

# THE FUTURE OF INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING: REDEFINING THE FOCUS?

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## **Abstract**

*This paper argues that an examination of the literature suggests that many things go by the name of intergenerational learning. It can simply mean any form of learning – formal or informal – in which one generation affects the learning of another, or it can have more focused meanings, the most current perhaps being that of directing formal and informal learning towards dealing with a global demographic context of ageing societies, and therefore of the possibility of utilizing the talents of both young and old in helping each other. Yet two questions arise: are all the possible relationships within an intergenerational context utilized, and why should intergenerational learning not be used for a number of other major global and societal changes? This paper argues that the number of possible relationships involved in intergenerational learning could be expanded, and that more future-focused forms would also lead to the incorporation of other, more widely globalized issues as part of its pedagogic canvas.*

## **Keywords**

*Intergenerational learning, generation, inter-generationality, ageing society, global changes*

## Introduction

Intergenerational learning as a concept has been around for as long as human beings have been. Even before formal education systems, intergenerational learning was the informal vehicle through which families inculcated and educated the next generation in a variety of facts, skills, attitudes, and values. However, as a term with more specific meanings, it has only relatively recently been a focus of educational, policy, and academic interest, as particular concerns have been expressed about learning and relationships between generations. Such interest, however, has not been accompanied by a great deal of clarity over precisely what the term might mean. For example, Gadsden and Hall (1996, p. 5) have suggested that the term is used “as an all-encompassing concept for several kinds of human relationships across different generations.” Granville (2002, p. 1) echoed this thought when writing that “the term ‘intergenerational’ is in many ways a loose one. We need clarity over what the approach is and what it seeks to achieve.” A decade later, the situation had not improved that much, for as Hollingshead et al. (2014, p. 24) comment, “there is little precise language on the meaning, methods, and goals of intergenerationality.”

This is not to say that there have been no attempts at definition, and indeed an examination of the definitions that have been proposed shows that an overlapping series of concerns are covered. The European EAGLE project (Fischer, 2008, p. 6), for instance, described intergenerational practice as aiming “to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and may contribute to building more cohesive communities.” ENIL (The European Network for Intergenerational Learning) suggests (*Report on Intergenerational Learning and Volunteering*, 2013, p. 4) that intergenerational practice “must contain the following three features:

- involvement of more than 1 generation
- activity planned prior to its implementation in a progressive nature
- mutually beneficial learning...”

On that basis, ENIL suggests that intergenerational learning is “learning partnership based on reciprocity involving people of different ages where the generations work together to gain skills, values, and knowledge.”

These definitions, and many of the practices stemming from them, tend to suggest that intergenerational learning takes place through and because of engagement with different age groups in the exercises, and not through a concentration on any particular subject matter. This, it will be argued, seems limiting, for a combination of different age groups focusing on particular intergenerational issues would seem likely to more greatly improve the effectiveness of both. This will be returned to shortly.

Researchers have also used the term to examine different kinds of generational relationships. Gadsden and Hall's (1996) review of the literature focused almost exclusively on family issues, and particularly on the father's role in a child's development, for as Newman (2014) points out, from the 1970s onwards, as the US experienced significant social change, family dysfunction became a major concern, and one particular issue was the limited role some fathers took in their children's upbringing. Kaplan (1998, p. 2), however, defined intergenerational activities more broadly as being those "activities, events, and on-going programs designed to increase cooperation, interaction, or exchange between people between sixty years of age and older and twenty years of age and younger." This interpretation has been supported by Newman and Hatton-Yeo (2008), who suggested that not only do newer models advocate an "extra-familial" focus, but that concern is now very much upon the relationship between the young and the retired, echoing the increasing concern about support for a growing elderly population.

This concern over changing demographic patterns will shortly be an object of focus, but first, it is important to stand back and try to see what intergenerational learning might mean, in terms of (i) who would take part, and (ii) what the foci of such activity might be.

### Intergenerational Participants

Intergenerational participants would seem, almost by definition, to be those belonging to different age groups. Yet this is not as clear as it might seem, for whilst many might conceive of societal generations as simply consisting of the young, the adult, and the aged, this is not sufficiently fine-grained to capture the needs, and indeed the talents, of many participants. For example, children in their early years (0–4 or 5) clearly have needs which are met by other age groups intergenerationally, but this might not be seen as part of intergenerational activity because the children do not contribute to this arrangement. Yet this seems unnecessarily constrictive: the attention and stimulation provided by this generation can induce enormous feelings of well-being and care in all those who are older than this group, irrespective of whether the children are conscious of what they do. In the same manner, whilst it is common to categorize the elderly as a unified group, a distinction has been made in Japan (see Matsutani, 2006) between the *able elderly* and the *infirm elderly*, with the creation of *age banks* into which the able elderly deposit *goodwill* through helping the infirm elderly, in the understanding that they will be able to *withdraw* such goodwill when they become infirm themselves. This suggests, as Table 1 indicates, that intergenerational participants need to be thought of as belonging to one of at least five different categories, meaning that there are at least 20 potential intergenerational relationships.

Table 1  
*Intergenerational Participants and Potential Learning Relationships*

|                    | Early years | The young | The mature | The elderly | The infirm elderly |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------|------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Early years        |             | X         | X          | X           | X                  |
| The young          | X           |           | X          | X           | X                  |
| The mature         | X           | X         |            | X           | X                  |
| The elderly        | X           | X         | X          |             | X                  |
| The infirm elderly | X           | X         | X          | X           |                    |

As argued above, it seems neither necessary nor indeed ethically justified to exclude an age group from an intergenerational learning situation just because it is believed that they cannot proactively contribute to the benefit of the other generational partner. Both the young and the very old, by their current status and by their needs, may well provide useful learning opportunities of both an experiential and a vicarious variety (*“so this is what it is like to be very old; I’m going to be in that position myself someday”*), as well as beneficial feelings through being able to provide care for others. There is, after all, and as Oscar Wilde might have said, only one thing worse than being needed, and that is not being needed. A first and important point, then, is that a more careful categorization of the stages through which individuals go on their life journeys would provide a better understanding of the potential range of intergenerational relationships and the benefits that might stem from them. Table 1 is probably only a start, and there can, and perhaps should, be more detailed suggestions of the divisions of life’s journey that would provide richer and more nuanced pictures of the kinds of learning and support activities intergenerational relationships could promote.

### **Intergenerational and Intragenerational Foci**

It was noted above that the focus for intergenerational learning can vary, for instance, from intra-familial to extra-familial concerns, and from the father-child relationship to a child-senior citizen relationship. In these last two examples, the driving force seems to be concerns expressed at societal and policy levels about the ageing nature of many populations. Intergenerational learning, both formal and informal, is seen as a way to ameliorate the perceived challenges stemming from such changes.

In terms of focus, an interesting and important development comes from the United Nations, in their 2013 report *Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations* which argued, following the sustainability arguments

of the earlier Brundtland Report (*Our Common Future*, 1987), that concern shouldn't just be expressed about the problems of the current age groups (*intragenerational concerns*), but, as importantly, attention should be paid to the potential problems caused by this generation for age groups in the future (*intergenerational concerns*). It is important to be clear on this point: *generation* is being used here in a different, but no less important, sense than it is often used in intergenerational literature. In both the Brundtland and United Nations reports, and in much of the writing on global sustainable development, the concerns are for sustainability and equity in the use of resources between the age groups of this and future generations. This perspective, as Hollingshead et al. (2014, p. 26) note, takes intergenerational learning into the areas of intergenerational equity and sustainability, and raises a whole new debate on intergenerational learning. It suggests, for instance, that what has been termed the "precautionary principle" becomes a central point of reference in intergenerational learning. First enunciated as Principle 15 at the 1992 UN conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, it argued that "where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation." As an intergenerational principle, Meyer (2010) argues that this proposes that present generations need to question the adoption of policies which might benefit them, but which may create problems for future age groups – the use of fossil fuels and resulting climate change being an obvious example. Seedsman (2014) also seems to be arguing along the same lines, suggesting that the field of intergenerational relationships needs to be aware of the danger of simply following a successful course of action in the hope that things will continue as they were: as he argues, the future is increasingly less likely to be like the past. Societies need to make fairly drastic reappraisals of the issues that they will confront, and Seedsman argues that intergenerational studies should do the same. The concerns of future generations need to figure much more prominently in the field.

This second, futurist meaning of intergenerationality would add another dimension to Table 1, as it would suggest that participants and relationships cannot be portrayed as being two dimensional and only located in the present, because present actors, as they move into this future, will change their intergenerational roles and will later die and move off this grid, whilst others will enter.

This future focus on intergenerationality in the Brundtland and the UN (*Intergenerational Solidarity and the Needs of Future Generations*, 2013) reports addresses the ENIL (*Report on Intergenerational Learning and Volunteering*, 2013) criteria for intergenerational learning mentioned above. These criteria required any form to involve more than one generation, for activities to be planned

in a progressive manner, and the creation of learning beneficial to different age groups. The future intergenerationality of the reports does involve more than one age group, it can be used to develop progressive managed activities, and it can be of benefit to different age groups. Current intergenerational learning tends to focus on the *current expression* of long term issues; a Brundtland approach asks for a learning culture which tries to appreciate not only how these issues affect the present, but how they affect the future as well, which to many may provide it with a stronger claim to true intergenerationality.

If it is accepted that intergenerational learning would need to focus not just on present expressions of problems, but also on the impacts of such problems, it might also suggest another very different form of intergenerational learning. If mainstream intergenerational learning has been concerned with the problems faced at present, and if the second form proposed in this paper were to be concerned with the impact of what we do on the well-being of future generations, a third form would be a slightly paradoxical “personal intergenerational learning” which would ask individuals to reflect on where they have been, where they are, and where they are going. This would fail the first of the ENIL criteria – to involve more than one generation—but it is a type of learning that is needed by everyone, as it requires individuals to reflect upon the person they have been, who they are currently, and who they may become, and how larger forces are likely to affect their life journeys. It would require them to reflect upon what they need as they move along this life path, how they would meet these different external changes at different stages of their life, and how they would prepare for their eventual exit. It would then be an education in, and a learning opportunity for personal intergenerational sustainability, and would extend the kind of individual-development thinking which Kuehne et al. (2014) argue constitutes a major element of the theories used in intergenerational programmes; it would also need, as Boström (2014) suggests, to reflect upon the contexts and backgrounds within which such growth is situated. It would mean, in practice, current interactions with records of a former self, through activities such as the portrait approach (Bottery et al., 2009), which provides cross-sectional portraits of an individual to reflect upon in the future. Some of this is partly covered in formal education provision today, but little of it fits within conceptions of intergenerational learning, although it would seem to be a naturally situated and personalized application of the concept.

A final concern over the focus of intergenerational learning returns to the major reason for the initial adoption of this approach – the need to address contemporary societal issues. Currently, it seems fair to say that much intergenerational writing focuses on the individual and the group. Kuehne et al.’s (2014) overview of theories in this area demonstrate this strongly, and even the title of an important journal in the field like the *Journal of*

*Intergenerational Relationships* suggests a focus on micro-level, or at best meso-level, perspectives. Yet future intergenerational issues are as much about wider macro-concerns of sustainability and equity towards future generations as they are about interpersonal relationships. One may simply dismiss such issues from an intergenerational focus by definitional fiat, but this hardly seems a reasoned, educative, or empowering way of defining the boundaries of thinking in this area. Such global intergenerational issues—those which affect the present global generation, and which will almost certainly affect future generations—would include:

- climate change
- resource consumption
- global pollution
- energy usage
- demographic changes
- equitable distribution of resources

This is an extensive list, though Bottery (2016) has examined how educational leaders can provide appropriate foci on these issues for present and future generations, for any of these areas could provide important areas for intergenerational learning. To illustrate some of these possibilities, this paper now examines the potential for intergenerational learning from current global demographic challenges.

### **Intergenerational Learning and Demography: Ageing Populations**

The issue of demographic change—or at least the phenomenon of ageing populations—has been a pivotal influence in the advocacy of many intergenerational projects. We live in an era when most societies are developing an increasingly ageing profile: according to a recent UN report (*World Population Prospects*, 2015, pp. 47-8), for example, the current population in China is expected to live to 76.5 years of age, in the Czech Republic to 79.1, and in the US to 79.6. By the end of the century, however, the Chinese population is expected to live to 89.9 years, the Czech to 89.2, and the US to 89.3.

Some of the results of this ageing phenomenon are well-defined: if people live well beyond the age of employment, the decreasing percentage of the total population remaining in work will have to provide the funding to support welfare institutions for the retired and the young, and for other kinds of welfare that societies provide for health, unemployment, and disability. As Leeson (2009) points out, many governments are therefore legislating for later retirement, reducing the value of state pensions, and encouraging their citizens to take out personal pensions. Leeson suggests that societies can travel down two very different roads. One road is of *Age Segregation*, towards

lonely, un-respected and poverty-dominated old age. The other road, of *Age Integration* (Leeson, 2009, p. 2), is possible when actions are taken to ensure that the elderly are respected and remain active and useful. On this road, formal and informal learning have hugely important roles to play. The OECD's (*Trends Shaping Education 2013*, 2013) review of educational trends demonstrates how participation in learning activities improves cognitive skills and benefits the physical, mental, and social health of the elderly. The countering of old-age isolation and the prevention of a decline in self-respect through strengthening the social networks that joint learning can provide are critical to this. Indeed, by expanding such learning opportunities, the elderly are helped in better communication with their caregivers as well as in educating themselves in better self-care. Health literacy is thus very important for the ageing. As the OECD (*Trends Shaping Education 2013*, 2013, p. 9) notes, "such literacy is likely to be weakest among those with the greatest need."

The case for forms of intergenerational learning is very strong, and as Kaplan et al. (1998) and Boström (2003) have pointed out, it benefits younger members of a society as well as the elderly. For the young, such learning can provide new knowledge, new perspectives on life's problems, different forms of support, and vastly greater experiences of life. For the elderly, it can provide increased perceptions of worth and help maintain social and learning flexibility in a rapidly changing world. Such action can strengthen a society's social capital, as learning becomes more concerned with activities in which different generations have different personal and social needs which need to be met and in which different generations contribute different things to such processes. Intergenerational learning, then, is a highly important strategic response to ageing population concerns.

#### *Forms of intergenerational learning driven by other demographic trends*

Many aspects of current intergenerational learning practice have been driven by the demographic trend of ageing populations. Two other important demographic trends could also be drivers for intergenerational learning: expanding populations and, a little paradoxically, shrinking populations. The next two sections examine these.

#### *Expanding populations: Five issues for intergenerational learning*

Expanding populations can affect present and future societies in a number of ways, particularly depending on whether rising populations are likely to cause resource issues for future generations. This debate began over two hundred years ago (see Wolf, 2003, on the debate between Malthus and Condorcet), and has continued to the present day. Perhaps the best exponents of it recently are Julian Simon and Paul Ehrlich (see Sabin, 2013, for a summary and commentary on this). The optimists, like Condorcet and Simon, tend

to argue that social improvements will help reduce the size of populations, or that even if populations expand, human ingenuity will produce resource alternatives. The more pessimistic, like Malthus and Ehrlich, tend to argue that whilst resources increase arithmetically (double, treble, quadruple), populations increase geometrically (2, 4, 8, 16), and therefore the demands of an expanding population will always eventually outstrip an environment's ability to meet these needs.

Whilst there are strengths in both arguments, one particularly worrying aspect of population expansion is humanity's slowness in recognizing its rapidity. Weisman (2013, pp. 34–6) provides an excellent example of this when he asks us to assume that a species of bacteria in a bottle divides into two every minute. Two bacteria become four, four become eight, and so on. Weisman asks: if a bacterium was put in the bottle at 11 a.m., and the bottle was full by noon, when would it have been half full? A little reflection will show that the answer is: only one minute before noon. But before one can feel too pleased with oneself, Weisman's more surprising and important question is his next (p. 36): "If you were a bacterium in the bottle, at what point would you realize you were running out of space ... At 11.55 a.m., when the bottle is only 1/32 full, and 97 per cent is open space?"

The rise of the global human population bears a striking similarity to the growth of the bacterium. In AD 1000, there was a global population of only 250 million people, and it was 500 years before this number doubled. It was one billion in 1804, a second billion was reached by 1927, and as gaps between increases shortened, the seventh billion was reached in 2013. Another billion is likely to be added by 2025, and 9 billion by 2050 (Münz & Reiterer, 2009). If the earth's resources are limited, then it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that as more people consume these finite resources there will be less for other species and for future generations. Any intergenerational learning, one might argue, should make both inter- and intragenerational global resource distribution key issues for discussion. It should ask: what would be a fair distribution for today's generations, and how much should currently be used to ensure there are sufficient amounts for future generations? Such intergenerational learning would be *intragenerational*, by focusing on current distribution, but it would also be truly *intergenerational*, by focusing upon a greater sense of responsibility to future generations. It is hard, for the current writer at least, to see why this shouldn't be a key area for intergenerational thought, research, and teaching.

So far, then, three concerns about demographic increases have been suggested as topics for intergenerational learning: (i) the impact of an expanding global population on global resources, (ii) the current and potentially future inequity of the distribution of these resource, and (iii) concerns over the sustainability of future generations. A fourth issue for

intergenerational learning stems from these, and concerns itself with (iv) the kind of high-consumption lifestyle most societies embrace today. This is because, if present global resource consumption is close to or has already exceeded sustainable levels (as *Living Planet Report 2008*, 2008; Meadows et al., 2004, suggest) then consumption by expanding populations who see their well-being as defined by heavy consumption is likely to be highly damaging to the environment, particularly if the most easily accessed resources have now largely been used up, and greater efforts are needed for future extraction, with even more environmental damage.

However, countering such conspicuous consumption is likely to raise problems of its own. There is enormous injustice in the amount of resources that the developed world historically and presently consumes, compared to the developing world. Smith (2011) argues that increasing the developing world's consumption levels to those of the developed would require a ten-fold increase in the consumption of global resources, which would place the world in an even more precarious position than it currently is.

This almost necessarily points towards consideration (and a focus for intergenerational learning) of the kind of societies humanity needs and can afford if greater equity is to be achieved, whilst balancing these concerns with those of global sustainability. Attempting to resolve questions of equity by the single strategy of raising the consumption levels of the developing world to those of the developed world is not likely to resolve questions of global sustainability. A better way to address this issue is probably to ask if a high-consumption society is the model humanity should pursue. Indeed, such forms of society may not even be satisfactory models of human well-being, as there is increasing literature on well-being (Hamilton, 2004; Jackson, 2009; Seligman 2011; Stiglitz et al., 2010) that suggests that such high consumption cultures do not ultimately satisfy human needs. Physical consumption may be essential purely for survival, but the data point strongly to other requirements that individuals have, ones based more on social and community and self-realization needs. Such a change of focus would lead intergenerational learning once more into new territory, but territory which seems entirely appropriate to forms of learning focusing on current and future problems.

There is a fifth and final intergenerational learning issue stemming from population growth that deserves equal consideration, but that is likely for many to be highly uncomfortable personally, socially, and politically. As noted earlier, the global population rose to 7 billion by November 2011, and is projected to rise to between 9 and 12 billion by the middle of the century (Münz & Reiterer, 2009). Changes in lifestyle may help in reducing the impact of humanity upon global resources, but this may fail to sufficiently address the problem. If this is the case, then it may be part of humanity's responsibility

for its stewardship of the planet to include in any intergenerational discussions (v) what an *optimum* human global population size would be, and how, over generations, humanity should attempt to manage its way towards such a size.

The Royal Society (*People and the Planet*, 2012, p. 83), after reviewing the evidence, came to the conclusion that "...it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a gradual and equitable decline in numbers will serve humanity best," without fixing on any particular number. Weisman (2013, p. 51) argued that the optimum population size would be one which could survive without having to use massive amounts of artificial fertilizers to grow food for a global population. He suggested that this meant a population size of somewhere between 2 and 3 billion.

For many, such a recommendation may be shocking, particularly if it assumed that this means allowing 5–6 billion to die off in a Malthusian world of starvation and disease, or in the use of the kind of "lifeboat" strategies which Hardin (2007) suggested, where a minority allow the majority to drown whilst they stay in protected lifeboat societies. Of course, nothing of either sort is being suggested here. Rather it is being argued that the rise in global population size entails consideration of what it would mean to plan for long-term global reductions in family size over a number of generations to reach this kind of number. Once again, such considerations are normally accompanied in most people's minds by thoughts of China's enforced one-child policy, or India's forced sterilisations, or going even further back, to the eugenic advocacy of selective human breeding – now almost always associated with the Nazi atrocities, but an idea actually having a much wider and surprising sponsorship (see Pearce, 2011).

Yet there is very strong evidence to suggest that a reduced population size might be achieved in many parts of the world simply by providing greater rights and better learning opportunities for women, as this research indicates that greater choice over the use of their own bodies often results in women having smaller families (see Campbell, 2007; Lutz 2009; Speidel et al., 2009). Consideration and provision of learning opportunities in such issues might be seen as essential to long-term planetary sustainability. Why would consideration of the implications of an expanding global population not be a key subject for intergenerational learning?

### **Intergenerational Learning and Shrinking Populations**

Ageing and expanding populations are now being accompanied in some parts of the world by a rather unexpected third trend: populations decreasing in size below replacement level. To understand the numbers here, demographers talk of Total Fertility Rates (TFRs), where a calculation is made of the average

number of children couples have in a particular country. A TFR of just over 2 maintains population size (just over 2, because some couples are childless, and some children don't survive to maturity). In the 1950s, the overall global TFR was over 5; by the late 1970s, it was down to 3.9; and by 2008, it was 2.6 (Münz & Reiterer, 2009). Recent projections (*World Population Prospects*, 2015) suggest that by 2025-30, the global TFR will be 2.4, and will be 2.0 by the end of this century. If such projections occur, then the global human population may gradually decline and end up below replacement level.

However, as with resource consumption, it is very important to note that this trend is not evenly distributed. Whilst many poor countries have TFRs well above 2 (Egypt has one of 2.8, Kenya 4.5, Nigeria 6.0, and Niger 7.6), many rich countries now have TFRs considerably below 2, and therefore their populations are falling well below any maintenance level: Russia has a TFR of 1.6, Italy 1.4, the Czech Republic 1.4, Germany 1.4, and Poland 1.3. Japan, which has the longest-living people in the world, has a rate of 1.4 (*World Population Prospects*, 2015).

Such variation produces different problems within different countries, and therefore places different demands upon societies. In poorer countries, for instance, larger numbers of children may increase the numbers in the workforce, but only if the jobs are there; it could also mean more mouths to feed and more resources needed for both formal and informal education. As the numbers of children decline in poorer countries, these countries will likely begin to experience the same opportunities and problems as richer countries, where smaller workforces have to provide a tax base for an increasing elderly population. Where the opportunity arises, lower numbers of children may enable more time and care to be devoted to the smaller youthful population, and intergenerational learning may be even more important, as an elderly semi-retired population would be available for engaging in learning opportunities which formerly were largely the function of a formal workforce. The effects of an ageing population in a shrinking world would then probably mean that intergenerational learning was even more necessary than in stable or growing populations.

Yet such variations also create a highly problematic international picture. As Demeny (2003) has pointed out, projections for the remainder of this century suggest a global picture of richer countries with declining or static populations at about 1.2 billion being surrounded by poorer countries with populations expanding from 5.3 to around 7.8 billion. This is likely to have a considerable impact upon relationships between rich and poor countries, with increased migration, both legal and illegal, and a greater demand for a more equitable global distribution of resources. The situation in the Mediterranean in 2015-6, with many thousands of refugees fleeing conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan, is but one instance of a phenomenon which is likely

to increase and will likely result in increased tensions between rich and poor nations if not recognized and adequately responded to. In my own country, many politicians and the public both seem wrapped up in a little England focus, in the vain hope that they can insulate themselves from these problems. This is a major and highly urgent demographic trend which present and future generations need to be able to respond to in an informed manner, and it therefore seems to be another key area for intergenerational learning.

### Final Thoughts

This paper has argued that whilst much good work is currently being conducted in the area of intergenerational learning, there are a number of issues which any overview of the area needs to address. One issue is the need to be aware of the variety of intergenerational relationships that are possible, and current practice only utilizes a limited number of that variety. Were research to suggest that an even more finely nuanced categorization than the five-fold categorisation suggested in this paper was sensible, then there would be many more potential forms of intergenerational relationships, and hence intergenerational learning possibilities, which could be developed, and which could be beneficial in a variety of as-yet unanticipated ways.

A second issue is that of the current focus in much intergenerational writings on *intragenerational* concerns with the current human population, when consideration of the needs of future generations, some of whom may be alive today, but whose needs in the future may not be fulfilled, is as important. This seems a different and important way of conceptualizing intergenerational learning, as it moves into issues of sustainability and equity, both now and in the future.

A final issue is the investigation of potential foci of intergenerational learning through the examination of larger global issues. This article took demography as an example, arguing that the issue of ageing populations has driven the most popular form of intergenerational learning, but that two other demographic changes—of expanding and shrinking populations—could be drivers for different and important foci for intergenerational learning. Such new foci would still celebrate the personal and local, but would also lift the vision to the macro-level. As a Chinese saying warns, if people lower their heads to pull their cart instead of raising their heads to look at the road, they fail to see the roads they are likely to travel down, including the ones to different futures. Intergenerational learning could then be a critical way of developing clearer visions of different futures.

If this Chinese saying provides an important reason for engaging in intergenerational learning, a popular African one provides its *raison d'être*. It states that if you want to walk faster, then walk alone; but if you want to walk further, then you need to walk with others. Humanity needs to walk a long way into the future, and this paper has argued that this distance is best reached by working with an expanded notion of intergenerational learning. Based on the conception argued, intergenerational learning would be a form of learning which not only recognized more intergenerational partners, but understood that we will change many of our partners as we walk from the past into the future; that it is a form of learning which could help us, as we leave this journey in providing those we shall *not* meet with the ability to walk as far as we have done. Macro-issues of equity and sustainability, then, need to be new key values for the future focus of intergenerational learning.

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