

# Bring Back Agency!

A 'late-modern' rationale for the education of older people



CONFINTEA VII



“ ‘Life begins at 100’



Agency  
Health  
Learning

Dagny Carlsson, the oldest  
Swedish blogger (1912-2022)

# WHO & UNESCO: Learning, Agency and Health

*On the Health side:*

‘**Healthy Ageing** requires lifelong learning. The latter enables older people to **do what they value**, retain the ability to **make decisions** and preserve their **purpose, identity and independence**’ (WHO, 2020, p. 7, bolded for emphasis).

**Active Ageing** requires lifelong learning to stay **healthy, relevant and engaged** in society. It is individually and socially **empowering** (International Longevity Centre Brazil, 2015; WHO, 2002).

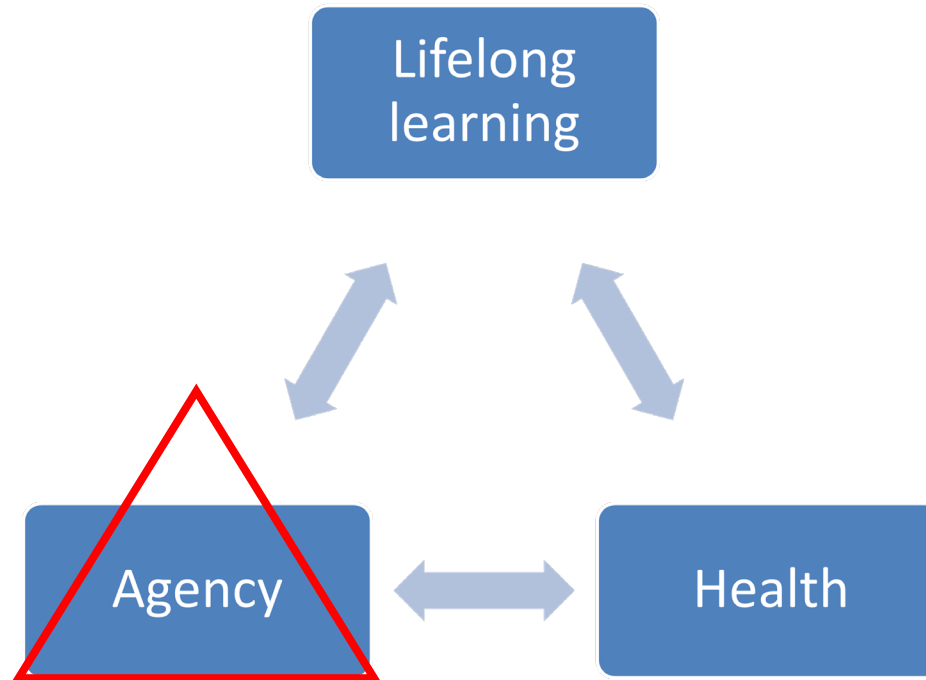
*On the Learning side:*

‘**A new social contract for education needs to allow us to think differently** about learning and the relationships between students, teachers, knowledge, and the world’ (International Committee on the Futures of Education, 2021, p. 3, bolded for emphasis).

‘We must motivate **agency and action** that is **relational** and **collectively distributed**. This means recognizing that we live and learn with the natural world (International Committee on the Futures of Education, 2021, p. 66, bolded for emphasis).

# Evidence: Learning, Agency and Health

<p>Learning enhances health (Al Hazzouri, 2020; Chang et al., 2020; Hammond, 2004; Narushima, 2008; Narushima et al., 2018; Schoultz et al., 2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Pathogenic</b> perspective - Learning as a means for reducing risk: depression, dementia, cognitive declines.</li><li>• <b>Salutogenic</b> perspective – Learning as quality of life, social networks, health resources (happiness, wellbeing, social networking, community building, coping strategies)</li></ul>
<p>Learning enhances learners' agency and empowers them (Bjursell, 2019; Formosa &amp; Galea, 2020; Hachem &amp; Vuopala, 2016; Hachem &amp; Manninen, 2020; Narushima et al., 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Socialisation &amp; subjectification:</b> Making friends, forming communities of like-minded older people, social &amp; civic participation, individual and social identity work, happiness, enhanced self-concepts (self-confidence, self-efficacy), life satisfaction &amp; joy of life.</li><li>• <b>Qualification:</b> Skills, abilities, vocational education, liberal arts education, knowledge acquisition, IT &amp; health literacy</li></ul>



Interplay between LLL, health and Agency

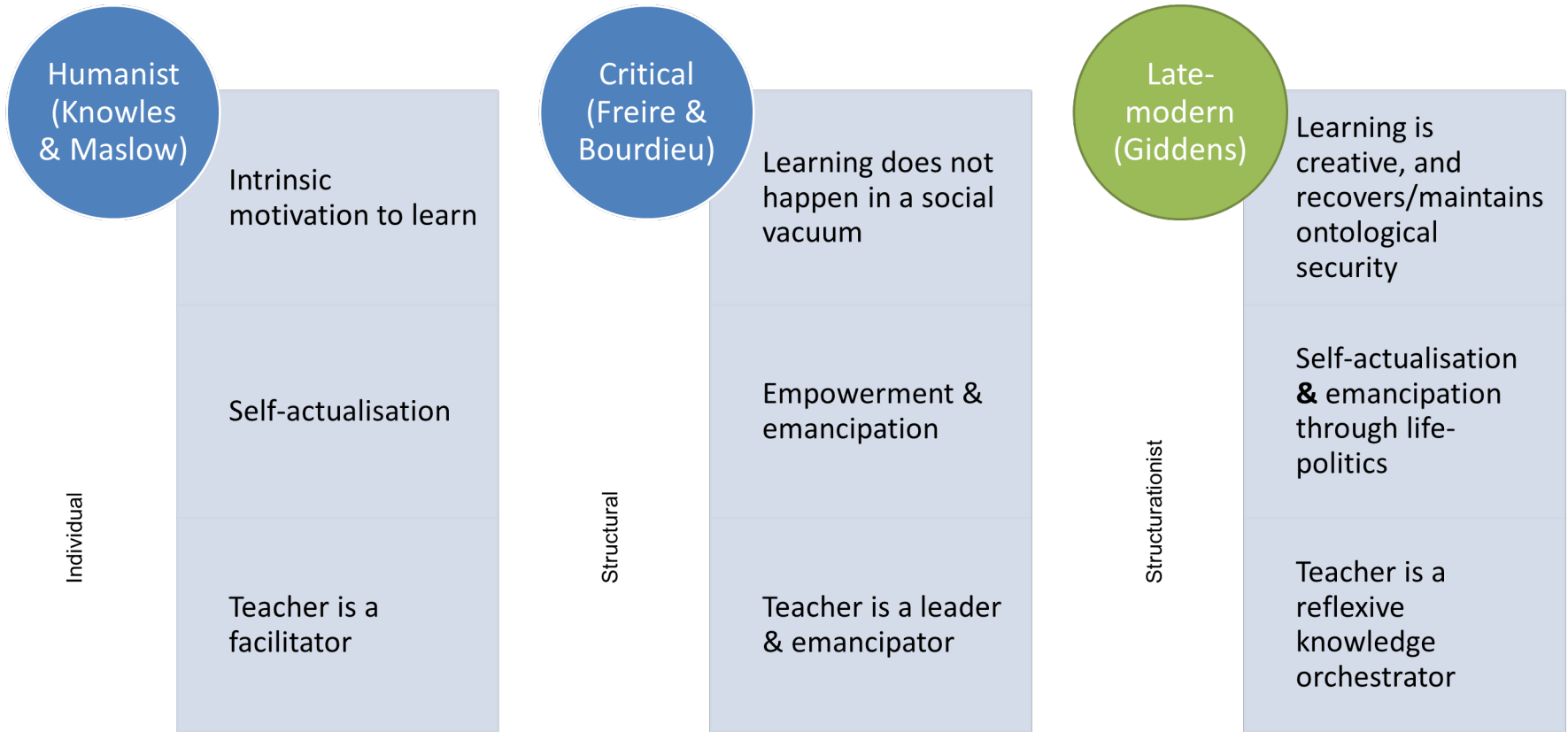
Original Articles  
**Is “Raging” Good for Health?: Older Women's Participation in the Raging Grannies**

Susan L. Hutchinson & Blair Wexler  
Pages 88-118 | Received 01 Mar 2006, Accepted 15 Aug 2006, Published online: 23 Feb 2007

Download citation <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399330601003515>

Bring Back Agency!





Learning Philosophies in Older Age (Hachem, 2020)

# Where is Agency in the Philosophies of Learning in Older Age?

Agency is the ability to intervene, or refrain from it in the world with the goal of influencing a specific process (Giddens, 1984).

**Humanist** philosophy of learning: Older people are naturally curious ... if some cannot learn it's a fault in the system (Percy, 1990)

**Critical** philosophy of learning: Older people are oppressed ... they are victims of social systems and they must revolt against them (Formosa, 2011; Glendenning & Battersby, 1990)

Agency either exists in a social vacuum or is 'deterministically' restricted by structures.

It is counterproductive to discount learners' agency in the process of emancipating them.

**Critical (late-modern):** Older people **have agency**, they are **resilient** in times of crisis (Kulmus, 2021), **reflexive** and they **knowledgeably** navigate their social world. Their agency [re]produces limiting and enabling structures. Social change is more readily possible.





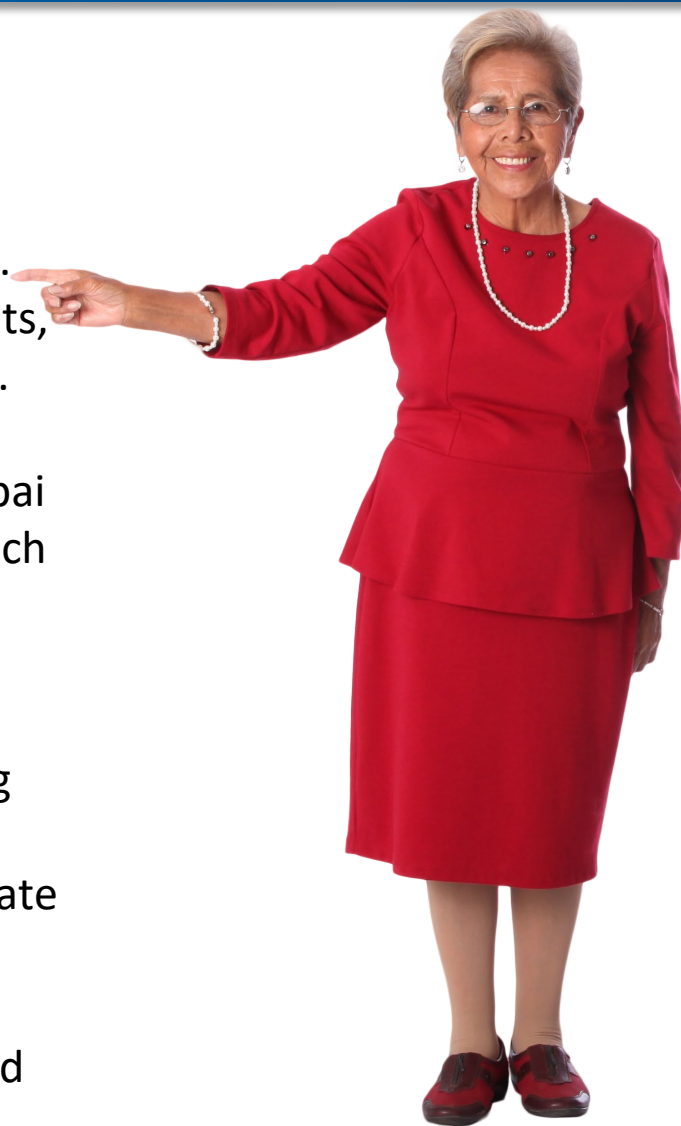
# Contours of a Late-modern Rationale for Late Life Learning

Detraditionalization of societies: social rules are more readily contested (Giddens, 1991) – need for reflexivity (Bjursell, 2020). Upon their **'life turn'** or other life events, older people make identity defining choices (Illeris, 2014). Negotiate new positions and social roles (in labour markets, in HEIs etc ...) and face health challenges (Withnall, 2022).

Self-actualisation and emancipation: using life politics (Sibai & Hachem, 2021). Education can have other functions, such as **health outcomes and healthy literacy**, without its medicalisation.

Teaching promotes reflexivity, self- and social questioning (Hachem, 2022a). No to imposing revolutions, no to discounting learners' agency and choices in order to liberate them.

Reasons for learning can be many (intrinsic, functional and social) (Hachem, 2022b). Listen to the voices of older learners (Withnall, 2010).





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Emancipation is not an outcome to learning, it is rather a starting point

Jacques Rancière (1987)

# Thank you, Merci!

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