

CONCLUDING REMARKS

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This chapter provides a chance to reflect on the significance of the 42 country/regional descriptions and analyses of later life learning/education. It is deliberately entitled “Concluding remarks”, as opposed to “Conclusions”, to indicate that this is essentially an exercise using a problematizing approach (Freire 1984). This is a place for observation and critique of patterns related to later life learning. It is not a place, as post-modernists remind us, to espouse “grand narratives” on the state of older adult education globally but to examine some of the key dynamics at play in interrogating its character.

Arguably, there are many ways to shape a review of the significance of the 42 country/regional reports that precede this chapter. In the introductory chapter, we indicated that we recommended to authors that they select from a framework of questions to analyse the nature of older adult learning/education for their geographical context. In this chapter, we use this framework to discuss emergent patterns/themes from these international descriptions and critique. While discussion under each heading relates as closely as possible to the title, the categories are porous and not mutually exclusive. Subsequently, we address how research, policy and practice have significance in learning in later life.

Historical formations

Each country has its unique patterns of historical events but in many instances patterns emerge which go well beyond country borders as globalisation has gained precedence in economic, political, socio-cultural realms (Hake, van Gent & Katus, 2004). In the continent of Africa particularly, while the effects of imperialism have had some similar detrimental impacts across countries on indigenous knowledge, the resultant formations differ significantly. For instance, the advent of Christian missionaries and their consequent ideological and practical influence in locations such as Kenya and Tanzania, have meant that older people have responded differentially. The ascendancy of Western views of the world has meant that in most of the African continent, local knowledge(s) have been largely subjugated but remnants survive. In a broader context, exemplified by the case of New Zealand, indigenous knowledge has re-emerged as a significant driver of public policy, in this case aligned to the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 between the British Crown and local iwi (tribes) (Smith, 1999). Māori knowledge is now enshrined in educational structures from early childhood to tertiary education wherein Māori people have an alternative structure for more formalised learning from cradle to grave (lifelong learning).

In the Asian context, Confucianism has had a similar sway to Christianity in terms of values and norms adopted by citizens of countries such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan but also present in other neighbouring countries such as Malaysia. Religion and/or spirituality in Malaysia and Indonesia, especially connected to Islam, have historically heavily influenced the provision of educational opportunities for older citizens. In both cases, mosques form an integral component of non-formal education and the state supports this agenda. In more secular societies, for instance, the USA and Australia, religion may still have some influence on older adult participation (particularly in “the bible belt” of the South in the USA) but there is less overt relationship of the state with religion.

In most of the Asian countries included in this book, respect for elders has been maintained both in civil society but also through governmental policy. The concept of filial piety still matters but according to the experiences of Hong Kong and Taiwan, modernisation and urbanisation have disrupted this cultural dynamic. There is active contestation here, as in other countries reported in this volume, among providers of organised learning linked to the state, the private sector and civil society (especially the family) concerning whose responsibility it is to arrange educational opportunities for seniors. Historically, governments have been slow to acknowledge any substantive support for senior education though there is considerable variation. For example, the United States of America has had longstanding support from federal and state level government; this contrasts with the situation in Colombia where the dominant pattern of neglect of older people is the norm. Indeed, the relative high degree of social exclusion of older persons in the South American continent led to the older adult education movement emerging from the action of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) whose rationale is to increase the quality of life of older persons through empowerment programmes. However, in recent decades, even the North American movement in older adult education became characterised by a liberal and individualistic temperament. Initiatives promoting older adult education in Shepherd's Centres, OASIS, Seniornet, Senior Centres, Elder Hostels and Senior Theatres were all the result of personal and community-led enterprises. The market has also emerged as key driver in the USA, as more companies seek to tap into the silver industry market, something that will certainly become more the case as other countries register an increase of their quota of baby boomers. A similar situation is found in Canada where one finds many excellent examples of groups or organisations that provide high-quality learning opportunities for older adults, and which developed from micro-level initiatives. Aligned to nationalist movements, some countries (China stands out as a classic case) have suffered dramatic changes in ideology (e.g. the Cultural Revolution, 1966-76) which have further impacted (usually negatively) on the confidence of elders to voice their learning needs and aspirations. The apartheid movement, discussed in the renditions from South Africa and Namibia, maintained an oppressive regime of blatant social control over blacks and minorities, so that education was denied not only to older people but to those normally considered part of the labour force (normally 18-65). In Zimbabwe, a long period of suppression of (descendants of) former colonisers, has chased out many members of the workforce, leaving behind older people with very basic skills to cope with a new era.

Although older persons in all European countries are under-represented in formal institutional learning, the historical emergence of older adult education in this continent defies any simple characterisation. For instance, whilst in Austria one can trace early developments to professional association with an interest in education, in other countries such as France and Malta older adult education emerged as a specific branch of traditional universities. Elsewhere, such as in Germany and the Nordic countries, interest largely emanated from third sector organisations interested in improving the employability of older workers, whilst in Southern European countries such as Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece and Cyprus initiatives only emerged following an awareness of the long 'wasteful' retirement span of retirees in such regions. An interesting point here is that whilst most countries experienced improvements in the development of older adult education, the opposite cannot be ruled out. For instance, after an excellent tradition of senior education in the Netherlands, especially in the 1980s, nowadays many of these past innovations have been completely lost, whilst others are silently embedded in institutional and organisational provisions. Although there is currently a more positive image on ageing, the innovations have not resulted into a more active governmental policy on senior education. New crucial developments are information

and communication technology, inter-generational issues, retaining older workers and attention for older migrants. This demonstrates that one cannot assume or take for-granted that countries with past good practices in older adult education will continue to strengthen or build on them. However, the opposite may also be the case, as countries such as Slovenia and Malta have included recommendations for older adult education in all their public policies.

Significant organizations and individuals

In many of the country descriptions, a plethora of organizations have been identified. Diversity of provision, especially in the richer countries, is the norm. The actual structure of provision is linked to historical patterns (see above) but can be divided into more generalised adult education open to all adults and specialist age-segregated forms. Participation patterns evident in adult education more generally, tend to be repeated in older adulthood. In the analysis of Malta, the U3A is critiqued for its elitist intake according to social class, gender and third ageism. The U3A movement internationally is very strong (particularly in Commonwealth countries such as Australia and New Zealand; in China, Taiwan and Malaysia too) but the critique is fairly applicable across different Westernised countries, regardless of location. The North American equivalent (Lifelong Learning Institutes) also exhibit the characteristics of middle-class capture and gender differentiation (older women predominate; the curriculum is largely “feminine”) yet also demonstrate how self-directed older adults can self-organise to collectively achieve their educational aims. U3As epitomise the self-help philosophy in action.

In the developing countries in this volume, the influence of NGOs is potentially very strong, dependent to some degree on the relationship with the state. In some instances, NGOs operate in place of the state or otherwise in partnership. In the case of Lesotho, a very small country in Southern Africa, the religious and community-based NGOs provide a backbone to provision for older people. In Hong Kong, a triangle of provision operates among NGOs, the government and business. Added to this picture, the international NGOs and aid providers, as in the situation of Nigeria, may enhance the prospects of older people’s learning but also get in the way of local people providing local solutions. In Tanzania, the unexpected help from Sweden has seen the proliferation of Folk Development Colleges (derivative of “the Nordic model”) transplanted into a very different historical/cultural context. Hence, international aid can have complex and sometimes contradictory consequences.

The role of universities in older adult education is a major topic explored in many countries. At one extreme is the case of Colombia where older adults are ignored and neglected by universities, reflective of wider societal malaise. In more developed countries (e.g. Germany, the USA, Canada), the relationship between universities, in terms of community engagement, has been pivotal to the enhancement of older adult education, particularly for the well-heeled. In some African countries described in this book, adult and continuing education has played a significant role in provision, in research (though this is hardly plentiful) and community development. The case of the University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Zimbabwe (see chapter 43) is especially salient in this regard in its provision of parallel classes, block courses and e-learning. While NUST has had a more vocational/technical emphasis in provision, the University of Zimbabwe has tended to provide more liberal adult/continuing education. This kind of complementarity across tertiary providers (instrumental versus liberal education) is echoed in many other countries. The community college sector, emergent in several Asian countries (derivative of the “American model”), provides less formalised and lower qualification programmes to adults, inclusive of elders.

In terms of individuals influencing the direction of older adult learning/education, each country has its own “heroes”. In the UK, pioneers such as Frank Glendenning have improved the visibility of educational gerontology, enhancing it as a serious area of study. The influence of at least two people stands out: Julius Nyerere in Tanzania who argued for a different approach to adult learning in which collaboration and empowerment became crucial to the development of nationhood; Grundtvig in Denmark (and adjacent Nordic countries) where enlightenment, creativity and humanism have been hallmarks of Scandinavian countries’ adult education system. The Nordic “story” in this volume (see chapter 28) is one of considerable success based on egalitarian principles that is the envy of many adult educators across the world.

What does older adult learning/education look like?

As in chapter one, the distinction between “learning” and “education” comes to the fore. In the previous section of this chapter, the diversity of organizations was emphasised related to governmental, private or voluntary initiatives. The complexities of any one country’s provision in education are evident; the 42 chapters illustrate that many factors influence the ultimate pattern: societal history; colonization; geography; climate; ethnic composition; level of literacy; social movements and so on. It is simply not possible to generalise across countries to encompass all forms of older adult learning/education.

One factor which is not mentioned universally in the country chapters is that of workplace learning/education. In the “developed countries” where the numbers of older adults are continuing to stay in paid work beyond what used to be compulsory retirement, the issue of who gets what form of training or professional development is a hot topic. In Germany, vocational training for older workers is taken very seriously; elders undertaking “second” and “third” careers, especially in Western countries, are the targets for extra training in some environments such as the Nordic countries; in the UK, the establishment of the Third Age and Employment Network (TAEN) is illustrative of the need for countries to reconceptualise and implement new pathways for mature-aged adults to (re) enter the workforce with commensurate expertise. Yet what is significant from the 42 chapters is the relative absence of discussion on workplace learning/education.

Another important theme to emerge in terms of older adult learning is the place of indigenous knowledge(s). As pointed out in chapter 27, Nigeria has upheld the value of traditional education in which the entire community finds an appropriate preparation for life and where older persons have been treasured in dealing with social and political issues. In New Zealand, the distinction is made between indigenous and derivative forms of knowledge (Dakin, 1992); the former relates to Māori knowledge construction and emergent educational structures associated with *tino rangatirota* (self-determination); the latter to European style learning/education linked to institutions of the coloniser. In several developing countries this tension between derivative and traditional/indigenous learning is unresolved but Western frameworks are shaping to dwarf local indigenous exemplars.

Inter-generational learning is another area wherein there is increased consciousness of its importance as part of a fuller range of opportunities for (older) adults (Schmidt-Hertha et al, 2004). Learning across generations is nothing new (see the lifelong learning ethos of many indigenous peoples) but inter-generational education has gained traction in many sectors of the globe. When grandparents and grandchildren are involved in collaborative enquiry or

carry out learning together, then one form of inter-generational learning is occurring linked to the informal context. In Taiwan, for instance, there has been considerable governmental investment in this area, including in universities where more citizens are being trained in effective strategies (see chapter 37). However, the trend revealed in these country accounts is that little public money is currently being prioritised for this kind of education.

In some countries, however, older adult education is truly a melting-pot of activity. Clear cases in point include the Russian Federation where presently older adult education is located within various institutions ranging from scientific institutions to adult education institutions to state institutions to adult education centres. In Turkey older adult education programmes aim to improve literacy skills as well as to address various socio-economic disadvantages; and the United Kingdom boasts the highest rate of older persons in tertiary education but also provides wide-ranging initiatives in third and fourth age learning. Another interesting facet of older adult education includes the University Programmes for Older Persons present in Spain and Portugal where traditional universities include learning centres that coordinate diploma programmes for solely persons aged 50-plus.

In South America, older adult education's priority is to have a positive impact on the quality of lives of participants and older persons in general. For instance, Brazil includes over 200 Universities of the Third Age whose goal is to promote learning as an end in itself, whilst late-life learning in Argentina contributes to a better understanding of the social construction of active ageing. This has been achieved by enabling better recognition of human rights, and the need to become socially integrated through education as a means of social transformation. In Chile, older adult education has made knowledge more democratic, making it possible for older adults to acquire useful tools to positively address the changes inherent to the ageing process from biomedical, psychological, functional, and social perspectives. At the same time, it has also helped promote the right to equal opportunities in social participation in comparison to other age groups. Chapter 8 gives an overview of senior adult education in Chile, shedding some light on the challenges emerging in this field.

Key concepts and theoretical perspectives

Unsurprisingly, the diversity of concepts and theoretical positioning of the authors in this volume is immense. These differences relate to contested "central" concepts such as lifelong learning, "active ageing", the learning economy, ageing societies, social exclusion and self-directed learning (SDL) but also to a fuller range of kindred ideas, including empowerment (both of individuals and groups in varied societies), retirement, multi-culturalism, second/third careers, learning in place and filial piety (especially in Asian countries).

Almost without exception, the authors mention the changing population structure for ageing as a major driver in respective countries for growing awareness of an ageing society and what a learning society might look like where older people have equivalent status to younger generations. What is quite remarkable are the in-country differences within sub-groups of national populations. As in the case of Canada (see chapter 7), the disparities across the provinces are large and, as a consequence, policy responses are similarly at variance. These differences can have major impact on the quality of life of citizens. Again, in the Canadian scene, the broadband availability of citizens in Toronto contrasts with access for people about an hour away. The urban/rural divide, alluded to here, is a major impediment to social inclusion, particularly evident in reports from developing countries of Latin America and Africa.

Embedded in most analyses from the authors are the latent themes of lifelong learning – the economic imperative of countries to compete in a global marketplace; the seeking of self-fulfilment through learning opportunities in later life; the need for an educated citizenry throughout the life course; the acknowledgment of diversity within older age groups (heterogeneity) and the need to address social inequalities (Findsen & Formosa, 2011). In many countries, there is a realisation that age-friendly environments (e.g. businesses; supermarkets) help older people in terms of mobility and social connectedness but also are favourable for other generations in society. The overt philosophical tension between on the one hand to enhance a country's economic well-being (in which older people are commonly marginalised) and on the other to put in place policies and practices to promote seniors' participation, is recognised across national boundaries. In the case of the European Union, while countries are financially interdependent, they all face the spectrum of alienation of older citizens from contributing to nationhood. A possible answer lies in “the Nordic model” (see chapter 28) where collaboration and social dialogue are emphasised yet even in these nations where adult education is arguably the strongest across the globe, there is the need to be eternally vigilant of the consequences of social policy choices on the least privileged of older citizens.

The role of the state

The role of the state in older adult education is at the very best minimal. This role is interconnected with the respective roles of the marketplace (private providers) and civil society (exemplified by older adults' voluntarism in organisations and how the family is positioned). We need to always consider the wider parameters of educational opportunity in individual countries, usually in relation to the context of adult education and lifelong learning. Some countries have long traditions of state engagement in adult education – from large countries such as the USA where the provision of educational opportunity for the general public is bewildering to tiny countries such as Malta where provision is much more modest but equally important to citizens. Further, we know that globalisation has affected nations differentially, sometimes related to how governments manoeuvre themselves in relation to corporate culture. For many African countries, international intervention (in terms of direct financial aid and/or partnerships on projects) has had both positive and negative implications for the local populace.

In the commentaries from Asian authors in this book we gain a nuanced understanding of how governments have negotiated their pathways of social policy in terms of seniors' welfare. It is evident that social protectionism is to the fore, exemplified in the situation of countries such as Singapore, Taiwan, the Republic of Korea and Hong Kong. The general approach in such countries has been to connect educational opportunity/provision with other social policy initiatives in a blended approach. For instance, in the Republic of Korea, there were several interlinked policies announced by government in employment (1994), welfare (1997) and lifelong education (1999). In Indonesia, the National Commission for Older Persons, established in 2004, set up three leading tertiary education institutions to focus on the development of older adults' well-being in which education/training is embedded. In Singapore (see chapter 33), the author points to government's role as a catalyst in older adult learning. In China there are 10 ministries whose work connects overtly with the quality of life for seniors but the challenge is to insist that they communicate effectively not only internally but also externally to the millions of Chinese citizens in later adulthood.

One key policy area connected to the promotion of “a learning economy “ is retirement and/or pension schemes. In poor countries it is the rule rather than the exception that older people fend for themselves “post-work”. There are encouraging exceptions, as in the case of Lesotho, where a non-contributory government pension scheme has been developed in a struggling economy, but more generally, the poorer the country, the greater the likelihood that citizens are left to their own devices. In practice, this often translates to older family members looking after younger or vice versa. The phenomenon, especially in Africa, of grandparents looking after grandchildren on a permanent basis, is serious, related to the impact of HIV/AIDs on younger Africans and/or the need for “middle generations” of men going abroad to seek employment.

The general picture of state assistance to older people’s education is very poor. When state support is visible (often not the case) it is commonly connected to other social policy which does not necessarily strengthen older adult education.

Who benefits from the current situation?

This sociological question has quite clear answers. The oppressed in societies (Freire, 1984) are the least likely to participate in formal education and this trend may continue for them into non-formal provision, related to state policy (see above). In almost every chapter, there are compelling renditions of how members of marginalised groups have been disenfranchised from educational opportunities. The patterns of participation, displayed in younger life, tend to continue into later adulthood (Oduaran & Bhola, 2006).

It is clear that colonisation has had major historical effects on who gets to define and access education in later life. Throughout Latin America and Africa, the “stories” of imperialism abound in individual accounts. The hegemony of colonisation/imperialism has had profound impact as illustrated in the case of Nigeria (see chapter 27), where the slave trade saw large cohorts of locals transported to the countries of the coloniser; In South Africa and Namibia, apartheid upheld through white supremists, meant that educational opportunity was only a dream for black Africans. The wars in Africa, as in Zimbabwe, have also impacted very negatively on who gets what forms of knowledge (see chapter 43).

The patterns of colonial domination cannot be dismissed lightly. But other forms of domination continue, related to social structure, in all countries of the world. Related to gender inequality, ethnic oppression, rurality, worker exploitation and a host of other factors, each country/region has challenges in terms of issues related to social stratification. In the instance of Tanzania, marginalised older adult groups whose literacy levels are poor, have been directed to empowerment-based, learner-centred initiatives to try to address their predicament. The Regenerated Freirean Literacy Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT) methodology was employed, as an example of a community-based adult education programme, to help overcome historical disenfranchisement. The resultant impact on their lives has been mixed (see chapter 38). In the situation of Zimbabwe, the disparities between commercial and communal farmers, in terms of their relative access to effective technologies, are a painful reminder of how those with the most resources get the “best” forms of education/training (see chapter 43).

Key issues for older adult learning/education

As in the section where key concepts and theoretical orientations were discussed, a similar plethora of issues has emerged from the 42 chapters. Issues are of an ideological type (from definitions of “an older adult” to ideological positioning such as Confucianism), related to policy decision-making at multiple levels (e.g. the impact of international projects), to discrimination in terms of one’s place in the social structure (e.g. the treatment of older women) and to practical matters (e.g. the accreditation of learning).

An issue which permeates all chapters is that of adult literacy and the effects of illiteracy on older adult participation in learning/education. A definite pattern emerged that older cohorts in national populations invariably were the least literate members of that society. However, there was an awareness that subsequent cohorts of elders would be more literate and better educated, particularly evident in Western countries. To some extent, this belief in greater literacy among older people, is reflective of the expected impact of actual programmes currently in operation in countries such as Germany, Canada, the Nordic countries and the UK. Significantly for some parts of Africa, this is also the case, as exemplified by Tanzania (see chapter 38). In India, where millions have historically not engaged in any form of formal learning, older minorities have been identified as a priority in policy and practice in terms of greater access to higher education (see chapter 16).

Resource allocation to adult education in most countries has been a low priority (the Scandinavian countries appear to be an exception). Allocation of resources to older people in many countries lags behind the realities experienced by these citizens (Riley & Riley, 1994). Unsurprisingly, then, older adult education receives pitifully little in terms of funding, if indeed it is officially recognised and not rendered invisible. Within many countries, as in China where the divide between urban and rural is very wide, there are severe disparities. As mentioned by some authors, lifelong learning/education does receive indirect support through other categories of social provision. Hence, an intelligent strategy has been adopted in some instances to strengthen the connections for older adults in other social spheres where funding is less contestable (e.g. health).

Amid the multitude of issues faced by countries in this book the inattention or neglect of people in their fourth age is stark (Laslett, 1989). As mentioned with respect to Malta, people in their fourth age (largely dependent on others for care; more prevalent amid the old-old) are devoid of current priority from the government and it is usually the family who have to bridge this gap. In addition, this care falls disproportionately on older women, as typically the female population in late adulthood in any country is more numerous than the male and stereotypically women work more often in the domestic domain. In Japan and other neighbouring countries where ageing of society is on a fast track (the Republic of Korea is an example), the issue of how people in their fourth age receive care and educational opportunity will be watched carefully. It is relevant here to mention that the issue of suicide, mentioned in a few reports, is high in Japan (see chapter 19), particularly in the 80+ age bracket. A contributing factor, it is believed, are the connected issues of loneliness and social isolation.

Successful initiatives

There were a large number of innovations and “success stories” conveyed in the 42 chapters. While the criteria for “success” will vary, so too will the magnitude of the initiative. In some countries the innovation might be significant but not be considered noteworthy in another. However, the underlying notion of empowerment of older people tends to be a common factor – previously silent groups taking the step to be heard by authorities (as in the Nigerian

village episode, UNIVA); a pattern of provision common in other places being introduced into a new environment (as in the Malaysian U3A movement); a different ethnic group asserting its self-determination (as in the case of Māori elders of the Rauawaawa Trust in Hamilton, New Zealand); an innovative inter-generational programme as described in the Taiwanese context (the Madou Learning Resource Centre for Active Elderly, LRCAE); the men's shed movement, especially in Australia, where unemployed and/or "retired" men commonly assemble for learning and sharing together (see chapter 3).

One of the emergent themes from the country descriptions is the high association between adult literacy and older adult self-determination. Particularly in the African context, national or mass literacy programmes have benefitted the older generations, given their lack of opportunity earlier in their lives. One such example is the Kha Ri Gude Literacy campaign ("Let us learn") initiated in South Africa in 2008 mainly for non-literates up to the age of 74. Supported by the South African Council for the Aged and many NGOs, this programme has had very impressive outcomes for a sub-population which have been left out of educational opportunity previously (see chapter 35).

Other initiatives worthy of specific mention, again from the African sub-continent, include the Roma Valley Pensioners' Project in Lesotho, the Sengerema Older learning District plan in Tanzania, the Umguza Tobacco Farmers' Association in Zimbabwe. In the Asian context, the advent of the Barefoot College model in India where older women are trained as solar engineers and the retired Senior Volunteer Programme in Singapore are testimony to initiatives taken resulting in positive outcomes for older people.

Looking at the Future

Many of the issues discussed earlier in this chapter are also included in this future scenario development. Most country/regional accounts provide a balance between pessimism and optimism. In many instances, the identification of problems was quite similar – the literacy issue among elders which restricts their engagement in society; how digital innovation is impacting on existing seniors with ambivalent consequences; how unenlightened policy among employers and governments is having a discouraging effect on older workers' seeking appropriate training and development; the failure of higher education in most countries to work with older adults in meeting their formal learning aspirations; the reluctance of governments to invest in older adulthood social and educational issues.

Counter-balancing the more negative projections are those of a much more optimistic orientation. Included in this more positive scenario are the following observations: the baby-boomers, whose behaviour is unlike any previous generation, will spark significant changes in most societies; older people will continue to volunteer in large numbers and thereby help keep a viable civil society active; there will be greater cognisance taken of the learning needs of older workers as their numbers proportionately increase in workplaces; the fourth age will receive its proper share of resources as governments can no longer sustain patterns of neglect.

Research, policy and practice

Research

The sub-title for this book is "Research, policy and practice". It is useful to provide explicit comment on each of these components in this book, given that most discussion of these domains has been implicit. Research in the field of learning in later life (educational

gerontology) is emerging at a quickened rate from a very low baseline. There are some examples in this volume of specific small-scale empirical and/or action research, which tend to be hallmarks of this emergent interdisciplinary area. Under different headings (e.g. social gerontology; human resource management), there are worthwhile examples of research, much of which is not included here. The “elephant in the room” with respect to learning in later life is the relative failure in data collection by (governmental) agencies for people learning/working beyond the normal working age (18-65 in most countries). While this observation emanates principally from Australia/New Zealand, it is a global issue. There needs to be far greater pressure exerted on authorities to collect relevant data on older adult learning/education across the globe so we can continue to learn from one another.

Policy development

In this book there have been discussions of policy developed at multiple levels – local; regional; national; global). Many countries rely on internationally high status (learning) institutions from which to glean appropriate guidance such as the UNESCO, the OECD and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). At a European (EU) level, there are several agencies which have provided benchmarks for international performance. There is an overall picture of neglect in most countries in terms of their development of lifelong learning and/or adult education policy, let alone older adult education. Most social policy currently related to this field is derivative of allied domains (e.g. health; finance; social welfare; labour). While adult educators may exploit other connected domains for resources to assist older people, there is a limit to this game. It is important, wherever policy is being developed, that the voices of older people themselves, especially those most disenfranchised, be heard in venues that matter. It is also imperative that an *educational* policy be developed, independent of other related social policy initiatives. In the country accounts, without exception, the gap between rhetoric and reality is almost a chasm. The conceptualisation- implementation gap is one which we need to continually trumpet for correction in order to get effective outcomes for older adults.

Practice

There are many instances of “good practice” contained in the chapters, particularly associated with “successful initiatives”. Ideally, there should be a thread of consistency from research to policy to practice or more directly from research to practice. Much practice in older adult education, as for many sub-fields in the social sciences, is motivated by numerous factors including a person’s wanting to help older people, personal fulfilment, or from an altruistic stance (e.g. social justice). Few people engage for financial gain; few undertake professional development; most are volunteers. One of the emergent themes from these chapters (see chapter 37 on Taiwan as an exemplar), is the need to professionalise the field further. However, there should be an active debate on the merits and limitations of such an approach (see Findsen, 2009) before this orientation is adopted more universally. As mentioned in chapter 1, the intent of this book has been to provide insight into how older adult learning/education is conducted across many countries globally, influenced by policies and, to a lesser extent, research. A framework of questions was used as a benchmark for commentary by authors and as a consequence it has provided us with some useful comparisons and insights. Quite clearly, this book should function as a trigger for many more analyses of older adult learning both in countries included in this volume but also for others whose voices are yet to be heard.

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