

# Abstracts

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## Lifelong Learning

Frank Glendenning

Sandra A. Cusack. 1995. Developing a lifelong learning programme: empowering seniors as leaders in lifelong learning. *Educational Gerontology*, 21 (4), 305–320.

Cusack, of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, has published a number of papers in recent years on third-age learning topics. This latest describes a project designed to give substance to British Columbia's public commitment since 1989 to provide lifelong learning for all. What are the implications, she asks, for senior citizens of a public policy of lifelong learning? As in other parts of the western world, only a small percentage of older people participate in educational activities. Many had bad childhood experiences of education and do not perceive it as relevant in later life.

Cusack recognises that for official policy to be implemented within existing statutory continuing education programmes, there is an inherent danger that much will be made of the 'benefits' of education in later life without necessarily ensuring that the educational needs of seniors are articulated by seniors themselves. She suggests that the traditional method of conducting needs assessments reflects a service-delivery model of getting information from and providing service to seniors, which may be disempowering. This conviction led her to develop a learning programme at a recreation and leisure centre for 2,000 people aged between 50 and 102 years. Her goal was to create an empowering process by working with seniors to determine their needs, and to develop a programme based on the needs as defined by seniors themselves.

She regards many expositions of empowerment as rhetoric and asks what does it mean? She is influenced by Foucault and Lather, who regard empowerment as enabling people to gain self-understanding and self-determination and to exercise power, not as hegemonic control but as energy, capacity and potential.

We meant to enable seniors to serve as advocates and leaders by putting a process in place that would develop their knowledge of lifelong learning and research skills, increase their self-confidence and self-esteem, and then involve them actively in conducting an assessment of the educational needs of the

membership and produce a report which would summarise the findings and formulate recommendations (p. 309).

The process model included research as emancipatory education, a collaborative approach to programme development and reciprocal learning experiences. Critical reflection was encouraged throughout with both formal and informal methods. Participants were equal partners with the two facilitators. By inviting them to voice personal experiences, the process raised their critical awareness of their social world, reinforced their personal skills and recognised their contributions. The purpose being to develop a plan for a comprehensive life-long learning programme for seniors, the specific objectives were to review the literature, to train seniors as researchers, to develop a survey and interview questionnaire to be administered to their peers, to conduct an assessment of the educational needs, and to produce recommendations. Evaluation procedures involved pre- and post-test questionnaires, participant observation records of all class discussions and a final evaluation through a focus group (Cusack and Thompson, 1993).

The Canadian National Advisory Council on Aging (NACA) published a position paper on life-long learning in 1990 and the project gave priority to three of its recommendations: (a) the development and promotion of educational activities for older adults, (b) the talents of older adults were recruited and opportunities were provided for them to share their knowledge and skills in the education of others, and (c) barriers to participation were identified. The findings have provided a framework within which the senior leaders and the professionals at the centre can work towards a comprehensive lifelong learning programme for seniors. The requirement now is to secure continuous funding to facilitate the delivery of a quality lifelong learning programme for seniors.

### **Comment**

In this project, seniors were involved as partners in defining terms, constructing a knowledge base, conducting research and playing a leadership role. Cusack's view is that critical theory has much to offer in this field and we need continually to ask the questions, whose interests are being served, and where does power lie in the dynamics of the relationship between tutor and student? This well thought-out and well-managed project was clearly successful and it is not surprising that Cusack is now adding her influence to those who are urging a critical approach to educational gerontology.

## References

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André Lemieux. 1995. The University of the Third Age: Role of Senior Citizens, *Educational Gerontology*, 21, 4, 337–344.

Lemieux, of the University of Quebec's School of Education, begins with the premise that 'a university is essentially a place of teaching, research and service to the community'. He does not expand on this concept and comments that universities of the third age (U3As) have mostly developed teaching. He suggests that there have been three generations of U3A curriculum models. The first developed educational services as 'cultural leisure', as in the Elderhostel programme. The second generation centred their educational activities on participation and the development of the life experiences of seniors, to prepare them to intervene in the problems of society. Frank (1955) is invoked, and Lemieux suggests that, 'certain social gerontologists still pretend (sic) that the teacher of senior citizens has no other aim than to make them agents of social change'. The third generation emerged in the 1980s has engaged, he claims, in developing a curriculum for seniors who are retiring earlier and earlier, are better educated and demand credited university courses because they are not willing to pay high fees for non-credit courses. This view partly explains the rapid development of an international movement for self-help education for older adults.

Lemieux describes the curriculum (if I understand him correctly) for the inter-disciplinary certificates in education for elderly people which lead to a Bachelor of Arts degree at L'Institut Universitaire du Troisième Age in Montréal. The purpose is to update the knowledge of older people so that they can achieve a better management of their personal and social life. For admission, students must have reached the age of 50 years and have appropriate qualifications or demonstrate self-taught knowledge and be able to work in both French and English.

The curriculum covers education and the third-age person, including development and learning; the psychology of ageing; techniques of creativity; knowledge and self-expression; helping skills and relationships; law and the third age; art and life; new conceptions of work and leisure; values and education. The author discusses the importance of

research and regards the first generation U3As as having excluded research. He invokes De Lansheere (1979) to support his view that the second generation U3As developed action-research on values and objectives which are common to seniors, but because it was motivated by social change, research became an object of mistrust. He concludes that the (societal) roles of third-agers can only be adequately researched by themselves.

The author proposes that we must 'develop a model in which the senior is both the agent and the object of research. This model... is action-research' (p. 342), which he previously seemed to dismiss. He goes on to suggest that in action-research, seniors themselves guide the research toward the action and bring the action back towards 'research considerations'. However, 'it would be ill-chosen to think that any person who is interested in a topic can organize research. The simple collection of potential knowledge drawn from the wealth of collective memory of senior citizens does not represent the essence of action-research in the third age' (p. 342). Research conducted in a traditional university setting or in a U3A would 'use the same scientific methodology and respond to the same didactic rules' (p. 343).

### **Comment**

The paper suffers in the translation and in presentation but is valuable for those interested in U3A developments. There is increasing anecdotal evidence that some older people are keen to learn research methodology and are willing to place themselves at the disposal of recognised researchers. They have the time, and many are intellectually equipped to take part in research but do not know how to make the necessary links and contacts. The paper displays an antagonism to social gerontologists, who may think the author's criticism to be misplaced. As for the historical reflections at the beginning of the paper, how and where the U3A established itself in 1960 is not stated. The first educational institute for retired persons was recorded in New York in 1962 (Weinstock, 1978; Mills 1993). The first U3A was founded by Pierre Vellas at the University of Toulouse in 1972 (Philibert, 1984). Elderhostel was not founded until 1975 (Mills, 1993), so it is confusing to connect it with the 1960s.

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## **The Law and Elderly People**

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Alison Brammer. 1994. The Registered Homes Act 1984: safeguarding the elderly? *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 4, 423-437.

In this article the author, who is a solicitor and lecturer in law at the University of Keele, writes about what she identifies as deficiencies in the system of quality control and policing introduced by that Act. The background against which this legislation was introduced is outlined and the need for registration indicated. The actual process of registration is set out and the main thrust of the article consists of a variety of criticisms, both of the legislation itself and of the interpretation and application of that law by the Registered Home Tribunal. Any person who is seeking registration must be a 'fit person' but this element of fitness is nowhere defined in the Act nor is it even the subject of guidance. Two streams of case-law have emerged in Tribunal interpretative decisions. An element of confusion appears to exist as to how far authorities have power to add conditions on registration.

Alison Brammer discusses those cases where serious risk to the health, life or well-being of residents is in question in relation to orders cancelling registration; she also discusses the way in which the Tribunal appears to have adopted some sort of 'sliding scale' standard of proof. The unsatisfactory way in which the Tribunal has looked at financial considerations has also been highlighted in this article. The article concludes by pointing out that while from April 1991 all local government authorities were obliged to establish arms-length inspection units, amending legislation is now in force which brings small homes, *i.e.* those with fewer than four residents, within the ambit of the registration scheme, but no additional resources are provided speci-