

# AEA DIGEST

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**Association for Education and Ageing**

**Issue no 24**

**Summer 2008**

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## ***FROM THE CHAIR.....***

*Jo Walker*



**Chair Jo Walker and Secretary Carol Allen enjoy a coffee break at the 2008 conference**

Dear Friends,

The first half of 2008 has proved to be busy and exciting. The annual conference, held this year at Leicester University in May, offered a stimulating day on the current state of knowledge about learning in later life.

### **Annual conference and lecture**

The conference presentations drew on our recently completed Literature Review and on a series of Economic and Social Research Council funded seminars at the University. We were grateful to Professor John Benyon and his colleagues for their hospitality and contribution to the programme. More on

the proceedings can be found on page three of this issue.

The occasion also included our AGM and the 2008 Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture, given this year by Professor Emeritus David James, University of Surrey. His topic was Living and Learning, Exploring our Biological Roots, which reflected David's life-long interests in biology, psychology and education, and especially how each of these fields informs our understanding of ageing. The lecture – the sixth in the series – was well received by long-standing and newer members alike, who found themselves considering notions of later life from a rather different perspective than usual. We are hoping that a published version of David's lecture will be available later this year, as well as on our website.



**David James delivering this year's Frank Glendenning lecture**

### **Comings and goings**

One of the many reasons for asking David to be our lecturer this year was his imminent departure from the Association's Executive Committee, on which he has served since its inception – latterly on an ex officio basis as a past

chairman. His contribution has therefore been both broad and long and he has provided valuable continuity with the original vision. We shall miss his wry observations and those masterly summaries for which he was famous at AEA annual conferences. We wish him and Penny well for a much deserved retirement and release from numerous committees. He has however very kindly agreed to continue as president of the association for the foreseeable future...

Happily, the Executive Committee has now been joined by two new members, to replace David and Brian Findsen, who has returned to New Zealand (see Digest no. 22 – Winter 2008). Trish Hafford-Letchfield is a senior lecturer at London South Bank University with academic responsibilities in both social work and education. Jonathan Hughes is a lecturer in the Widening Participation team at the Open University. His PhD investigated policies surrounding the provision of learning for older people, on which he presented a paper at our Brighton conference in 2006. We are delighted to have them both and look forward to working with them.

### **New boy**

Our new Development Coordinator, Jim Soulsby, has been working for several days a month since January, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation grant. His role has been to coordinate the projects within the funded programme, namely: a literature review, a dissemination conference, some regional consultations and membership growth. I have been asked to say a little more about Jim by way of introduction than we were able to in our previous issue, I have borrowed from a recent *Older and*

*Bolder* newsletter (Issue 25, April 08), published by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, with whom Jim worked for over a decade.

*Jim has become a well-known figure on the national scene. Wherever the education of older people was being discussed, Jim could be found, tirelessly networking, bringing alliances, building links between organisations that otherwise would not have met, and encouraging individuals and groups with good ideas and practice. Jim campaigned not only for proper provision for older people but for their right to play a part in shaping and directing learning, not just receiving it. He was concerned to create ways for the voices of older learners to be heard in debates about adult learning, and took care to enable documentation of good practice, such as through the Senior Learner of the Year Awards and the Older and Bolder database.*



**Jim Soulsby speaking at the AEA Conference**

Readers will appreciate that, as Jim considered a step-change from employment (he didn't use the word retirement), we were keen to be at the front of the queue for a share of his time and talents.

### **New Look**

As part of our capacity-building programme, AEA is undergoing a make-over – not to look 10 years younger, but to improve our image and clarify our aims and activities. This is for the benefit of both members and potential members, and to better represent the aspirations of older learners and those who work with them. We aim to have a new logo and house-style and then a re-designed website, as fund-raising allows. The new look will help us, as we seek to gain the support of partners for a re-launch of our Journal and in representing ourselves at national and international meetings. We are planning to make contributions to at least three major conferences in September. If you are attending relevant events and could take some publicity material about AEA, do let me or Carol know. (contacts page 17)

All good wishes for a relaxing and / or productive summer.

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*As promised by Jo above, here is a fuller report on the **AEA Annual Conference “The Latest on Later Life Learning”**, which was held at the University of Leicester - 20 May 2008*



Our conference this year was in association with the Institute of Lifelong Learning at the University of Leicester and took place on their main campus. Following welcomes from Jo Walker, Chair AEA, and John Benyon, Professor of Lifelong Learning, AEA's *Literature Review on Later Life Learning* was presented. This had recently been compiled by Sasha Anderson, who sadly could not be with us on the day. In her absence, Jim Soulsby outlined the main areas of the Review and led discussions on its findings. Conference participants had been sent an outline summary document prior to attending and this is available on request or downloadable from our webpage ([www.cpa.org/aea](http://www.cpa.org/aea)).



**John Benyon and David Wilson at the conference**

John Benyon then led a session with David Wilson, honorary research fellow, describing the work of the Lifelong Learning Institute and its Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC) research seminar series. They recapped on current concerns and topical

issues that form the contexts for research - such as demography and work/retirement; wellbeing and active engagement; wider benefits of learning; forms of participation and barriers to learning in later life.

The ESRC funding for the seminar series had been awarded in order to bring together an interdisciplinary network of researchers and practitioners. It also aimed to share knowledge about ageing and adult learning; identify gaps and opportunities for collaboration; and strengthen theoretical and empirical foundations. John and David described the contributions and participants so far, the topics covered and the future programme. Various published and ongoing interactive outputs were envisaged.

Following a splendid hot buffet lunch, participants were invited to respond in groups by drawing up wish-lists and priorities that would enhance older adults' learning. Professor Alex Withnall then chaired a plenary discussion to share their thoughts. These were in two areas, where the collated responses from four groups have been summarised in the following paper:



### ***The value and place of learning in later life***

- There are different audiences within ‘later life’, such as 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> agers
- Peer support cannot be underestimated
- Non-learners need more / accessible information about learning, including from non-educational sources, such as health and social services
- Promote intergenerational learning to all generations
- Learning jointly with other groups promotes social cohesion and integration
- Learning is addictive
- Let learning be less acquisitive and more inquisitive
- Use Wii technology for physical and mental mobility
- Value (of learning in later life) is currently too low in government quarters, which views it at best, patronisingly and at worst, as a waste of money
- The nature of the learning provider partnerships are changing, involving retreat from public funding (especially local authorities and higher education)
- There is a decreased offer in adult and community education
- One-to-one training in healthy living, available in some areas, should be offered more widely
- Learning has been turned into a commodity – who can pay can choose
- Do value and benefits of learning vary with the subject(s) chosen?
- Or does involvement in learning generally lead to a better life?
- Although its value is perceived as positive (a ‘good’ thing), we cannot claim this without qualification
- Values of later life learning include active citizenship, broader horizons
- Benefits include coping with change, physical and mental health impacts
- Learning has moral, ethical and aesthetic aspects (therefore good for individuals and society?)
- Learning can be fun as well as painful, but always purposeful
- Learning enriches quality of life and helps people’s negotiation through life

### ***What part might AEA play?***

- Publish and disseminate research and practice, for example, through a Journal, news/magazines and third sector literature.
- Identify partners with whom to develop joint projects
- Combine research with campaigning, such as:
  - Meeting with politicians
  - Lobby key figures
  - Identify and join broad alliances, especially within voluntary & public sector
  - Raise issues via media
  - Identify key political themes, feed into all-party groups
  - Draw on European and international charters for backing
  - Produce a manifesto to articulate goals and priorities

- Develop more resources with / through which to ‘trade’ for help and influence from partners and funders in exchange for their resources and support, such as:
    - Literature review
    - Briefing sheets
    - Expertise / experts
    - Manifesto
    - Research papers
    - Website (e.g. links)
  - Better promotion of the Association, to facilitate all of the above
  - Better promotion of adult and community learning in all its forms
  - Networking and facilitating relevant groups with interests in common
  - Responding to *and* predicting change in our areas of interest.
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## NEWS ITEMS

### *Lesley Hart*



**Lesley Hart with Retiring President of the Later Life Students' Association Irené Rankin and the first President Jim Alexander**  
Copyright University of Strathclyde

*Congratulations to former AEA Secretary Lesley Hart, Head of Lifelong Learning at the University of Strathclyde who was one of 13 winners of the second UCU-Endsleigh Life Changers Awards in May for her foresight in championing the Learning in Later Life Students' Association (3Ls) twenty years ago. The awards were presented by Joe Baden, last year's main winner and the ceremony was also attended by Bill Rammell, Minister for Lifelong Learning, who told winners "The work you do contributes to us being a decent*

*society – you are engaged in genuine public service".*

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### ***New members***

*A warm welcome to new individual members Sue Lander, Christine Ball, Paul Oliver, Eileen Rudden, Eileen King and Judith Barratt and to Carolyn Hale of the Workers Education Association (N.I) and Emma Solomon of Digital Unite, both of whom have recently taken out corporate membership.*

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### ***Don't stop me now. Preparing for an ageing population.***

*Alex Withnall draws out attention to the Local government national report, Audit Commission, July 2008.*

Recognising that England's population is ageing, the Audit Commission argues that councils have a local area leadership role and should therefore do more to create an environment, in which people can thrive as they grow older. Noting that central government's Opportunity Age initiative has had limited impact, the Commission stresses that all councils need to understand their older communities and to shape both universal and targeted services accordingly; and points out that increased awareness,

better engagement and innovation would help many older people without significant expenditure. As Michael O' Higgins, Chair of the Audit Commission is widely reported to have said "Ex-punk rockers and Rolling Stones fans are not going to be happy with a cup of tea and daytime TV!"

*More detail of this report can be found on the Caring Business website. Go to <http://www.caringbusiness.co.uk/12> and type Don't Stop Me Now into subject box and 17th July into both date boxes.*

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### ***AEA's Literature Review on Later Life Learning***

(see page 4)

Hard copies of the full literature review are available as follows:

**Members: £5.00 (inc. p & p)**

**Non members £10.00 (inc. p & p)**

Offer includes published copies of Brian Groombridge's 2006 Frank Glendenning lecture and Eric Midwinter's 2007 one (see [http://www.cpa.org.uk/aea/Frank\\_Glendenning.html](http://www.cpa.org.uk/aea/Frank_Glendenning.html) for details). Only while stocks last.

Write to Carol enclosing a cheque for the appropriate sum – address page 17

(Copies of the review summary document are available **free** on request via e-mail only)

***How retirement affects identity and lifestyle of academics.***  
*Tatiana Schifferle Rowson, a student based at Keele University asks for our assistance with her research project for a Ph.D thesis. The research is a comparative study between England and Brazil.*

Retirement is an expected stage for workers; having grown and consolidated in the 20th century, and more specifically after World War II. Retirement came to be seen as an 'earned right', and fully incorporated into the life course. However, the experience of retirement is personal and individualised. Life in retirement is to some extent a consequence of midlife, a period when people may experience a range of social and psychological changes.

The main theory supporting the research is the 'continuity theory' developed by Atchley. This argues that the continuity of ideas and lifestyle from middle to late life is a common adaptive strategy to changes. Continuity means the maintenance of consistent lifestyle patterns (i.e. internal: ideas, values, etc, or external: place of residence, activities, etc) by keeping them unchanged or by presenting only minor fluctuations.

At face value academic careers in Brazil and England seem very similar. In both countries there is a community of full time academics that have devoted most of their careers to academia. However until recently in Brazil academics worked part-time because the salary was poor. In addition, female academics in Brazil do not match the level of

qualifications and the occupational status of men of the same generation. Because of these differences and the difficulty of controlling all the variables that would make the retirement of academic women in Brazil and in England comparable, this research is focused on the retirement of male academics only.

The aim is to study the transition to retirement of male academics with similar levels of qualifications and work status in Brazil and England and takes into account the impact of both the part-time academic profession culture in Brazil and the full time academic culture in England, whilst studying the experience of continuity in retirement. Participants have been chosen based on the following characteristics: male, retired academic staff (i.e. receiving occupational pension), whether working or not working; and retired for between one to 5 years (inclusive).

The data collection in Brazil has been completed and we are currently recruiting respondents for the England online survey stage. If you would like to take part in this electronic survey stage or know someone that fits the criteria, please, get in touch at: [t.schifferle.rowson@keele.ac.uk](mailto:t.schifferle.rowson@keele.ac.uk)

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*The Workers' Educational Association Northern Ireland recently held a one day conference in Belfast entitled 'No Age Limit – Securing the Place of Learning in Later Life.' The conference was the last piece of work in an action research project looking at the value and practical benefits of learning in later life. Diarmuid Moore of WEA NI writes about going **Beyond the Myths and Stereotypes of Ageing***



**Dr Gene D. Cohen**

As well as hearing expert input from researchers, academics and older learners the conference was particularly pleased to welcome keynote speaker, Dr Gene D. Cohen, MD, PhD founding Director of the Centre on Aging, Health & Humanities at George Washington University. Dr Cohen is an internationally recognised academic and author, whose work includes seminal books such as *The Creative Age: Awakening Human Potential in the Second Half of Life*, ground breaking research demonstrating the health benefits of creative activity in later life, and the invention of award winning intergenerational board games.

The conference also welcomed expert input from Dr Alex Withnall, Warwick University, who facilitated a workshop on the gender issue – bringing older men back into learning and Jim Soulsby, freelance expert, who lead a workshop on recognizing and affirming later life learning. The conference was attended by researchers, practitioners and representatives from age sector organisations from across Ireland. Most importantly older people themselves were given the opportunity to share their experiences of learning in later life.

Dr Cohen opened the event with a talk on learning capacity, psychological growth and creativity with ageing. He presented recent research findings which gave new perspectives on the effects of ageing on brain function and the implications of this for later life learning and creativity and said

For too long, images of ageing have been guided by a series of negative myths, stereotypes, and misinformation about the process of aging and the experience of middle age and later life. There is no denying the problems that can occur with aging, but what has been denied and too often trivialized is the potential—potential that can be mobilised even in the face of illness and chronic disorders. The latest research reveals that this potential is very real....The latest science is showing that many positive things happen in later life, not “despite” aging, but because of aging.

Dr Cohen continued to present a synthesis of the latest research on the ageing brain and although the limits of this article cannot do justice to the depth and range of his findings, highlights include:

Views on cognitive capacity: The general perception is that cognitive capacity begins to decline as we move toward and through later life. Modern neuroscience now shows that new brain cells—neurons—are generated throughout the aging process, created by challenging activities and experiences. These new neurons help to keep the brain vital, flexible, and poised to respond to new demands and opportunities. These positive brain

changes can bring new learning interests and capability with ageing.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts: Not only is the brain broadening its capacity to process and store information as we age, but scientists only very recently have discovered that around middle age, we begin to use both sides of the brain simultaneously, creating new capacity and new ways of looking at things. Our brain is making optimal use of both hemispheres operating together; we experience a deepening capacity for left brain/right brain integration, heart-and-mind thinking. Gene added succinctly that the brain is moving from two wheel to four wheel drive.

The Liberation Phase: Dr Cohen used the term “Liberation phase” to explain a theme in later life which draws upon cognitive development and left/right brain integration. In this phase the older brain is turning over questions such as: “If not now, when? “Why not?” and “What can they do to me?” The effect is liberating in thought and deed. Dr Cohen used the example of Charles Darwin; from 22 to 27, he traveled the world collecting thousands of plant and animal specimens and recording his observations in dozens of notebooks. However he struggled for another 23 years to see the bigger picture, finally piecing the puzzle together in his classic publication at age 50—*On the Origin of Species*. The Origin of Species was a revolutionary and controversial work and it took Darwin to reach the liberation phase of his life to have the freedom to publish.

Dr Cohen ended by looking again at the reaction and the interaction of these

themes with learning and creativity. Again his research into creative arts has shown that mentally challenging activity can enhance the positive potential of the brain. As he put it “With aging, art is like chocolate to the brain.” Our work at the WEA has allowed us to give out some “chocolate” and to witness the powerful impacts that learning can have. We hope to publish a full conference report soon but in the mean time you can find out more about Dr Cohen’s work at <http://www.gwumc.edu/cahh> . For further information on the project please contact Carolyn Hale, Development Officer, WEA (NI) on 02890329718 or [Carolyn.hale@wea-ni.com](mailto:Carolyn.hale@wea-ni.com)

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*In the last digest we invited members to respond to the **Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) Consultation on Informal Adult Learning**. We also submitted our official **AEA Response**, summarised here by **Jo Walker***

The UK Government Department’s consultation based on the document, *Informal Adult Learning – Shaping the Way Ahead*, ran from February to June 2008 and was widely circulated to people and organisations that might have a view. Senior civil servants made themselves available for meetings with stakeholders, and adult education organisations ran informational events both nationally and regionally to encourage responses. AEA was invited to a number of these, including one for experts on older adult learners, since it was recognised that older people have a special interest in informal learning.

AEA submitted a full response to the 27 specific questions posed by the consultation document, which we also

described in the previous issue of the Digest. The questions were in the general areas of: Understanding and improving current provision; the Government contribution; DIUS-funded informal adult education; Equality of access; Broadcasting and technology.

In addition to these, we made points in the following areas in a covering letter:

- Welcoming the acceptance of the value of learning in later life
- The range of settings involved
- The recent ‘loss’ of older learners from adult learning
- The unintended outcomes for older learners of equality legislation (loss of concessions) and the skills agenda (equal or higher qualification holders unable to continue publicly funded studies)
- Informal adult education as an access route to other learning / training
- The role of the adult tutor as change agent and supporter for older learners
- The ‘residue’ status of informal adult learning in educational budgets
- The learning potential of other government programmes for older people, especially the promotion of Opportunity Age as a positive context for older adult learning.

We are in the process of putting our full response onto our webpage at [www.cpa.org/aea](http://www.cpa.org/aea) If readers or their organisations also made responses, we would be interested to see them.

## FEATURES

### *Video as a learning and teaching tool*

*The digital revolution has put an invaluable teaching and communication tool into the hands of anybody with a digital camera and a computer. **Trish Hafford-Letchfield**, Chair of Age Concern Greenwich and teacher in social work education talks about her experience of developing innovative learning materials in this area in terms of a slide show on **Community Care and Older People** for teaching social work students about issues in older people's services.*

Stereotypes and myths about older people can easily be reinforced by unimaginative approaches to developing learning materials within higher education. As a lecturer on a programme where students obtain a degree in social work, I have found it very challenging to teach subjects such as law to social worker students in an interesting and stimulating way. There are so many ethical issues involved in applying social work law to real life problems and dilemmas as well as the fact that law as a subject can be potentially a dry and generally unsatisfying for both teachers and learners. On the surface principles underpinning social work legislation emphasise choice, independence and social inclusion for older people using social care services through the promotion of a healthy, active lifestyle and increasing user involvement (DoH, 2006). However, putting some of these laudable principles into practice through the practical implementation of such legislation can become compromised within increasingly managed care environments and

resource constraints. I wanted to find a way of getting to the heart of some of the key issues affecting the rights of older people; to convey what it means to consider the diverse range of people using social care services and to focus on an older person's own definition of a 'life worth living' and to emphasise the support they might need to achieve this. Older people coming into contact with social work services are primarily conceptualised as a 'challenge' in the current social, economic and political environment, where ageing is commonly perceived as a time of difficulty and loss ultimately leading to increased dependency. In a large class of 50 or so social work students, engaging the new generation of professionals more critically in these debates has to be a real priority for any educator.

As I have become more seasoned, confident and experienced in my role as a teacher, I have also become more interested in arts based approaches to learning in social work and social care. Combined with my new year's resolution to become much more of a 'techy' eventually led me to explore the Windows Movie Maker facility on my laptop. I had recently during the process of designing a new course undertaken a public consultation with older people at Age Concern on their views about what makes a good social work manager. I was struck by the significance of relationship issues with professionals and the importance of recognising emotional issues, when working with older people and their networks during the process of using social care services. This then provided the stimulus to make a short slide show as a means of drawing social work students' attention to some of the key concepts underpinning The White Paper: *Independence, Wellbeing and Choice, 2006*. one of the more radical

and recent policies affecting older people and community care I tried to draw on a combination of visual and auditory cues punctuated with key facts as a means of introducing or concluding some of the key points being made. As a first venture in using this type of media, this involved searching and trawling images on Google and selecting appropriate images that stood out or prompted a particular emotion or unexpected thought. Going through this more creative process made me think much more reflectively about what I really wanted to say to the students and how I might use a different means of communicating with them without the luxury of text (as one might do in a normal teaching situation). Selecting certain images also enabled me to consider issues such as diversity and to confront stereotypes of how older people are normally portrayed. For example, the images of older people in intimate or gay relationships, their roles as lovers or as users of IT services. The images were timed in with the actual words in the accompanying song thus reinforcing specific concepts or ideas. I deliberately led the viewer to see a more stereotyped view of older people at the beginning, where older people might be portrayed as more passive users of services but then moving progressively towards introducing concepts of them taking control and exercising their rights and choices. The overall result can be seen by clicking on the link below and although it only lasts less than 4 minutes, I feel that this medium is more powerful than any session I might have provided for social work students using more traditional teaching methods.

Having shown it to students and colleagues I then question them about

what they remember most about the slide show. Many are able to recall significant facts such as the invisibility of gay and lesbian service users, the loss of control that older people have over their end of life care; the significance of emotions following the loss of a valued family member and particularly the images of older people engaged in relationships and valuable activities such as using IT and exercise. These all reinforce the value of individualised budgets and learning opportunities for older people a key message at the end of the slide show.

So what have I learnt from this process? I am very conscious that this slide show is from my own academic and 'professional' perspective. Within social work degree programmes, we endeavor to involve service users themselves in the teaching and learning environment. This experience has recently led me and other colleagues to work with service users involved in our degree programme to explore how we might use digital media for service users and carers to tell their own stories and specifically to control how they want to be portrayed. We have successfully bid for funding to provide a workshop for service users and staff later on this year on how to make their own digital stories. This has a number of spin offs including opportunities for service users to become more 'techy' like me. I have also just completed a project with an older people's theatre group and students to make some learning materials about older people's sexuality – which has been participatory in developing a joint venture across generations, where social care issues can be explored and conveyed on a more equal footing.

To have a look at the slide show please click on the link below or cut and paste it into your internet browser. All

feedback and comments welcome directly on to the YouTube site.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diFhXLcL4Cw>



Older person's lunch club - a still from Trish's video

*In another example, Sue-Jane O'Keefe, who is the Older & Vulnerable Manager for Genesis Community, the charitable arm of Genesis Housing Group, has been working with film maker, Jason Gleeson to produce an awareness raising DVD focussing on subtle abuse, called "**Friend or Foe**". The project has been funded by NESTA.*

Tenants with mental health issues in Essex and Herts were involved in all aspects of the process; script writing, character development, acting, filming, editing and set design.

The DVD is designed to be an information tool for vulnerable people, in a docu-drama style and in a non-judgemental, non-threatening format. It is suitable for all levels: friends, family, staff, healthcare professionals as well as vulnerable people themselves. The issues covered are; false befriending, phone, letter and email scams, and people borrowing money or possessions & not returning them. These scams seem to be targeted at vulnerable people, and can affect any one of us.

Once you respond to a scam, your details are "sold on" and you are inundated with other scams, and the constant barrage can be really intimidating, and ebb away at confidence and trust.

The aim of the DVD is to empower people to recognise these scams, and details are provided of helplines and organisations, which can help stop this sort of abuse.

In addition, the DVD shows the fantastic creative skills and enthusiasm of people with enduring mental health problems

For a taster of this project, have a look at the trailer on [www.myspace.com/GCfilm](http://www.myspace.com/GCfilm) Click on "videos"

If you or your organisation is interested in receiving a free copy of the DVD, please contact Sue-Jane on: 07738 458650 or via email: [suejane.okeefe@ghg.org.uk](mailto:suejane.okeefe@ghg.org.uk)

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*Anita Pincas of the Institute of Education, University of London writes about the thinking behind the new course she has developed which started with the question, **Older learners - what's different about them?***

I started to wonder about this question about six years ago, having been a teacher trainer at the Institute of Education all my life. A former MA student of mine had decided to learn Spanish in her 50s, so that she could communicate with people when she retired there. I ended up helping her to gain a doctorate on the subject of her own learning styles. As a result, I came across two other doctoral students who were also investigating older learners. Through this experience, and now as a

member of our (then) Lifelong Learning department, I appreciated for the first time the ongoing worldwide demographic changes. I also noticed the many older people in our lecture halls and library, where both staff and students around me were still happily working beyond retirement. I decided to find out the age profile of the Institute and discovered to my surprise that in 2005-6 around 10% of all our students were over 50. I had to look further into this.

I found that the buoyant academic field of 'adult learning' focused primarily on young adults from as young as 19 or so up to the 40s but seemed not to acknowledge the increasing numbers, who were still learning and often studying seriously at much more advanced years. The more I read, the more I realised that people were interested in this phenomenon but there was no major consideration being given to the question as to whether older learners were significantly different in any way from younger ones. If they are, is it anything beyond just having more life experience? Or do they possess some different characteristics that might identify them as a learning group in the same way that we can define primary, secondary or college learners?

My questions quickly became more numerous, difficult and fascinating but my efforts led me to realise that I needed help. The help I have always found most effective is a class of students alongside me - with whom I could pose questions, explore books and articles, test hypotheses against experiences, and share the general companionship of developing a body of knowledge that a serious group of learners can achieve.

The result was a new one-term master's degree level module with a title that I hoped would signal my aim: *Issues in educating and training older learners 50+*. The course ran for the first time last January, with 12 very keen men and women, ranging in age from just 50 to 73. They came from a variety of professional backgrounds involving older people - in many cases, teaching them. Their fields included care, physical education, counselling, research into community roles, adult education, history and religious education, the BBC, and management. We met for a weekend at the start and end of the course, where visiting speakers shared their knowledge with us and in between we worked together by email.

When it came to curriculum, I had to structure our exploration of the field into manageable chunks and realised that it was necessary to start with the many contexts, in which teaching and learning issues are embedded. These contexts seemed to be social, personal, and educational, from which we could tease out what might be special about older learning and the ways older people needed to be taught.

We looked at UK, European and worldwide statistics about demographic changes and future predictions, and how these affect social, economic and political matters, including educational opportunities. That led to wondering about the impact on the workforce and the consequent demands for re-skilling, further education & professional development, either for late changes of career or lengthened working life. Key concerns were then with health, well-being and care - as seen in communities and within social service provision - and with how social attitudes and theories about later life were being re-shaped.

With this insight into the world surrounding older age, we could focus in on older people themselves. What is their psychological state like? Are they living happily ever after, or do they have worries, and how do these affect their perception of themselves and their later years? Are they declining in cognitive abilities or getting on with a normal life in their own eyes, and in those of other people? We looked particularly at the brain sciences, following through some of the recent findings that seemed to say two main things. First, even though some parts of the brain may function less well with ageing, other parts can still develop and adjust sufficiently. Second, while older people may slow down and may have less efficient memories, they have lived long enough to develop good mental strategies that appear to compensate well.

Before considering older learning itself, we looked around at the education and training opportunities available, to consider what choices there are for learning in later life, i.e. formal, informal, non-accredited, self-fulfilment leisure learning, work-place training, and so on. We found that there is one growing area relatively well-funded and that is in the use of new technology, especially the internet and other communication media. Nevertheless, there was a general government reluctance to assist older learning, despite universal acknowledgement of older people's usefulness to the economy and their proven ability to keep going far beyond the official retirement age.

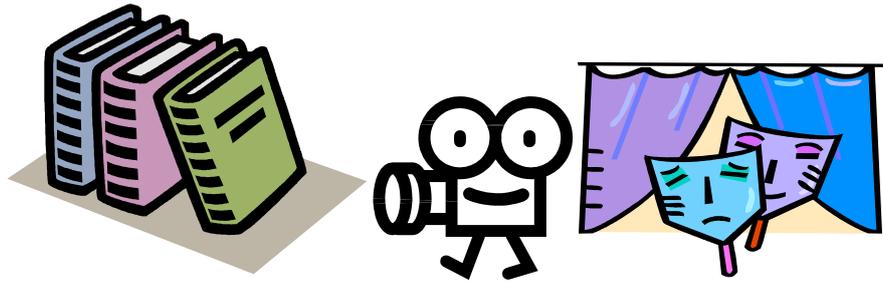
Finally, we looked at the processes of learning among older students and what modes of teaching might best suit them. This part of the field of

educational gerontology is sometimes known as geragogy – a term we did not like. On the way through we had also noted information about ageing among social minorities, gender issues, older people's participation in music and the arts and had surveyed the enormous number of organisations devoted either to older people generally, such as Age Concern, Age Positive, and the Longevity Centre, or to learning opportunities for them such as the U3A, the Senior Studies Institute at Strathclyde University and, of course, adult & community colleges.

Our journey took in many research studies ranging from purely cognitive investigations through to how older people can learn the piano at 60+, how they fit in with younger students at college or university and what benefits they are providing as voluntary workers in the community, sharing their knowledge and experience widely.

Can I say I have achieved my aim at the end of the first course? Yes, because the group that I worked with were serious, lively, and good fun. Between us we covered a huge amount of territory. No, because now that I am wiser, I know I need to develop the course in various ways. That is one of the privileges of being a teacher.

Anyone who would like to start reading around this subject is welcome to look at the course website we used. It is going to be improved and up-dated before the next course in January 2009, but you will find plenty to read at <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/English/MLBib.htm>  
Email: [A.Pincas@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:A.Pincas@ioe.ac.uk)  
<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/english/Apincas.htm>



## ***AEA DIGEST CULTURE SECTION***

***Brian Groombridge, our regular correspondent on **The Arts and Older People**, has been busy of late mixing with those who are the movers and shakers in the field. \****

A sequence of ten meetings in May-July left me exhausted but with a rare feeling of political hope: the climate affecting issues of most concern to AEA could be about to improve. Obviously, governments are serious about lifelong learning, when by 'lifelong' they actually mean 'the entire length of life' i.e. including older people. A convincing test of that is ensuring that older people can be variously involved in the arts. These meetings and conferences actually seemed to suggest that the Government means to take some significant steps forward.

Those taking part in these meetings included Cabinet ministers - and not just from DIUS; voluntary artists of all ages, from primary school children playing rhythmically complex riffs on playing what I believe were African Djembe drums to a senior citizen improvising a story for our entertainment; eight young women singing madrigals with great flair and delicacy; a militant adult education professor pushing hard for humane, demographically aware reforms to policy and practice; a trombonist, doing his day job as a voluntary arts

champion, and doing so with real stage presence; and a table-full of academic experts foreseeing possible futures. On all the occasions in the list below, I banged another drum for older learners deserving better opportunities.

### **Some of the main events**

*June 11th:* NIACE invited representatives from most sectors of adult education to discuss how best to follow-up the DIUS Shaping the Future consultation. The whole day meeting was arranged in association with DIUS, attended by DIUS staff, as part of its 'On-going dialogue with stakeholders' - another sign that the consultation was serious. Rightly thinking cross-departmentally, DIUS acknowledges reassuringly that as well as television, museums and galleries, 'many IAL sources' must include day, evening and weekend courses and lectures. The Consultation Report is due in September 08 and there'll be a 'policy paper setting out future vision for IAL'. So we should: Watch this space.

*July 2nd:* DCMS in partnership with Arts Council England and Voluntary Arts England launched a substantial document: *Our Creative Talent: the voluntary and amateur arts in England*. The night before the launch conference, VAE arranged a reception with a difference (at the London Barbican). Along with the networking refreshments, we enjoyed a delightful

concert (alluded to above), with brief, lively informative background speeches between each performance.

In preparation for the launch, a round table meeting was held at the Arts Council (June 4), chaired by its director, Alan Davey and opened by DCMS Minister Margaret Hodge.

*June 9<sup>th</sup>*: VAE followed that with a conference for grassroots activists from a wide variety of voluntary arts organisations. On the day, again opened by Margaret Hodge, the excellent speakers included Davey, confirming the Council's commitment; DIUS Minister David Lammy on video briefly introduced Liz Walton (with us in person), the civil servant who's inspired confidence in her contributions to this process; Robin Simpson, VAE's Chief Executive (also mentioned above), and AEA member Professor John Benyon (Leicester University).

John deserves a special mention. As well as making one of the strongest speeches at the launch, he was interviewed the previous evening by the BBC's Sylvia Reed. He also wrote the Foreword to a lively booklet we were all given, *Edutainment: the benefits of arts and crafts in adult and community learning*, and spoke with authority and passion about creativity, opportunity and learning, maintaining they were central to the agenda for older people as well as younger

generations. Recalling Blunkett's humane *Preface to Learning for a Change*, he expressed the anger so many of us feel at the subsequent 'betrayal' of lifelong learning. The NIACE statistics on the damage are quoted in "Our Creative Talent" (see previous page). I believe AEA should follow all this up, so hopefully: Watch this space.

*And finally*: These and many other issues feature in a FORESIGHT report on *Mental Capital and Mental Wellbeing (MCW)*, due to be published in October 2008. This important paper, compiled for the Government by a panel of scientific experts, has two chapters about the MCW of older people. The whole document will justify AEA's interest. Alan Tuckett (NIACE), Gordon Lishman (Age Concern England), and I, are members of the Stakeholders Group, commenting on the work in progress. We had our last meeting on July 3. So to conclude emphatically: Please watch this space as well!

\*I owe thanks for the opportunity to take part in these meetings to NIACE, the Educational Centres Association, and Reemer Bailey (Voluntary Arts).  
BG

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## ***The Association for Education and Ageing***

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**Treasurer:** Ron Speight [ronspeight2003@yahoo.com](mailto:ronspeight2003@yahoo.com)

**Elected members:**, David Crossan, Mervyn Eastman, Brian Findsen, Anne Jamieson, Carlie Newman, Jim Soulsby, Glenys Tuersley, Dr Alex Withnall

*Submissions for the **EAC Over 60s Awards**, created to celebrate the artistic talents of older people, have just closed. We hope to have a report on the winners and the exhibition of their work, which will be held at the Bankside Gallery near Tate Modern, in the next digest.*

The youngest exhibitors in 2007 were aged 60 and the eldest was Henry Abbott, aged 93. Another winner was Sonia Frette, who took up painting late in life for therapeutic reasons and entered the art awards with the motto 'nothing ventured nothing gained'. Her success in these exhibitions has boosted her confidence. As her eyesight is now failing, she plans to enter work this year that incorporates embroidery and recycled materials. John Jarratt won The Artist Award in the 2007 exhibition and received editorial coverage of his work in the *The Artist* magazine, which with sister publication *Leisure Painter*, is supporting the awards by offering publicity support and a prize. 'The quality of the work on the walls was marvellous – I was astonished that I had won', says John.

Journalist and broadcaster Joan Bakewell will be acting as a judge for the competition and also presenting the prizes at this year's private view.



*Meanwhile at Dulwich Picture Gallery in South London the Education*

*Department have been reaching out to both ends of the generation spectrum. As well as teaching art in a local youth club, whose members are generally part of street gangs, the gallery has at the same time been involving older and often isolated citizens in both art appreciation in the gallery and in the execution of their own work with their project '**Good Times: Art for Older People at Dulwich Picture Gallery**'*

This is a ground-breaking programme pioneering new ways of using art to enrich lives for hundreds of older people. The Gallery has worked with 41 community partner organisations benefiting 1,770 participants to date, including, care homes, sheltered housing, health centres, hospitals and hospices. Practical art workshops, Gallery tours, tea, drama and even dance are on offer. Gallery teams are also busy out in the community reaching the most lonely and isolated.



*Some of the comments of those who have taken part:*

*'Now we have something different to talk about tomorrow'*

*'I don't want lunch – I want to see more paintings'*

*'I've never done anything like this, never in my life, never!'*

*'When you bring someone to such a lovely place – well, they really feel valued'*

*For her book review in this digest Alex Withnall has selected a story which almost sounds like a commercial for the benefits of lifelong learning! “The Most Interesting Journey of Lizzie Robson” by S.J. Dunn, publ Third Age Press, £6.99*

At last! Well, it was bound to happen eventually ...a really enjoyable work of fiction featuring an older learner as the central character. So here we meet Lizzie Robson, a native of the North East now 77 years old and living at the suggestion of her rather prissy son in sheltered accommodation near to his family in Northamptonshire. The warden is always trying to get our feisty Lizzie to join in with the other residents and ‘do things’. But Lizzie wants more than bingo and armchair exercises. She wants to find the real Lizzie, to develop, to discover and learn, to have fun; in other words, to go on a journey. This is the engrossing story of that journey told in her own words through her diary.

There are certainly some giggles along the way as Lizzie shocks her son by boldly modelling for a life drawing class and stands up to some of the other residents with her sharp wit and outspoken manner. But she really begins to blossom when she takes up pottery and then computers and starts to tell her life story to Emily, a local teenager who has come to interview her as part of a school project. A wonderful friendship springs up between the two; Emily encourages Lizzie in her learning and Lizzie is there to support Emily when she finds she is unexpectedly pregnant. As Lizzie joins U3A, she begins to find her horizons expanding especially when Paul comes into her life and she embarks on a new and wonderful

loving relationship. Meanwhile, with Emily’s help, she makes peace with herself over her past. As a wiser and kinder Lizzie emerges, she grows in confidence as she realises the power that older people’s experience gives them to support each other and to make their voices heard. I was so engrossed in Lizzie’s life that I almost cheered out loud when we learn that she’s been accepted on a Ransackers course at Ruskin College. Her account of her term there is a real challenge to anyone who still thinks that older people can’t learn and her reflections on her life changing journey of self discovery are truly inspirational.

Readers will be captivated not just by Lizzie’s determination and strength but also by her fascinating account of her early life as she recounts it to Emily. The author has developed the other characters that Lizzie encounters on her journey in a way that makes them totally believable, as are those she knew in her past. I particularly loved her pompous son Stephen and her fellow resident Marjorie, who appears to be nothing but a spiteful and unpleasant individual but who turns out to have a surprising secret past of her own.

By now you will have gathered that I could hardly bear to finish this highly enjoyable book and I would certainly recommend it as an inspiring read for any older person who thinks they’re stuck in a rut – or indeed anyone who is committed to lifelong learning. And the greatest recommendation probably comes from my 93 year old mother who has just finished reading it for the second time and is still convinced that every word is true! Perhaps it is.....? “

## ***On Screen***

***Carol Allen***

Ben Kingsley gives a virtuoso performance in *Elegy*, based on Philip Roth's novel *The Dying Animal*. It's a thought provoking and grown up meditation on the themes of love, responsibility, ageing and sexuality. Since his youthful failed marriage sixty something university professor David Kepesh (Kingsley) has enjoyed a series of carefully controlled short term liaisons with his female students and a comfortable but casual twenty year affair with Carolyn (Patricia Clarkson). But when he meets and falls in love with Consuela (Penelope Cruz), he's finally forced to grow up and face the realities of love, commitment and growing old. Very good supporting performances from Dennis Hopper as David's friend, fellow hedonist professor George, from Clarkson and from Peter Saarsgaard as the adult son, who still nurses a grudge against his father for his desertion.

Frances McDormand plays the title character in *Miss Pettigrew Lives For A Day*, a sort of down and out, unemployed Mary Poppins governess in late 30s London, who out of desperation and sheer hunger cons her way into the job of secretary to small time cabaret singer Delysia (Amy Adams). In the course of a day Miss Pettigrew sorts out childlike Delysia's complicated life with her three suitors, bullying nightclub owner Nick (Mark Strong, junior theatre impresario Phil (Tom Payne) and her devoted pianist Michael (Lee Pace); gets a Cinderella makeover and finds mid life romance herself with leading lingerie designer Joe (Ciarán Hinds). There is a distinct sense of fairy tale in the story. McDormand as the resilient, resourceful and dryly humorous heroine is the unifying force in a film, which has many delightful moments

but never quite finds a consistent style. It's sometimes period Hollywood romantic comedy, sometimes ersatz Coward but without the sparkle of his dialogue and its picture of 30s London is more American depression era than England. There is though a lot of charm in the performances and the period costumes and settings, particularly Delysia's luxury apartment, courtesy of lounge lizard Nick and its use of London locations make it really good to look at.

There are two films opening in September, which I have yet to see but which sound promising. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is a World War II drama about a forbidden friendship between the son of a Nazi commandant, and Shmuel, a Jewish boy held captive in a concentration camp, which is conducted through the barbed wire fence that separates them. It is directed by Mark Herman, who has a good track record ("Little Voice", "Brassed Off").

*The Duchess* stars Keira Knightley as Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, who enjoyed similar public adoration to her descendent Princess Diana, was trapped in a loveless marriage to a cold husband (Ralph Fiennes) and also had problems in finding true love. Film also stars up and coming talents Hayley Atwell as the woman she has an affair with and Dominic Cooper as her true love, future prime minister Charles Grey. All sounds like a bit of a costume romp. And they're all very young aren't they?

Which reminds me, still around so you might just catch it is *Mama Mia!*, in which Meryl Streep, Julie Walters and Christine Baranski enjoy the Greek island life, while singing Abba songs. Proving that older girls too just want to have fun!