

Lecture - Re-thinking later life learning in the age of longevity

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Abstract

For some time now, the ageing of populations throughout the world has posed a number of challenges across a whole range of policy dimensions, most recently in relation to the worldwide impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, a focus only on chronological age fails to allow for the more positive aspects of the ‘longevity effect’ which is driven by improvements in longer and more productive lives together with a better understanding of what happens to our brains as we age. What are the implications for learning in later life? We will consider current developments in lifelong learning, itself frequently the subject of significant debate, and how later life learning is related. We will also critically examine some theoretical perspectives on later life learning and introduce the concept of ‘long life learning’. Finally, we will consider some significant developments in the light of the longevity effect and the worldwide spread of Covid-19.

Biographical note: Alexandra Withnall

Alex retired from her post as Associate Professor in Lifelong Learning & Health in Warwick University Medical School in 2009 and has held an Honorary post in the Centre for Lifelong Learning ever since. She previously worked at the Universities of Lancaster and Keele and at the former National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (now the Learning & Work Institute). She has been researching and writing about later life learning for over forty years, has given invited lectures in countries all over the world and has published extensively in the field. In retirement, she has continued to occasionally teach, to research and to publish, to contribute to international conferences and is active in a number of international associations and networks. She was awarded a prize by the Educational Studies Association for her book *Improving Learning in Later Life* in 2011.