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## Mind the gap! An exploration of the role of lifelong learning in promoting co-production and citizenship within social care for older people

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### Abstract

*Contemporary themes in public policy have emphasised co-productive approaches within both the access and provision of support services to older people. This paper provides a cross disciplinary exploration from its respective authors perspectives on social work and educational gerontology to examine the potential for lifelong learning and learning interventions from which co-production with those using social care services in later life might be better facilitated. Using an example from the UK, we specifically elicit how co-produced care can enhance the horizon of learning and learning research. The synthesis of ideas across these two disciplines could enrich understanding and provide essential levers for moving towards empowerment and emancipation by engaging with a more co-productive approach in social care for older people.*

**Keywords:** older people; user participation; person-centred support; co-production; lifelong learning; educational gerontology; critical pedagogy

### Introduction

Within the European Community, a plethora of government policies assert a paradigmatic shift towards increasing the engagement of older adults with public services. Following international trends, the themes of active ageing, participation and user involvement are all thought to be integral to achieving wellbeing, social inclusion, and citizenship in later life (European Commission, 2012). In the UK, the term ‘co-production’ is increasingly being used to describe new types of public service delivery thought to embody these shifts particularly in ageing services. Co-production refers to active input by the people who use services, as well as—or instead of—those who have traditionally provided them. These contrasts with approaches that treat people as passive

recipients of services designed and delivered by someone else (Needham & Carr, 2009). Co-production emphasises that the people who use services have assets which can help to improve those services, rather than simply expressing needs to be met. These assets are not financial, but rather are the skills, expertise and mutual support that service users can contribute to effective public services.

The main vehicle for promoting co-production is through policy and practice initiatives that support the personalisation of care using what is known as 'Personal Budgets' (PBs) and self-directed support. Personal budgets are a way of combining several budget streams following an assessment of an older person's needs and allocating the individual an up-front indication of funding that can be used flexibly and creatively to help them meet their needs. Self-directed support describes the mechanism and framework through which personal budgets are being delivered and encourages self-assessment and support planning to realise and achieve maximum choice and control. The evidence however, shows that older people have been less likely to benefit from these initiatives than other groups resulting in inequality in social care provision (Katz, Holland, Peace, & Taylor, 2011). Whilst there are a plethora of reasons for this, a number of studies (Hafford-Letchfield, 2011; McNair, 2012) have highlighted the significant role that knowledge, information and advice on older people being able to exercise their citizens' rights and in achieving quality support, all of which could be addressed through adopting a learning approach. This paper explores this proposition through examining the contribution from both the disciplines of social work and educational gerontology, which are inherently concerned with promoting user involvement, participation and citizenship in later life. Based on an analysis of the UK context and through a more detailed exploration of how the two respective policy areas and disciplinary knowledge connect, we have drawn on a wider source of literature to examine the potential of lifelong learning and learning interventions in promoting co-production. We similarly provide a more critical discussion of the policies built around co-produced care and the subsequent implications for adult education and learning.

## **Co-production, older people and social care**

Whilst co-production provides a new way of talking about direct participation, community involvement, the sharing of power and expertise in social care; embedded in the discourse of co-production lies many unchallenged assumptions. For example, terminology used to describe and articulate the 'co-producing' relationship has included 'service user', 'consumer', 'customer', 'client', or 'expert by experience' and also highlights some of the different political and discursive dynamics behind their adoption, as well as in highlighting the hierarchical power positions involved. Some have suggested that these terminologies represent a move from user participation and involvement in social care to more consumerist discourses. Gilleard & Higgs (1998, p234) for example, go as far to state that this: "rhetoric of consumerism attributes to all older people, a position of agency which, as users of scarce and targeted resources, they cannot fill". The suggestion that co-production attempts to steer a middle path between the 'bottom-up' user movement and the 'top-down' ambitions of successive governments acknowledges an ever increasing penetration of market-related mechanisms into the public sector, particularly into welfare and ageing services. Making the commitment to co-production requires a culture within older people's services which builds on a shared understanding of what it actually is, and identifies a set of principles for putting the approach into action as well as recognising the benefits

and outcomes that will be achieved through adopting such an approach (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2013). It raises the question as to what strategies might be used to achieve co-production and whether we have sufficient knowledge about how best to achieve it in practical terms (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2013).

It is particularly important to develop strategies from the perspective of those using social care services in later life. Co-production cannot be a mechanism for public service reform without giving attention to the effectiveness of tools and approaches such as personalisation that enables it to meet its key objectives. Allocating a personal budget in lieu of services can for example include direct or cash payments, from which an older person or their carer, are expected to manage their own care which could include equipment, personal, housing related or community support. A study by Xie, Hughes, Sutcliffe, Chester, & Challis (2012) of the progress made towards promoting personalisation in social care services for older people found that this requires the whole system to change not just the social worker and older person. Greater integration of services and expansion of community-based services were identified as essential to work against previously rigid and bureaucratic approaches to commissioning and purchasing, and to enhance previously poor relationships between statutory, voluntary and community organisations so that can work together to provide a more holistic response. Slow progress has been identified in some areas such as the implementation of the older person's self-assessment and in achieving sustainable results with particularly disadvantaged groups. Groups of older people with high support needs for example, are becoming increasingly diverse with increasing representation of people from black and minority ethnic communities, people from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and groups such as people with learning disabilities who are living longer (Sharif, Simpson, Ross, & Turner, 2012). Within the research on personalisation and co-production, these groups are currently largely excluded from participating in decisions about service delivery and development. Critical perspectives on co-production also indicate that physically frail older people have low expectations and can feel intimidated if they express dissatisfaction about their experiences of services such as those in care homes (Barnes & Bennett, 1997). They are also less likely to participate in pensioners' action groups and older people's forums. Therefore, rhetorical aspects of relevant policies tend to skirt over some of the practical difficulties experienced by these groups where control and choice within user-participation and co-production rationales do not always recognise the critical realities of the lives and circumstances of those older people who require social care support. Their lives, especially those residing in deprived areas, may be characterised by intense levels of vulnerability. One may conclude that vulnerable older people are the anti-thesis of progressive welfare policies and within the cultural field of third age lifestyles, their non-participation may not simply be because they choose *not* to participate, but because they may simply not know *how* to participate.

Research into the experiences of older people living in the community contemplating personalised support (Hafford-Letchfield, 2013) has highlighted the increasing focus within social care provision on individual and family responsibility and the failure of support planning to engage with widespread structural inequalities that characterise those using care in order to bring about change. The underlying assumptions about how far older people using social care services might become autonomous, self-managing and enterprising individuals within a co-production agenda has also been questioned (Scourfield, 2007). Lymbery (2010) draws our attention to the inadequate resource base for adult social care in the UK. A lack of tangible support for the process of engaging with directing one's own care has been shown to engender

situations where the potential of ‘user participation’ in social care in later life remains relatively unfulfilled. It has also been asserted that some of the rhetoric around personalised support and co-production embedded within policies guiding how care should be delivered are part of a mere discursive strategy to justify reform, with little meaningful discussion about how these changes might actually take place. Furthermore, government emphasis on individual responsibility for social care and its concomitant espousal of ‘moral communitarianism’ (Clements, 2008), seems to suggest that service users have duties “to contribute to mobilizing the support they require” and “to engage available capacities outside the social care system” (Hatton, Waters, Duffy, Senker, Crosby, Poll, Tyson, O’Brien, & Towell, 2008, p. 33). Social workers and other professionals thus tread an increasing uneasy balance between expanding levels of needs and expectations with tightly constrained resources.

Given that personalisation is absolutely central to the UK’s government’s agenda for transforming social care and that older people are the largest group of social care users, personalisation cannot be successful unless it’s working for older people. If properly implemented personal budgets can indeed lead to improved levels of effectiveness of support at similar cost and of user satisfaction (Carr, 2004). In turn this should result in much more sustainable solutions which will deliver savings in the medium term (Hatton et al, 2008). Implementation of personalisation in its broadest sense has also proven difficult to measure and record in practice. There are some activities and targets which have been used to indicate that a local authority or provider is taking a ‘personalised’ approach to provision. Policy documents related to personalisation in social care are, therefore, a mixture of description of the vision of personalisation combined with gentle persuasion aimed at local authorities and providers to implement change. This is especially true in relation to the skills and knowledge that older persons might need to capitalise on to achieve more person-centred support, or engage meaningfully with a co-productive approach.

The benefits of co-production for older people (SCIE, 2013) refer to the direct importance of recognising their assets and skills and building on existing capabilities, particularly by valuing reciprocity, mutuality and their peer and personal support networks. Co-production emphasises the potential to build relationships where professionals and citizens share power to plan and deliver support together and recognises that both parties have vital contributions to make in order to break down barriers and improve quality of life for people and their communities. Therefore, user involvement is more than a politically mandated ‘good thing’ given its practical and ethical benefits. Whilst users are recognised as experts about their own needs and issues, harnessing user involvement itself can be therapeutic, through its socially inclusive process.

Notwithstanding, the aforementioned structural constraints and tensions in bringing these agendas into the day-to-day realities of older people using social care and for those supporting them, we suggest here that that parallel developments in the policies on social work and lifelong learning may offer a more integral means of supporting positive outcomes for implementing the co-production agenda. We draw particularly on the principles of educational gerontology as a discipline within lifelong learning which debates the purpose and meaning of learning in later life.

There has been a relatively under-theorisation of lifelong learning, in terms of needs, opportunities, and experiences of older people using social care such as in the situations described earlier, and much less of an empirical research base (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; 2011). Given that older people with high support needs are one of the groups currently largely excluded from participating in decisions about service delivery

and development (Sharif, Simpson, Ross, & Turner, 2012); we suggest that a convergence of the lifelong learning agenda with social policy and its consequences for care has potential to increase interrelated and overlapping activity in both policy implementation and practice. For example, acknowledging that the experience of major life events resulting in change and transition, or crises, can make opportunities for learning crucial to how an individual responds. This is especially true if learning interventions follow a critical rationale, by which we mean that the learning involved is informed by a social justice agenda and utilised as a lever for empowerment and emancipation.

We first consider some of the issues and evidence for this assertion and following a further discussion of the wider policy context and empirical evidence available so far, we attempt to delineate learning strategies within social work practice that offer potential towards successful policy implementation of co-production in improving the lives of older vulnerable people.

### **Lifelong learning as an instrument for supporting change in social care with older people**

Lifelong learning has become a ubiquitous concept often referred to by politicians, policy-makers and academics who have explored its different angles, epistemological platforms and applications. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1997, para 3) referred to lifelong learning as "the entire body of ongoing learning process, formal or otherwise, whereby people develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their qualifications".... or "turn in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of society". The concept can be visualised as an attempt to provide formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities to all, irrespective of either age or generation.

Policies that promote lifelong learning have been adopted over the five continents. The European Union [EU] which declared 1996 as the *European Year of Lifelong Learning* supported by a range of funding opportunities to promote adult learning and to encourage pan European partnerships to develop and sustain good practice. Of significance to older people, the EU Grundtvig programme funded over 400 lifelong learning projects although at the time of writing limited analysis has been undertaken of this provision and its benefits (see the database at [www.foragenetworks.eu](http://www.foragenetworks.eu)). Within the UK specific policies such as *The Learning Age* (Department for Education & Employment, 1998); *The Learning Revolution* (Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills, 2009) both observed the need to effect a major cultural change away from the traditional confines of education and vocationalism to one where learning was seen as lifelong and lifewide (the latter describes learning occurring in a range of different contexts). An argument was made for equal access for potential learners and emphasis given to how "continued and renewed opportunities for intellectual stimulation will make all the difference between a life retaining some prospect of dignity and independence" (National Advisory Group for Continuing Education & Lifelong Learning, 1997, p. 63). A content analysis of these policies however (Hafford-Letchfield, 2011a) noted that whilst there are frequent mention of the importance of the provision of learning 'opportunities', there remains minimal acknowledgement of a lesser instrumental role of learning in later life; it's more tangible and intrinsic qualities or the layering of actions at the individual, community and organisational partnership levels that are necessary to make learning opportunities a reality. Any curriculums at the

level at which services are developed therefore need to be more closely aligned to the citizenship agenda in order to assist older people in assessing and asserting their participation and involvement.

The Carnegie UK Inquiry (Schuller & Bostyn, 1992) made a significant attempt to examine participation by older people in lifelong learning at three levels within policy making; economic; philosophical and societal. It was the first influential report to demonstrate inequalities in learning between generations and how older people, particularly women, experience cumulative disadvantage in education. The Carnegie Inquiry challenged the rhetoric of lifelong learning and argued for a more positive and wider appreciation of the potential of older learners. In 2012 a subsequent thematic paper on older people was commissioned by The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) within its inquiry: *The future for lifelong learning* (McNair, 2012) and demonstrated minimal progress. Its report indicated that those least likely to engage in future learning are those of 75 years plus with particular resistance from within the skilled and unskilled working class. NIACE's *Older and Bolder* programme attempted to collaborate with other disciplines engaged in older people's issues nationally, through learning initiatives such as health promotion and financial literacy (Carlton & Soulsby, 1999) with some success. Several other studies have begun to identify and make the case for the benefits of learning in later life (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; Formosa & Finsden, 2011; Jenkins, 2011; Jenkins & Mostafa, 2012). Drawing on quantitative and qualitative datasets, a small evidence base has since been building to show how learning in later life may result in improvements in life satisfaction; self-image; ability to cope with challenges; increased health knowledge and self-reported improvements to physical and mental health including cognitive performance and a reduced risk of dementia. The *Men's Shed* movement in Australia for example, (Foley, Golding & Mark, 2009) highlighted benefits and growth in personal confidence afforded through older men's participation in learning when this was aligned with cultural and gender needs in more traditional settings.

At an international level, debate about the role of education and training has focused on its relationship to economic competitiveness and globalisation. Whilst lifelong policies and initiatives acknowledge the family and community as significant sites for learning, few have given genuine attention to the situation of older people (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010; 2011). The EU policy on lifelong learning only referred specifically to older people as late as 2006, where an emphasis on the "need for up-skilling and increasing lifelong learning opportunities for older workers...in order to keep [them] employable" (European Commission, 2006, p. 8-9) was prioritised. In summary, whilst learning in later-life has recognised older people as more than a potential group of workers, it has paid less attention to the challenges of key transitional phases that may result in complex needs and situations that accompanies ageing.

### **Critical perspectives on ageing and wellbeing policies**

Critical perspectives within social gerontology on the other hand seek to understand the social construction of ageing, and to create impetus for change beyond the political economy lens which pay attention to not only how social structures affect how we view older people but also on how they might view themselves. Whilst it may be true that growing old has become a more social, reflexive and managed process, post-industrialism has not obliterated inequalities in later life. Social class, gender, sexuality and other types of inequality have not become less important in late modernity, but

rather, they have become (re)defined and experienced in different ways. Indeed, a considerable number of older persons in high- and middle-income countries - as much as 19 percent in the European Union (a total of 16 million or one in five) - live at the risk of poverty (Eurostat, 2010).

Aspin & Chapman (2001) assert three other 'agendas' for lifelong learning - namely, economic progress and development; personal development and fulfilment; and social inclusiveness and democratic activity. It is these agendas that could perhaps be more closely aligned with the potential for learning programmes in social care. Learning could be utilised by focussing on identifying challenges and issues in later life, and to work with service users to equip them with better skills in choosing the best option to resolve any crises. Further, a critical educational gerontological approach might adopt lifelong learning to promote social inclusiveness and democratic activity made possible by "deconstruct[ing] and recognis[ing] never-ending multiple, shifting knowledges" (Aspin & Chapman, 2001). Holstein & Minkler (2007) suggest that the successful ageing model fails to account for particular life trajectories and environmental realities, and is predicated on reductionist aims for a very large idea (p16). Overzealous attention to health or employment as a measure of success and achievement crowds out cultural space to grapple with critical existential questions and devalues people who flourish despite limitations in this area. These are some of the issues that may inform an approach to utilising lifelong learning to help shape how older service users experience ageing, dependency and their use of services in an everyday and co-productive approach.

As in Europe, the UK's population projections predict that increased social expenditure related to ageing, in the form of pensions, healthcare and institutional or private care is likely to result in a higher burden for working age populations and on the sustainability of public finances and welfare provisions (Eurostat, 2013; Lehning & Austin, 2010). Against this backdrop, successive governments have prioritised pragmatism and the communal over individualism, envisioned as one successful way to adapting social democracy to a changing world through a framework of re-thinking and reformulating policy. For example, active and healthy ageing has been identified as an area by the European Commission for cooperation on the basis that such a standpoint "values older people and their contribution to society identify and overcome potential innovations, barriers and mobilise instruments" (EuroHealthNet, 2013, p.1). More importantly there is a steadily developing link within initiatives promoting wellbeing and co-production where later-life learning is present. This has mostly been associated with the effect that the process of participation that occurs through learning, on wellbeing rather than focusing on the actual learning outcomes itself given that learning often takes place in social settings (Soulsby, 2014). The significant UK *Foresight Report* (Kirkwood, Bond, May, McKeith & Min-Min Teh, 2008) aimed to generate a vision for the size and nature of future challenges associate with mental capital and wellbeing identified learning through life as a major contributor. This report described the concept of mental capital as the totality of an individual's cognitive and emotional resources, including their cognitive capability, flexibility and efficiency of learning, emotional intelligence and resilience in the face of stress. The idea of capital as asset within the trajectory of later life assumes some benefits which accrue. However, policy makers will need to resolve any obstacles to reap such long term rewards which may need investment earlier on. Revaluations of the under-utilised mental capital of older people has the potential to lead rapidly to novel opportunities for learning, continued productivity and social engagement. These will have strong potential to enhance quality



of life and to benefit the economy by reducing premature dependence (Kirkwood et al, 2008).

In summary, we have outlined some of the arguments for both lifelong learning and 'co-production' in terms of the positive implications for support in later life, and by giving examples as to how far policy and practice is succeeding or not in the move towards meeting the personalised needs of older people in response to changing demography and traditional lens's through which older people are viewed. We have noted that in both areas, a significant disjunction remains between policy rationales and actual implementation and that policy in different areas do not always talk to each other. We suggest that there are some key areas where shifting paradigms necessitates deep cultural shifts, both individual and systemic, so as to bring relationships in line with the new ideological stance on positive ageing. One way to go beyond this impasse might be to embed personalised care in a lifelong learning programme that aids potential service users to obtain, process, and understand information needed to make appropriate decisions about their support. The remainder of this paper proposes ways in which these policy frameworks might be integrated where learning and 'user participation' in social care can support genuine co-production.

### **Supporting co-production through learning in later life: Integrating policy and practice**

Saleebey (2001) and Lamb, Brady & Loman (2009) highlighted the importance of developing resiliency to operationalise strengths-based perspectives within gerontological social work to provide a focus for identifying and encouraging coping strategies and to implement user-participation that remains sensitive to risks but which does not dwell on deficit management (Lamb et al, 2009). Policy directives which lack structures for active representation, and are devoid of networking between different professionals, or who operate from an ideology of 'individualisation', will fail to access those older persons with complex needs and who are already excluded from learning opportunities. Specific strategies are needed in the co-production discourse for example, to reach older people experiencing mental health issues, such as dementia, or learning disabilities (Routledge & Carr, 2013). These groups may hold a subaltern status in society, often labelled as 'other', or experience double jeopardy - that is, discrimination on the basis of more than one ascriptive bias such as older women (ageism and sexism), and older ethnic minorities (ageism and racism). There are areas of participation which require further development for example with minority ethnic groups, older gay and lesbian people (Concannon, 2009), and older adults with disabilities (Janzon & Law, 2003). This is where critical educational gerontology (CEG) can offer an appropriate interface with social work and social care. Calling for attention to the triumvirate of knowledge, power and control CEG asks fundamental questions such as: why do we encourage older people's learning? whose interests are really being served? who controls the learning process? why is education 'good' for people? how is quality of life enhanced by education? CEG is unsympathetic to 'instrumental rationality' and posits that the aim of learning in later life is to enable learners to be in control of their thinking. Key principles include a focus on the (i) making links between oppressive social structures, ageing and education, (ii) challenging that late-life learning is more than a neutral enterprise, (iii) including socio-political concepts such as emancipation and empowerment in the process of learning and; (iv), developing an epistemology for learning based on dialogic and reflective practice between those facilitating learning and

learners (Glendenning & Battersby, 1990). Like critical gerontology, CEG has suggested that the embodiment of learning in later life can be a prime catalyst towards an improved democratic and equitable engagement in a variety of contexts ranging from long-term care and other settings where older people are able to exercise citizenship which are beyond traditional learning contexts (Formosa, 2011). Despite the variety of such contexts, one dominant theme should be to improve and enhance the quality of life of older people through learning experiences that help the older person take control of their lives. Thus learners are given a say in the planning and coordination of the learning experience.

Hafford-Letchfield (2011) has differentiated the utilisation of types of learning within care settings. Learning opportunities and interventions can be used, for example, to support the development of new skills to cope with changing or new situations such as bereavement, living with health conditions, becoming an informal carer and other transitions associated with ageing. Learning can be a goal in itself as well as to increase enjoyment and leisure for its own sake. Further, she has identified a number of projects where the direct use of learning has supported older people realising their ongoing contribution to the community (Hafford-Letchfield; 2013). A qualitative evaluation of the provision of learning opportunities in care homes where older people were matched to volunteer learning mentors (Hafford-Letchfield & Lavender, 2015) demonstrated that the outcomes were not only transformational for the individuals involved but other benefits included intergenerational transfer of knowledge, skill and understanding between older people and learning mentors. By forming partnerships between community based mentors and care homes through a paradigm of learning, the quality of care was also raised where the relationships developed fostered advocacy on behalf of the older person, particularly in safeguarding situations and improved the older persons self-esteem and confidence in raising issues about care that may have been previously ignored (Hafford-Letchfield & Lavender, 2015).

Participation is actually more than simply having an opportunity to have one's 'voice' heard and barriers to genuine involvement require being in touch with the right people, having knowledge about one's rights, being able to develop consciousness about external factors such as poverty, culture, and ageism and how these are recognised. These warrant a more robust empowering framework such as offered by some organisations who work in the community on the ground using these methods. In the USA, a small scale study identified a variety of characteristics associated with the cognitive process in later life used to enhance the critically reflective aspects of ageing and contribute to the development of increased resiliency in older people through the mechanism of informal learning (Lamb et al, 2009).

These diverse perspectives highlight the potential for embedding learning within the social relations of social care and its partners which make explicit links between learning and more effective care, particularly around coping with transitions. Policies in both education and social care could say more about their purpose or function in equipping people to succeed in using personalised care. Normative applications of the term 'lifelong learning' stress connections with social cohesion, community building and individual development and freedom, rather than one advocating participative citizenship. Invariably, this calls for shifts for the "development and strengthening of collective organisation both amongst those who use services and amongst those who provide them" (Ferguson, 2007, p. 401). Without doubt, learning in later life can be a significant factor in achieving such as objective, as well as in enhancing older people's capacity to exercise choice and determining their circumstances and needs.

## **Transformational models of learning**

A transformative agenda in late-life learning is one where “learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities using a range of formal and informal methods” where a “common defining feature is that programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants” (Scottish Executive, 2004, p. 33). Transformational approaches to learning have the potential to engage with the effects of structural inequalities, their potential undermining of collective provision and the way we perceive lifelong learning in personalised care. This approach might be described as one that celebrates interdependence and the reclaiming of social work skills, knowledge and resources with the reassertion and revaluing of relationship-based practice that has been traditionally co-located within community education through the medium of co-production. The key underpinning principles might refer more direction to the rationale for using learning as a mechanism for co-production; inclusion and curriculum as follows:

### *Rationale and inclusion*

Learning about social care can be premised on community education which traditionally focused on improving social conditions for marginalised groups and individuals. Educators and practitioners in the field can equip service users with the power of criticism and create opportunities for the development of critical consciousness and for transformative action in their relationships with them. Katz et al, (2011) found that older people with high support needs value similar things to everyone else. However, many have had to adapt the way they meet their needs, or come to terms with unmet needs, as a result of illness or disability and other issues, such as money or information. The things that older people value can be divided into three (sometimes overlapping) aspects of well-being: social, psychological and physical and paying attention to their cultural lives including music, art and crafts, theatre, religious observance and watching television have been shown to bring benefits including social interaction, relaxation, a sense of achievement, mental stimulation and continuity with the past. Others valued the roles they played or wanted to make more of a contribution to their community. Empowerment-based practice recognises the importance of linking micro-educational and practice methodologies to theories of social change and that the development of critical consciousness within older people’s social movement is an important precursor to critical action, where the self is a key site of politicisation. A transformative agenda would therefore provide learners with the scope to extend their understandings of themselves and the contexts in which they live. It affirms and offers older people a language that allows them to reconstruct their moral and political energies in the service of creating a more just and equitable order that simultaneously undermines hierarchical relations. This means engaging in building the capacity of older learners and their social networks by using a problem-solving approach that promotes individual confidence and provides a sense of achievement and direct support to utilise a broader range of resources (Hafford-Letchfield. 2010). Their progress could then be assisted through developing links and communications with educational providers in the area to ascertain that older persons make the right care choices. These approaches can open up, expose and counteract institutional processes and professional mystique. Only by positioning as experienced and knowledgeable social actors will older people achieve an active role in engendering a learning environment equally shared by service providers and users which harnesses an interactive approach.

We have already referred to the evidence on those older people excluded from lifelong learning. Transformational learning refers to that in which individuals change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. This process is fundamentally rational and analytical. Transformational learning is embedded in a politics of social inclusion which can be defined as the support of those “activities aimed at removing the barriers to enable individuals to participate effectively in economic, social and cultural life” (Stenfors-Hayes, Griffiths, & Ogunleye, 2008, p. 626). In the context of the social care, this means that learning activities must “aim at (or designed to achieve) the social interaction of service users with society and be the process by which society makes efforts to help service users to reach their full potential”. In achieving acceptable levels of inclusion, social care literacy must seek to include older adults identified at greater risk from exclusion. For example studies have shown that older service users including those with dementia, can, and want to articulate the things that matter to them. There may be scope to develop a stronger collective voice for this group. Katz et al (2011) suggest using the internet as a means of communication in a number of ways for example; as a prompt to identify and explore what individual older people with high support needs want and value in their lives, to be used by older people, their families and professionals; as a tool in the education and training of professionals working with older people; as a framework for commissioning services, based on outcomes for older people rather than on the input of services; as a tool for understanding the trade-offs individual budget holders are (or are not) willing to make; and as an aid for researchers who are exploring quality-of-life issues for older people with high support needs and assessing the impact policies and services have on their well-being (p. 4). At the same time, learning coordinators must also counter the accessibility issues in learning contexts. Besides physical, they may include psycho-social barriers such as the stereotypical and ageist belief in the adage “I’m too old to learn” or older adults’ generalising from previous poor learning episodes to current programmes, and situational barriers that relate to an individual’s life context. Access for disabled learners both physical and institutional barriers such as non user-friendly enrolment procedures, high fees, inappropriate venues, or unexciting methods of teaching and learning have been shown exclude or discourage certain groups of learners as well as how learning is marketed or not. Social workers can therefore utilise personal budgets and resources in more imaginative and targeted ways which provide evidence from analysis of economic costs, and benefits relating to longer term gains associated with quality of life.

### *Curriculum and pedagogy*

From an epistemological perspective, curricula are never neutral and always embedded in hidden and ideological constructions. A transformative agenda in lifelong learning stipulates the reconstruction of curricula in ways which enable participatory learning and which challenge pre-determined ownership of knowledge by facilitators through the authority of institutions. In essence, the curricular repertoire of social care literacy is to include skills to be able to process and understand basic information needed to make appropriate care-related decisions, as well as having the knowledge, beliefs and confidence to manage one’s own social and health. Research by Hafford-Letchfield (2011) demonstrated the need to include within everyday practice, the identification of how learners can direct their own care, maintain and exercise control and engage in meeting and achieving meaningful outcomes to themselves. On one hand, supporting people with long-term care need may need to address issues of confidence and skills in

being independent and taking control of their condition and ability to manage these. A key aspect of learning might be in providing service users people with the opportunity to explore their own solutions to their needs which fit with how they would choose to live their lives and manage their situations. This warrants the sharing of timely and relevant information about local options, discussing self-care and self-management skills and fit with relationship based practice approaches to social work. Indeed, a crucial ingredient in social care literacy is the dissemination and sharing of information. The choice and personalised care agenda, individual budgets and a shift to earlier intervention and preventative approaches are all dependent on older people being aware of the options available, being able to keep up with what is going on in the world, and not least to be in a position to take advantage of these. Being successful in utilising information is crucial to developing skills of self-reliance so central in aiding service users discern which care item best caters to their needs and are consistent with a co-productive approach.

Geragogy refers to the art and science of teaching and instructing older adults and the creative of learning environments in which teaching assumes the status not of an imposed set of prescriptive guidelines and strategies, but arises as a concern for influencing the conditions that promote the disempowerment of older people and for unsettling learners' assumptions that they cannot affect social change. Critical geragogy invokes a 'community of practice' centred around 'dialogue' and 'problem-posing'. Freire (1972) reminds us that whilst dialogue refers to the "encounter between men [sic], mediated by the world, to name the world...which is to be transformed and humanised", problem-posing involves a "constant unveiling of reality" where learners achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality (p. 61, 54). In practice terms this aligns with user participation which engages older people in the planning, organising, and delivering of their own learning and how this relates to their care needs. Service users may themselves become peer advisors, gaining their views on what should be taught and what learning materials should be included, as well as providing them with an opportunity for actual face-to-face teaching. User engagement in learning situations have been found to be successful helping service planners come to a better emphatic understanding of the wider issues relevant to users of welfare services and the impact of their condition on their lifestyle (Costello & Horne, 2001). At the same time, service users reported that this co-learning approach made them feel valued and increased their confidence skills and heightened their self-esteem (Harding, 2009).

## Summary and conclusions

This paper has attempted to synthesise some of the relevant policy themes in relation to co-production and the linked concept of personalisation of social care services to older people by considering the role that lifelong learning might play in promoting these agendas more meaningfully and through a co-productive approach. We highlighted the under-theorisation of this field at the beginning of this paper and have traced some of the policy developments within the field of lifelong learning and co-production and what we currently know about the impact of these policies on the everyday experiences of older people using social care who remain a relatively marginalised group. We have attempted to consider the subtle interplay of context and welfare subjectivities which highlights the ways in which policy and its subjects combine with other factors such as socio-political or economic ones that might contribute to or hinder older people's

involvement and participation in their own care. Within the rhetoric of co-production and lifelong learning, those engaged in social work and social care have a role to play in challenging power relations or the discursive aspects of how older people are viewed in such a complex policy environment. Utilising learning within the ways in which we interact and intervene in our everyday practice with older people and the decisions made together with social care users permits reflection on the real meaning of co-production. It leads us both to question how the state manages the relationship between the individual older person and the society and how resources are allocated and arrangements for their 'empowerment' made. Having an understanding about how older peoples experiences are shaped by society's norms and its institutional arrangements are important to consider the potential roles that learning can then play in social care. Quality learning experiences within social care need to be explicitly concerned with both what are seen as the causes of older people's needs and desires as well as recognising older peoples potential to achieve higher levels of expression through contributing in a way that is actually determined or articulated by them when using services. Through their commissioning and arrangements to support older people, social workers can do more to engage, educate and change the behaviour of the public in this endeavour.

Despite positive developments surrounding the implementation of co-production services within social care, older people have not been at the forefront when capitalising on their benefits. Mounting pressure on social care budgets have attempted to shift the focus of resources to those with higher levels of need, hence reducing the potential for more preventative or innovative forms of intervention causing real tensions in achieving co-production in practice. This paper has identified a number of issues that act as barriers in the progress of achieving co-production in social care and considered how lifelong learning particularly in its critical forms might bridge that gap. Recommendations highlighted a need for increased information, advice and support. Most importantly, it revealed that issues concerning eligibility criteria and understanding older peoples independent living and expectations about care and support should be similarly recognised and addressed as this is not just restricted to health and social care needs. Promoting co-production in services capable of responding to the circumstances, strengths and aspirations for older people requires considerable strategic collaboration by the relevant stakeholders actively engage older people in developing robust structures for the development of social enterprise and sustainable communities that transgress ageism in the way older peoples services are conceived and delivered. This 'transformation' involves working across boundaries such as housing, benefits, education, leisure, transport and health and presents challenges to established ways of working. More flexible responses to local need based driven by forums, networks and task groups are said to involve service users, carers and front-line staff as active participants in the design and change process. In Needham & Carr's (2009, p. 17) words, "if co-production is to improve outcomes in social care, it will be at the 'transformative' level, avoiding versions of co-production that simply cut costs, demand compliance or reproduce power relations".

There are assumptions made by policies attempting to shape how society sees old age and older people's potential for learning and the spaces that might be created within social care services in which to 'age well'. Whilst older people's learning needs have in the past decade become subject to increased discussion at educational policy level, it has triggered a somewhat awkward partnership between the different domains involved. As a radical agenda, and in the current economic downturn, we suggest here that educational and social care professionals should position themselves within these

powerful discourses in order to truly transform services for older people which grapples with some of the more sustainable approaches outlined in this paper. In conclusion, it is thus essential to develop a continuous critical dialogue by deconstructing these different relationships and unearthing any assumptions made by policy to which educational gerontology, particularly critical perspectives, can illuminate.

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