

Enhancing social connectedness through older adult education

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Overview of presentation

- Perspectives on older adult learning in relation to lifelong learning
- The 60 plus movement in the Waikato

Contexts for learning

- Formal: institutionalised; chronologically graded; hierarchical
- Non-formal: systematic; organised educational activity outside of formal settings
- Informal: acquiring knowledge, skills, values, attitudes from daily living
- Older adults – most learning occurs in latter two categories

Learning in the third age

- Major demographic changes in New Zealand society
- Virtual exclusion of older people from higher education internationally
- Marginality of older adults: is higher education/University relevant to their lives?
- Third age (Laslett, 1989) part of lifelong learning agenda
- Rights of OALs to education throughout life
- Involves both expressive and instrumental forms of learning
- Universities: fear from past schooling? (Unintentional) barriers? More than credentialing factories.

Different kinds of learning needs

- McClusky (1974) identified four types of need:
 1. **Coping**: adults engaged in physical fitness; economic self-sufficiency; basic education
 2. **Expressive**: taking part in creative activities for their own sake; not necessarily goal-oriented
 3. **Contributive**: adults as useful contributors to society (e.g. volunteering)
 4. **Influence**: adults becoming agents for social change (e.g. campaign against Council tax increases)

Types of adult education agencies

- Self-help: controlled by older adults to meet their own learning needs (e.g. U3A)
- Agencies which develop programmes specifically for older adults (e.g. Elderhostel; Senior Studies Institute)
- Mainstream providers: some courses may appeal to older learners (e.g. Centres for Continuing Education)
- Agencies which ignore older people (no provision; no suitable facilities)
- NB Plenty of non-educational agencies engaged in education (Age Concern; City Councils; Grey Power)

Participation patterns in education

- Varying definitions of ‘learning’ and “education”
- Plateau or decreasing participation as age increases
- Overall patterns from earlier life repeated
- Issues of social class, gender, race/ethnicity
- Historically, scant presence of older people in higher education
- Changing economic pressures: more older people wanting/needing to study for a variety of reasons (Scottish research)

The Sixty Plus Movement

Organised by the Centre for Continuing Education,
University of Waikato

Statistical data on trends in 2000s

In Hamilton city:

- 2005: 291
- 2006: 272
- 2007: 308
- 2008: 312
- 2009: 300+ (still counting!)
- 2010: ???

What motivates people to participate?

Morstain & Smart typology:

- Social relationships*
- External expectations
- Social welfare*
- Professional development
- Escape/stimulation*
- Cognitive interest*

* Purported as stronger in older adulthood

Developments in the Waikato region

Current groups operate in the following cities/towns:

- Matamata
- Otorohanga
- Taupo
- Tauranga
- Te Aroha
- Te Awamutu
- Te Kuiti
- Thames
- Waihi
- Whangamata

Issues faced by groups

Technical:

- Venue capacity/suitability
- Safety (e.g. wheelchair access; ventilation)
- Parking
- Sound system

Social/cultural:

- Costs
- Developing an effective programme
- Decision to limit numbers
- Effective leadership

Sample programme

University of Waikato

Continuing Education 60+ Group Lectures

Term I 2009

- 10 Feb Exciting Travel Experiences for the Over 60s *Alastair Calder*
- 17 Feb War, Media and the Truth *Dr Ron Smith*
- 24 Feb The Honey Man: an update *Professor Peter Molan*
- 3 Mar Acupuncture vs Western Medicine *Trevor Pritchard*
- 10 Mar Antarctica *Dr Catherine Beard*
- 17 Mar Genealogy *Margaret Couch*
- 24 Mar Carbon Credits and Sustainability *Steve Perdia*
- 31 Mar Camp Quality – Kids With Cancer *Mike Cook*
- 7 Apr The Teen Brain *Assoc. Prof. Monica Payne*
- 21 Apr PRAXIS : The visual language of James Ormsby *James Ormsby*
- 28 Apr Forging a Life of Purpose *Aaron Fleming*
- 5 May Environmental Sustainability *Liz Hallsworth*

Benefits for older learners

- Opportunity for social interaction
- Sustaining friendships
- A structured programme
- Cognitive development (keeping the mind busy!)
- Health prevention (positive intervention)
- Providing access to University expertise & knowledge
- Building/sustaining identity as lifelong learners