

Editorial

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This special issue of the International Journal of Ageing in Developing Countries (IJADC) focusses on learning in later life (also known as educational gerontology). As guest editor for this issue, I am hopeful that this divergent compilation of articles will provide the stimulus for further insights into what is happening in developing countries for older people in respective societies. Over the last decade there has been much more attention given to how learning and education can provide the basis for more 'active ageing' and 'successful' lives. Both learning and living are inextricably connected. This issue expands on some of these emergent perspectives.

A recent publication co-edited by Marvin Formosa and myself entitled *International perspectives on older adult education: Research, policies and practice* (2016) was an attempt to map the kinds of learning that seniors in different parts of the globe were undertaking under particular conditions, many of which were detrimental to active learning. From the 42 countries/regions included in this volume, there were a significant number from continents where even basic necessities of life could not be taken for granted. Correspondingly, the dearth of basic education/literacy with and for older people was a fairly major theme. In particular, unsurprisingly, Africa, Asia and Latin America were prominent in these narratives. The realisation that very different material, cultural and social conditions in developing countries represented in this book were tangibly impacting upon learning opportunities was a prime motivation for the construction of this special issue of the IJADC.

This volume of five articles provides additional insights into what is happening (or, indeed, cannot currently happen) in several different locations. Deliberately, this journal issue has authors from diverse regions within Africa (2), Asia (2) and Latin America (1). These articles are not considered 'representative' of the regions but do interrogate how older people are positioned with regard to policy and practices in specific locations. Further, they provide analysis of how ageing and learning are inter-connected; usually, seniors in nations struggle to gain their share of resources so that provision of older adult education is really scant. Nevertheless, older people through their own initiatives are capable of developing 'really useful knowledge' to meet their diverse learning needs in later adulthood.

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The special issue begins with an invigorating look into the lives of older people from two Argentinian authors, José Yuni and Claudio Urbano, who examine the notion of “Good Living-Living Well” in Latin American thinking. This concept is very different from prevailing Eurocentric conceptions of gerontology imposed via colonization. The authors explain how the adoption of this notion allows for a critical re-examination of meanings, policies, and gerontological practices amid the politics of Latin America. These existing gerontological traditions are culturally and historically-bound. A serious consideration of ancestral visions of the world allows for challenging individualistic frameworks of thinking and doing, largely emergent from early patterns of dominance. Hence, these authors provide some principles of “critical intercultural gerontology” connected to the concept of “Good Living” derived from indigenous peoples. In this way, the education of older adults may be viewed in a different light and the possibilities for new positive practices develop.

Following the Latin American example, this issue introduces two African studies. Learning remains a major national resource of immense value in the contexts of individual, community and national development in most African countries. In the first of these two African articles, Akpovire Oduaran has selected three countries for comparative analysis - Botswana, Nigeria and South Africa. He investigates the policy context for learning in later life in each of the three countries before examining structures, programmes, participation, achievements and challenges. As is the case in many countries, the policy context is largely framed in terms of ‘active ageing’ and ‘lifelong learning’ with insufficient intersection and is found lacking. He makes recommendations that may assist in the effective implementation of educational programmes for older people to enhance learning in later life.

In the second African example the focus of the article by Philomen Mushi and Mpoki Mwaikokesya is on the learning landscape in Tanzania where the authors argue that the challenges in meeting the educational and learning goals for older adults seem to be extremely acute. As for both developing and developed nations, the dominant discourse for training and educational programmes for older people has been closely aligned to the demands of the labour market even though the reality of most seniors’ lives in Tanzania resides outside this framework. This article traces the trends, issues and concerns in the provision of education for older adults in Tanzania. It assesses both the needs for such education, and the institutional responses which have been in place in an effort to ensure the effective provision of education and learning opportunities for older adults.

In the final two articles, the geographical attention switches to Asia where authors take very different approaches. In the case of Malaysia, Rahimah Ibrahim, Noor Syamilah Zakaria, Tengku Aizan Hamid and Sen Tyng Chai analyse the adoption of the concept of the University of the Third Age (U3A), emanating originally from a European context, into the cultural milieu of this South-East Asian country. In a bid to recognise the benefits of learning as a positive engagement in later life, the University of the Third Age (U3A) as an institution of lifelong learning for older adults was adopted in this knowledge-based economy in partial response to an increase in the ageing population. The authors use two case studies of U3A associations in Malaysia to highlight the complexities of transferring a model from abroad to

the local context. Their review outlines the structure and practices of these two U3A associations, notes the differences between U3A associations in Malaysia with those of developed countries, and highlights the issues and challenges faced by U3A as an institution in Malaysia. They argue that lifelong learning for older adults has lagged behind in the philosophy, framework and funding structure despite the imperatives of lifelong learning in national policy discourse. While the character of U3As globally can be very different, in general there is a strong emphasis on learning as a leisure activity for older adults. Indeed, this is the case in Malaysia. Unsurprisingly, this domain of learning has remained outside the education system that focuses on human capital development and financial return of investment. The authors point out that an age-stratified education system, coupled with stereotyping of ageing, has compressed the time and space for learning in later life, relegating it to the margins to be part of social welfare. They explain that financial unsustainability and competition for limited government funding has made life difficult for practitioners at a micro level. At a societal level, a shortage of skilled personnel, course-related member attrition and cultural ideas about late-life learning have negated the expansion and replication of U3A associations in Malaysia.

The final article by Ilango Ponnuswami and R. Rajasekaran from India addresses a very important global issue: long-term care for frail older adults and the role of education in facilitating changes in attitudes and supportive practices. In this geographical location, the numbers of people in this category is currently immense and likely to continue to grow. This escalation of numbers of older people needing long-term care has major implications for the economy, cultural and health-related resources. While current services of elder care can include residential care, private home care, day-care centres, governmental geriatric care, "old age" homes and those provided by Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs), the majority of care is undertaken by family members. This approach is in accord with powerful cultural expectations that the young will care for the old in a familial context. In this developing country, the availability of alternatives is restricted by a lack of affordability. The authors argue for a nation-wide stocktake of existing provision, involving all relevant stakeholders. In addition, they point to the need for greater awareness of how education can positively contribute to increased understanding of the nation's needs, of the professionalization of long-term care and of socio-cultural and economic challenges to effect significant change.

The above articles point to the simultaneous promise and challenges of promoting greater provision of older adult education in these three continents. While the invigoration of public policy is an imperative in all locations, the reality is that change cannot occur without the understanding and co-operation of older people themselves. It continues to be important for the education of older adults to receive its proper slice of the education pie but this cannot be the major determining factor for progress to be made. The challenges for practitioners are significant and in developing countries these are exacerbated by insufficient material resources; yet hope is still latent in the considerable 'people-power' in developing nations that can be marshalled from diverse stakeholders to work together for 'really useful knowledge' to be developed and shared so that learning can meet diverse needs of elders.