

**EUROPEAN UNION POLICY ON
OLDER ADULT LEARNING:**

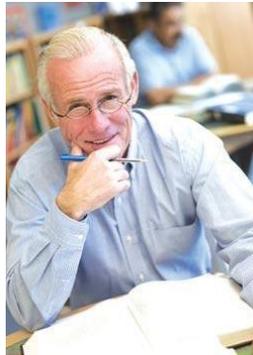
A REVIEW OF ISSUES AND FUTURE OPTIONS

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LATE-LIFE LEARNING

A short preamble



OLDER ADULT LEARNING

Older adult learning = processes where older adults, individually and in association with others, engage in direct encounter and then purposefully reflect upon, validate, transform, give personal meaning to and seek to integrate their ways of knowing.

Older adults = “people, whatever their chronological age, who are post-work in the sense that s/he is no longer involved in earning a living or with the major responsibilities for raising a family” (Withnall & Percy, 1994).

Formal learning: Older adults are a minority in post-secondary and tertiary studies

Non-formal learning: ...the opportunity to engage in serious learning projects, socialize with peers, and engaging in physical and cognitive activities, but without any pressures of accreditation and assessment.

Informal learning: in contexts ranging from the family, religious institutions, mass media, the workplace, volunteering, and various community-based initiatives - and the creative use of museums, theatres, libraries, online surfing, and travel.

PARTICIPATION

- a lower percentage of older learners compared to younger peers,
- a sharp decline of participation as people reached their seventieth birthday, and
- typical learners are middle-class women so that the working classes, older men, and elders from ethnic minorities are highly underrepresented

RATIONALES FOR OLDER ADULT LEARNING 'to what end?' & 'why?'

The functionalist paradigm: Adjusting to later life and retirement: Havighurst, Hiemstra, & McClusky

The moral dimension: A right to a fair share of the educational budget

Critical educational gerontology: Emancipation, empowerment, liberation: Glendenning, Battersby, Finsden, & Formosa

The liberal-humanist position: Emphasises personal, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual development: Laslett, Percy, Withnall,

Transcendence: developing a reflective mode of thinking, spiritual advancement: Moody

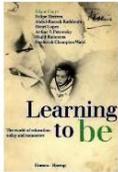
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THE GENESIS OF LIFELONG LEARNING

UNESCO: *Learning to be* (Faure et al., 1972)

OECD: *Recurrent education: A strategy for lifelong education* (OECD, 1973)



THE EU AND LIFELONG LEARNING

1974: advanced the concept of '*education permanente*'

1994: *Competitiveness, employment, growth*

1996: European Year of Lifelong Learning

2000s: *Memorandum on lifelong learning*
Making a EU area of lifelong learning a reality
Resolution on lifelong learning,

LIFELONG LEARNING: THE EU'S MANTRA!

- Economic competitiveness
- Citizenship

THE EU AND LATE-LIFE LEARNING

Older persons were a late entry in policy documents as it was only in **2006** - some **eleven years** after the first policy document - that late-life learning was first mentioned.

Adult Learning: It is never too late to learn (2006)

there is a need for **up-skilling** and increasing lifelong learning opportunities for older workers.. to keep older workers employable, investment is needed throughout the life cycle

learning provision for retired people is needed (including for instance increasing participation of mature students in higher education)... Learning should be an integral part of this new phase in their lives

Action Plan on Adult Learning (2007)

This Action Plan focuses on those who are **disadvantaged**...these could include migrants, older people, women or persons with a disability.

- [i] by upgrading low-skilled workers...
- [ii] to decrease the no. of early school leavers
- [iii] to reduce poverty and social exclusion...
- [iv] integrating migrants in society/labour market
- [v] to increase participation in lifelong learning after the age of 34.

GRUNDTVIG AND LATE-LIFE LEARNING

The breadth of funded projects is impressive as a recent mapping exercise identified some 200 initiatives covering a range of learning activities, but mostly, elearning, inter-generational learning, and older volunteering

(Soulsby, 2010).

THE LIMITS OF ACTIVITY RATIONALES

- Positive: The benefits of older adult learning, **but**
- 'public issues' are projected as 'private troubles' (Mills, 1959)
- What about non-typical learners? Working class, men, rural elders, ethnic minorities

THE IDEOLOGY OF PRODUCTIVE AGEING

- Positive: Older adults can be productive, **but**
- Simply in paid employment? What about volunteering, informal care, leisure, intergenerational activities?
- Capitalist logic: Human capital theory!

THE ABSENCE/EXCLUSION OF FOURTH AGE LEARNING

- Positive: Celebrating third-age learning, **but**
- What about frail older persons, with cognitive and/or physical limitations?
- An absence of fourth age learning

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

- A 'Widening Participation' agenda
- Policies that break down barriers to participation in the labour market
- From 'older adults' to 'active citizens'
- Learning for 'housebound' older adults
- Learning for older adults in residential/nursing homes

CONCLUSION

...a better understanding of the ways in which older people learn, whether and how they differ from those used by younger people and if so, how their learning could be enhanced...

Withnall, 2008 : 3
