

Lifelong Learning Comes of Age: Intergenerational Perspectives

Alexandra Withnall¹

Abstract: Although subject to considerable debate, the potential of lifelong learning to promote social inclusion and cohesion within ageing populations, means that it has come to feature in range of policies at all levels. Within this framework, intergenerational learning has a particular appeal. However, different concepts of generation have spawned a diverse literature. There is also an expanding range of accounts of practice in different countries. New forms of intergenerational learning such as acquiring digital literacy skills and new settings such as universities and the workplace are discussed. It is argued that what is now required is an appropriate theoretical framework within which to explore emerging issues together with better insights into cognitive changes as people age. Questions of knowledge transmission and power and the need for cultural sensitivity in intergenerational learning are also addressed. It is concluded that intergenerational learning has much to offer within the context of lifelong learning.

Keywords: lifelong learning, intergenerational analysis

Introduction

For more than four decades, there has been a whole range of debates about the nature and meaning of lifelong learning especially in a European context. As different rationales and models have emerged, much of the debate has been concerned with policy analysis and implementation at supranational, national and regional level. Other discussions have focused on the role of social capital, social inclusiveness and, amongst feminist writers, the need for a more egalitarian and emancipatory approach that would allow gender, class and the sometimes racial aspects of lifelong learning policies to be exposed to closer scrutiny (Leathwood & Francis, 2006). Subsequently, realization of demographic trends and the implications of the ageing of populations for the development of lifelong learning policies in Europe and beyond have added another dimension to the debate; the challenges posed by the sheer diversity of older people's lives whether or not they have remained in the labour market. At a time of global economic crisis and austerity politics in many countries, the attraction of intergenerational initiatives that involve interaction between two or more generations with the promise of mutually beneficial positive outcomes cannot be denied. This

¹ Associate Fellow, Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Warwick, UK

paper will explore critically the nature of educational intergenerational activity to date and comment on some outstanding issues that require further discussion and debate.

Concepts of generation and solidarity between generations

A useful starting point is to examine different concepts of generation. The term has been used imprecisely over time beginning with its application within the life sciences. The idea of human generations was then adopted within the social sciences to refer to changing roles within the family; being of a certain generation in this sense is closely tied to one's stage of life, for example as a parent or grandparent, rather than year of birth. Perhaps the most important influence on our understanding derives from Mannheim's theory of generations which originally appeared in an essay in 1928 (available in English translation 1952). Put simply, Mannheim argued that a generation is a group of people who experience similar events in their youth (especially in late adolescence) during a distinct period of time. Socio-historical events group together people based on their experiences of living through these particular occurrences; however, not every generation will develop a distinctive consciousness as this depends on the pace of social change. In addition, within generations there may be different types of responses to a particular event depending on individual circumstances so that generations may be further internally stratified. Mannheim's theory has been widely debated and criticised over the years particularly for its focus on western youth but it has been instrumental in helping sociologists to consider the perspectives of different generations and to analyse their sometimes differing value systems. In recent years, we have become familiar with rather unhelpful terms such as 'Baby Boomers', 'Generation X', 'Generation Y' (or 'the Millennials') and Generation Z to describe different generations living today, the underlying assumption being that they must share particular experiences and values. It is noticeable that less attention is given in Europe to the perspectives and interests of the 'Silent Generation' (those born in the period 1928-1945) or indeed to the very oldest but dwindling generation, people born in the shadow of World War One but whose lives were very much influenced by World War Two and its immediate aftermath.

This is not the only approach to understanding the concept of generation which has spawned a diverse and uneven literature based not just on sociological approaches but also on those developed from psychodynamic and gerontological perspectives (Biggs, 2007). In spite of it remaining an essentially disputed concept, it has become widely adopted in the literature of social relations, within political discourses and in marketing. In a similar way, the concept of intergenerationality has been a powerful one not just in

education but when analysing family relationships, community development and, in recent times, in respect of potential conflict in some countries over differential access to financial and other resources.

Work by Antikainen et al. (1996) and Aro et al. (2005) in Finland and by Field (2013) in Scotland has been concerned with developing the concept of generation in the context of learning across the life course. Field, in particular, discusses the value of researching generational identities and memberships in attempting to understand the role and meaning of learning in the lives of older people. In this he echoes the views of Withnall (2010) who conducted a series of focus group discussions with different groups of older learners in order to gain an insight into the main influences on participants' experiences of education and learning within the wider historical framework where societal and cultural change was necessarily a prominent feature. She noted "how the multiplicity of influences on the collective and individual life course operate in an interrelated but highly complex manner within a continually changing and evolving social and cultural context" (p. 52). Some of these focus group members also commented on other older people they knew whose lives they perceived to have very little focus and who seemed to be unwilling to try learning anything new. In her wider study, Withnall draws on this point to suggest that individual personality traits may also be important in understanding whether or not older people develop a commitment to learning within their particular generation but this aspect is currently very much under-researched.

The rhetoric of the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations in 2012 helped to draw attention to the need to identify and to resolve any major differences between generations as populations age and to strive for more and better intergenerational solidarity. However, Sánchez and Hatton-Yeo (2012) have been highly critical of this particular approach and offer a reconceptualisation in which they suggest that the 'active' component should refer to an awareness of how to age better bearing in mind that ageing is an extremely complex phenomenon; and that ideas about active ageing should inform the whole of the life course, not just later life. They argue further that intergenerational relationships and not necessarily intergenerational solidarity should be the focus of debate although they recognise that intergenerational relationships are ambivalent as is active ageing. Perhaps their most important point is that life and ageing needs to be seen as complex and dynamic processes within a framework of relationships with others. How might intergenerational learning activities offer the opportunity to establish fruitful and worthwhile relationships bearing in mind that not everyone wishes to learn in an intergenerational setting?

What is intergenerational learning and what can it offer?

As programmes and practices have been developed across the world, a range of definitions of intergenerational learning in different countries and contexts has appeared, especially as the benefits of continuing to learn throughout life have been emphasised in various educational policy documents worldwide. Broadly speaking, what the various definitions have in common is an assumption that people of all ages can learn from each other by sharing knowledge, skills and experience thereby fostering reciprocal and mutually beneficial learning relationships. It is believed, in many cases, that the outcomes will be greater understanding and respect between generations, leading to enhanced intergenerational solidarity, trust and better community cohesion as well as contributing to the building of social capital (Boström, 2003; Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008). In particular, Newman and Hatton-Yeo give examples of different types of intergenerational programmes that they believe possess three important learning characteristics – benefits for all parties, reciprocity and empowerment. However, it is not entirely clear from their examples how far their claims are valid, whether the programmes they discuss were subject to rigorous evaluation and the extent to which these programmes were comparable.

Unpacking the various claims further, Finsden and Formosa (2011) draw particular attention to the literature that focuses on the perceived social and psychological benefits of participation such as the breakdown of certain stereotypes, especially in regard to older people and the fostering of self-esteem and psychological well-being as well as helping to dispel feelings of hostility and competition towards other generations in times of economic crisis. Thomas (2009) believes the benefits are even wider; he argues that intergenerational learning can contribute to the breaking down of barriers within communities, the prevention of anti-social behaviour in younger people and an improvement in the health and well-being of older people if they can be perceived as productive and useful. In these ways, he believes, we can be helped to move closer to the creation of an “age-friendly society”. This kind of rhetoric has been influential in encouraging the European Union (EU) and some individual governments, notably in Germany and Scotland, to embed policy initiatives on intergenerational learning into their long-term strategies for socio-economic development.

A helpful development was the EAGLE project (European Approaches to Intergenerational Lifelong Learning) funded through the EU Socrates Programme and reporting in 2008. The project set up an Observatory – an overview of intergenerational policies, programmes and different initiatives at European level working in six member states, focusing especially on good practices. The project also produced a specialised toolkit for intergenerational activities but it is not clear how far this has been put to use to

inform subsequent new programmes or whether it will be kept updated. (www.eagle-project.eu).

Another recent development has been the expansion of European networks for intergenerational learning as those involved in setting up and running different ventures come together to share and reflect on their experiences. Prominent networks have been the European Network for Intergenerational Learning (ENIL), itself a project funded through the EU Lifelong Learning Programme; and The European Map of Intergenerational Learning (EMIL), a collaborative network of members working together to support different kinds of intergenerational learning taking place across Europe. It is hosted and supported by The Beth Johnson Foundation, a charity working with older people in the United Kingdom (UK). However, such networks may fail to achieve their original objectives if funding is withdrawn or key personnel move on and general enthusiasm wanes.

Meanwhile, the debate about the perceived importance of intergenerational learning continues; as an example, in a discussion held in 2015 under the auspices of the European Civil Society platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) and funded under the EU Erasmus+ Programme, a forceful case was made for sharing best practice across the EU, for more long term and sustainable funding and for the mainstreaming of intergenerational learning not just into educational practices but also into social and employment strategies. In particular, it was argued that the concept of intergenerational learning should be used at national level to target groups who are most at risk of unemployment and social exclusion (www.eucis-lll.eu). This kind of thinking shows how a new rationale for intergenerational learning is emerging in a time of economic stringency.

New forms of intergenerational learning

An examination of just some examples of the myriad of intergenerational learning programmes available across Europe and beyond shows that many, but not all of them, have been concerned with bringing together children or teenagers and older people in a particular location or in a range of countries. For example, the Grundtvig funded partnership “Twinning the Elderly Disadvantaged and Disabled with the Young by Enabling Active Reminiscence” colloquially known as “Teddy Bear” to engage the interest of children and young people, was judged to be one of the most successful in the Grundtvig portfolio. The approaches and methodologies employed have been detailed by Della Pietra et al. (2009) but briefly, the project was concerned with linking young people with older people in their communities, often in rural areas, through structured meetings and co-working in an educational context in specific areas of England, Italy, Finland and later, Slovenia. The model developed through the project incorporated guidelines

for building similar and more complex projects and demonstrated the requirements for sustainability in each location. There are many examples of similar projects across Europe and beyond.

Acquiring digital literacy skills through intergenerational learning

One interesting aspect of the wider Teddy Bear project was the pairing of children with older adults (under teacher supervision) when children acted as mentors to their older partners to help them acquire digital literacy skills. Between 2008 and 2011, a whole series of projects were funded through the EU Lifelong Learning Programme concerned with information and communications technology (ICT) for seniors' and intergenerational learning. The overall aim was to decrease the growing gap between the generations by tackling what has come to be called "the digital divide". The projects had differing target groups and varying objectives; for example, BASIC-LIFE, led by the Romanian Society for Lifelong Learning, worked with disadvantaged families, often multigenerational, to improve their knowledge and competencies in the ICT field, developing five educational models in the process. My Story, also led from Romania, involved younger people learning camera and film editing skills to interview older people about their lives whilst also using their ICT knowledge to train the older people in computer skills (www.eacea.ec.europa.eu).

Such projects usually claim to have been successful although it is never clear how far gains can be sustained by the different participant generations or how far findings can be extrapolated to other situations. There is also the dilemma of rapidly developing technology; skills and competences acquired by older people (and indeed, by younger people) may become quickly dated. Furthermore, Gamliel (2016) addresses the dialectics of the power relationships between younger and older people in a technology driven relationship although her particular focus is on children's empowerment as "teachers" and their experiences of agency. This raises questions as to how such a relationship can be understood and evaluated. We will return to these issues later.

Universities and intergenerational learning

Strictly speaking, the role of universities in promoting and supporting intergenerational learning is not new. Much early work emanated from Generations Together, an international centre for intergenerational studies at the University of Pittsburgh, USA founded by Professor Sally Newman who subsequently became the Founding Chair of the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs (ICIP). Newman and Hatton-Yeo (2008)

went on to discuss some rather ambitious ideas as to how universities in general could be engaged in intergenerational learning mainly in order to help older people to become more productive members of their communities. There are numerous examples of other universities becoming involved in experimentation with different forms of intergenerational learning. A notable example is Dublin City University in the Irish Republic which offers a space where older people from the local community are able to engage in teaching, learning and research opportunities with academic staff and students as part of an Age Friendly University Initiative as well as participating with other universities in a range of European funded projects (Corrigan, 2016).

In recent times, a newer form of intergenerational learning within universities can be observed as students of all ages are increasingly studying together for a qualification perhaps over a period of several years as the concept of lifelong learning slowly becomes accepted within European universities. Participants in a particular course will all be adults but at different stages of their working lives or even beyond. Some may be seeking a first qualification, others hoping to retrain for a new career or even following up an interest. Accordingly, their motivations for studying and their ambitions are likely to vary. Sánchez and Kaplan (2014) distinguish between the term “multigenerational” to refer to the presence of different generations in the classroom and “intergenerational” which they take to mean the various interactions between these generations in the learning environment.

Schmidt-Hertha (2016) observes that such a mix of ages, rather than generations, can present a particular challenge to university teachers who are traditionally more accustomed to dealing with younger students and who may not be well equipped to deal with multigenerational learning environments or to cope with potential conflicts within a group. However, Sánchez and Kaplan (2014) argue cogently that multigenerational classrooms within higher education offer considerable opportunities to rethink teaching-learning practices through a consideration of learners’ generational positions so that classrooms become appropriate contexts for lifelong learning. They suggest that intergenerational learning can involve not only learning about and from others but can also provide a powerful vehicle for learning about oneself and understanding one’s own generational position. Hopefully, this can provide a focus for self-reflection and encourage the challenging of long-held assumptions but in addition, there is always the need to avoid assigning particular characteristics to members of other generations and over-generalizing about them.

The implications for teachers or facilitators in a multigenerational classroom are immense. They themselves may be of a different generation from their students and existing standard toolkits developed for facilitator training may be of little use to them. Schmidt-Hertha (2016) discusses work by a group of German researchers that might be applicable to this kind of

intergenerational learning within a university context; the core idea developed is “to enrich intergenerational learning by relating it to concrete local problems, to activate participants to contribute to solutions and to reflect on individual biographies as well as on learning experiences” (p. 174). However, the degree to which it would be possible to implement such a strategy must surely depend on the subject(s) being studied, the skills and training of the tutor in maintaining a balance of interests and inputs and the willingness of participants to try to learn with and from each other and to develop a reflexive stance. This scenario obviously represents a new aspect of intergenerational learning; rather than a formally organised programme set up for the very purpose of engaging different generations in an exploration of mutual learning, the focus is on particular learning goals for all the participants. Intergenerational learning is part of the process rather than the goal.

Currently, analytical accounts of this kind of intergenerational learning in higher education are somewhat sparse although Lirio Castro et al. (2014) note the different kinds of programmes that are appearing in Spanish universities and also present an evaluation of an intergenerational learning experience at the University of Castilla-La Mancha. Here older people from an elective course on the same subject were integrated into a third year undergraduate course on gerontological pedagogy apparently with positive reactions. However, some suggestions emerged from students as to how a tutor in a multigenerational classroom might develop a more dynamic teaching method in response to differing student motivations. Certainly, as increasing numbers of students of all ages aspire to a third level qualification and find themselves learning alongside other generations, this is an issue which deserves more evaluative research across a range of subject areas so that the views of all parties, including those of curriculum designers and teachers, can be assessed.

Intergenerational learning in the workplace

It is widely acknowledged that as governments in different countries struggle with the implications of demographic trends and adopt policies that involve a longer working life, organisations will increasingly need to find ways to make better use of the capacities of their older workers in ways that are appropriate and productive for them (CEDEFOP 2012). A related issue is how to encourage harmony and cooperation between different generations within the workplace especially as younger people now enter the workforce having grown up in the digital age. It is obviously important for organisations to optimise the skills and talents of all age groups in order to make use of the diversity among their employees for both individual and organisational advantage. Of course, workplaces generally offer various

different kinds of opportunities for learning and practising job-related skills. Sadly, as Phillipson (2013) has discovered in relation to the UK, there is a link between increasing age and declining access to training especially for men and women in part-time or casual positions. Although workers in the public sector fare rather better, he points out that continuing decline in public sector employment may significantly decrease these opportunities in future. Accordingly, more and more public sector and indeed, other types of organisations will need to find ways to achieve their goals whilst retaining their overall efficiency. It can be argued that, in theory, intergenerational learning offers the chance to bring the importance of learning and training to the forefront, to challenge negative stereotypes of older workers and to build capacity within an organisation if developed in a way which engages different age groups in a constructive and mutually acceptable manner.

These issues have been discussed in some depth by Spannring (2008) and by Ropes and Ypsilanti (2012) who, reviewing the multidisciplinary literature, note that implementing an appropriate intergenerational learning programme in any organisation is invariably extremely complex especially as different employees will be motivated to learn for different reasons. They also distinguish between formally organised learning activities, institutionally planned with pre-determined learning goals which are usually skill based; and informal learning that may have more far reaching results and which they believe is the most common form of workplace learning. They observe that intergenerational learning in the workplace as “a social-collaborative way of learning that is situated within organisational structures, can take different forms centralised around work tasks, and may or may not be planned” (p. 285).

The authors go on to discuss how different generations that might be encountered within an organisation will have had different social experiences and may hold different values as previously discussed. They may also attach different meanings to work and hold different work-related values as well as displaying different working styles and learning characteristics which may impact on learning and work performance as well as on work motivation and career development especially as employees grow older. In addition, there are age-related changes in cognitive function, discussed later, and in the perceived value of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards which can affect both work satisfaction and performance. Thus, balancing the needs of different generations becomes extremely challenging for both supervisors and managers. The authors conclude that for forms of intergenerational learning to be implemented successfully in any organisation, it is necessary to take into account both factors relating to the nature of the workforce and the structures within which they operate as well as providing both formal and informal structures for promoting learning that complement the different types of knowledge residing within different generations. Differing goals for learning also need consideration. Bjursell (2015) makes a useful

point when she stresses the importance of shifting the focus from “succession of knowledge” to the “co-creation of knowledge” especially as the “digital generation” enters the workforce.

That the growth of the multigenerational workforce in many countries is providing a new challenge is reflected in the fact that *The Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, the leading academic journal in its field, chose to devote a whole issue to the topic in 2013. Nevertheless, it is probably true to say that research into intergenerational learning relationships within the workforce is still very much in its infancy. As more age-diverse workforces continue to be the norm, it is also the case, as Phillipson (2013) has observed, that non-standard work arrangements will continue to increase. These may involve part-time, temporary, flexible and home-based working; it is often, but not always, women who opt for these kinds of arrangements so that gender issues need more attention. In addition, it will be increasingly necessary to consider that older people will have had portfolio careers and may have acquired a whole range of skills during their working lives. It is also likely that any learning and training will increasingly take place on-line the implication being that it will also be important to periodically reconsider the contribution that intergenerational learning can make to organisational and individual development and to devise appropriate methodologies for its use in a changing labour market environment.

Discussion

The foregoing account demonstrates that formally organised intergenerational learning has had a comparatively short but chequered history and that it is continuing to develop in diverse ways. This has been accompanied by considerable debate about its meaning and efficacy in achieving better intergenerational solidarity as population ageing continues to be seen very largely as a problem, especially of resource allocation, in a time of global economic instability and rapid social change. Although research into different aspects of intergenerational learning has continued to grow, there are still some issues that require attention and which merit further discussion.

One criticism that is often made is the lack of any theoretical framework within which to explore learning within intergenerational (or multigenerational) settings. Reviewing theories used in the research literature on intergenerational programmes between 2003 and 2014, Kuehne and Melville (2014) found that, in general, the papers they examined made use of theories that focused on groups and individuals in interactive contexts and those that emphasised individual development in almost equal measures. Very few were concerned with conceptually based programme evaluation.

However, not all the papers reviewed were primarily concerned with learning. The authors conclude that what is needed is a broader theoretical base for intergenerational practice in order to develop a better understanding of intergenerational relationships. Certainly, intergenerational learning programmes could benefit from consideration of a comprehensive theoretical framework to inform their development.

Pinto (2011) makes a useful contribution to this debate in her analysis of why intergenerational learning has not yet become an academic discipline. She points out that any theoretical knowledge has emerged from practice rather than from research; that professionals are not adequately trained to promote dialogue; and she also observes that society's focus tends to be on individuals rather than viewing them as members of an intergenerational community.

Yet, as Findsen and Formosa (2011) observe, intergenerational programmes are based on the idea that learning is a lifelong process and that people may have particular learning needs at different stages of the life course which those from other generations might be well positioned to help them to meet. What has received less attention is any insight into how the mental processes involved in learning can change over an individual's life time and the implications of this for learning with and from other generations. Withnall (forthcoming) draws particular attention to the comprehensive international literature that demonstrates how people change, both biologically and psychologically as they grow older. However, as she points out, we need to remember that individuals are not all the same and it is important to be aware of differences in cognitive ageing as well as variability within the individual. She suggests that we need to take into account recent insights emerging from the field of cognitive neuroscience since modern neuroimaging techniques are now able to explore and explain some of the processes involved in learning at different ages through empirical study of the brain and connected nervous systems.

Life course studies also have a role to play in helping us to understand changes in cognition. For example, it has been shown that cognitive capability grows very fast in the early stages of life, reaches a peak in early adulthood and then declines with age in most people. However, another kind of cognitive capability is based on knowledge 'reserves' that many people accumulate over their lives and this remains stable in later life in most people. There is also some evidence that cognitive ability in early life appears to be protective against cognitive decline but that in later life, social relationships also become particularly important in helping to maintain cognitive abilities (Kuh et al. 2013). In a study that tried to identify factors across the life course that can influence both cognitive and emotional development, Richards and Hatch (2011) argued that that good quality early education where attention is paid to shaping confidence, motivation and

control of thoughts, emotions and behaviour, can augment cognitive skills independently of existing abilities.

Such findings obviously have implications for the ways in which people from different generations are able to work together in mutually satisfactory ways especially where programmes involve children or adolescents and older people of different ages including those who may exhibit some degree of cognitive decline. It is important not to make assumptions about participants' cognitive abilities but to be aware of these possibilities at the outset (Whitehouse, 2013). The findings also raise questions in relation to how knowledge is produced, transmitted between generations and, absorbed and indeed, the validity of that knowledge or the efficacy of skills that are exchanged. What are the mechanisms that enable different generations not only to make sense of, and use the knowledge, skills and experience they may possess but also to select and share relevant aspects with others? How do individuals absorb and make use of others' knowledge and the skills they may acquire from these sources? In a forthcoming book, Field et al. (in press) promise to probe these issues through an examination of the complexity of what they term "knowledge migration," focusing on the intersection of learning and knowledge migration with social and cultural influences such as gender, race and class. Such an approach is to be welcomed in that it moves us away from the notion of knowledge and skills as commodities to be exchanged and to be automatically absorbed (or not) and utilised in exactly the same way by members of a particular generation. It is particularly relevant for further investigation of the multigenerational classroom or workplace where intergenerational learning and working together is incidental to the main aim of the programme but nevertheless, is an integral part of it.

Discussion of these issues leads on to a consideration of the nature of power in intergenerational learning relationships as previously mentioned. "Empowerment" was seen as one of the learning characteristics of the intergenerational learning programmes discussed by Newman and Hatton-Yeo (2008) although they describe very different empowerment strategies in each example and it was surely not the case that all participants necessarily felt empowered in the same way. In the examples of older people being instructed in digital literacy skills by children, discussed above, it appears that, at that point, power resided in the children who had temporarily assumed the role of teacher. Other projects used the teaching of these skills in exchange for young people learning about their older learners' lives or being instructed in some kind of craft or skill where power then resided with the older generations in view of their knowledge and experience. But is this the same kind of power and does it demonstrate reciprocity? Withnall (2010) has previously argued, based on some early debates amongst community educators, that power is not some kind of tangible entity to be given, received or exchanged. Rather, it is the balance of power within each indi-

vidual relationship at any given point that is important and this is dependent on the various resources available to that relationship. These may naturally include physical resources together with some or all of experience, knowledge and skills but also involve participants' self-confidence and sense of solidarity. Well designed research into these aspects of the learning relationship would open up new vistas on the nature of intergenerational exchange.

We may also want to question the role of programme organisers, teachers, trainers, instructors, tutors in relation to the power they are perceived to hold. Although they may have been largely responsible for initially defining the goals of a programme, for setting it up and/or for ensuring its delivery as intended, they can also try to increase the kinds of resources available to participants, especially those who appear to be lacking resources of their own, through the processes of educational engagement in a particular learning environment. This may involve developing appropriate monitoring and feedback strategies for all participants and encouraging reflection and discussion in order to bring about more equitable power relations and to diffuse any apparent generational tensions. However, this may be a long-term goal if it is necessary to build participants' confidence, ability and willingness to contribute suggesting that a considerable degree of sensitivity and insight is necessary in those planning and facilitating an intergenerational programme. The advent of a European qualification in intergenerational learning (Melville & Hatton-Yeo, 2015) is to be welcomed if it can help to address some of these points.

Finally, much of the existing research and practice in intergenerational learning has taken place at the micro level. As an integral part of lifelong learning, it is important to take a macro level perspective on this. For example, we are currently witnessing an unprecedented movement of migrants and refugees worldwide with more than a million people crossing into Europe in 2015; and the crisis shows no sign of abating. Although Germany and Sweden receive the highest number of asylum applications, most European countries are affected (The UN Refugee Agency, 2015) and the issue of migration is politically highly sensitive.

Looking ahead, what are the implications for lifelong learning and for intergenerational work? McNair (2009) carried out a thoughtful analysis of the implications of likely patterns of migration for lifelong learning in the UK (admittedly prior to the rapid escalation of numbers of displaced persons through conflict and violence). He was able to make some constructive suggestions for ways in which learning can help to support social cohesion and to make diversity a positive aspect of community life. In particular, he focused on learning to make a contribution through acquisition of the skills and knowledge needed for work whether paid or unpaid; on learning to be part of a community through working alongside people from a range of backgrounds; and personal learning which involves developing a

positive sense of identity and control over one's life. Guo (2013) has addressed similar issues.

Intergenerational learning, whether planned or unplanned, would seem to be an integral part of

being able to achieve such learning goals but, apart from issues of cognition, knowledge migration and power, previously discussed, a further challenge is the need to display cultural sensitivity where participants are not just from different generations but also possess diverse social, cultural or ethnic backgrounds and experiences, some of which may have been so distressing that they are difficult to discuss. Findsen and Formosa (2011) talk about the need to exercise critical consciousness in this situation and warn against simply trying to replicate programmes in different settings. What is required is a careful analysis of each potential situation and a heightened awareness of the dynamics of bringing such diverse groups together in a learning environment where aspects other than age are a characteristic. Management of such groups will present a further challenge to programme organisers emphasising the need for much more specialised training in intergenerational relationships and in understanding how learning can take place.

Concluding remarks

Intergenerational learning as discussed here has come a long way in a comparatively short time. There is a growing international community of scholars and practitioners who have much to contribute to debates in a fast changing world. As lifelong learning has increasingly been seen as the key to dealing not just with the continuing economic crisis but also with the ageing of Europe's population, intergenerational learning offers significant potential to engage different generations and to broaden their horizons in a range of ways and for a variety of purposes. The move to the digital economy is a case in point but multigenerational learning at university and in the workplace have been identified here as sites for further exploration. It has also been argued that we need a better understanding of how people learn at different points in their lives rather than making assumptions about their capabilities. A good starting point for further research would be the development of a theoretical framework within which to explore how issues of knowledge migration and power impact on intergenerational and multigenerational learning practices in a changing world. If these issues can be addressed, intergenerational learning has an even brighter future as an integral part of lifelong learning across Europe and beyond.

References

- Antikainen, Ari, Houtsonen, Jarmo, Kauppila, Juha, & Huotelin, Hannu (1996). *Living in a learning society: Life histories, identities and education*. London: Routledge.
- Aro, Mikko, Rinne, Risto, Lahti, Kati, & Olkinuora, Erkki (2005). Education or learning on the job? Generational differences of opinions in Finland. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 24, 459-474.
- Biggs, Simon (2007). Thinking about generation. Conceptual position and policy implications, *Journal of Social Policy*, 63, 695-711.
- Bjursell, Cecilia (2015). Organizing for intergenerational learning and knowledge sharing, *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 13, 285-301.
- Boström, Ann-Kristin (2003). Intergenerational learning in Stockholm County in Sweden: a practical example of elderly men working in compulsory schools as a benefit for children, *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 1, 7-24.
- CEDEFOP. (2012) *Working and ageing. The benefits of investing in an ageing workforce*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at www.cedefop.europa.eu/files
- Corrigan, Trudy (2016). *Welcoming the New Year*. Retrieved from <https://intergenerationallearningdcu.wordpress.com/2016/01/15/welcoming-the-new-year-by-dr-trudy-corrigan/>
- Della Pietra, Fabio, Godding, Bernard & Olver, Paul (2009). Grundtvig supports Teddy Bears – transforming an ageing society. *LLinE*, XIV (4), 232-239.
- Field, John (2013). Learning through the ages? Generational inequalities and inter-generational dynamics of lifelong learning. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 61, 109-119.
- Field, John, Lynch, Heather & Malcolm, Irene (in press). *Intergenerational learning: age, education and the production of knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Findsen, Brian & Formosa, Marvin (2011). *Lifelong learning in later life*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Gamliel, Tova. (2016) Education in civic participation: Children, seniors and the challenges of an intergenerational information and communica-

tions technology program, *New Media and Society Online* First 1461444816639971 doi: 10.1177/1461444816639971

- Guo, Shibao (Ed) (2013). *Transnational migration and lifelong learning*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kuehne, Valerie S. & Melville, Julie (2014). The state of our art: A review of theories used in intergenerational program research (2003-2014) and ways forward. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 12, 317-346.
- Kuh, Diana, Cooper, Rachel, Hardy, Rebecca, Richards, Marcus & Ben-Shlomo, Yoav (Eds.) (2013). *A life course approach to healthy ageing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leathwood, Carole & Francis, Becky (2006). Introduction: gendering lifelong learning. In Carole Leathwood & Becky Francis (Eds.), *Gender and lifelong learning. Critical feminist engagements* (pp 1-5). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Lirio Castro, Juan, Alonso González, David, Herranz Aguayo, Immaculada & Arias Fernández, Enrique (2014). Perceptions concerning intergenerational education from the perspective of participants, *Educational Gerontology*, 40, 138-151.
- McNair, Stephen (2009). *Migration, communities and lifelong learning*. Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning Thematic Paper 3. Leicester: NIACE.
- Mannheim, Karl (1928/1952). The problem of generations. In Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Melville, Julie & Hatton-Yeo, Alan (2015). The development of the European Certificate in Intergenerational Learning. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 13, 334-337.
- Newman, Sally & Hatton-Yeo, Alan (2008). Intergenerational learning and the contribution of older people. *Ageing Horizons*, 8, 31-39.
- Phillipson, Chris (2013). *Ageing*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Pinto, Teresa A. (2011). Why intergenerational learning is not an academic discipline yet?. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 9, 117-119.
- Richards, Marcus & Hatch, Stephani L. (2011). A life course approach to the development of mental skills. *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Science and Social Sciences*, 66 (Suppl 1), i26-i35.

- Ropes, Donald & Ypsilanti, Antonia (2012). Factors influencing intergenerational learning: towards a framework for organisations to ensure successful learning in older employees. In CEDEFOP. *Learning later in life –uncovering the potential of investing in an ageing workforce*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Sánchez, Mariano & Hatton-Yeo, Alan (2012) Active ageing and intergenerational solidarity in Europe: A conceptual re-appraisal from a critical perspective, *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 10, 276-293.
- Sánchez, Mariano & Kaplan, Matthew (2014). Intergenerational learning in higher education: making the case for multigenerational classrooms. *Educational Gerontology*, 40, 473-485.
- Schmidt-Hertha, Bernhard (2014). Different concepts of generation and their impact on intergenerational learning. In Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha, Sabina Jelenc Krašovec & Marvin Formosa (Eds.). *Learning across generations in Europe* (pp145-153). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. Available on-line from www.sensepublishers.com
- Schmidt-Hertha, Bernhard (2016). Intergenerational learning at the university. In John Field, Bernhard Schmidt-Hertha & Andrea Waxenegger (Eds.). *Universities and engagement* (167-178). London and New York: Routledge.
- Spannring, Reingard (2008). *Intergenerational learning in organizations (IGLOO). Summary of the literature report*. IGLOO Project 134587-LLP-2007-AT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP. Available at www.iglooproject.eu
- Thomas, Michael (2009). *Think community: An exploration of the links between intergenerational practice and informal adult learning*. Leicester: NIACE.
- The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (2015). *Global trends 2014: World at war*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org>
- Whitehouse, Peter (2013). The challenges of cognitive aging: Integrating approaches from science to intergenerational relationships. *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, 36, 225-232.
- Withnall, Alexandra (2010). *Improving learning in later life*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Withnall, Alexandra. (forthcoming). Towards a better understanding of learning in later life: missing links, *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*.