Why later life learning is important

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Definitions

- Life-long learning in old age can be defined as personally and socially motivated experience-based learning. It includes every targeted learning activity that serves to continuously improve skills, abilities and competencies.

- Education in later life can be defined as acquiring knowledge and new skills in a conscious and targeted manner. Education is a broader term than learning as it implies the development of reflexive practices within learning relationships.
Three Models of Lifelong Learning  
(Hans Schuetze 2007)

1. The human capital model where lifelong learning refers to continuous work-related training and skill development. (Employability)

2. Lifelong learning as a system of learning for citizens of democratic countries that includes opportunities for embracing modern technologies. (Knowledge society)

3. The emancipatory/social justice model. LL is available for everyone in the interests of equality in a democratic society. (Active citizenship)
Starting points: Changes of age(ing)

- Demographic changes
- Higher educational levels
- New scientific findings
- Disappearance of the „three boxes“
Low educational status of older age cohorts: Average years of schooling, by age group

Persons with low educational attainment, by age group, %, 65 years or over

ISCED levels 0-2: pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education.
Deficit models of ageing

- „When the age is in, the wit is out“ *(William Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing)*
- In the normal course of ageing, people gradually withdraw from social roles as a natural response to lessened capabilities and diminished interest (e.g. Disengagement Theory)
Review: Activity summary domains associated with wellbeing, health or survival in 42 studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Longitudinal studies (N = 24)</th>
<th>Cross-sectional studies (N = 18)</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
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<td>Formal</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leisure/consumptive</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intellectual/cultural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Solitary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Productive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual/service</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total domains</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality/satisfaction</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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You can’t teach an old dog new tricks

Theoretical age gradients

e.g. P.B. Baltes et al. 1999; J.L. Horn 1982
At what age is there a reliably detectable age decrement in ability?

The Seattle Longitudinal Study
Age dynamics in scientific creativity: Nobel laureates 1875-2008

Findings show fundamental shifts in the life cycle of research productivity. Jones BJ, Weinberg BA (2011)
From age-differentiated to age-integrated structures („Disappearance of the three boxes“)

M. Riley & J. Riley, 1994, p.26
Effects of learning in later life

- Maintaining and strengthening one’s health; preparing for a restricted mobility;
- Recognising and imparting one’s own competences in volunteering and in intergenerational dialogues;
- Learning to operate new media (research, networking).
Why should the elderly learn?

Positive effects of learning on Health

- intellectual abilities by minimizing memory losses or even reversing them (Kotulak 1997)
- likeliness to seek medical assistance sooner and more effectively prevent and treat ailments by self-diagnosis
- recovery from diseases
- fitness and exercising
- satisfaction with health (Khaw 1997)
Individuals with low education are 70% more likely to be physically inactive, and 50% more likely to be obese than individuals with a higher education.

Cognitive ability is strongly associated with education – the higher educated are more cognitively skilled than the lower educated.

All countries reveal a positive relation between well-being and education level.

The level of education is inversely associated with the reported medication. In the category primary school 27% of individuals indicated that they take none of the listed drugs. Among individuals with tertiary education 46% do not take drugs.
Why should the elderly learn?

Positive effects of learning on **Social Inclusion:**

- participation in social & political activities
- counteract risk of poverty
- improve equal opportunities
- challenge negative images of ageing

(Withnall 2010)

Educational participation is not only enriching for people who attend courses or attain knowledge for themselves, but it also has “spread effects”, impacting the entire social context.
Why should the elderly learn?

Positive effects of learning on **Computer Literacy**:

- seniors are not technology adverse; however, they want technology that supports activities they are already familiar with.
- they were willing to learn new technology as long as it has great usability.
- Social supports ist important for learning computer skills and develop lasting interest in computing technologies (Ng Ch-hung 2007).
Can Adult Education Delay Retirement from the Labour Market?

- Adult education has no effect on the timing of retirement from the labour force.
- Higher education has a positive effect.

Outlook

Later life learning

- is relevant for the **labour market**
- improves **democracy** by active participation in society and tackles social exclusion
- develops **individuals** (self-esteem, self-determination)
- improves **health**
- reduces educational **inequality**.
Concluding comments

- Learning as a lifelong activity – dipping in and out
- Reducing the association with work
- Learning as a form of social linking
- The distinctive role of learning – self-reflective sensibility for the unknown
- Learning is not only directed towards better functioning in daily life or self control but also towards a new culture of aging which includes social participation in civil society