PASCAL/Australian College of Educators Inclusion Workshop — *Seniors as Lifelong Learners*
Queensland State Library — **23 March 2016**

Introduction

This workshop was part of an *Inclusion* series within the Learning City Networks (LCN) of the PASCAL International Observatory, coordinated and facilitated by Mr Peter Kearns OAM FACE, Director of the PASCAL LCN program and PASCAL Associate Dr Denise Reghenzani (both executive members of the Australian College of Educators [ACE] Brisbane Metropolitan Regional Committee). Throughout the past year, there have been active responses organised on pertinent themes concerned with this *Inclusion* strand of interest as follows:

- May   Townsville (Queensland, Australia) *Inclusion in Learning City Development: Local and Global*
- September   Glasgow (Scotland, UK)   *The Role of the Smart Campus in Inclusion*
- November   Bristol (England, UK)   *Learning for Everyone*
    a)   *Supporting Young People Leaving Care into Education and Employment*
    b)   *Improving Adult Mental Health through Community Learning*
- November   Melbourne (Victoria, Australia)   *Seniors as Lifelong Learners: Barriers, Strategies, Outcomes*
- March   Modi'n (Israel)   *Gender Equity*
- March   Brisbane (Queensland, Australia) *Seniors as Lifelong Learners*

Aspects of this series will be profiled during the 13th PASCAL International Conference: *Learning Cities 2040 – Global, Local, Connected, Sustainable, Healthy and Resilient*, 3-5 June 2016 at the University of Glasgow. Challenges and opportunities for cities into the future for development and learning will feature across the five Learning City Networks themes of: *Addressing Disadvantage to Build Inclusive Learning Cities, Implementing an EcCoWell Approach, Connecting Urban and Rural Initiatives, Harnessing Cultural Policies in Building Sustainable Learning Cities,* and *Entrepreneurial Learning Cities*: http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/.

Welcome and Opening

The welcome was conducted by Ms Laura Keating FACE, President of the Brisbane Metropolitan Regional ACE Committee. Opening on behalf of The Hon. Coralee O'Rourke MP (Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Seniors and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland) was her Executive Director – Stakeholder Engagement & Communication, Department of Communities – Mr Wayne Briscoe. Chair, Mr Peter Kearns OAM FACE provided introductory comments.

The TedEd lesson: http://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-playing-an-instrument-benefits-your-brain-anita-collins was screened. In her support for the symposium topic, Ms Laura Keating advised that learning is not the sole province of the young, with an acknowledgment to the traditional owners who significantly met, gathered and shared at this place. Key sponsors were also thanked, viz. the Queensland State Library and the Australian Catholic Superannuation Retirement Fund.

Mr Wayne Briscoe added regard for the 3,000 generations of indigenous knowledge in his opening comments and that learning does not stop for anyone. With reference to the Department of Communities recently hosted presentation by Professor Alexandre Kalache, the W.H.O. age- friendly "architect", he added that one of the fundamental pillars is lifelong learning. (The four pillars are health, participation, security and lifelong learning.) In sustaining community connectivity, the age-friendly strategy for seniors being developed will be at the forefront of supportive environments in Queensland.

While "pillars" are an oft platform for policy, Mr Peter Kearns suggested the metaphor provided an up/down structure that was instead, really one of interaction between and that a weakness in one "pillar" needed all working together to support the framework, hence the strength for lifelong learning to be well recognised and integrated. The above notes on the Learning City Networks were highlighted. Then, he posed the challenge question for the symposium:
How Can we Create Lifelong Opportunities for All Seniors in Queensland?

Panellists

*1. **Professor Liz Coulson** – Group Leader – Nerve Cell Survival, QLD Brain Institute, University of Queensland*
What Neuroscience Tells Us

Looking at the science and biology behind what is it that our brain does, how we react to our world and how we react to environmental factors, we can begin to understand the densely packed connections (100 trillion points) of neurons through synapses in the complicated process of storing memories. In life, we 'prune back' the unconnected or unused cells as part of normal development, what is known as a cell suicide program. However, new synapses do get made.

Reiterating the "use it or lose it" adage, the issue of dementia and Alzheimer's disease was addressed as nerve cell death where no neurogenesis is occurring because toxins trigger the cell suicide program and over time the brain shrinks. The area affected first is where executive functions such as judgement, planning and memory occur.

In looking at how lifelong learning can help, a 2003 study demonstrated longevity where a range of language skills (determined by brain scans to cognitive tests) in maintaining more complicated written structures existed, correlational factors were found with having a good education and being engaged mentally. Sustaining this throughout life was a positive factor. Now, a pill is in clinical trials to keep nerve cells boosted and delay degeneration.
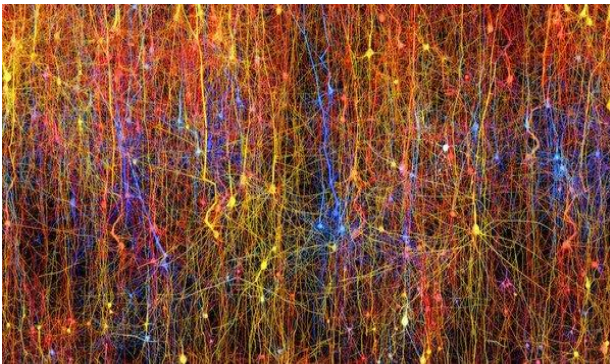
It has been found that we can stimulate neurogenesis with enriched environments, although we cannot stop eventual decline as diagnosed dementia toxins still exist and we will fall to the same point eventually. However, lifelong learning can potentially lengthen time to decline and thus increase quality of life. Laboratory experiments have shown that a combination of being social, pursuing extra experiences and exercise (remember, the running wheel for mice) can improve memories. It is possible to make decline redundant longer.

What can we do? Enrichment activities include exercise (to stimulate neurogenesis), visiting art (museums, etc. as art therapy enhances quality of life), finishing crosswords to sudoku (i.e. at new and challenging levels), completing jigsaw puzzles, playing a musical instrument (with new scores), learning a new language, undertaking travel (new experiences) and getting good sleep (keeps the brain healthy).
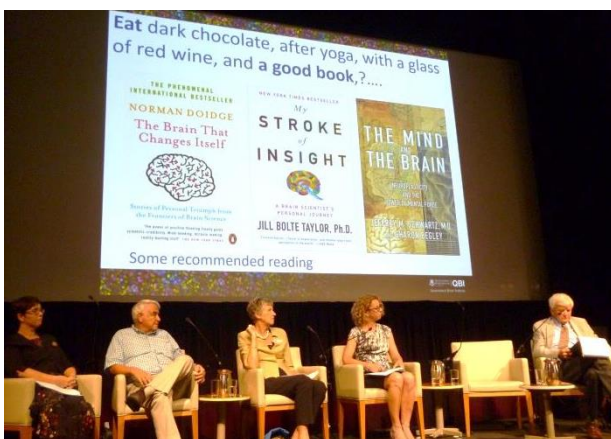
Professor Coulson left us with some recommended reading: Doidge, N. 2007. *The Brain that Changes Itself* (Viking Press), Taylor, J.B. 2008. *My Stroke of Insight* (Hodder & Stoughton), and Schwartz, J.M. & Begley, J. 2003. *The Mind and the Brain* (Harper Perennial).

Comments made at this time referred to the optimism out of cognitive and social decline, the measuring of emotions, feelings and attitudes, but can we also measure motivation, depression to tolerance (referred to other specialists) and how three days in the wilderness for reflection in nature can 'reset' from external stressors by providing 'involuntary attention'.

*2. **Ms Nancie-Lee Robinson** – General Manager – Digital Inclusion, Telstra Chief Sustainability Office*
Tech Savvy Seniors

This Australia-wide partnership program is implemented in Queensland with the Queensland Government and State Library to reach 10,000 seniors through 38 shire, regional and city councils. With technology and the internet "critical enablers" of lifelong learning, there is the social justice imperative and challenge of achieving digital inclusion for seniors so that they move forward fast enough with their digital transformation.

Playing the informative video: http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/whats-on/programs/tech-savvy-seniors-queensland opened the door to this program, with the experiences of seniors. Especially as so many more services are online and we need to keep pace, today's technology will help the older generations remain connected in families and the broader community. Here, we were reminded of the European Commission definitions in describing learning as occurring through one's lifetime and lifewide into the continuum of formal, non-formal and informal learning as relevant to seniors. Thus, four mutually supported objectives were outlined: personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability.

Access becomes an issue, for only one in five Australian adults (4 million people) are still not online. Hence, overcoming this barrier and the different levels of skills, confidence and experience poses a major challenge. ABS data declared in 2012/13 that only 46% of those 65 years+ were internet users and only 44% had accessed the internet from home. A further study in 2013 by the CSIRO revealed that online engagement was hindered by low household income and living alone. It is known that older Australians tend to be 'light' internet users, seek email rather than social media, are less likely to use add-on features of general surfing, games, downloads, are more concerned about security and find the impact of the internet less positive than younger people.

Relevance, showing how and keeping it simple are the keys to the training program developed. From face to face classes through library community hubs (safe, trusted places), quick reference guides and support videos explain how to practice and follow-up from home. The Digital Ambassadors program provides 1:1 coaching.

An independent evaluation found that almost 9 in 10 seniors who had participated to date increased their knowledge and confidence in using their device, 3 in 4 increased their internet use (to stay connected, access information for personal interest and/or keep informed for active ageing decision-making) and 1 in 2 increased their use of online services. It has been assessed that every $1 invested in Tech Savvy Seniors has garnered $11 in social value.

Examples of digital participation success stories relay the broader potential in embracing technology to extend a working and active life as we age. Senior entrepreneurs (average age 57) now lead 34% of young firms in Australia, as identified in a 2015 Swinburne and QUT study. Technology is making is easier and cheaper to start business, especially with cohorts who understand the needs of their ageing marketplace. Another innovation has been referred to by leading authority, Don Tapscott: Global Solution Networks (GSNs). These networks value authentic voices, collaboration, and a collective future in coming together over the internet globally to design solutions to issues such as poverty, climate change and clean water.

Comments here looked at the potency of building skills to be online and the social justice concern in being on the wrong side of the digital divide. Extending the EU notions for continuing learning outreach through our various stages and phases of life, life deep was added. Facing up to optimum access, is the low to no cost provision of administrative and classroom spaces for learning in our schools and public institutions such as local libraries (that can also help in wide-spread delivery in regional and rural areas of the state, to a degree). The futility of social media to contact or seek older participants for related programs among those not yet relying on this mechanism to be informed, was well understood.

3. Ms Julie Porteous – *President – U3A Network QLD Inc. & Chair – U3A Australia Alliance*
Learning for Pleasure

The origins of U3A were set in the historical context of a summer school through the spare holiday capacity of Toulouse University. It was the brainchild of Professor Pierre Vellas, Faculty of Social Sciences, in 1973. Of course now, some associations do not engage specifically with universities or university lecturers as tutors solely for continuing, open learning, but use other meeting facilities and share peer expertise. In Australia, this Cambridge (UK) sharing model was

adopted for the joy of learning and personal wellbeing in moving into the mature "third age", i.e. after the "second age" or parenthood and career. The approach is one of local level organisation and self-help. Within the local Redlands bayside community, the example of service to senior constituents that identifies and brings together the various networks to benefit is an exemplar for elsewhere. Talks are held in the senior citizens centre. Also, the area high school provides an office and after-hours classrooms access for U3A activities in seeing its role as a community learning hub, well integrated with the societal activities around it.

U3A Network Queensland Inc.

Staying mentally active and having an opportunity to sustain social interactions through U3A learning is seen as part of healthy ageing. Continuing to learn new things as a means to strong activity patterns and wellbeing is seen as a purposeful way to manage age-related changes. Acknowledging that the brain is our most valuable asset, U3A responds with programs that we know through brain/body studies on ageing can stimulate, including associated activities to improve blood flow and function such as exercise.

In aligning with the Mental Health Week 2015 goals, U3A has picked up the balanced approach of giving something back, relating with other people in social environments, exercising the body, appreciating one's world and trying something new. Embracing and integrating the mental/social/physical nexus, U3A participants are seen as choosing to stay active and adopting all the good reasons for staying curious, viz. increasing intellectual growth, keeping up with changes around them, remaining engaged and possessing wisdom to pass on.

"Once you stop learning, you start dying"
~ Albert Einstein ~
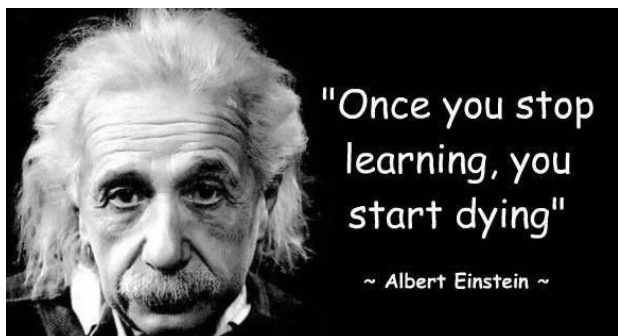
Learning for sheer pleasure is the U3A catchcry with adult education programs for retirees across 33 groups in Queensland and an estimated 21,000 members. Weekly classes are held on a whole spectrum of subjects - including computing, languages, travel, the arts, history philosophy and a range of physical fitness activities. All programs are provided by volunteers who share knowledge and experiences in the joy of discovery - no prerequisites, no exams! "You are never too old to learn!"

Further information on both the QLD association and the suite of online course opportunities are at respectively: http://www.u3aqld.org.au/ and https://www.u3aonline.org.au/content/our-courses.

Within the participants, a high awareness rate of U3A was demonstrated by a show of hands, which relates another issue of reaching beyond those already motivated by further learning to achieve inclusion and engagement. It was confirmed that criteria and codes of conduct exist for tutors to ensure they are not only willing and able to share, but also qualified and experienced. Intergenerational learning was also explored, with tutors not always coming from within the membership age range cohort and creating a vibrant interchange of ideas, ages and cultures.

4. Mr Graeme Curnow – *President, Queensland Men's Shed Assn. & Director, Australian Men's Shed Assn.*
Shoulder to Shoulder: There's More to Men's Sheds than Bench Work

From a small beginning (13 sheds with $100 in the bank), the phenomenon that is the Men's Shed movement is now a grass roots, not-for-profit organisation of some 150,000 individuals spread across 960 sheds throughout Australia. The openness and inclusion providing a 'place' for what began in our country and gone international (Ireland, U.K., Denmark, Canada and a few in the U.S.A.) have embraced participants from disparate backgrounds and education, regardless of sexual orientation, those marginalised, sufferers of mental and physical disability and those lonely or isolated (particularly widowers). It has been a response to real, distinctive needs.

Boys as young as twelve have been welcomed, mentored and given new skills in some sheds – with intergenerational programs run for those younger members formerly in 'trouble' or disengaged from education. There have been more indigenous men's sheds on communities than sustained currently. The average age of Queensland members has been in the mid-60s, whereas the conformation in Ireland draws those in their late 40s overall.

The evolving nature of topics and "bench work" has meant that the self-run nature of sheds has been able to address and meet local needs. Sheds have a distinctive role in bringing forth those not usually "joiners" or "sharers" and providing non-deliberate learning. The members of sheds are independent in their decision-making and responsible for running their own affairs. Structurally, men's sheds in Queensland are aligned with zones of local government, from whom there has been most support. There is a synergy with Beyond Blue, epitomised through the statement that "men's sheds save lives". However, the sheds are not in a position to meet clinical needs of those suffering severe medical conditions.

The range of activities do cover wood (70%) and metal work, but also respond to needs for computer, health, trade skills and cooking instruction with opportunities to socialise (e.g. a game of cards) and offer community service. Some sheds even have their own string quartet. Emerging out of 'yarning', two key men's health screening and advice promotion programs have been developed: "All Power to You: Journey through Arthritis" and "Spanner in the Works". These materials can be viewed online at: http://www.qldmensshed.org/page32731/All-Power-to-you-copy.aspx and http://mensshed.org/spanner-in-the-works/.

Another project entailed design, production and logistics to purposefully carry out on the G20 Brisbane sign. Translating plans with computer assisted drafting and other exercises meant further learning for those engaged in this collegial enterprise. The opportunity to talk and share "shoulder to shoulder" (rather than "face to face") has come into its own as men have opened up, alongside one another, on the issues concerning them and for about which they are doing something concrete.

Questions around provision of land/facilities and women members were raised. In terms of land, there are a variety of offers, from crown to private to church. Some women are admitted, but it was conceded that many wives did not want other women involved in their husbands' domain, or sought by men necessarily as sheds cater to unique men's needs and changing such a characteristic would weaken the nature, appeal and sharing in coming together. Both this Men's Sheds session and the one prior on U3A brought up the dearth of ongoing investment in their efforts by governments generally.

5. Ms Laura Landmann – *Coordinator – Information and Learning, Library Services, Brisbane City Council*
Engaging Seniors in Brisbane Libraries

The fit with Council's shared aspirations, especially as an "accessible, connected city" and as "our smart, prosperous city", is seen as linking in seniors to the richness and variety of the "community learning hub" philosophy that underpins the work of Brisbane's public libraries. In providing access to the collections/services, physical spaces and technology, libraries inter-connect the community in facets of lifelong learning.

Through customer feedback, for all stages and ages in life, the library is developed as the favourite lifelong way "to connect, read, learn, work, relax and explore new ideas". Improving the quality of people's lives is woven around program offerings that take up learning for living (e.g. family history), engaging in meaningful ways (e.g. themed group talks/meetings), social collaboration (e.g. clubs/discussion), and experiential learning (e.g. making a herb garden to providing workshops with handouts).

Core to the programming in libraries is digital literacy, including extending *i*skills services and training. While the Telstra *Tech Savvy Seniors* delivery has been discussed, as part of the Telstra Connected Seniors initiative, the library system

continues to access technology; and through library facilities (a digital hub and resources), the public can learn how to maximise this use. Programs are specifically targeted at the late adopters (those 50+), localised community circles and those of diverse backgrounds (CALD, potentially disadvantaged and marginalised). Community members have accessed widely such learning opportunities in this city, either 1:1 or in groups.

Libraries are community leaders in numerous ways to engage the public. With libraries overcoming the learning barriers, they reach a readiness in participants by being a safe, comfortable and convenient place to meet. In such an open environment, people are coming together for key sustainable living classes (e.g. World Kitchen interactive workshops to making a community garden where produce is harvested and rosemary picked for the suburban Anzac Day events). Home library services are a mobile outreach and meet the "customer" where they are located, i.e. in place.

Outcomes from programs are reviewed for updating and developing new programs so that skills training solve client problems. Building stronger community relations, meeting needs, to partnering with experts keep pace with the changing nature of libraries in planning towards the future.

Creating awareness of the aspects of learning through libraries, Brisbane City Council developed "Humans of Brisbane Libraries" footage: #HumansofBNElibraries. We all aspire to be interviewees Claire, Danny or Concetta! "What's On" online and in booklet form, and public noticeboards at Libraries provide the listings of extensive across-city activities and workshops that are an adjunct to the collections held, from social clubs to game/craft groups to author talks and more.

Opening up library facilities in the future as a "wall-less" environment, like the great galleries of the world, for virtual exposure and experience received comment as a "switched-on" approach to inclusion. Aiming for productive outcomes as a service provider and within clients participating through library outreach and intake was seen to recognise and encompass the key role of libraries as significant lifelong learning hubs, creating a learning society.

Further Questions & Suggestions
Further discussion was elicited by the Chair in seeking questions from the audience.
- The challenge of knowing what is 'out there' and 'on', i.e. **"How do people find out?",** met with a range of recommendations: free press (diminishing in circulation), social media/facebook (recognising again that the senior cohort are not yet fully seeking or taking recourse to this form of communication), websites such as *WeekendNotes* or *Communify* (suggested by Probus members new to Brisbane), running a local Volunteers Day, integrating with Seniors and Adult Learners Weeks, and seeking a universal website through the intended Age-Friendly initiatives.
- Building **partnerships and dialogue** to engage seniors was a concern, and the development of the Hume Global Learning Village: http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Libraries_Learning/Hume_Global_Learning_Village/About_the_Village, (Broadmeadows, Victoria) was given as an example of starting with a concept, framework and library centre as a community learning model that has drawn in a diverse clientele in a highly multi-ethnic and low socio-economic class area (emerging out of the social justice charter of local government). Case studies in Local Government Association of Queensland publications and at summits could 'back up' leadership of such initiatives.
- Knowing and **sharing the opportunities** for membership in a wide range of groups that promote ongoing learning in the non-accredited, informal, incidental yet still structured sense was viewed positively. Such an example given was of the Lyceum Club that is an association of women interested in the arts, sciences, literature, education, journalism, contemporary issues and the pursuit of lifelong learning. This organisation is almost 100 years old. It brings to mind the travelling speakers who would provide visiting lectures in Lyceums or Schools of Art halls across the nation in years gone by and Queensland's former Board of Adult Education that would provide free coordinators and classes to the public in community places free: whether they were schools, CWA halls, Bowls clubs, construction sites, etc.
- In acknowledging the "complex industry" of getting people to traverse and engage, it was suggested out of community education economic development that we need community **"learning brokers"** who can facilitate and be a conduit for accessing information, and checking (as libraries do) "have you got the information you need?".
- **Lifelong Learning Festivals** were identified as a unifying force in contemporary learning cities where free opportunities were planned for public participation with providers offering a myriad of learning experiences. Local government takes the lead in Cork: http://www.corkcity.ie/services/corporateandexternalaffairs/learningfestival2016/. It was suggested sponsors of festival fireworks could be encouraged to split off funds to support a Lifelong Learning Officer in Council..

Summing Up

Rapporteur Dr Denise Reghenzani provided key themes from the symposium that showed points of intersection between the presentations with the following diagram, and added the need for partnerships to be developed cooperatively.

Initially, the central circle provided for "Active, Positive, Productive Ageing" in line with the topic of "Seniors as Lifelong Learners", but this was amended with the Chair introducing a Challenge Question:

How Can we Create Lifelong Opportunities for All Seniors in Queensland?

This also draws attention to how can we, with passion and drive, build on the power of ideas and maximise opportunities for lifelong learning that enhance and enrich the lives of our senior citizens.

Examples such as Gallery Sunshine Everywhere (http://www.gallerysunshine.com/Home.html) or the cohesive, holistic Taipei Learning City approach (http://lcn.pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/pascal-activities/news/about-taipei-learning-city) with their range of cross-disciplinary programs or the alternating Bad Tölz Learning and Health/Wellbeing Festivals (LearnFests) (http://pie.pascalobservatory.org/pascalnow/blogentry/learning-cities-2020/bad-t%C3%B6lz-learning-region-case-study) or the Swedish open-air heritage museums or harnessing local neighbourhood engagement at suburb/street level provide some insights and methods into how can we penetrate into people's attitudes, readiness and needs to engage in active and worthwhile lifelong learning. Here, we can refer to Jacques Delors' phrase: "Learning: The Treasure Within".

- Inclusion implies social justice, engagement, equity, social cohesion, identity capital, belonging and connectivity
- Barriers means overcoming them and enabling support to lifelong learning access for all, i.e. in. trust and safety
- Outcomes seeks sure and viable ways of preparing programs with goals and long-term societal gains articulated
- Quality of Life requires issues of good health, well-being, liveability and making confident, knowledgeable choices
- Policy needs clarity in comprehensive approaches for an age-friendly learned society with integrated services
- Gender & Diversity accounts for catering to significant sectors for balance, participation and holistic development
- Place & Space indicates design and use of appropriate "venues" to interact, exchange and 'be' and 'do'
- Intergenerational Learning demonstrates the value of cooperation and sharing in learning to live together positively.

In expressing concern for the loss of adult and community learning programs that had been a free part of the fabric of all communities in Queensland for the more "vocational" and "user pay" orientation, attention was drawn to the OECD study that found a significant link between learning for one's own interests and improved empowerment, wellbeing, health, and sociability. In the absence of lifelong learning or a good education, an association appears with loneliness and cognitive decline. We can only commend the state government's progress from its age-friendly community survey.

Report compiled by Denise M Reghenzani-Kearns PhD, PASCAL Associate
Immediate Past President: Australian College of Educators, Brisbane Metropolitan Region