintain and strengthen ‘personhood’ - that is, the way that individuals relate to others without any degree of instrumentality. Albeit studies on the engagement of PLWD in novel learning situations are scarce, those that exist confirm that PLWD are still potentially interested in, and capable of, learning skills to solve problems that they might face in daily life. Recent studies by Ingebrand et al. (2020, 2021) on attempts to teach PLWD how to navigate tablet computers generated similar results. An initial case study of efforts of communicative partners to train a woman living with Alzheimer’s disease how to use an iPad found her to rely less on expertise and explicit instructions and more on the immediate feedback provided by the tablet (Ingebrand et al., 2020). An ensuing study with PLWD in care homes found them actively soliciting required information and assistance, verbalising newfound understandings on how to manage the tablet computers, and expressing a capability to excel given enough time and practice (Ingebrand, et al., 2021). Reviewing the impact of computer-based learning programmes on the mental performance of PLWD, Klimova and Maresova (2017) reported that findings were relatively neutral with respect to their efficacy in improving basic cognitive functions. Whilst such interventions were found to have the potential to generate some positive effects on PLWD, such as the improvement of learning and short-term memory,

nevertheless these impacts were only short-term, limited by small sample sizes, and present in only half of the reviewed studies.

## Conclusion

This article has explored and presented the capacities for learning and teaching amongst persons in the fourth age. Society has a moral obligation to ensure that fourth agers are not denied their human rights and this includes a right to learning. Admittedly, the provision of learning opportunities for the frail and vulnerable members of older persons is far from straightforward and requires finely-tuned, perhaps even novel, theoretical and geragogical approaches due to the fact that the fourth age is conspicuously absent from mainstream philosophies and policies of older adult learning. This is largely because of society's and its institutions' avoidance of the 'darker side of ageing', as well as the hegemony of - to borrow a term from van Dyk (2014) - the 'Happy Gerontology' perspective whereby policy makers and gerontologists continuously "promote positive views on old age by neglecting frailty, dementia and hardship, while stressing the continuities between midlife and independent/active later life at the same time" (p. 93). A rationale advocating learning opportunities for frail older persons living in the community or peers living in care homes for older persons requires a contrarian paradigm that rejects the extension of 'mid-lifestylism' and instead insists that older people are not similar to middle-aged persons but, in many aspects, rather different. In practice, this warrants an all-inclusive approach that embeds older persons in the fourth age in lifelong and late-life learning agendas that are sensitive to their unique personal and social experiences in the biological, socio-economic, cultural, and psychological realms.

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## How the Slovenian third age university has been established: its present roles

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### **There is no lifelong education without the education of older adults**

Inspired by the new concept of lifelong education, new areas of education were challenged in the second half of last century. Previously, adult education practices tended to follow primarily the needs of jobs and work. Slovenia could not readily submit to lifelong education, because education is “life wide” as well. At the same time, the third age has prolonged up to 30 and more years of life. Can we talk of lifelong education if we don’t also include the last decades of life? Older adult education brings new aspects and emphasis on the social role of lifelong education.

Journalists showed great interest in the new phenomenon of third age universities. Their first and common question was: “Older people have finished with their jobs, why would they need education?” There are two immanent functions of the human race: people are born for learning and doing, like the birds are for flying, from their birth to death. They die if these two functions would be stopped.

### **The beginning of Slovene third age university**

We were inspired by our cooperation with UNESCO, through Paul Lengrand and Pierre Vellas from France, who created the first third age universities. The first experimental group started in 1984. An advert in the newspaper attracted one student. Some of our friends and relatives joined the first study circle. The public considered our advert to be a joke or mistake. The social stereotype about older people was very strong among our public. In the beginning older people demonstrated reservation about the idea and needed encouragement from friends and family. Also, in the next few years, when entering the Third Age University, people would appear in the company of neighbours and friends. But later senior education was commonly accepted and known also among younger people saying: “I don’t look with fear to the time of my retirement anymore, because I have a different perspective now: the third age university.”

The media who were interested in the phenomenon, helped to promote the idea of third age education, challenging negative old age stereotypes.

## **Democratisation asks for a national network of third age universities**

From the very beginning of the Department of Andragogy, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana began in 1985/86 two-semester long continuing education for future leaders of local third age universities and their potential mentors. Democratisation of education really begins when it reaches people in small towns and offers them equal opportunities. The response from the public showed us a major social need. The interest was great; letters and calls enquiring about learning possibilities abounded. The Slovene Third Age University was established as a national, independent NGO with the status of “special social importance” supporting a basic network for older adult education.

Today the Slovene third age university consists of a network of 55 local members. Modest financial support to all members is provided by our Ministry of Education, local communities and via engagement in EU projects. It is multiplied by regular, constant volunteer work of third age university leadership, mentors, animators and students themselves. Without voluntary work, third age education in Slovenia could not have experienced its broad expansion. In 2006 it ranked second in Europe, following only Austria, in the rates of older people pursuing education (Source: Eurostat 2007)



### **Basic concept: older adults are the subjects of their own education**

The concept of older adult education was carefully prepared by the Department of Andragogy, University of Ljubljana. Older students should be, according to their knowledge and life experiences, the “subjects” of their education in a full sense and not passive objects, when education and learning derive from personal interests and are carried out with joy. But at the same time their new knowledge may lead them to new activities of work and engagement in local community plans, projects, and activities. Part of our concept was from the very beginning that older adult education has goals and objectives: gaining new knowledge and engagement in activity can help older people to overcome social exclusion.

The basic unit is a study circle consisting of a mentor, animator and 10 to 14 students. Small study groups are more intimate and can more readily meet the social needs of older people for new social relations after their retirement, overcoming empty family nests and social exclusion. Study circle functions as a primary social group like the family does. All members are connected via friendship, responsibility to each other, cooperation, and trust among themselves, leading to open communication and keeping negative emotions to a minimum. Mentors provide professional services, working as external collaborators. Certain operations can be taken over by animators, who are students, members of their study group. They expand the possibilities to learn by conducting extra mural events (concerts, exhibitions, excursions, visits to various organisations, media, visitors, internet links etc.). They also keep the link between their study group and its leadership, taking care of the information flow in both directions.

Students are active in all stages of education, as pointed out before: they are subjects (and not objects) of the whole educational process. They co-operate in shaping the annual or long-term study programme; they suggest the most effective methods of learning; they help to solve problems, representing, together with mentors and leaders, the Third Age University in the media. Based on their social capital they have obtained throughout their life they support their education in various ways.



### Older adult education becomes a way of life



The Third Age University is not a school which lasts for 2-4 years. Students who join it, tend to stay for ever with it. We have students who were with us for 20 or more years. The population of students grows according to the “snowball principle” and constantly enlarges. The study group has its entity and usually stays together even if members change the subject of learning, because it is their “social nest”.

Our research shows that older students are very sensitive to the social climate in the study group. Frequently some who enter the new study circle, usually in October each year, will after a few meetings come back to the office and ask to change their study group. Their usual reasons would be: “there is one person in the group, who disturbs me very much”; “I could not connect with this mentor”; “the group did not accept me”; “there are several things, which disturb me in this group”, etc. Mainly, they are looking for another “nest”, to which they would better fit and learn more efficiently. We call it “changing the nests” which happens each year. Older students are socially conscious, and they want to learn efficiently, in a favourable social climate with positive emotions.

Is this the privilege of education in older age? Can children in regular schools ask for something like this? How can they change class or teacher without affecting their social status? Even in adult education environments older adults are under constant pressure of other obligations; they need to adjust to the situation.



### Conclusion

The concept of third age education has been continuously re-developed and expanded, modified to include the theoretical and practical developments at home and abroad. During the crises in 2009 we introduced the social trend of “each one, teach one” or education in pairs of mentor-student, sometimes located at a student’s home. Knowledge can be seen as a present, where many of our students became

mentors to other people. We have recommended this approach when the student had learning difficulties or could not pay the fee for education, or emotional problems such as a fear for computers.

In the last few years, during the pandemic, quick digitalization of the older population and distance learning has been required. The change necessitated other forms of keeping in touch with our students such as video telephone calls, listening to the same music on you-tube, singing together a song from their homes, groups celebrating someone's birthday, communicating by zoom with a glass of champagne in their hands, or by e-mails. Their imagination discovered more new ways to communicate. At the same time third age universities have put greater effort to improve the digitalisation of older people.

Basically, older adult education at our third age universities involves social responsibility and at the same time respect to individualization of an older student's education. Without these aspects, there is no learning effectiveness.

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# The Open University of Tanzania: A Key Contributing Partner to Adult Education and Lifelong Learning in Tanzania

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The Open University of Tanzania (OUT) is a fully fledged, autonomous and accredited public University, established by the Act of Parliament in 1992, and became operational in March 1993. Until 1992, Tanzania had only two public universities (the University of Dar es Salaam and the Sokoine University of Agriculture). With a population of 23.67 million in 1992, the majority of Tanzanians, especially working-class adults, did not have a chance to pursue university education. At that time, only a small portion of youths who were completing advanced secondary education had a chance to participate in university education. Establishment of OUT in 1992 therefore created a third Government owned university.



**Figure 1: OUT Headquarters in Dar es Salaam**

The general mission of the OUT is to enhance adults' access to university education. To attain this mission, OUT offers university education through a distance mode. This allows adults to attend the university education while fulfilling their social and work responsibilities; they are not required to leave their homes and offices to attend university education. Presently, the OUT has temporary headquarters, located in Kinondoni, Dar es Salaam as shown in Fig 1.

Permanent headquarters are under construction at Kibaha District, in the Coast Region, although OUT is spread all over Tanzania, operating through 27 regional centres in Tanzania Mainland and four coordination centres in Zanzibar, Pemba, Kahama and Tunduru. Figure 2 shows the Dodoma Regional Centre where I am located. Each centre serves as a coordination and administrative centre and is headed by a director. These regional and coordination centres bring all necessary services close to students.

Issues of application, orientation, course registration, examination, face to face sessions are addressed in these centres.



*Figure 2: Dodoma Regional Centre (One of OUT's Regional Centres)*

OUT is the only Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in Tanzania. It is ranked 13th (out of all 103 ODL institutions) in the world and 2nd (out of 7 ODL institutions) in Africa. There are five faculties, including Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Law, Business Management, and Science, Technology and Environmental Studies. These five faculties offer a total of 133 programmes from non-degree, bachelor degree and postgraduate levels. As it is for other conventional universities in Tanzania, all OUT's academic programmes are quality-assured and centrally regulated by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). However, female enrolment at OUT is low compared to male enrolment. For instance, in the 2020/2021 academic year, male students' enrolment was 65.4% while female students' enrolment was 34.6%. With this disparity in enrolment perhaps, it is evident that OUT needs to encourage females to join its programmes so as to meet its theme of "affordable, quality education FOR ALL".

By 2021, the Open University of Tanzania had a total of 322 academic staff, whereby 205 (63.7%) were male staff and 117 (36.3%) were female staff. When OUT started, learning materials and assignments (hard copies) were posted to regional centres where learners fetched them in person. Recently, the Open University of Tanzania has moved to digital communication. ICT has been used to facilitate teaching and learning processes. Learners receive most of the learning materials and assignments and receive their results online through the Learning Management Systems (LMS). Learners also communicate among themselves, and with their tutors online. Online lectures (through ZOOM) have become common in recent years. However, there are a number of challenges associated with this move. For instance, in some arrears, learners do not have access to reliable internet connection. Others cannot afford the costs of buying computers, smart phones and internet bundles.

### **The contribution of the Open University of Tanzania to Adult Education and Lifelong Learning**

Since the world has been changing dramatically, people need new ways to address these new challenges which they face. For this reason, innovative ways to address new issues at workplaces are needed. Hence, people, including adult-workers, need to keep on sharpening their knowledge and skills every day to cope with such new challenges. This calls for adult education and lifelong learning. It is noted

here that lifelong learning is an act of learning throughout one's life – from the cradle to the grave – regardless of the period of one's life, space, gender, or status. This includes older adults.

OUT is a key contributor of adult education and lifelong learning in Tanzania, and Africa in general. As it is obvious in its key mission, most of OUT's learners are adults. They come from Tanzania and from other countries such as Rwanda, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, and Ghana etc. The majority of enrolled undergraduate learners are aged between 21 and 46 years, while most postgraduate learners (Masters and PhDs) are between 35 and 46 years of age. Most of the enrolled learners at OUT are workers who could not secure study leave to attend university education in conventional universities. Learning through OUT allows adults to study without leaving their homes and offices. For the past 26 years, the Tanzanian education sector has benefitted a lot from OUT.

It should be noted that most of the enrolled learners at OUT do not have sponsorship; they pay for their university education by themselves. This is possible because most OUT learners are workers, and OUT has set its tuition fees manageable (relatively low). Studying at OUT is cheaper than studying at a conventional university. Therefore, this affordability encourages adults (the working class) to undertake the university education at their own cost and pace, to improve their knowledge, skills, and levels of education. This has, arguably, improved their productivity at workplaces.

### **Barriers to access for older adults**

Apart from the marginalized working class, OUT accommodates older adults who seek to further their education. These are people above 55 years of age. At this point, it is worthwhile to note that the average life expectancy in Tanzania for males is 65.4 and for females is 69.3; centenarians are few in number. Some older adults study for bachelor degrees and others for postgraduate degrees. However, these are not many. Possibly, four factors might be the barriers to their access to OUT programmes. One reason is that, even though the intention of the OUT is to widen access to education to a wider society, especially adults; still, it (OUT) is governed by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). TCU has set the minimum academic criteria for one to join a university degree. These criteria are implemented in all universities (without exemption), including the OUT. Unfortunately, most older adults do not fit into the criteria due to their academic background. Consequently, those who do not meet the current criteria are automatically excluded. The second possibility is that, although learning through OUT is cheap, it is not free. Most older adults in Tanzania do not have sufficient income, as they are retired from work. With other social responsibilities they have, they possibly find spending the little money they have to pay for education is a waste. The third possible reason is that, in Tanzania, it is not common for older adults to attend classes. It is possible that older adults have the feeling that gaining a formal education at old age is a waste – they do not expect to use it for production. Finally, since OUT uses modern technologies (ICT) to offer education, it is possible that lack of technological competence automatically excludes older adults.

### **Future possibilities**

Since the mission of OUT is to widen access to education to adults, the organisation may introduce a scholarship for older adults who have the courage to undertake the university education. This could be a catalyst to others (older adults) who have a feeling that university education is not for older adults. Also, there is a need for OUT to develop short and free courses relevant to older adults. These courses may connect older adults and encourage them to involve themselves in learning. In so doing, more older adults will be involved in lifelong learning.

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## Learning for elders continues amidst Covid in Hong Kong

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The Covid pandemic has made life difficult for everyone, especially elders whose contraction of the coronavirus could be fatal. Elders are the hardest hit group in Hong Kong as the recent outbreak of the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the virus has caused a fifth wave of infections among one sixth of the 7.5 million population, according to official statistics. Older adults aged 70 and above are a group that has the lowest vaccination rate in Hong Kong, with many still hesitant over the shots' reported side effects.

After more than two years into the pandemic, many elders are kept at home due to the social distancing restrictions, which have led to isolation for this vulnerable group. Depression stemming from isolation and a sense of hopelessness has hit especially hard for elders, both healthy and weak. Mental health issues are common among elders, many of whom have faced long-term isolation either in care homes or in small flats for two years. The closure of community centres for elders and other recreational facilities has heightened their sense of loneliness and cut off their social networks. Long-term isolation at home in one of the world's most cramped cities, the situation has been grim and bleak.

To help them reconnect with each other and the community, the Elder Academy of the Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) initiated an endeavour aiming to provide continued learning opportunities for elders who are isolated within four walls inside their homes during the pandemic. The initiative is a tripartite partnership involving three parties: EdUHK, Innoage Hub of the Jade Club, and the Alumni Group formed by graduates of the academy's training program for tutors of elders. The program is unique in that it was offered by a university specialising in teacher training. Being the only teacher education institution in Hong Kong, the EdUHK is well poised to provide teacher training for a full spectrum of educational provision from kindergarten, primary, secondary, tertiary to education for elders. The program has graduated so far 400+ trained tutors since it was launched 12 years ago in 2010. In the current initiative, the trained tutors work as volunteers to provide courses and activities to help alleviate boredom and isolation among elders who are socially restricted due to the fear of coming down with Covid. The tutors volunteer their time to offer courses and share knowledge, experiences, interests, and skills with elders who can attend for free and from home through online learning. The Innoage Hub

provides an online platform for elders to access courses anywhere, anytime. The Hub has a membership scheme where elders can enrol for free and take courses from their smart phone or home computer.

Working together, the three partners run a series of free online lectures and interest classes from April to June. The online classes provide diverse learning opportunities for elders who have been fighting the pandemic at home for a long time. Since rolling out, the initiative has drawn a great deal of interest and active participation from elders in the community. As of today, over 30 online courses are offered between April and June, covering a wide range of topics by a group of enthusiastic tutors of elders. Online lectures include sharing sessions on long-distance running, travel, acupoint massage and household cleaning. Elder people can also join online interest classes on dancing, yoga, Putonghua, painting, cooking, flower arrangement, etc. A timetable displaying the different courses with date and time is provided on Innoage Hub for elders to choose and apply to attend. They need to act quick because places are limited as there is a quota for each class to ensure optimum interaction despite its online delivery.

The pandemic has greatly affected the social life and learning of elders. The online classes not only benefit the elder participants but also those who volunteer as tutors. Tutors have the opportunity to take part in this meaningful initiative to contribute their knowledge, skills, and interests for the benefit of elders and the society at large. The initiative is a timely one to help elders weather the difficult times of social isolation. It is a result of the concerted work of many committed individuals from the university, social welfare, and social enterprise sectors. By joining hands, the different sectors of the community are contributing to the well-being of elders, who have been most susceptible to the impact of the pandemic in Hong Kong.



*Image 1: Learning keeps pandemic boredom at bay for elders*

# The Wisdom Village Project Aotearoa New Zealand

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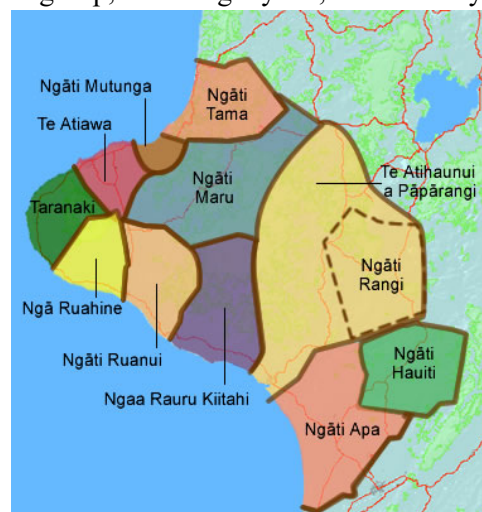
The Wisdom Village Project is a *moemoea* - a dream, a vision of a group of Indigenous Māori *kaumātua* (elders) from within my *rohe* (region) of Taranaki in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Their dream started with a *te kakano* (a seed) that was planted in August 2011.

## Origins of the Wisdom Village

The seed planters were an 85+ *Kuia* (female elder), her daughter who was her full-time caregiver, the manager of the largest voluntary service to Aged peoples in Taranaki called *Friends Plus*, and the then Chairperson of Puke Ariki Kaumātua Committee. I was the person they phoned to say they wanted to come and talk with me about a very important *Kaupapa* (purpose). At that time, I was the Chairperson of a large philanthropic Trust, then known as the TSB Community Trust.

The *hui* (gathering) went for several hours and at the end of it the group, including myself, unanimously agreed that there was an urgent need for a first-class kaupapa Māori (Indigenous principles and ideas which act as a base or foundation for action) *papakainga* (village) built for aging Māori *kaumātua* (Indigenous elders) in Taranaki.

A discussion document and plan were drafted but mainly the idea was discussed informally with *kaumātua* groups, at *hui* (meetings) of all kinds to gauge the response of a diverse range of people. The informal responses were very positive and “yes, that is a great idea”; “yes, we need that for our *kaumātua*”; “My god, that is a great idea and a very big job!” I don't remember any Indigenous or non-Indigenous person saying “No, don't do it - it is a bad idea”. So, for us the seed was definitely planted, and the Wisdom Village project was born.



*Image 1: Our tribal boundaries in the province of Taranaki, North Island, Aotearoa NZ*

Now in 2022, there are other drivers for the Wisdom Village that are more amplified than they were 11 years ago such as the housing shortage that exists for the young and the elderly populations of Aotearoa-NZ and within that cohort, the housing for *Māori Kaumātua* (Indigenous elders) is almost non-existent.

The Wisdom Village Project today is a response to address that significant housing gap for our Indigenous Māori kaumātua. Here in Aotearoa-NZ we have a saying “It takes a whole village to raise a child”. It is also true that “It is the responsibility of the whole village to care for their kaumātua, their elders’. So, from an Indigenous perspective, the Wisdom Village is also about taking responsibility of caring for our Māori kaumātua.

When my kaumātua and *whanau* (family) members came and gathered in my home in 2011 they did not say ‘We want the Government to do this for us’. They identified there was a ‘need’ and they wanted to start the process, to plant the seed, to bring it to fruition.

### **Nourishing the Growth through collaborative working and learning**

The ‘how’ was not considered naively. The kaumātua understood that it would take time, research, discussions, advocacy, fundraising (see Image 1) and building a solid team. The ‘why’ was their driver. We need our own *kaupapa Māori papakainga* (Indigenous village) for our Māori Kaumātua to ensure that they can spend their twilight years in safe, warm, and affordable houses, living as Māori.



*Image 2: Comats Community Caterers – one of our little enterprises in 2015*

So, the Wisdom Village Project, when it is completed, will be a living breathing manifestation of all the dreams and aspirations as shared by the original ‘seed planters’ in 2011. A village that meets the cultural, spiritual, physical, mental, and environmental needs of our Kaumātua Māori.

Te Roopu Kaumātua o Whai Tara (TRKOWT) - a group of kaumātua - picked up the torch and engaged in a strategic PATH plan in 2017 to assist with the

planning and development of the Wisdom Village. The Wisdom Village PATH contains their contribution of dreams and aspirations and identified the next steps for consideration and action up until 2022.

Another positive driver for the Wisdom Village Project is the experience of working alongside the Te Roopu Kaumātua o Whai Tara elders (TRKoWT). These elders have continually demonstrated their love for learning. Their natural enquiring minds, combined with their 70-80+ years of life experiences, have demonstrated that they are interested in all manner of things.

The majority of our kaumātua did not engage in tertiary level education. Not because they did not want to, but life was very different for them as young Indigenous women in the 1930s and 1940s. Some have shared unhappy memories of their early schooling days, from physical abuse practices in schools and the never-ending racism throughout their schooling and then throughout their working lives too. Most of our elders in our TRKoWT group have necessarily made good of their respective situations and have arrived at their ‘golden years’ as healed as they can be.

## Realisation of the Wisdom Village Project 2022

Having a safe, warm, affordable, and environmentally friendly home to live in should be an absolute right of passage for any Indigenous kaumātua. Similarly, having an abundance of learning opportunities available to them, regardless of age, gender, physical and or mental abilities, will be an integral part of the papakainga Māori (Indigenous village) model aptly called the ‘Wisdom Village’.

The Wisdom Village Project is envisaged as being a collaborative *kaitiaki* project (joint guardians) with leadership being provided by Nga Pekanga Catholic Māori Charitable Trust (NPCMCTrust). The investment is NZ\$20m. Completion of 30 first class kaumātua houses, inclusive of all infrastructure below and above - the ground, roading, lighting, landscaping - will become the Wisdom Village in Whai Tara, Taranaki, Aotearoa-NZ.

## Retirement, Intergenerational and Lifelong learning

The Cambridge English dictionary defines retirement as “the act of leaving your job and stopping working, usually because you are old”. My personal view is that this official concept of ‘retirement’ is polar opposite to our Indigenous Māori world view and our lived practice. As one of my kuia (an elder grandmother) at the age of 80+ years said to us frequently - “Māori don’t retire - the older I get, the busier I get!” (Kuia Makareta Majorie Rau-Kupa, née Raumati). Our world view is saying “Get ready as there is going to still be a lot of living, learning, life and fun to be had. You have a whole tribe who needs your wisdom and worldly knowledge and experience”.

*Image 3: Intergenerational Learning at its best!*



actually touching or seeing what a computer could do. They did not want to leave when the school bell rang! Intergenerational learning at its best!

As an Indigenous Māori of Aotearoa-NZ, I note that kaumātua who have lived well into their 80s or 90s are sometimes our wisdom keepers and some are power houses with various gifts. Some kaumātua have *matauranga* (an expansive Indigenous knowledge base) that is critical to their role as leaders at this point of their lives for the new generations that follow behind them. Our kaumātua are the orators, the dream weavers, the magicians, the healers, the activists, the chiefs (male and female).

Our kaumātua find personal value and satisfaction fulfilling their cultural roles and responsibilities. They add huge value to our Indigenous communities, gatherings, and cultural rituals. Of course, the ‘pace’ in which any kaumātua may go about these cultural roles and responsibilities is set partly by themselves in terms of their disposable capacity and capability when they reach these golden twilight years.

It is not compulsory to engage and participate - but most kaumātua want to because often cultural activities can be great learning opportunities, fun and, more importantly, can give an added a sense of purpose to their lives, the lives of their *whanau*, *hapu* (sub-tribes) and *iwi* (the larger tribe). So, in terms

The Indigenous Māori word to ‘teach’ is *ako* - so a teacher is a *kaiako*. To learn or to be the student comes from the same word - but is *akona*. It is recognised in our Māori culture that you can and often go through life being BOTH. Our kaumātua constantly walk between these two worlds of being a *kaiako*, in some situations, and as the student, an *akona* in other situations.

Image 2 shows how the *Kaiako* (teachers) are our *rangatahi* (youth) at Waitara High School Computer Lab and the *akona* (students) are the *kaumātua* (elders) learning all about computers. For some of them it was their first experience of

of intergenerational lifelong learning, Kaumātua Māori are almost by default, engaged in some form of learning, or teaching across multiple generations, whether they are conscious of it or not. I believe this to be true for other people, regardless of ethnicity.

Our kaumātua researching skills are constantly being honed as they delve more into *whakapapa* (genealogical ties) through generations of blood lines. The recitation of whakapapa requires a very structured discipline and practice that can take years for some to hone, while occasionally we have a few individuals who, with their photographic memories, support and discipline, are able to grasp this skill quite effortlessly. The following images show just a snapshot of the lifelong learning activities our kaumātua have been engaged in.



*Image 4: Making Wheatgrass Juice*

Our classroom was in the home of a local couple who specialise in growing wheatgrass and making wheatgrass juice as a health supplement for those who might want or need it. A great fun and learning and fabulous Taranaki hospitality.



*Image 5: Kaumātua Artwork Example*

An example of the quality of Artwork that was produced by one of our kaumātua (elders) after engaging two professional art teachers because the kaumātua said they couldn't paint. Most of them had not picked up a paint brush since they left primary school which you went to from 5 years old to 12 years of age.

Our kaumātua participated in a wānanga (an Indigenous learning forum) with visiting scholars from the USA, from Canada and New Zealand. Today we learnt of the journeys of an Afro-American poet, a first nations Canadian woman and her partner and a Māori woman and her extra-ordinary work with whales.



*Image 6: Participating in a wānanga (Indigenous Forum)*

## Telling stories of older adult learners in the ‘third age’: Neighbourhood houses in Australia

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*Tracey Ollis is recognised as leading researcher in adult education and has published widely in Australia and Internationally. She has conducted research projects on Adult Education in human rights, VET, and Adult Community Education (ACE). Her research explores adult learning practices in formal, nonformal and informal education spaces. The purpose of this research is to improve understandings of what motivates and engages adult learners and how this is influenced by context, such as workplaces, Neighbourhood Houses and community activist settings.*

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### Neighbourhood Houses - Sites of Adult Learning.

Australian Neighbourhood Houses are learning centres that are part of the Adult Community Education (ACE) sector. There are more than 1000 Neighbourhood Houses in Australia located in all states and territories. Each state, excluding the two territories (NT and ACT), has its own peak body and there is a national (unfunded) peak body which contributes to policy and issues of common interest, and promotes the sector. They are not-for-profit community-based settings that provide a range of services and support, including adult education. Integral to their philosophy and practice is a place-based community development framework supporting and resourcing local communities to identify and respond to their local issues and needs (Rooney, 2011, Ollis 2018, et al).

Neighbourhood Houses and centres in Victoria are integral to local communities. They provide opportunities for social engagement, social inclusion and learning through a range of formal and informal education programmes, developed with and for people with diverse life experiences, for example, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, people living with disability, older adults, retirees, young people who have not continued in formal education, and the unemployed. The majority of participants are people who are on low incomes, socially isolated or at risk of social isolation, and with low levels of formal education.

This snapshot of older learners in Neighbourhood Houses for the PIMA bulletin draws from a larger research project of Lifelong Learning in Neighbourhood Houses (see Ollis, Starr, Ryan & Harrison, 2016; 2017 & 2018, for example). It uses multiple case study research and produces some of the case studies as poetry to illustrate the complexity of learners' experiences in Neighbourhood Houses.

### Later Life Learners in Neighbourhood houses

Ollis, Ryan and Harrison's (2016) research into neighbourhood houses and adult learning revealed there were many older learners who were participating in the houses for a variety of reasons, but the majority of older learners attended the houses for personal interest learning. This is affirmed by the data on



learning and work in Australia that twenty-seven percent of older adult learners aged between 55-65 study for personal interest. There is growing interest in research focussed on education and ageing; the literature describes these learners as older adult learners or later life learners.

It is commonly assumed that learners in later life are learning for personal fulfilment, socialisation and recreation purposes rather than employment-related purposes. It was evident from the lived experiences and stories told by some of the research participants that this is not universally the case. Instead, a multiplicity of reasons, including, but not limited to, personal interest, socialisation and employment, were motivators for later life learners' participation in a broad range of learning activities, computer literacy such as craft, art, healthy living, new technologies, English language skills and other creative pursuits (Ollis, et al, 2017)

#### Later life learning

The later life learners who participated in this study ranged in age from their early 50s, most were over 50 years of age, and two learners were in their early 80s. Twenty-five of the learners were aged over 60, nine were under 60 years of age (Ollis, et al 2018). The situations and intentions of these learners, regarding paid employment, varied. Twenty-five of the participants were retired or no longer working in long-term careers; however, one was continuing to work in a chosen career. Of the remaining 60 participants, career changes were relevant to seven of the participants with one actively seeking work following redundancy, one having taken up a new career, and another participant planning to establish her own consultancy. A number of later life learners were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and had undertaken their early years of schooling outside Australia. In all, just nine of the 87 later life learners had completed secondary school.

#### Data as poetry as text.

This interpretive case study research took an approach of wanting to tell learners' stories. Older adult learners' stories are under-represented in the broad data on adult learning which is commonly focussed on technical and instrumentalist examples of learning regarding employment trends, upskilling, and reskilling. These objectivist research approaches do not always express the deep and embodied experiences of older learners whose lives are often rich, colourful and deeply embedded in the complexity of the life they have lived over many years. Some older learners had chequered histories of learning; many had not completed secondary school; others had experienced social isolation and mental health issues. They entered the space of neighbourhood houses to find something, relationships and friendships, to study for further work, for leisure, or to stay healthy and fit in later life (Ollis, et al 2016; 2018).

Drawing on the methodology 'data as poetry as text' and finding inspiration in the writing and conceptual lens of Laurel Richardson's writing on the 'skipped line' (Richardson, 1993), the case study data evolved into poetry revealing beautifully expressed snapshots of older learners' lives, uncovering their motivations, desires and aspirations embodied in this form of wholistic adult learning. Consequently, the data revealed their lives had been transformed in some way because of their learning. The case study of Jill expressed below who returned to learn in a Neighbourhood Houses in her 60s is an example of wholistic embodied learning in these spaces.

**Jill: the world's our oyster**

*I think I was ready  
to go back into learning again,  
in my 60's.*

*I ran a tourism business from home for 20 years, before that I worked in disability, with children.*

*I found it a bit difficult at first.  
We have to work on a self-paced level, try and work it out for ourselves,  
I don't know where it will go -  
Being able to switch the computer on and know that I can understand where everything is  
I felt very much achieved, at the end.*

*I think this is what's great about the Neighbourhood House -  
you're offered these courses  
they're at reasonable prices  
you're working in a small group setting  
you're getting a lot of concentrated assistance -  
our teachers are great because they move around with us  
personally,  
at our level  
at our age and stage  
you can keep your brain going  
which is great.*

*I didn't realise there is a lot offered in this area,  
You don't have to stay at home and get bored  
If you start to feel a little bit lonely, get in a class it's great,  
The world's our oyster.*

Like Jill's story, some of the older learners had previously been employed, some had retired from their long-term employment or careers, but they maintained a desire to find employment; they wished to take a break from their current work and to find a new direction in their life. One such respondent wanted to retrain to become a marriage celebrant, while another tertiary educated participant had given up her job to re-train in the horticulture industry.

Apart from attending formal more structured workshops and classes, the data revealed later life learners learned informally and incidentally through volunteering in the houses (Ollis, et al, 2017). Some outcomes were unexpected but equally as beneficial for participants and their communities. For example, several participants had become volunteers, including taking roles within neighbourhood houses and centres. Such involvement in the houses through volunteering improved their understanding of civics and citizenship and built knowledge of the local community around them. In this study, six later life learners were facilitating programmes in creative writing, crafts, and children's programmes. One person oversaw the community garden, seed saving, and plant sales. Another provided individual support and mentoring for people learning computers, while another was a volunteer with a gardening social enterprise. Nine were either currently or had previously served on the committee of management at the Neighbourhood House.

## A final word

The case study expressed here in the poem of 'Jill' reveals neighbourhood houses and centres are rich sites of older adult learning in Australia. Whilst the reasons for participating in the houses are varied, the majority of learners came for personal interest learning, to socialise, some to exercise and stay healthy and fit as they aged. The relational space of the houses provided opportunities for older learners to flourish, to forge new friendships, learn new skills, to volunteer and to remain active in the 'third age' of their lives. Whilst providing a detailed account of the complexity of adult learning that takes place in the houses is beyond the remit of this paper, it is hoped the data expressed as poetry gives some insight into these older learners' lives.

## For more information on older adult learning in Neighbourhood Houses see:

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria. <https://www.nhvic.org.au/>

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## Sheds: Australia's Gift to the World

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PIMA members have likely heard enough about Men's Sheds from me before. This article provides something of a very brief update on the back of my second big (444 page) tome: *Shoulder to shoulder: Broadening the Men's Shed movement* published in late 2021 in the US by Common Ground Research Networks, as a sequel to my 433 page book from 2015 which dug right back into the movement's fascinating early history in Australia, and later the UK, Ireland and New Zealand in *The Men's Shed Movement: The company of men*. The necessarily brief article also provides a small insight into the complex and fascinating role gender plays in Sheds.

With around 2,700 Men's Shed-based organisations across the world by 2021 (plus 120 Women's Sheds), 20 peak body national and state/provincial Men's Shed organisations and new movements in Denmark, the US and Canada, there was a lot to research to write about for me during COVID lockdown. The subtitle of my article is no joke. The model has proved robust and transferable, subject only to the recent debilitating impact of COVID 19 which has made working 'Shoulder to Shoulder' unwise, uncomfortable and unsafe for many older people and debilitated some existing Sheds.

The Shed model is deceptively simple but difficult to pigeonhole academically. What is clear is that the movement begun at grassroots in Australia in the 1990s with an emphasis on older men beyond paid work has proved to be transformational to men, women and communities in many nations. In some ways, the Shed model is analogous to the curious hybrid status associated with one of two Australia's monotremes: the *Platypus* (the other monotreme being the *Echidna*). As an article in the Melbourne *Age* newspaper put it in 'The enigma of the Platypus' (10 Sept 2003), 'Found in the streams and lakes of eastern Australia, the platypus lays eggs like a bird, has webbed feet like a frog, a bill like a duck and venom like a snake. But, because so much of its life is spent underground, a lot about the platypus remains largely unknown'.

To tease out the analogy, while Sheds in community settings have to do with ageing, informal learning, health, community connection, well-being and gender, none of these fields *on their own* define a Shed or what does or should happen with men, women (or both) inside. Because most of what occurs with and to participants happens informally in the Shed, it's not easy from any one academic field to analyse an activity or to definitively study outcomes from a process and organisation that is so diverse,

inherently social, very local and situated in communities of practice which may (or may not) be gendered.

My emphasis in what follows, after my brief international update, is to dig some way into the role gendered spaces are playing in these evolving Shed movements, based on research I've recently conducted with Dr Lucia Carragher (from Dundalk in Ireland). In Chapter 10 of my 2021 book we propose a Shed typology by gender and organisational type. If you don't have access to that chunky chapter specifically about 'Women's Sheds worldwide', you might like to look at our 'The Women's Shed Movement: Scoping the field internationally' paper with Annette Foley in the *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 61(2), which the second half of this article about a proposed gender and organisational typology for Sheds draws heavily from.

In brief, there are now active Men's Shed movements in nine nations (inclusive of the four devolved nation in the UK) with smaller numbers of Sheds in eight others, most recently joined by Iceland and Norway. Women's Sheds are operating in seven nations but mainly in Australia, Ireland and the UK. The highest density of Sheds (per head of population) is in Ireland. In general, Sheds work best in small rural, tree change and sea change communities where the proportion of men beyond paid work is higher than average. In these situations, there is often a relative absence of government services for older people, particularly men, in which case local people create their own grassroots, community solutions based out of a community Shed.

However, the notion that there are just two distinct Shed organisation types in community settings based on the gender of the participants is not borne out by the observed range and participation patterns within either Men's Shed or Women's Shed organisations. While men-only or women-only Sheds are most common, in some cases an existing Men's Shed reorganises itself such that men and women run separate programs on different days, sometimes with separate and parallel Men's Shed and Women's Shed organisations. In order to categorise this diversity observed in the field, our 2021 *AJAL* article (Golding, Carragher & Foley) proposes a typology by gender, summarised in Table 1, which acknowledges and is inclusive of the observed continuum in the data between standalone Men's Sheds organisation at one pole, exclusively and located separately for men, and at the other pole, standalone Women's Sheds organisations, exclusively and located separately for women.

The Yeoval Shed (in the tiny village of Yeoval in central western NSW, Australia) sits in the centre of this continuum in Table 1, with 'Yeoval & District Men's Shed & Women's Shed' on the sign outside. Similarly, the Frome Shed in England incorporates the Frome Men's and Women's Shed. Dereel Men's Shed in Victoria, Australia, is an example of an organisation called a Men's Shed (immediately to the left in table) but where men and women participate together and equally. It is important to acknowledge that an increasing number of new Sheds have decided not to gender the space, instead calling the organisation a 'Community Shed' or simply 'The Shed' but running a gendered program on separate days or at different times.

*Table 1: A typology of Men's and Women's Sheds by Gender*

<b>Organisation Names</b>	Men's Shed	Men's Shed	Men's Shed	Men's Shed & Women's Shed	Women's Shed	Women's Shed
<b>Participants</b>	Men only	Mainly men, some women	Men & women together	Men & women separately	Women only day(s)	Women only
<b>Locations</b>	Men's Shed	Men's Shed	Men's or Shared Shed	Shared Shed	Men's Shed	Women's Shed

Aside from a typology by gender we have also proposed a three-part organisational typology of Women's Sheds as summarised in Table 2, adapted from insights in the health and community engagement literature, since the broad categories and associated organisational models appear to fit with trends identified within the Women's Shed data.

*Table 2: A proposed Women's Shed organisational typology*

<b>Models</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Typified in:</b>	<b>Relationship with Men's Sheds</b>
<i>Community Partnership</i>	Community partnering with charitable organisations	England	Often close and collaborative
<i>Peer Involvement</i>	Local women supporting peers	Ireland & Australia	Minimal: Autonomous & independent
<i>Cooperative</i>	Connecting women to existing workshops & expertise	Australia & UK	Sharing resources, expertise & skills

The 'Community Partnership' organisational model is most evident in the UK (mainly England), with charitable organisations such as Age UK, Brighter Futures, and Footprints in the community working in partnership with local community organisations to sponsor and open Women's Sheds, including overseeing the management of programs within them. This model can be seen to be underpinned by a belief that Women's Sheds will be more effective when developed within a larger body that advocates for them nationally.

The 'Peer Involvement' organisational model is the dominant one in Ireland but also in Australia. Most Women's Sheds have originated from the efforts of a small number of highly motivated and politicised local women who have strived to raise awareness of local needs and grow support among their peers locally. Such Women's Sheds are typically autonomous and independent of Men's Sheds, although sharing many of the same principles, albeit from a feminist perspective. Activities are typically agreed and organised by women based on peer-based skills sharing (for example, via peer mentoring) as well as via peer support (learning together or sharing experiences) and empowerment (where needs are identified and women are mobilised into action). In this second model, change is believed to be facilitated by the credibility, expertise or empathy of Shed members.

The 'Cooperative' organisational model, becoming increasingly popular across all countries with Women's Sheds, but less so in Ireland, has seen Women's Sheds share premises with Men's Sheds locally, but meeting on different days or at different times. This model connects women to existing resources and information, such as sharing workshop equipment and skills. Often men are allocated set

time slots to teach the women how to safely use the workshop equipment such as lathes, band saws and other tools and materials.

It is relevant here in this necessarily brief and broad-brush account to note that Men's Shed organisations tend to fall within four broad and sometimes overlapping models. One is the 'hosted model', where an agency seconds staff and other resources, including premises, to bring members together, such as via the Age UK Men in Sheds program in the UK. Another, perhaps the commonest, is the 'bottom-up' model where a group of men come together to plan and develop an independent, community-based Shed organisation themselves. A third model involves what is called an 'auspice' arrangement in Australia (but sponsorship in some other countries), where the Shed operates under the insurance and organisational umbrella of a separate parent organisation. A fourth arrangement is where a service is provided by a service provider for men who are not in a position to fully self-organise, for example, for men with dementia or some forms of disability.

## New Member

Daniel Bladh

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We welcome to PIMA: Daniel Bladh. Daniel is a PhD student at Linköping University conducting research on education in political parties. Previously, he was working as an international coordinator at the university. Daniel has been interested in sustainability issues for a long time, working both with these issues on a policy level in Brussels and in the field in Vietnam. Currently, he takes part in a working group in his department where they try to develop their understanding and teaching practises in relation to sustainability issues, and they also collaborate with other colleagues at LiU on these matters. Daniel is also involved in research work on popular adult education which is a tradition with a great potential in relation to societal transformations that need to be initiated as a response to the various socio-ecological crises of our time.

[PIMA Website pimanetwork.com](http://pimanetwork.com)

