



Extra Time: Arts, Health and Learning in Later Life

Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture 2006

Given by Professor Emeritus Brian Groombridge

CELEBRATING AGE CONFERENCE
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Frank Glendenning Memorial Lecture 2006

The 2006 lecture in memory of Dr Frank Glendenning (born 7 February 1921; died 13 December 2002) was given by Professor Emeritus Brian Groombridge at a joint public session of two conferences – the Association for Education and Ageing and Better Government for Older People – at the Brighton and Hove Festival, Celebrating Age. He has prepared this summary as a tribute for the record. Angela Glendenning was a member of the large audience and the session was chaired by Keith Richards, chairman of the Third Age Trust.

INTRODUCTION ON FRANK

Frank's pioneering approach to educational gerontology was wide-ranging; he was an imaginative and generous editor, and this lecture's big themes all featured in the many seminars he organised and books he edited.

Frank himself performed in amateur theatre. When he was an Anglican priest, he chaired the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, and in the 1960s was the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art's honorary chaplain. He was a quiet man and an unusually good listener. As Angela said to me: 'It was all something to do with the look in his eye. He didn't say much but when he did people found whatever he said very enabling'. That was certainly my experience.

ARTS, LEARNING AND HEALTH GO TOGETHER IN LATER LIFE

'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.'

(United Nations Department of Public Information, 1948)

This basic right is not enjoyed by all British citizens, and many older people are excluded by serious poverty and poor housing. Worsening inequality in our society has a marked and measurable negative impact on the stimulus to learn in later life, on participation in the arts, and on health, wellbeing and the enjoyment of life itself.

There are some paradoxes to consider:

On the one hand, there is a deep-seated belief that older people are past being creative; yet, both in history and today, there is an abundance of people in their sixties, seventies and eighties making art and, even if they are not originating art, enjoying and being enlivened by it.

Our lives are enriched by Dame Judi Dench, Peter O'Toole, John Mortimer, Lucian Freud, Humphrey Lyttleton, Beryl Bainbridge, by architects such as Norman Foster and Richard Rogers, and many others; everywhere people are still inspired by the work done in old age by Michelangelo, Joseph Haydn, Goya and Monet, and yet...

Many older people, especially women, feel they might as well be invisible. That sense is so strong and pervasive that it has even led to the worldwide Red Hatters movement, determined to grow old disgracefully – witness the Brighton Belles, Red Hatters using the art of millinery to proclaim their presence.

Less flamboyant evidence was also on show in Brighton and Hove: at the visual arts exhibition opened by Sir Christopher Frayling, Arts Council England's Chairman (the 50 best works out of 800 submitted from all over the UK), the dancing and music-making in the streets, in the parks and on the beach, the shows in the theatres and galleries.

Although it cannot be known yet which of our contemporary greats will be remembered in the future, we do know that there are and will be far more older people making and enjoying arts of all kinds than there have ever been in history.

Different arts make different physical demands, of course, but many years in adult education convince me that there could be far more of us making and enjoying art: what matters is opportunity and self-belief in the face of those deep-seated social inequalities, historic negative stereotypes, some seriously inadequate and under-funded public policies, and of course practices that could be improved.

Brain scientists are increasingly convinced that creativity, far from waning in old age, may actually increase. Professor John Gruzelier (Imperial College), for example, gives a physiological explanation for such increased creativity – older people reach the beta level of brainwaves needed for creativity more easily and rapidly (Gruzelier, 2005). Professor Tom Schuller confirms this with research results which have impressed him at OECD/CERI (the Centre for Educational and Innovation at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Two summary statements indicate the significance of these neuroscience findings for learning and creativity:

The brain is a 'novelty machine': it seeks novelty because sensory stimulation is essential for proper brain growth.

The brain is plastic; it is made for learning and it evolved to be a device for adaptation to a changing environment. The lifelong learning brain is a lifelong plastic device.

(CERI/OECD, 2007)

There is mounting evidence that creativity may link positively with health. An extraordinary example of this was produced as long ago as 1982, in Sidney Jones' doctoral thesis, *Learning and Meta-Learning with Special Reference to Education for the Elders*. One of the many stories in this groundbreaking work is one about Mrs MD, aged 102. She suffered from 'dementia proper', but was encouraged to start doing music and movement. After eight weeks, she was able to wash her hands and face; but she was still incontinent of urine. By week 19, she was continent. Dr Jones knows these astonishing changes were not solely due to the music and movement, but they were the main cause of the change.

This is an extreme case, but that is the point. As Jones and others since have established (including Jim Soulsby at NIACE, through his work on the Fourth Age (Soulsby, 2000)), we should rarely, perhaps never, write anyone off as beyond the possibility of some kind of creativity. Just as art may be used deliberately, therapeutically, to encourage better health, so being involved with art can result indirectly in better health and wellbeing as a by-product.

Similarly, learning can focus on improving health – on diet, exercise, and so on; or better health can be an indirect effect of learning. Jones called that 'meta-learning', but researchers at the Institute of Education are now documenting 'the wider benefits of learning'. Kathryn James's NIACE guide, *Prescribing Learning* (2001), practical even down to surgery waiting room level, includes a whole chapter on the arts and health. There is indeed plenty of justification for the official imprimatur – Standard 8 of the NHS National Standards Framework (Department of Health, 2004), which relates purposive activity (such as learning) to the health of older people.

Much of this is familiar. Many will know the couplet: 'Join the U3A! Keep the doctor away!' Science is in some ways catching up with and confirming common experience. An obvious example from the arts is singing. When you sing, you have to watch your posture and your breathing; you must stand up properly, and breathe right down to the diaphragm. You can go to choir practice feeling weary at the end of a tiring day and emerge refreshed; if you're singing solo, you also gain energy from interacting with the audience. What matters is being, as we say in ordinary speech, 'taken out of yourself', as we are or can be in the

theatre, or cinema or concert hall. It will be different with different arts, of course. Writing tends to be a solitary business; painting may involve standing at an easel with one other person as a model. Given the amount of clinical depression among older people, there is a health-giving effect from just getting out and joining some kind of club or group.

HOW MUCH OFFICIAL COMMITMENT?

Given the (acknowledged) mutually beneficial influences between the arts, learning and health in older people's lives, to what extent are the main official and public bodies responding with appropriate policies and tangible support (i.e. expert backing and money)?

THE ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

It is remarkable that the Arts Council² is over 60 years old: though the country was drained economically and emotionally, the first post-Second World War UK government set up this arm's-length organisation to celebrate the arts and make them flourish.

There are now separate Arts Councils in the devolved nations of the UK. Some critics believe their grants should only be used to support leading figures and organisations making art in our society, but it is vital to maintain the historic dual commitment both to promote excellence in the arts and access for all to experience and enjoy them. Not only did Frayling open the '50 Over 50' exhibition³, a significant amount of Arts Council money went into Brighton and Hove's 'Celebrating Age' (as well as funds from several other sources, including the Department for Work and Pensions).

Nonetheless, and despite the imaginativeness of its current practice, there is an issue to raise: given the demographic transformation of the UK's population, it is relevant to ask whether its policies sufficiently reflect that huge shift.

I must start by fully acknowledging that imaginativeness: there are highly public examples of its current liveliness in the way in which it has co-operated with broadcasters. The Arts Council co-financed BBC's *Operatunity*⁴ and Channel Five's *Singing Estate*⁵. *Operatunity* showed how good amateur solo singers can be, if they have the chance to train with the best in the country; the performers in *The Singing Estate* were 40 adults from Blackbird Leys, a once notorious housing estate – all ages (16–71), black, white and mixed race. Most of them had never sung classical music before, or even thought of it as their scene; none had ever been in a concert hall or opera house before. Yet in ten weeks, in the hands of a very challenging conductor, Ivor Setterfield, they could sing – beautifully – a movement from Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* – in front of an audience of 5,000 at the Albert

1 University of the Third Age <http://www.u3a-info.co.uk/>

2 <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/>

3 For further information see http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/downloads/artsComm/arts_commission/celebrating_age/Visual_Arts.pdf

4 For further information see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2799301.stm>

5 For further information see <http://www.five.tv/programmes/thesingingestate/theshow/>

Hall. The Singing Estate choir is set to continue, taking part in the Arts Council's 'Five Arts Cities' project. Their success has had a benign effect on the morale of the whole community.

Many choirs have a much higher proportion of older people, and it is natural and right that much of the activity supported by public money is for people of all ages working together – in choirs, brass bands, amateur dramatic companies, photographic clubs, writing and reading circles. Older people also benefited from the Council's 'New Audiences Programme' (1998–2003) (Arts Council England, 2003), which aided new approaches for general audiences and disabled people. All ages took part in Britain's First Bollywood Drive-in (for South Asian families in Abbey Park, Leicester).

There is though a case for making some funds available separately for specific generations. That would certainly include children and young people, and could include older people who often become, in the jargon, 'socially excluded', like the small groups of older people who entertain others in their local Age Concern meeting places.

Recent policy statements from the Arts Council say that young people will increasingly be a main focus of their attention and funds. No one, I hope, can argue with that, but a breakdown of recent expenditure under the New Audiences programme shows that of £20 million spent across England between 1998 and 2003, young people were given 23 per cent, but older people just 1 per cent.

The discrepancy is striking. Many older people are of course well-established mainstream enthusiasts, but the contrast does not make demographic sense. It needs explaining and maybe challenging. Arts Council Scotland⁶, on the other hand, has focused on older people as well as the young. It was one of the initiators, for example, of EncourAge: An Arts Programme for Older People in Glasgow⁷, now based at the University of Strathclyde's Senior Studies Institute. Inspired by the belief that 'the arts are not just the icing on the cake – they are fundamental to our personal wellbeing', it has enabled people to experience and learn more about the arts all over the city and in residential homes.

And yet, on the eve of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, there is considerable apprehension that the total grant available to the Arts Councils will be severely reduced. Peter Hewitt, Arts Council England's Chief Executive, recognises that the Arts Council needs a stronger relationship with the public, and all their partners, including other arts organisations, local and national government. They are to engage together in a public consultation and debate.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

There is official recognition in Standard 8 of the NHS National Standards Framework and elsewhere that purposeful activity is good for health and wellbeing, yet Government seems reluctant in practice to recognise the health benefits, especially for older people, of learning in later life, let alone making art, or enjoying the arts in some way. Most Primary Care Trusts, for example, seem to interpret Standard 8 in a fairly narrow, medical fashion. More encouraging in principle are POPPs, Partnerships for Older People Projects⁸, set up with £60 million by the Department of Health. This grant aims to encourage councils in England with their NHS, local government, voluntary and community sector partners to devise innovative approaches to establishing sustainable arrangements for supporting older people in active and healthy living, but they are still at the pilot stage.

Meanwhile Brighton and Hove should be applauded for being recognised by the World Health Organisation as a Healthy City, one of ten in this country and 57 in Europe as a whole. Ever since the Healthy Cities movement started (22 years ago), it has stood for the promotion of health and wellbeing through policies for all sectors which reinforce one another: if it isn't safe to cross the roads, your health could be seriously at risk; if the schools serve only junk food, like three-quarters of primary schools, even more people will join the ranks of the obese. Healthy Ageing is one of four core themes of the fourth phase (2003–2008) of the Healthy Cities programme (WHO, 2003).

Healthy Cities provide an apt framework for progress, but most of us have no WHO connection (in any case, WHO provides expertise, not funds). Working together, some of the organisations represented at the conferences with which Celebrating Age is finishing – including Better Government for Older People⁹ (with its inter-sectoral terms of reference reflected in its Older People's Advisory Group), and the diverse members of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education¹⁰ – could press for broadening the scope of Standard 8, and show critical support for the developments denoted by such cheerful acronyms as POPPs and PPIs.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS

This key department is the least satisfactory. It behaves as though there was no demographic transformation and it only really cares about vocational education – and it even interprets that too narrowly. Virtually all the money is being channelled towards young people's vocational training and basic adult literacy – very important goals, especially as 12 million workers have a reading age of 11-

6 <http://www.scottisharts.org.uk/>

7 For further information see <http://www.cll.strath.ac.uk/ssi/encourage-art/encouragea.htm>

8 For further information see http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/OlderPeoplesServices/DH_4099198

9 <http://www.bgop.org.uk/home.aspx>

10 <http://www.niace.org.uk>

years-old and younger, but concentrating on them one-sidedly has led to widespread damage to services for other adults.

Much adult education for personal and civic development has been demolished or priced beyond the reach of many older people. The Secretary of State Alan Johnson's defence – 'the country needs plumbers not pilates' – is contemptible. He has forgotten the *Learning Age* paper (DfEE, 1998), which made the inspiring assertion that 'we need the creativity, enterprise and scholarship of all our people'. He has even apparently forgotten *Opportunity Age* (DWP, 2005), the major two-volume policy statement published in 2005, which he himself introduced – he was then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions: there was a whole chapter on 'Active Ageing' which stressed the importance of learning in later life.

Like the Arts Council, NIACE announced a Big Conversation, along with the National Union of Students, NATFHE, Unison and the National Federation of Women's Institutes. It asked such questions as: What principles should determine how limited amounts of public funding are best used for adult learning? What should employers pay for? How much should individuals be expected to contribute to their learning? How much should this vary by level or subject? Diplomatically and fairly, it added: 'What has the government got right and where is it going wrong?'

When presenting the pre-Comprehensive Spending Review case for effective and increased public investment in self-directed adult learning, NIACE will draw on a dossier of evidence and analysis resulting from the Big Conversation. The Older Person's Advisory Group, Better Government for Older People, has already taken up the cause directly with Government, especially with Bill Rammell, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, who is at least not dismissive like his Secretary of State.

The Government's twin focus upon maintaining economic prosperity and combating social exclusion through improved work-related skills is well understood. In the world's fifth largest economy though it ought not to be so hard to consider community wellbeing, quality of life and cultural agendas for all. In the words of former US Secretary of Labor, Robert Reich: '... our life's worth isn't synonymous with our net worth ... the quality of our society is different from our gross national product'. Enlightened statements by members of the House of Commons Education Select Committee, across the political spectrum, express a willingness to think carefully about what adult learning is for and how it is best funded. We must work with them.

Despite the well-worn slogans about 'Joined-Up Government', there is no common understanding as yet of the policy implications of an ageing population. The media and broadcasting regulator Ofcom¹¹, however, shows that there are some arms of government that seem more demographically aware. It recognises, for example, that to get full value from many programmes, viewers and listeners need to be able to access the many different 'platforms' through which they may be followed up, for sheer convenience, for information, aesthetically or educationally. Hence, Ofcom has a legal responsibility through Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003 (Acts of Parliament, 2003) to promote media literacy, i.e. 'the ability to access, understand *and create* communications in a variety of contexts' (my italics).

Moreover, Ofcom has a specific remit to promote media literacy amongst the very diverse population of older people, 65 and over. The Ofcom website is not merely technical. It also deals with the critical understanding of broadcast content, especially sources of news, and why, how and whether different media are regulated – in other words, citizenship issues. There is scope, perhaps, for planned co-operation with partners in the arts, adult education and elsewhere.

CODA: CITIZENS FOR CREATIVITY

I have assumed throughout the philosophical, cultural and human rights case for significant public funding of education and the arts throughout life. The political case rests on the pragmatic truth that investing in them all is cost-effective. It will save money on the NHS, add value to neighbourhood renewal, and help to reduce social exclusion.

Putting the political case more broadly: there are four major government objectives that are, in the most general terms, worthy of cross-party and public support (assuming big differences of course on how they are to be achieved, on significant detail, and even on the jargon to be used). They are economic development; social inclusion; the development of citizenship; and even the promotion of education throughout life (lifelong learning).

An improved education system would focus more on cultivating creativity and innovation, so helping to develop an inventive society (good at adapting, e.g. to climate change and economic challenges); it could also foster policies, attitudes and talents which would show that the arts are not an add-on luxury: they are a humane necessity.

¹¹ Office of Communications <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/>

All responsible organisations, from government down, have to budget realistically, but it should not be necessary for states as rich as most of those in the EU to play any of these interests off against each other. In the UK, said to be the fifth richest economy in the world, it should not be necessary, for example, to play the educational and training needs of different generations off against each other, as is happening at present. Better administration of budgets and inter-departmental co-operation could achieve win-win results, as when investment in the arts and learning in later life helps reduce the immense cost of a health service responsible for an ageing population. I make no mention of the public money spent on bitterly divisive foreign policies.

A prudent state wants all its citizens to be well educated; a moral state wants to overcome the demoralisation caused by gross inequality; a civilised state does not want the arts and education to flourish just because of their wider benefits, but because they should be the very heart of society.

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Frank Glendenning was a founder member and prime mover in the development of the Association for Education and Ageing and served on its executive committee until ill health prevented him from continuing. The annual lecture series was set up in his memory by the Association in 2003. For further information about its current work and membership details please contact the Secretary, Carol Allen, 132 Dawes Rd, London SW6 7EF. Email: Carol@carolallen.wanadoo.co.uk

For further information about NIACE's work with older learners please contact Lois Gladdish, Information Officer, Older and Bolder at NIACE. Email: Lois.Gladdish@niace.org.uk

For further information about the Better Government for Older People programme (BGOP) please consult their website <http://www.bgop.org.uk>



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