

RETHINKING LIFELONG LEARNING IN AN ERA OF OPPORTUNITY AND THREAT

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Australia, like a number of other countries, is confronted by the challenge of demographic change with an ageing population. What's more, these demographic changes are occurring at a time of revolutionary changes in digital technologies associated with artificial intelligence, robotics and biotechnologies.

The demographic revolution with an ageing population poses the question for all stakeholders, including governments, whether the challenge will serve as a catalyst for a general revitalization on learning and community building in later life as a foundation for quality of life and well-being in these years. Beyond this question lies the broader imperative to rethink our approach to lifelong learning in an era of opportunity and threat posed by the impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

A recent international report, *Towards Good Active Ageing For All*, for the PASCAL International Observatory by a special interest group of the Friends of PASCAL (PIMA), aims to encourage international discussion of these vitally important issues.

The report goes back to the concept of active ageing developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), but takes the position that the pillars of participation, health, and security need to be supplemented by an ethical and moral framework that supports learning in later life and well-being in the context of radical change and dislocation.

It adopts a societal perspective and takes the position that the dual perspectives of individual and society, considered together, are necessary foundations for good active ageing in a sustainable society. This approach led to inclusion, citizenship, happiness, fulfillment, and employability being added to the pillars identified by WHO as foundations for active ageing.

While the Report makes a strong case for revitalizing learning and community building in later life in response to the demographic revolution with ageing populations, the broader question lies in the need to rethink lifelong learning in this era of opportunity and threat. While the impact of the technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution will clearly bring opportunities to enhance life for many people, there are also potential threats to the foundations of our civilization. The balance remains a matter of conjecture at present as the impact of artificial intelligence on employment continues as a matter of contention. But we must, nevertheless, prepare for significant changes in the next decade.

MIT physicist Max Tegman in a portrait of the coming world, which he terms Life 3.0, poses the question of "being human in the age of artificial intelligence". This is a question that all stakeholders should reflect on as a basis for action to preserve and enhance an empathic humanistic civilization. Some governments are acting already, such as Japan with its concept of Society 5.0, a concept with people in the driving seat, not technology.

Learning lies at the heart of the things that make us human. This was recognized by the famous UNESCO Faure Commission report in 1972 in its title “Learning to be”. Learning throughout life is a journey directed at personal fulfillment. In the emerging machine age, learning to be must remain at the centre of things that make us human in the age of artificial intelligence.

Australia needs an informed dialogue on the concept and mission of lifelong learning, its relevance to the looming Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Tom Schuller in the Special Interest Group (SIG) report on *Managing the Transitions goes back to the UK report, Learning Through Life*, that he wrote with David Watson, which proposed a framework for lifelong learning with four stages in the adult lifecourse: 18-25, 26-50, 51-75, 75+. This is a useful starting point for discussion, including the question of how we manage the transitions between these stages.

The Report points to some international directions in fostering lifelong learning that could hold lessons for Australia. This includes policies adopted in East Asia- in China, Republic of Korea, and Taiwan- in building learning cities.

What can be done in Australia at an affordable cost? While the federal and state governments are important in developing and implementing policy, the role of local government is crucial in bringing stakeholders together in planned collaboration. The municipal city of Melton in Melbourne’s west is the only Australian city in the UNESCO Global Network of 200 learning cities.

A potential path Australia could follow, building on this experience and the experience of learning cities in East Asia might include the following components.

- A national program funded by the Australian government to resource and support a set number of exemplar learning communities in each state and territory and with general policy and guidelines set on a collaborative federal/state basis
- An important state/territory role in monitoring and fostering development in each state and territory including recognizing communities that meet the state/territory standards for recognition as a learning community. This is an adaption of how the UNESCO GNLC works
- A local government role in organizing learning community proposals to state and commonwealth governments, fostering collaboration and passing on insights gained from the national exemplar learning communities, and international sources.

A national program along these lines would be cost effective in drawing on existing resources and enhancing the role of local government councils. This has been the path followed by the Melton, Hume, Gwydir, and Brimbank learning communities. However, it would be stronger in drawing on international insights and with a program of exemplars to identify and disseminate good practice.

Supported local action, based on collaboration and partnership, is the surest way to foster access to learning throughout life and to take steps to build a sustainable learning culture in Australia that both supports active ageing and learning in later life while also preparing for the challenges that the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with rampant technologies, may bring.

The conjuncture of the demographic and technological revolutions, along with other global shifts, makes a compelling case for governments to rethink lifelong learning policies as essential frameworks to sustain people in extended later life and enhance well-being, while also preparing for looming changes with the on-going impact of artificial intelligence and other technologies of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Read the full report here: <http://pie.pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/pascal-activities/news/towards-good-active-ageing-all-context-deep-demographic-change-and->

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