

NEWSLETTER 19

The ForAge Lexicon

The ForAge network has been concerned with collecting together knowledge, ideas and experience about later-life learning in Europe and with making them available, in accessible formats, to different European audiences including policy-makers, researchers and practitioners. As it has done this, it has become clear that the boundaries of later-life learning are both indistinct and contested. The language of later-life learning (at least in English) can be ill-defined and inexact; sometimes its usage is unclear and confusing.

Pan-European glossary of terms

The case for the ForAge project to construct a Lexicon was, therefore, strong and was anticipated in the 2011 application for Grundtvig funding for the project which included a range of planned “tangible outputs”. One of them was described as “the development of a pan-European glossary of relevant terms that are used across various disciplines relevant to later-life learning”. The purpose of the “glossary” (as it was called in the application documents) would be “to enhance European cooperation, knowledge exchange and [knowledge] expansion” in later-life learning.

This notion fitted well alongside central aims of the ForAge network which included being “the initial source of information for later-life learning activities in Europe”, creating “an archive and access point for EU and other projects and programmes concerned with disciplines that intersect with later-life learning”, providing “regular information on new policy directions”

The realisation of all of these aims inevitably required the shaping and selection of knowledge about later-life learning and of the meaning and usage of terms. The processes involved needed to be both conscious and transparent. So there was merit in the idea of the production of a compendium of terms which clarified the language of later-life learning in use. There was debate on what the compendium should be called, or, rather, on what it was. It was clearly going to be much more than a “dictionary”. It could be a “glossary” but a common usage of the term “glossary” was to denote a partial dictionary which explained special, esoteric or newly-constructed words. The term “Lexicon” fitted the bill. Definitions of it included both a “vocabulary of terms” and a “book of words”. In its all-encompassing nature it matched the purposes of the project well.

Collective effort

The ForAge project had a relatively large number of partners (18 when it began in January 2012). It developed the practice of single partners taking the lead on defined topics and areas and seeing them to completion, drawing upon the co-operation and expertise of all the other partners. The UK organisation, the Association for Education and Ageing (AEA) took over the Lexicon in the third year of the Project and planned and ensured its completion. The AEA was already responsible for the content of the ForAge database so there was a natural fit.

April 2015

NEWSLETTER 19

The ForAge Lexicon

The Lexicon went through several drafts during year 3 of the project, each time growing in size. Each AEA draft was subject to comment from Project partners in 14 countries and also from members of AEA. For example, 12 individuals from 11 partners contributed to draft 3 of the Lexicon. 8 made statements of general approval, 5 made comments on definitions of terms, 4 suggested new terms, 3 made comments on the question of translation into other languages and 1 made comments on use of the Lexicon. Altogether nearly 50 new terms or suggestions for altered definitions were received for Draft 3.

Discourse and practice

Now complete, the Lexicon contains 110 definitions of terms used in discussions of later-life learning and, in many cases, comments on that usage. The language of the glossary is English, as the most commonly used language currently in Europe. The 110 terms have been chosen because the Project believes that they are key to current later-life learning discourse. Of course, many of the terms belong also to other stages and phases of lifelong learning. The definitions used in this Lexicon, however, have been adapted and refined to fit with their relevance to later-life learning. 43 of the 110 definitions have been taken (some adapted) from other published lexicons, glossaries and lists. The remainder have been devised by the Project.

Now that the Lexicon exists, it is worthwhile to consider what it represents and to reflect on what

it tells us about both the discourse and the practice of later-life learning. One analysis suggests that there are five broad divisions of terms in the Lexicon, to which we can apply the following labels:

1. Commonly-used
2. Topical
3. Educational
4. Prominent
5. Philosophical

1. Commonly-used terms

Commonly-used terms in the field of later-life learning often seem so obvious that they do not require examination. The Lexicon, however, often makes suggestions to the contrary.

For example, definition (64) deliberately points to a definition of learning for older people beyond that provided by educational institutions, while definition (81) emphasises the varying current definitions of “older person” and the probability of change in the future.

Definition (102) points to the parameters of the term “Third Age” and its probable demise, whilst the definition of Fourth Age (definition 50), is phrased in a less urgent and dynamic manner.



April 2015

NEWSLETTER 19

The ForAge Lexicon

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
64	Later-life learning	All aspects of formal, non-formal and informal learning undertaken by, and relevant to, older people	ForAge

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
81	Older person	Views vary on the chronological age at which a person may be defined as “older”. The ages of 50 or 55 years are often mentioned as the starting point of “older age” but will often vary between countries depending on pensions or retirement age. It is likely that in the future the chronological definition of “older” will shift upwards	ForAge

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
102	Third Age	Normally taken to refer to the earlier part of older age, often post-retirement. Characterised by activity, involvement and reasonable health. The term “third age” is said by some to be falling out of usage and is being replaced by “the time between work, retirement and old age”	Unesco (adapted)

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
50	Fourth Age	A term used loosely to refer to the period of life between the ‘Third Age (q.v.) and death. Usually characterised as relating to the very old who are no longer active and need care and support. Rarely used in association with those under 80 years	ForAge

April 2015

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

NEWSLETTER 19

The ForAge Lexicon

2. Topical terms

Some terms appear in the Lexicon as relative newcomers to later-life learning but are now in regular use in multiple contexts. They are often connected with policy about older people in society and are heavily value-laden. “Active ageing” is a good example:

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
3	Active ageing	The process of optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance the quality of life as people age. More extensive definitions include independence in activities, social contribution, emotional connections, supporting people to adapt to age-related limitations, resilience, creative leisure, sexuality, retaining own values and removing structural barriers to participation	WHO CINAGE

The notion of the “silver economy” finds its way into the Lexicon because of the educational needs which can be associated with it:

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
96	Silver economy	The industry/sector focusing on providing older people, particularly those with disposable income, with products and services. Older people as drivers of economic growth, creating new markets for, e.g., technology services for wellbeing and health monitoring, health sports, tourism and financial and pensions services. Educational implications relate to older people learning to define needs for new products and services and to assess those offered by the market	ForAge

3. Educational terms

There are many terms in the Lexicon which have long been used in other areas of education. The task for the Lexicon has been to make clear the links with the field of later-life learning and to indicate the way in which a term is used. In definitions (43) and (98) there are indications of the contested or tentative nature of the links.

April 2015

NEWSLETTER 19

The ForAge Lexicon

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
43	Experience-based learning	The exploitation of experience to initiate, create and deliver learning. Based on the belief that adults, especially older adults, accumulate a body of skills knowledge and understanding through a lifetime of experiences	LARA (adapted)

Definition 98 refers to the link as a “claim”.

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
98	Social exclusion	Exclusion from the rights, benefits and privileges of society, typically as a result of poverty or belonging to a minority social group. The provision of education and learning in later life is often claimed to have a duty of promoting social inclusion for all older people	ForAge

4. Prominent terms

Definitions (22) and (74) refer to beliefs and claims about the implications of particular terms and issues prominent in later life-learning. The first is tentative in its observations; the second is definite about the existence of “strong evidence”.

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
22	Creativity in learning	To do something new; to produce something out of the imagination; to try something out; to design something. Some argue that many older people have the motivation, time and space to be creative in learning. Certainly activities such as creative arts and creative writing are popular.	ForAge

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
74	Memory problems	There are powerful cultural beliefs that memory deteriorates significantly in later life and, therefore, older people have more difficulty in learning. While there are physical changes, there is strong evidence that positive attitudes and mnemonic techniques can more than compensate for any physical change	ForAge

April 2015

NEWSLETTER 19

The ForAge Lexicon

5. Philosophical terms

There are, of course, terms in use in the field of later-life learning which cannot be verified empirically but are rather statements about humanity and/or the value and values of later life. They are, in part aspirational; learning may be seen as having a part in the achievement of the aspiration.

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
73	Meaning in life	Make sense of life; finding meaning in an individual life, normally one's own. Reflection on meaning in life can be regarded as an aspect of positive ageing.	ForAge

Number	Term	Definition and comments	Source
109	Wisdom	Pragmatic intelligence. The capacity to be wise, rational and to make balanced judgements. Sometimes associated with later life and the knowledge and experience it may bring as in the "wisdom of the elders"	ForAge

Stimulating debate

The ForAge Lexicon is not designed to monopolise or limit later-life learning in the future. Later-life learning is, hopefully, a field of knowledge, experience and practice whose time has yet to come. Its terminology, therefore, should expand and change and this Lexicon should be dynamic. As part of its ongoing support for the aims of ForAge, the AEA intends to review and to revise the Lexicon from time to time.

Moreover, a Lexicon like this should stimulate debate – hopefully some of the definitions and comments which it contains are contentious. Equally AEA and ForAge will be glad to receive comments or suggestions for improvement.

Debates can conveniently be held in the interactive ForAge Forum section of the ForAge project website which can be found at this address (<http://www.foragenetwork.eu/en/forum/>).

Comments can also be made on the Facebook page of the ForAge project which can be found at (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/ForAge-for-later-life-learning-building-on-European-experience/447577198673523?fref=ts>) In addition, comments can be left at the AEA Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/EducationandAgeing?fref=ts>)

Professor Keith Percy

ForAge partner, Association for Education and Ageing, UK

Percyk90@yahoo.co.uk

April 2015