

Lifelong Learning and Retiring Retirement Stereotypes

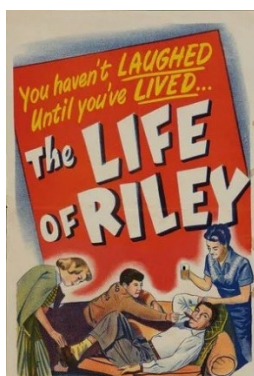
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Steve McCarty lectures for Osaka Jogakuin University and the government foreign aid agency JICA. He is the World Association for Online Education President. At Kansai University from 2015 to 2020 he taught international ICT classes and held a unique Global Faculty Development position. In the Japan Association for Language Teaching, he was a Chapter founder, Bilingualism SIG President, and appointed Representative of all the Special Interest Groups on the national Executive Committee. His highly cited publications on e-learning, bilingualism, language teaching, Japan, Asia, and the academic life are available from <https://japanned.hcommons.org>

This paper summarizes the author's presentation on February 26, 2022, to the Joint Mini Conference of JALT's Accessibility in Language Learning & Lifelong Language Learning Special Interest Groups.

The Mirage of Retirement

Whether citizens, sojourners, or immigrants, most employed residents of Japan will be unable or unwilling to retire. The natural desire to choose the terms of transitions, however, runs into customary age limits, around 65 for full-time and 70 to 75 for part-time employment in the case of higher education. However, teaching duties can be gradually decreased and improved in quality, while the teacher remains at least as active outside of the classroom.



Early mass media meme representing the promise of retirement. A recent Internet meme is like *jan ken pon*, whereby a stone

smashes scissors, scissors cut paper, but paper wraps around a stone. Supposedly, children have time and energy but no money, working adults have money and energy but no time, and older people have time and money but no energy. Like a stereotype, there can be some truth to it, but people over 65 with a healthy lifestyle and more rest than before can accomplish important tasks at least as well as ever.

This paper suggests aiming for a balance that was never possible before among continued but decreased teaching, societal involvement, and free time activities. Decreased working hours and increased discretionary activities mean greater freedom. Time, money, and energy can all be available to a sufficient extent.



Torii of Kyoto shrine Fushimi Inari Taisha scaffold a path through the unknown.

Career Tapering

Suddenly losing the status of full-time or gainful work because of age can be vertiginous. Combined with stereotypical dismissiveness toward older people, one's self-esteem is threatened. Yet there is a great demand for the services that older language teachers in particular can perform in Japanese education, society, and academia internationally. This paper therefore advocates never surrendering to ageist stereotypes, but rather to be present in selected spheres of action, and continue to make one's presence known.

As an example of career tapering, at age 65 the author asked to continue as a full professor even at half the salary or less but was relegated to part-time status with few classes. Job hunting was disastrous at first, being recommended to top national universities,

but their age limit was 65, too. There was a bit of disrespectful treatment where a foreign faculty member was in charge of recruiting. However, there are many possible ways to be treated categorically without explanation, so it is best not to take setbacks personally.

The author was losing face at home when, at a late stage, the acceptances began. A university in Kyoto, then one in Osaka, then a graduate school in Kobe from age 66, such that the author had choices where to teach, with about the same number of classes from age 65 to 70 as before. Although with only a fraction of previous earnings, the classes were meaningful and closer to the author's areas of research. Thus, after having been assigned one different EFL subject after another while full-time, the quality of classes may have improved. Interesting classes have included Bilingualism, Intercultural Communication, Tourism to Japan, Academic Writing (for African and Asian graduate students of IT), and ICT (for combined foreign exchange and domestic students). After starting with one class on ICT in Japan at Kansai University, classes increased, then the Division of International Affairs was looking for a scholar with multidisciplinary expertise for an innovative new Global Faculty Development program. The author was invited to be the sole one-to-one consultant for faculty members of all divisions urged to start English-Medium Instruction, and the author documented their stated needs (McCarty, 2019). No matter how successful all that was, the age limit for part-time teachers was 70. The two years since then have involved teaching Intercultural Communication and Bilingualism and Japanese Society classes at Osaka Jogakuin University. The author also continues as a lecturer since 2004 for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), introducing "Japanese People and Society" to visiting officials from developing countries. At age 72 the career tapering is welcome, while other academic activities continue unabated.



JICA participants after the two-hour presentation including Q&A about Japan.

Examples of Semi-Retirement Work

Aside from continuing the same type of work such as language teaching, there are many other possibilities for career continuation or tapering. Workers in Japan can receive a full pension even with middle-class earnings. There are many opportunities for mature language educators, who have skills to meet various domestic and international needs, whether paid or just to help. It might be worthwhile to consider what needs there are, so as to not only respond to job openings but also perhaps to propose work that is demonstrably needed, such as the above-mentioned faculty development.

Particularly for users of Japanese, there are a variety of possible roles in business or industry, sometimes needing credentials, such as translating, interpreting, or guiding visitors to Japan. Finally having more time, one might consider non-teaching academic roles such as mentoring, editing, or reviewing. Most English users are non-native, and online publications such as journals have proliferated. Most of the legitimate publications would be more creditable with constructive vetting and proofreading. Other volunteer work could involve community or societal activism, whether in Japan, one's home country, or of global scope through online communication. It could be political or environmental activism, given the daunting problems facing the world, or expertly targeting certain societal needs such as media literacy in an age of manipulative disinformation amid information overload.

Free Time for Lifelong Learning, Writing, and Curating

One faces choices of time management or the sheer possibilities of spending and not wasting precious time as one gets older. With wise choices and decent fortune, quality of life can be better than ever, by contributing valuable services where needed, and by enjoying more free time to create and curate.

Lifelong learning can be formal or informal. Japan's oldest university graduate was Masuko Fujiki at age 83 (McCarty, 2015).



With former student Masuko Fujiki at her graduation ceremony

To the credit of lifelong language learning, much research has shown that using plural languages is more protective against dementia than any other known intervention. When time finally allows any interest to be pursued, one example is reading. Will it be fiction, which there was no time for while focusing on one's academic discipline? Will it be philosophy or another genre that facilitates reflection? Is this the same person who rereads after decades a work of fiction or psychology? Lifelong learning can accord with lifelong interests.

One's writing that was hitherto confined to what 'counts' in evaluations is freed to involve any form of academic communication or creative genre, any platform such as topical Websites or social media, or multimedia such as video and podcasts. Not only among scholars, but one could be a public intellectual professing one's expertise in society, such as through journalism, newspaper or magazine articles, or through broadcast media interviews. Education takes place wherever specialized knowledge is turned into general knowledge.

Of current relevance, online education was mentioned in the presentation as a pandisciplinary meta-skill that can empower educators (McCarty, 2021).

Finally, time can allow a thorough cycle of publication, promotion, and curation. Writers and other creators depend on an audience to animate their works. One's publications therefore need to be promoted where relevant. Curation can apply to any possessions, preserving and organizing what remains valuable. In the case of publications, they are vulnerable to becoming unavailable to readers due to the possessiveness of publishers or from broken links. However, curation of one's academic and creative works in free research repositories can both secure their availability and promote their discovery. Academia Edu and ResearchGate have useful functions, and non-members can just scroll down to read most works. University repositories might host files of works confirmed to be sharable. This author recommends Humanities Commons, which is supported by U.S. government and other grants. See the URL at Humanities Commons in the bio-data at the beginning of this paper.

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