



An ageing world: the Asia Pacific context

The population of the Asia Pacific region is rising at an unprecedented pace. It is estimated that the number of older persons in the region will triple from 419 million in 2010 to more than 1.2 billion by 2050. By this time, one in four people in the region will be over 60 years old. Asia and the Pacific is currently home to 55% of the world's elderly population (2010). By 2050, it will be home to 62% of the world's elderly population. This demographic transformation is unmatched in scale anywhere else in the world.

The world's population aged 60 years and over stands at 759 million, representing 11% of the total population (2010). By 2050, it is anticipated that the world's population aged 60 years and over will have passed the 1 billion mark, representing 15% of the total population. In Asia, aging populations are most prevalent in China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan. In Japan, for instance, 23% of the population is 65 years or older. In developing countries, persons aged 65 or older will increase

from 155 to 325 million; and from 131 to 188 million in developed countries.

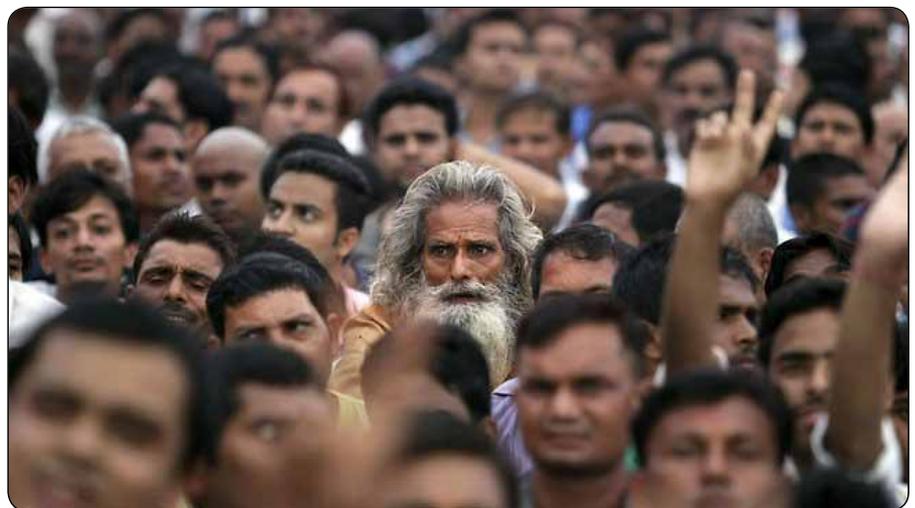
The increase in the proportion of older people to the general population everywhere in Asia and around the world is a clear indicator of the changing age structure of our populations.

Social and cultural realities for the elderly

A large proportion of older adults, mainly those living in poor conditions,

are threatened by isolation, poverty, social exclusion, and loss of human dignity. In both developed and developing countries, many older people live in poverty and are denied access to proper health care and other basic services.

Compared to younger generations, the majority of older citizens have lower levels of formal education. This is even truer of older women. The level of functional illiteracy among older people is relatively high compared to illiteracy levels among the younger generations. The lack of reading and writing skills makes it difficult for older people to gain access to information and services.



By 2050, one in four people in the region will be over 60 years old

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Learning opportunities for the elderly

Population ageing presents not just challenges, but also opportunities. Within adult education, it is important to build on the positive aspects of ageing, on older people's involvement and experience, and their potential for development and a fulfilling life in old age. Adult education has a lot to contribute to supporting active and successful ageing.

Where older adults are involved in education programmes, the experience has been positive. Older people possess a range of learning skills from prior experience, and they are no less active and motivated learners than younger people. Most older adults can achieve high levels of intellectual capacity. Their ability to learn does not decrease, nor does it necessarily remain static. In some cases, learning abilities can even increase. Literacy programmes for older people are an interesting way to illustrate the often wrong assumptions about older people's learning abilities for they have shown that the older participants are as persistent in their learning as their younger co-learners and equally successful.

New notions of active and successful ageing and the positive view of older people and their contributions to society need to be applied in the design and implementation of education programmes. It is necessary to recognise the creative potential of older citizens, their capacity to learn and to engage in new activities, their enthusiasm, and their willingness to contribute to improving their quality of life.

However, merely providing access is insufficient. Older people need specific learning programmes, different from the education opportunities open to younger citizens. Education should not only be for, but also with and by older participants.

Learning not only takes place in



Adult education must receive more support from governments. Available resources must be invested in learning opportunities for older people.

classrooms or other formal settings but in many and varied situations. The amount of informal, self-organised, unstructured, and individual learning most people are involved in is much greater than any provided by formal education.

Older people in particular have accumulated unaccountable hours of informal learning. Recognising prior learning also means acknowledging the richness and wisdom of older people's life experiences. It is not enough to give older people access to existing services. It is equally important to create educational environments which recognise and support all forms of learning and all forms of prior experience.

Older people have a lot to say and should be enabled to have a continuing voice in society. It is time the older generations were no longer marginalised, and their experience and knowledge were valued. Education has a major part to play in this process, enabling older people not only to pursue their own learning aspirations, but also to share their experience with others and to contribute their skills to their communities.

It is crucial to affirm that the right to education is a human right for all. Education for older people needs commitment from the State and all institutions; the State has a responsibility to provide education for older citizens. Governments should make adult education for the elderly population a priority.

The adult education sector must receive more support from the government. Available resources must be invested in learning opportunities for older people, in addition to primary education and vocational training. State-sponsored literacy education should include older people in addition to those of working age. Access to vocational retraining programmes should not be denied to older people.

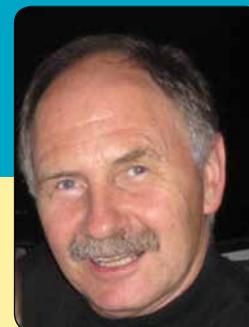
Older people need to be given the right to make decisions about their own learning. Education which is aimed at empowering older people to remain creative and independent cannot be one which simply assumes it can supply older people's needs and denies them the right to choose what and how they want to learn. Such programmes need to build on the resources, the creativity, and the experience of older people.

This article is based on a UNESCO booklet on 'Adult Learning and Ageing Populations' produced after the First International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg, Germany (1997), and from United Nations ESCAP resources.

EDITORIAL

Third age learning – who benefits?

- By Dr. Brian Findsen, Professor of Education,
 Faculty of Education, University of Waikato, New Zealand



The term “third age learning” is now well known in most adult educators’ vocabulary as that part of life beyond paid work (retirement) in which older people have opportunities to continue learning/education without the stresses associated with a work life. This is the fundamental idea espoused by Peter Laslett in ‘A fresh map of life’. In his original formulation, this is a time for expressive and creative endeavour. The third age occurs after a period of initial socialisation into adulthood, followed by the demands of adult roles and precedes the fourth age of dependence and frailty.

To some degree Laslett was right – this period of life should be one of continuing celebration of life in which learning has a key role. However, the reality is that for an increasing number of seniors across many countries and cultures, the third age continues to be one of struggle, especially as the economic crisis forces older people to continue to look for paid work (often part-time or casual) and/or support adult children

as grandparents, providing free labour.

We need to understand third age of learning in the broader concept of lifelong learning (and indeed, life-wide learning). Governments around the Asia Pacific and beyond in their official proclamations are usually upbeat about how learning throughout life benefits both the individual and the broader society. Most of this rhetoric is related to enhancing the skills and knowledge of the workforce to strengthen the economic base of a nation in a global capitalist system. Other not-so-dominant themes in lifelong learning are those of promoting personal fulfilment, developing an educated citizenry, and trying to ensure that nobody is left out (social exclusion).

There is hardly a country where the population structure is not rapidly moving in a skewed direction of increasing proportions of older people (arbitrarily defined as 65+). Japan leads the way in this regard and other nations (e.g. South Korea) are fast moving in that direction as current baby-boomers enter the third age. Many of the nations in Southeast

Asia are very aware of this trend, as I personally witnessed when I participated in sessions at the recent International Association for Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG) in Seoul in June 2013. There is no running away from the reality of ageing populations.

If adult and community educators really believe in a lifelong learning framework in practice, then it should be assumed that people of whatever age have access to learning/education throughout their lives so they can continue to contribute positively to their families, voluntary organisations, and communities.

It is an issue of fairness and social justice. This is consistent with the ideology of equal educational opportunity. The argument should not be reduced to a youth versus elderly question – both groups deserve attention. However, another, perhaps more persuasive, argument relates to the notion of social inclusion. We know that individuals with a solid educational and economic base from mainstream society tend to know where to find resources to further their already favourable learning journey. The University of the Third Age is an example of this self-help regime. It is the marginalised in societies (e.g. the poor; new immigrants; some women; the un- or under-employed; most ethnic minorities; and indigenous peoples) who most need help to gain access and participation to education. A growing number of older adults constitute another marginalised group at a time when governments are looking to further raise pension eligibility (where public pensions exist).



Most learning for older people occurs outside of educational agencies, usually in informal and non-formal arenas.

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Education for senior citizens in Singapore

By Thomas Kuan, Secretary-General, East Asia Forum for Adult Education (EFAFE)

Singapore has an ageing population. By 2020, 25% of its population will be 60 years old and above. With life expectancy at 80 years, (one of the world's longest) because of better health care and information, senior citizens will have about 20 years to contribute to society and have a meaningful life. Education in Singapore is mainly for sustainable employment in today's economic crisis. It is also for strengthening multicultural ties and racial harmony amongst Singapore's four major ethnic groups – Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Eurasians.

In a national survey in 2008 on the learning needs of citizens (and permanent residents) aged 40-74, it was found that the cumulative percentage of those who were 'very interested' and 'interested' in learning was 52.1%. Top priority for learning was spiritual growth (personal growth), computer literacy, foreign languages, and 'higher job skills'.

The education of the workforce has increased because of work-related informal learning and increased job requirements. In Singapore, education for 'senior citizen' workers is seen as training for improving productivity, with an

emphasis on conceptual skills for problem solving, decision making, and creative solutions. Senior citizens have a high literacy rate and wide work experiences. They are continuous learners through informal learning and networking

To cope with the stress of urban living, senior citizens in Singapore are self directed learners. They attend leisure courses organised by government agencies and various NGOs, and participate in ageing-related activities. For arts literacy, 'The Arts House' (www.theartshouse.com.sg) is the premier 'literary arts centre that is all-compassing and that is always relevant to the needs of the communities of Singapore'. It promotes Singapore artists and works by, from, and about Singapore, with a focus on literary arts.

In today's digital age, senior citizens are encouraged to be computer savvy by attending computer-related courses. The Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA; www.ida.gov.sg) has a Silver Infocomm Wellness

A m b a s s a d o r Scheme that embraces lifelong learning amongst senior citizens. It encourages IT-savvy senior citizens to inspire their peers to learn and use information and communication technologies in their daily lives.



Founder of U3A, Mr. Thomas Kuan (R), receiving a 'Certificate of Attendance' after completing a course for senior citizens at the Golden Age College in Singapore.

For inputs to government policies, senior citizens are invited to participate in 'Our Singapore Conversation' (www.oursgconversation.sg), a national project to share their views and concerns regarding governmental policies, and to contribute to shaping future policies to meet the challenges of today's living and learning.

There are many NGOs that offer learning for senior citizens. These are clans associations, university alumni, and various associations and foundations. The University of the Third Age - modelled along the British model of self-help activities for elderly (www.worldu3a.org) – has a member organisation in Singapore. It is a U3A (www.u3a-singapore.com) which advocates lifelong learning for senior citizens, and promotes networking amongst U3As members worldwide.

With a growing older population in the Asia Pacific, senior citizens will soon demand rights to find meaning in their lives. While there are U3As and Learning Cities in the Asia Pacific, there is not much synergy in understanding and learning from each other. ASPBAE, with its mandate of 'education for all', can promote cross cultural learning and champion the rights for meaningful (urban) living for elderly persons.



To cope with the stress of urban living, senior citizens in Singapore are self directed learners and actively participate in ageing activities.

Role of lifelong learning in promoting active ageing for the elderly in India

By Sabiha Vasi, Assistant Professor, Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL), Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India

The Aging Scenario

Human longevity has increased globally due to improvements in medicine, economic status, living conditions, and education. However, the “challenge is to provide opportunities for people to age with dignity and security, enjoying life through the full realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms” (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and HelpAge International, 2012).

The elderly in India are vulnerable because of insufficient income, ill health, no social security, loss of social role and recognition, and non-availability of opportunities for creative use of free time (SivaRaju., 2011). Besides, the older population of India, which was 56.7 million in 1991, and over 76 million in 2001, is expected to grow to 137 million by 2021 (WHO, 1999).

To enable this population to experience an optimal ‘quality of life’, it is necessary to create channels for utilising their knowledge and skills productively. Quality of Life (QoL) was described as the “individuals’ perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns” (WHO, 1997). Thus, opportunities for learning new skills through education are required to re-integrate this marginalised segment into mainstream society to boost successful ageing. The WHO (2002) adopted the term “active ageing” for describing “the process of optimising opportunities for health, participation, and security to enhance quality of life as people age”.

Education in Later Life: Lifelong Learning

The ultimate goal of lifelong learning is to enhance human potential for responsible citizenship. It encompasses all forms of learning activities (formal



The elderly participating at a Megafest for senior citizens to commemorate World Elders Day which falls on 1st October every year.

and informal) across the lifespan (Belanger, 1994). Empirical evidence points to the contribution of lifelong learning programmes in fostering social participation and personal realisation of older persons (Friedli et al., 2007; Jané-Llopis & Gabilondo, 2008; Lee, 2006; Lehtinen, 2008 as cited in European Network for Mental Health Promotion, 2009). Further, it has the scope to both prolong working life (paid and voluntary) and enable coping with retirement and old age (Davey 2002). In India, the National Policy for Older Persons (1999) and the draft National Policy for Senior Citizens (2011) embody this sentiment.

Scope of Universities of the Third Age (U3As) in Promoting Active Ageing through Education/ Training of the Elderly

The primary role of the Centres for Lifelong Learning can be equated with that of Universities of the Third Age (U3As), which is to build the capacity of individuals to engage in a variety of developmental activities for promoting a healthy lifestyle and creating opportunities for learning new skills that generate self growth, resilience, and social inclusion for the population at large and across the lifespan. Such an endeavour is embodied in the notion of the right of all



A student of a one-year Diploma in Counselling being given the diploma by Prof. Lata Narayan, Chairperson of the Centre for Lifelong Learning, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India.

people to have access to opportunities and resources for personal and professional growth and enhancement, especially the marginalised.

Experiences of the Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL) at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

The objective of this Centre is to provide training for adult learners in the areas of expertise of the Institute. Thus, it devises and implements relevant and need-based certified training programmes for a range of adult learners towards responsible citizenship. For this it offers programmes (academic, short term training, workshops) in the field of ageing with an aim to generate a trained cadre of professionals to promote the concept of active ageing, combat the forces of ageism, and enable the full participation of older persons in all domains of life.

Currently, a one-year Diploma in Gerontology (2008), a Diploma in Counselling (2009), a 15-week Certificate in Geriatric Care (2012), along with assorted programmes to prepare the elderly for old age, adopt healthy lifestyles, and plan appropriately for retirement, are being offered.

It is the intention of the Centre to work towards creating an age-integrated society, and one that fosters a healthy partnership between all segments of society - the young and the old. This is of particular significance because as human beings we are interdependent; hence, in promoting the well-being of older persons, we guarantee health of all.

NGO Initiatives

Training in computer literacy is provided by the Calcutta Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology, Dignity Foundation, Mumbai, and Nightingale Medical Trust's Center for Ageing and Alzheimer's, Bangalore. In addition, the latter offers training in accountancy, physical fitness, consultancy, soft skills, and marketable vocational enterprises (making of candles, greeting cards, eco-products, and eatables). An employment bureau assists the trained elders to get suitable placements.

Another critical area for training is life skills development. The WHO (1997) defines these as, "*abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life*". They include problem solving, critical thinking, effective communication skills, decision-making, creative thinking, interpersonal relationship skills, self awareness building skills, empathy, coping with stress and emotions, goal setting, assertiveness, and negotiation skills.

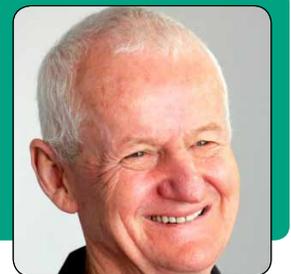
Such education opportunities can open up channels for reintegration of older adults into mainstream society and support the notion of 'second careers'. Further, it would empower and metabolise senior citizens into strong pressure groups and lobbies for advocating their rights;

negotiating with decision-making bodies to ensure the establishment of favourable policies for the elderly and monitor their appropriate implementation; combating ageism (negative discrimination on the basis of age); and promoting healthy lifestyles for successful ageing.

In conclusion, it can be said that Centres for Lifelong Learning, in partnership with NGOs, play a crucial role in promoting active ageing through relevant education and training that incorporate values of social equity, justice, and mutual respect towards all in society. Collaborations between Centres for Lifelong Learning and NGOs is a beneficial strategy as it has the potential to make such learning opportunities accessible across diverse groups of elderly persons and validate the training through academic certification from established universities.

Third age learning and successful ageing - Australia

*By Dr. Rick Swindell AM, Griffith University,
Adjunct Senior Lecturer; Co-founder of U3A Online*

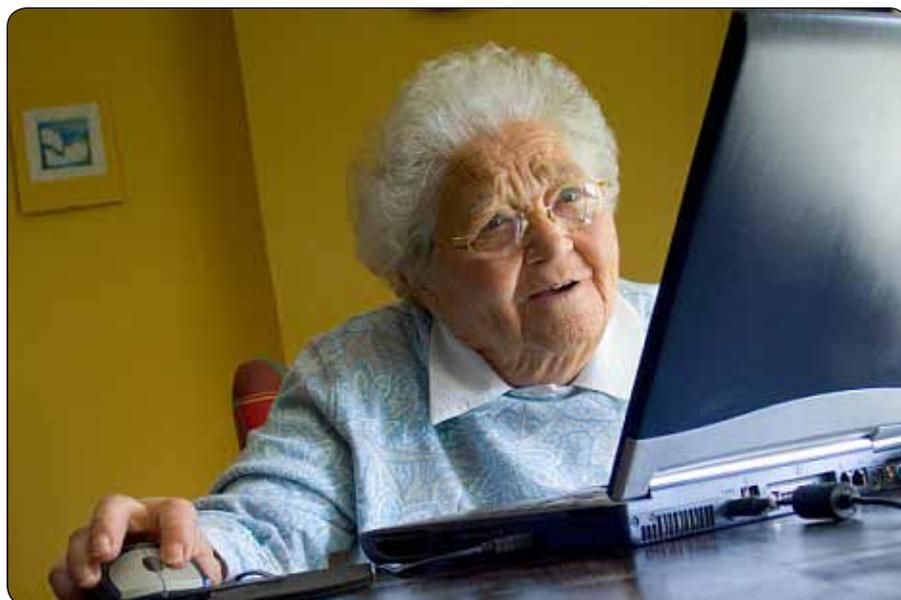


Third age learning? Why bother? Quite simply, keeping the brain active is one of just five Successful Ageing requisites which appear to act in concert to delay or even remove entirely the time when we will slip into a fourth age of expensive and increasing dependence. The other four successful ageing requisites are - regular exercise, maintaining strong social networks, doing interesting things, and following sound advice (e.g. regarding smoking, alcohol, diet, salt, exercise etc).

Third age learning approaches, particularly those that are run only or mainly by volunteers, are marvellous vehicles for achieving four of the above "big five" requisites (following sound advice is much more of a personal choice than the others.) These requisites are carried out in enjoyable and regular learning environments in ways that often

disguise the fact that important quality-of-life benefits are associated with learning. "Learn for your life" would be a great slogan for many third age learning groups to adopt.

U3A is the most widely known example of these "learn for your life" third age learning organisations, although many similar examples have flourished throughout Australia during the past three decades. U3As are independent; almost all are run entirely by volunteers, and most have been started by local enthusiasts. They can be found in almost any population centre around Australia. All courses and resources are developed by retired experts who continue to use their lifetime skills and knowledge for the "greater good". There is no set curriculum. Volunteers offer whatever they are good at - academic, non-academic, skills-based, exercise,



The Australian government has recognised the powerful influence of the internet for older Australians

social and hobby courses; all may be available in a large U3A. Similarly, all the administration is provided by skilled volunteers.

Since the late nineties, the most oversubscribed U3A classes have been the introductory computer courses as members clamour for information about the IT revolution that is transforming every facet of society. To try to meet this burgeoning need, numerous other computer clubs for seniors, taught by empathic, third age, peer volunteers, have sprung up everywhere around Australia (for example, see <http://www.ascca.org.au/>). It is impossible to overestimate the potential benefits of the internet for empowering seniors. For example, consider the very common instances of older persons who are prematurely isolated from their local networks by circumstances like becoming a full time carer, ill health, disability, poor transport, and so forth. For these isolated seniors with sound minds, the internet is literally a lifesaver for continuing to engage with life by keeping the mind challenged, making new social networks, and doing interesting things.

Somewhat belatedly, the Australian government has recognised the powerful liberating influence of the internet

for older Australians. The visionary Broadband for Seniors (BFS) project is a very successful idea that began in 2008 and has recently received additional funding until 2015. Two thousand Internet kiosks for seniors have now been set up throughout Australia in almost every small community, town, and city to introduce seniors, particularly those over 65 years old, to internet resources. Each kiosk is run solely by volunteers including peer tutors, many of whom are older than their “students”. The tutors act as one-to-one teachers to introduce internet resources that help seniors to stretch their virtual horizons (see <http://www.necseniors.net.au/> for details).

In 1998, the world’s first virtual U3A, U3A Online, was started in Australia primarily to help persons isolated from their mainstream communities to keep their minds active, do interesting things, and form virtual networks with like-minded people; in other words, providing three of the big five. The internet knows no boundaries, so from the outset this has been an international rather than an Australian-centric project. Volunteers and members come from any country. More than 40 excellent courses are currently available, each representing about

9 weeks of work, and each written by retired volunteer experts specifically for seniors. Many other virtual, quality-of-life resources are available. The monthly email newsletter GEMS, which features the latest successful ageing research briefs, is freely available to anyone from anywhere (including readers of this article - see <http://www.u3aonline.org.au>). Plans have also been developed to start culturally and linguistically diverse versions of U3A Online so volunteers from specific ethnic communities can engage virtually with ageing seniors who do not speak English.

Recently, the internet has enabled a major innovation in formal learning that will entirely change the face of formal learning everywhere. Consortia of the world’s best universities have made a wide variety of excellent courses freely available to the world at large through MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). Notably for third age learning, MOOCs have the potential to inexpensively meet previously unattainable aspirations held by many older people, notably women, to attempt formal studies that were previously denied them. [Over the past year, I have enrolled in three MOOCs offered by three of the top 100 hundred universities. I have paid nothing, choosing instead to audit my courses. All I chose to do was study the outstanding collection of video lectures each week (no poor preparation, fumbling for words, uninspiring presentations) and download the free textbook. I chose not to do the assignments and not to pay for credit. I wasn’t pestered by anyone.] See <https://www.coursera.org/>.

In this very brief article it has been impossible to do justice to the vast spectrum of formal, non-formal, and informal third age learning opportunities available to older Australians. For further information about the richness and variety of adult education in Australia, please see the Adult Learning Australia website <http://ala.asn.au/>.

FLASHBACK - With ASPBAE's 50th anniversary approaching in 2014, Ed-lines will look back at 50 years and feature articles commemorating important moments in ASPBAE's life and history in each issue in 2013-2014. Keep watching this time capsule for more...

Looking back at OPAL

ASPBAE's programme to promote learning for older people in the Asia Pacific

The needs and interests of older people, both as learners and as resources for learning, became a prominent issue in the late 1990s spurred by a recognition of the ageing of the population in many countries.

OPAL, Older People and Adult Learning, was an ASPBAE project that was launched in 1997 in Australia. The project was designed to promote the concept of lifelong learning among older people in the Asia Pacific. It had two major objectives – 1) to share and collate experiences on education work and programmes for older adults, and 2) to prepare an ASPBAE regional contribution to the UN Year of Older people in 1999. The Australian Association of Adult and Community Education (AAACE), now known as Adult Learning Australia (ALA), was the lead agency, on behalf of ASPBAE, responsible for the project.

The OPAL Coordinator, Dorothy Braxton, in her inaugural message in the OPAL newsletter that was first published in February 1998, said this about the new project – *“How OPAL will work in each country will vary widely according to the needs and aspirations of the people involved... Yet the objectives will remain the same – providing ways and means by which older people can study either formally or informally things in which they may long have been interested but never had the chance to tackle... It could be as basic as adult literacy, as complex as elementary physics, or astronomy. It also means providing opportunities for people to enjoy social interaction, vital for those who might otherwise become isolated and lonely.”*

Due to limited funding, OPAL was a largely self-managed project with members communicating amongst themselves to share ideas and exchange information.

In a working group meeting hosted by the Singapore Association for Continuing Education (SACE) in November 1999,

members spoke of the state of learning for older people in their countries and highlighted the variety of issues and problems facing older people throughout the region. These were – 1) the need to advocate a more positive view of later life to governments and the wider community, and the contributions older people can make; 2) the need to raise the awareness of less fortunate older people to the benefits of learning and the available resources to meet their learning needs, including emerging online learning and interaction opportunities, especially for those who are less mobile; 3) the need to create a database on the learning needs of older people; and 4) the need to ensure learning approaches suitable for older people.

The Asia Pacific Regional Conference of the UN 1999 International Year of Older Persons was held in Hong Kong in April 1998. It was organised by Hong Kong's Council of Social Service and brought together professionals



and social welfare practitioners from around the world for a dialogue around the UN conference theme, *Towards a Society for All Ages: Integration, Participation and Care*. One of the symposia at the conference, 'Lifelong Education and Older Persons', was chaired by ASPBAE Executive Council member at the time, Lawrence Tsui of Macau. OPAL was also introduced at the symposia.

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Fundamentally, we can identify three main players in society who can potentially provide educational opportunities in later life - the state, the market, and civil society. While governments may support the idea of providing educational opportunities to older adults, in practice this is rarely the case. It is in governments' interests to advocate for self-directed learning; in that way, they do not have to take responsibility (and fund it).

In the context of the market, private agencies in adult and community education have expanded to accommodate members of the "silver industry"; knowledge is readily packaged and sold but only a minority can afford it.

While the character of civil society may vary across nations, it is in this third space that most learning among older people will occur. Most learning for older people occurs outside of educational agencies, usually in informal and non-formal arenas. Social institutions such as families, religious organisations, and workplaces continue to provide learning environments of considerable value to individuals and nation states.

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