

Extending the boundaries of our thinking: The need and rationale for learning opportunities in later life.

Helen Heppner

ABSTRACT

The starting point for this paper is the demographic changes occurring in our population, and the inability of our existing social structures to positively cater for the developmental needs of society's fastest growing sector. Evolving from this discussion, it is argued that the largely utilitarian goal of present educational institutions has created an educational system which is associated with youth and young adulthood. Correspondingly, older adults are excluded by the educational system from positive and fulfilling educational involvement. So that we may better cater for the learning needs of the older adult, education should be targeted as an institution which has the potential to "broaden the basis for on-going activities and social interactions of older people" (Earle, 1995 :5). A redefinition of the relationship between education, work, citizenship and productive community involvement is necessary to change our perceptions, values and attitudes, and to create more positive and inclusive social behavioural options for older people.

A human being would certainly not grow to be seventy or eighty years old if this longevity had no meaning for the species. The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage of life's morning.

Jung, quoted in Moody (1985:38)

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So that we may better cater for the learning needs of the older adult, education should be targeted as an institution which has the potential to "broaden the basis for on-going activities and social interactions of older people" (Earle, 1995 :5). A redefinition of the relationship between education, work, citizenship and productive community involvement is necessary to change our perceptions, values and attitudes, and to create more positive and inclusive social behavioural options for older people.

Introduction

My belief in the value of educational opportunity for people over fifty has been strengthened both by personal experience and by accompanying reading. In the course of my Masters degree study I wrote a research essay on the establishment and development of University of the Third Age (U3A) in Auckland which gave me an understanding of the issues involved in education for older people. This investigation also gave me a personal fillip as it showed me that there was at least one place where I could pursue an interest in topics I had yet to explore. Further, being aware of the importance of maintaining social networks in later life, I was pleased to note that U3A could also give me the means of replacing lost social networks; social contacts that were associated with mutual interests in learning.

Then, having completed an MA thesis in my mid-fifties and contemplating life without the structure and involvement of study, I was heartened to discover a book which destroyed myths and stereotypes of how people over fifty should live their lives. In 'Growing Old Disgracefully' (The Hen Co-op, 1993) five women wrote of their positive attitude to ageing and how their learning, companionship and continuing to be active, participating (if somewhat unconventional) older members of society enriched their lives and enlivened their retirement years.

My reading for this article then took me to two other books which were on my 'read-when-I-have-time-list'. In a New Zealand book, Ann Gluckman and Mary Tagg (1995: 10) give considerable space to the place of education and learning in helping people "look forward constructively, with hope, optimism, aspiration and occasional inspiration to a time of fulfillment and interest". The second, much larger volume encompassed a considerably wider canvas of research. When asked to write a book on the problems associated with ageing, 58 year-old Betty Friedan resisted - she was not interested in delving into the issues of 'old' people. Cajoled to continue (with the reasoning that a greater proportion of the over sixties were women) Friedan (1995) became horrified at the medical orientation of the 'bright young turks' who were the new 'experts' on ageing; faced anger and hostility when she said that she wanted to discuss 'growth and aging' - a contradiction in terms she was told. The experiences of people whom Friedan describes later in the book, contrast strongly with the 'senior kiddies' attitude of early programmes she encountered. They were programmes which Friedan (1995:58) argued "provide compassionate services and patronizing diversions for older people" in which older people are segregated and encouraged into passivity. They are "ageist and work at increasing the dependence of elderly and increase segregation rather than working toward integration and independence".

All three books, written by women over 55 years of age, write of the realities for the growing number of people over 50 years of age. They are important books in that they offer a positive view of later years and rather like the 'women writing for and about women' arguments of many feminist writers, these authors are writing for and about a world they know personally. These writings are contributions from people who recognise that the present social structures and attitudes have left us inadequately prepared for the increasing number of years of adulthood.

The authors are all people who come within the category of older people taking some responsibility for the social future of society. It is a responsibility which Peter Laslett (1989) argues older people, particularly those from occupations such as medicine, social services and administration which have contributed to our longer life expectancy, have to the future generations. It is octogenarian Peter Laslett's (ibid: 196) belief that "growing older does not absolve a person from responsibility." Older people who have the knowledge and ability to "should do all they can to ensure the future is as good as it can be" to bring to the attention of others the effects of our changing social structures.

The emergence of the third age

Social structures of developed societies are in the midst of what has been described as a 'demographic revolution' - a revolution which will in time affect every individual and institution of those societies. When they wrote on the ageing of American society, Pifer and Bronte (1986) pointed out that due to an increased life expectancy and the resultant increased proportion of older people in the population, and a decline in the proportion of younger people, the median age of the population will increase. The impact of these demographic changes Pifer and Bronte (1986) argue, will be as great as earlier social movements such as the post World-War II baby boom, the women's movement and the influx of women into the paid workforce. While it may be said that in 'young' countries such as America, Australia and New Zealand the population has been steadily ageing since the 1800s, a research project in Britain produced a slightly different picture. In a lecture given at the University of Auckland in 1995, Peter Laslett explained the findings of research he was associated with in Britain (and which used 50-65 year-olds as research assistants). When they traced the changes in the historical profile of population demography over 450 years, they discovered that no 'old' populations as we now know them have ever existed before. The plateau of life expectancy had remained relatively stable until the end of the nineteenth century when it escalated precipitously to create what Laslett has termed the Third Age; the 25 years of life which follow the First Age of childhood and the Second Age of early adulthood. Laslett (1995) describes The Third Age as a period in which individuals released "from the trammels of the second age", have a measure of autonomy which comes from self-fulfilment and now have the potential to choose how they will spend their time "either on one's own or in collaboration with others in the third Age". The Fourth Age of dependency and death may occur at any point in the life course, but increasingly follows the newly created Third Age.

Statistics of demographic patterns in New Zealand show similar patterns of ageing and an increase in the median age. In 1995 11.5% of the population was aged 65 years and over. This compared with 11.3% in 1991, 10.0% in 1981 and 8.5% in 1971 respectively (Statistics New Zealand, 1995). As this growth in the elderly population has outpaced the growth of those under 60 years, the New Zealand population has also experienced an accompanying rise in the median age. From 1971 when the median age was 25.6 years, the median age rose to 28.2 in 1981, and 32.2 years in 1994. From the year 2005, when the survivors of the baby-boom generation turn 60, the median age of the population is projected to continue to rise so that by the year 2031 it is expected to be 40.5 years (Statistics New Zealand, 1993 and 1995).

Outdated social structures and opportunities

Leisure and the ways of occupying that time "have ceased to be the monopoly of the elite" (Laslett, 1989:202), so that outdated social structures and the associated social norms now fail to take account of the abilities and capabilities of the growing number of people who may live on average, 20 years beyond the usual retirement age. At present the demands of full-time work which limit the time available to develop new skills and leisure-time activities, coupled with restricted opportunities available in post-work years, consign an ever-increasing proportion of our population to "an extended period ... without a formal structure, an entry into the time of the 'roleless role'" (White Riley, Kahn and Foner, 1994: viii). While ageing people will all continue to have to adjust to changes within their personal and occupational lives, a significant proportion of the older population will for many years be "vigorous, healthy, mentally alert, and still young in outlook" (Pifer and Bronte, 1986: 11). The increase in the number and proportion of fit, healthy and active people in our older population demands the formation of new relationships between work, retirement and retraining. Relationships which cater for these new realities, need to be designed to make the Third Age a meaningful and fulfilling period of life which relieves many older people of the burden of their present loneliness and indolence.

The tendency for social structures not to adapt or change at the same rate as the changes which have been occurring to the lives of individuals, has produced what a group of authors (including the ninety year old Rileys), have termed 'structural lag' (White Riley, Kahn and Foner,1994). In the Preface, the authors argue that while "the concept is simple enough ... the tendency for structural changes to lag behind changes in people's lives has become a serious problem" (ibid: vii). Our attitudes have remained conditioned by social structures which were developed in the nineteenth century when people worked virtually all of their lives and comparatively few lived to an old age. While, throughout the twentieth century an increasing number of individuals have lived to a greater age, the

numerous social structures, roles and norms have lagged behind. There is (now) a mismatch or imbalance between the transformation of the aging process from birth to death and the role opportunities, or places in the social structure, that could foster and reward people at various stages of their lives (White Riley and Riley, 1994:16).

An extending, active lifespan also creates an urgent need to challenge old attitudes of 'how-to-be-elderly individuals'; to develop new models of how to be older, active, participatory and still learning; to raise awareness of the pleasure, companionship as well as the continued mental development and joy that can be gained from participating in learning activities. According to Pifer and Bronte (1986:12), as today's so-called 'elderly' are not at all the same people as the elderly of previous generations, and as society is no longer willing to provide full-time occupation for all of our capable years, these later years offer an opportunity of "new possibilities for being productive". They (ibid: 12) have also pointed out that as the proportion of older people in the population increases, "society will need the contributions its older citizens can make"; the contribution of those who see many years stretching ahead of them and have a wish to stay productive.

Ageing and education

The recognition of needs and entitlements for older adults is problematic. (This is a subject which will be returned to later). Throughout life we are conditioned to "accept the dominant myths and definitions of what constitute the legitimate expectations, roles and activities of older people" (Tobias, 1991: 425). Over the last few years, New Zealanders have witnessed older people, aware of their medical needs and conditioned to believe that they are entitled to assistance in catering for those needs, campaigning for continued access to full medical care. A similar vociferousness has been expressed with regard to economic entitlement. Spokespeople for both issues are representatives of the increasingly strong 'Grey Power' and 'Age Concern' movements. What we also need are more people who can demonstrate theoretically and practically the mismatch between the current transformation of the ageing process and social structures which do not cater for the learning potential of older people.

Education has traditionally been regarded as a preparation for life and work, an activity which is condensed into the early years of life. Educational institutions, practices and beliefs are mostly conditioned by utilitarian, goal directed outcomes designed to serve the economic development of an industrialised nation. Not required to cater for the present lengthy, healthy post-work years, social structures were developed which regarded older people as a group of people who suffered physical or mental incapacitation, problems that were catered for by the welfare and medical professions (Levine and Roberts,1993). When people lived only a few years post-work, their problems were treated with medical responses. Critiques of the ensuing medicalisation of old age have pointed out that today many of the problems experienced by older people are the result of socio-cultural rather than physiological transformations. Through the loss of status and roles, age stratification and age inequalities, older people are more likely to be suffering from boredom and grief than illness (Koopman-Boyden, 1988). A pathology model of ageing, which only looks at frailties and disabilities and seeks only to address presenting problems, prevents us from looking at

the abilities of older people, their potential for development and the contributions that they can make to the community.

Though usually referred to by an all-encompassing term such as 'people over 65 years' 'retired people' or 'older people', the growing number of people who make up any population from 60-90 years cannot be regarded as one homogeneous group. Not only does this group "potentially encompass a greater number of years than any other period of life" (Merriam and Lumsden, 1985 :56) but it is comprised of individuals whose view of the world is the result of their individual differences and varied experiences. Thus the older population is,

more diversified than in any other stage in human development. The elderly may be young and active or dependent and weak, their personalities are motivated by a vast and varied gamut of personal experience and social factors. Many are balked by retirement practices which deny them the right to work; many others are on the threshold of personal liberation. None is likely to grow to the full, except through a social structure which facilitates continuous development through life (Groombridge, 1982:316)

It is a period in life in which there is the potential for considerable shifts in individual needs and interests.

A frequently quoted categorization of presuppositions about education and older people is outlined below. This outline of Moody's analysis of educational programmes for ageing people has been taken from Lowy and O'Connor (1986) and Peterson (1985).

The first of the four stages in Moody's categorization is the stage of *rejection*, associated with a society which values productivity, power, beauty and youth. Older people are perceived as being of little economic value and therefore not worth spending economic resources on. Sensing that they are of little value to society, older people who feel they have little value experience associated attitudes of avoidance, repression, neglect, isolation and expendability.

The second stage, the provision of *social services*, is associated with political liberalism and institutions of the welfare state. The education of older people is based on a belief that the problems of this group of people can be ameliorated by programmes provided by professionals, usually at government expense. In programmes which address the symptoms but not the cause of these problems, education is usually seen as something "to be done for or to older adults in the same way that they were seen as clients with time on their hands who were to be entertained or kept busy with leisure time pursuits" (Lowy and O'Connor, 1986:6). These passive programmes which do little to encourage people to develop their self reliance skills offered little opportunity for intergenerational contact.

The third presupposition of *participation* contends that as older people have skills and abilities which are useful within society, they should be assisted to remain active and involved in the communities in which they live. Education for participation may include consciousness raising, leadership training for advocacy roles, preparing individuals for second careers and by the co-ordination and facilitation of volunteer roles.

The fourth categorization of *self-actualization* assumes that humans possess a continuing ability for psychological or spiritual growth aspects of which are only possible in the later stages of the life cycle. Education at this stage attempts to determine the meaning of experiences and integrate understanding acquired through life.

The Australasian experience

A research project in Australia which investigated the social network needs of Australian elders, referred to in 'Indicators of Successful Ageing and Successful Leisure' (Earle, 1995), 'Sheds and Male Retirement' (Earle, Earle and von Mering, 1993), in reports to the Minister for Senior Citizens in New Zealand and the Ageing and Education Working Party report (1987) all suggest that learning

possibilities in both countries have yet to cater significantly to the participation or self-actualization models.

A somewhat unsatisfactory picture of active citizenship continuing into later years emerged from one Australian research project. Aware that encouraged retirement was occurring at a time when the number of years people were capable of living healthy productive lives was expanding, the researchers sought to ascertain the extent to which older people retained a productive place within the community. In the project, which questioned a cross-section of 500 people aged from 50 to 80 years, the researchers explored factors which influenced successful ageing; variations in lifestyle that influenced the "achievement of successful ageing" and ways in which "people compensate for deficiencies with respect to social support networks and activities" (Earle, 1995:3). Findings indicate that the present education/work/leisure structure of Australian society tend to "isolate older people by restricting their options; facilitated dependency perceptions towards and among older people; and marginalised older people" (ibid:4).

A predictable finding was that middle class people were very likely to retain existing social or professional contacts. Groups identified as having little or no community involvement included people who experienced loneliness when shifting house or locality, a shift which relocated people away from their existing networks of friends. Loneliness and lack of access to social networks was compensated for by talking to pets, listening to talk-back radio and having contact with other people by visiting shopping centres. A gender difference emerged to show that overall, men were less socially competent or confident, were less outgoing and less inclined to try new ventures outside of the house or make new friends. An interesting finding was that many, particularly working class men, pursued "autonomy and creativity through personal involvement in activities in the seclusion of their sheds or gardens ... often at the expense of social involvement and social interaction" (Earle, 1995:9). Not surprisingly, it was discovered that where people had access to human service personnel such as a community development officer or recreation professional there was increased participation in social activities and networking.

Similar experiences and concerns were expressed in a New Zealand report which outlined the findings of 22 government-funded public meetings to which, the Minister of Senior Citizens, in a most patronizing comment, stated "that even in times of economic restraint every attempt must be made to ensure (senior citizens) a decent quality of life" (1991 : 1 / Senior citizens reported that they wanted to remain in contact with, and participate in, the community. They also wanted their contributions to be recognised and valued. Respondents expressed concerns about the isolation, loneliness and loss of status which followed the disruption of social networks associated with enforced retirement.

Perceived needs as inadequate indicators of the value of learning

If a society wishes to obtain a good quality of life for citizens of all ages, to encourage active citizenship and community involvement for people who have completed their major commitment in the workplace then, rather than focussing on the problems of ageing people, it would do well to look at capacities and opportunities. Research findings now tell us that the lessening of abilities such as memory can occur at any stage in life and are more probably due to behavioural and environmental patterns than physiology (Groombridge, 1982). Further, in the "absence of pathological conditions, no significant loss of intellectual functioning needs to be associated with ageing if the individual is cognitively stimulated throughout the lifespan" (Swindell, 1991: 177). Studies have provided evidence that, with continued access to cognitive stimulation, the intelligence scores of older people, including nonagenarians, do not decline. Participating in educational activities that go beyond "patronising hobby courses and leisure-time frill programs for the aged" can be crucial in helping older people cope with their changing circumstances (ibid: 176). From results of her studies on older people, Langer (1989) argued that the lack of mental challenge,

a perceived lack of control over one's life and low self esteem have the potential to promote ill health and early death. Thus, although education for older people may not contribute to greater economic productivity, it is valuable for many other reasons. As detailed by Groombridge (1982:317), education in later years:

- has the capacity to foster the self reliance and independence of the elderly, by enhancing their self-esteem and strengthening their mental as well as physical health, thus reducing the increasing demands made on private and public resources
- can potentially be a major factor in enabling older people to cope with the innumerable practical and psychological problems in a complex, changing, and fractured world
- for and by older people themselves strengthens their actual or potential contribution to society and to the many tasks which pose great problems for younger generations
- create a self-awareness by older people, their self-interpretation and the communication of their experience to other generations fosters balance, perspective and understanding which is valuable in a rapidly changing world of conflict
- is crucial for many older people who strive for expression and learning, and who look forward to the fulfillment of their dreams and aspirations which found only inadequate satisfaction in the earlier part of their lives.

Many older people - for example a fit, active person, an assertive elderly person, some leaders in politics and the judiciary or quiet, healthy, busy individuals who do not fit the pathology model - demonstrate to us that people over 65 years of age can live fulfilling, active lives. These empowered individuals, most of whom have probably been educated very well in their earlier years, are more likely to have developed a capacity to continue self education. This ability to accommodate to the changes of their later years is an indication of the latent potential within a large portion of the older population; people who may have lower educational attainment levels, people who have been conditioned to believe in decremental models of human development and the utilitarian goals of education, and for whom the need for education may not be apparent.

'Felt' and 'expressed' needs, as the basis of most of the educational programmes within the social service model, are "inadequate measures of real needs because they are limited by the perceptions of individuals, their awareness of services available, their own self-awareness and their willingness to depend on services" (Merriam and Lumsden,1985:56). Being unaware of a need is not indicative of the irrelevance of participating in a learning activity. Lack of participation is more likely to be an indication "that older adults are not conscious of the particular values that education may hold for them" (Marcus and Havighurst, 1980:29). Citing Patricia Cross, Moody (1986:209) argues that surveys have found that a person's perceived needs are related to previous experience with education; "people really have no sense of what their need for education might be until they actually experience a concrete alternative program and measure the difference". Lowy and O'Connor (1986:74) tellingly point out that needs imply a lack of something which requires relief or fulfillment. They suggest that it may be more constructive to think in terms of 'wants'. The word 'wants' implies a more positive concept of a desire, a wish to be satisfied which may lead to a more creative assessment in determining content of educational programmes. McClusky's frequently quoted categorization of the learning needs of older people - the need to cope, to express oneself, to contribute, to have an influence and to transcend (for elaboration, see Lowy and O'Connor,1986 and Merriam and Lumsden,1985) - underscores the diversity of interests and motivation this significant section of the population encompasses.

The process of attending to these learning needs draws older adults into activities which provide meaning and satisfaction to their lives. Friedan (1993:589) reports how from a review of a longitudinal study it was found that compared to marriage and health which "account for a trivial degree of people's satisfaction with their lives after retirement", greater satisfaction comes from

doing things individuals "find most meaningful, were most competent at and took the most pleasure in". No longer driven by the developmental needs of the Second Age, "the fountain of age" is replenished by continued growth and developing new paths of meaningful activity.

The economic and developmental rationale for education

Life is growth. When you stop growing you die.

Dr Karl Menninger, quoted in Friedan (1993:593).

Similar to Laslett's notion of older people taking responsibility for improving their own lives, Timmermann (1985) proposed a 'self-sufficiency' model of learning. Critical of the social services' 'activity' model of education which does not help people develop skills to become, or to remain self-sufficient, Timmermann contends that learning which encourages self-help and self-reliance, and is coupled with social responsibility, empowers older people to take care of themselves and others. While full-time employment may be unwanted and undesirable, the greater flexibility associated with part-time and volunteer work is, for many, an appealing alternative. Training or retraining which enables adults to use their skills, talents and experience in either a paid or volunteer capacity, increases the possibilities for older adults to make a real and valuable contribution to society. In addition, continued social interaction and contribution in either a paid or volunteer capacity has the potential to counter the psychological impact associated with redundancy or retirement. Job and income loss, and accompanying psychological, physiological and social factors have the potential to negatively affect individuals. Such effects may be mitigated by the "feelings of self-worth, interest in others and the social life of the community" which part-time employment and volunteer activity brings (Sheppard and Fisher, 1985 :210).

Learning for continued economic participation

Education and re-training offer people over fifty the chance to develop a whole new career, "to acquire career development and job-search techniques, gain new and marketable skills or re-tool old ones and explore new options for earning money" (Timmermann,1985:30). With the pending phasing out of mandatory retirement (in New Zealand in 1999), training for second careers becomes an important option for many people. A survey in America showed that rather than retire, 51 % of employees would prefer to continue with some form of employment. Of those who had retired, 46% would rather have been working, while 53% of those who had retired wished that they had not done so (Sheppard and Fisher, 1985). Therefore, rather than being a period of "gradual withdrawal and decline towards an inevitable cut-off point at sixty-five" the years of our late fifties and early sixties offer the opportunity "of rebirth, with the awakening of new interests and enthusiasm for life and new possibilities for being productive" (Pifer and Bronte, 1986: 12). And, significant in these times of fiscal retrenchment, part-time work gives older people an opportunity to continue earning. By moving into productive roles which supplement their finances, older people are helping themselves and reducing their dependence on public finances.

Learning for volunteer contributions

For those who do not want the commitment of a part-time job, volunteer participation enables older people the opportunity to help "themselves, their peers and others" (Sheppard and Fisher, 1985: 197). As well as positive utilisation of their now abundantly available time and making a valuable contribution to the community, work as a volunteer enables older people to retain their status as participating citizens.

Those older people who already perform important tasks in the community on a volunteer basis demonstrate "not only their ability to learn but also (their capacity) to teach others" (Timmermann,1985:31). Learning for volunteer participation has however, been identified as an educational area of need. It has been pointed out that although many older people already bring their talents, dedication and lifetime of experience to volunteer roles, traditional approaches to recruitment exclude many more. In Britain an advisory committee of Education Resources for Older People identified a need for older people to have access to training courses in which they were prepared for unpaid work in the community. A greater number of older people contribute to the volunteer workforce if they had access to a group training programme. Older people responded positively to the supportive environment of group training to update their knowledge and skills (Cooper, Curtis and Webb,1992).

While the volunteer activities of older people may touch all sectors of society, the expansion of the older population suggests that assistance which helps that sector of society to adapt to physical and psychological changes they encounter will become increasingly valuable. Training for volunteer participation provides learning opportunities which support life changes and supports older people as they learn specific skills to help their peers. Moody (1986:11) provides an example of a nationally known and recognized Californian programme which "combines older-adult education with organized self-help groups" in classes which cover "blood-pressure control, nutrition, stress management, exercise and health education". Rather than being regarded as a 'frill' educational activity, such learning empowers older people to learn how to prevent illness and care for themselves; a positive alternative to isolation, alienation and the millions of dollars spent on medical treatment. Thus any "education which helps older people maintain their health and independence is a direct contribution to society" (Cooper, Curtis and Webb, 1992:3).

The broader effect of learning enables older citizens to move into productive roles - as older people, they are empowered to help recognize and respond to continuing and changing economic and social problems. It is participation which may help to redress the view that only those in full-time work are of value to the community and that older people are a burden on society. This advocacy of participation in turn, has the potential to create "positive and social effects throughout society" (Timmermann, 1986:29).

Cultural fulfilment and another opportunity for continued social contact

Timmermann's (1985:30) last category in the learning for self-sufficiency model, encompasses "learning for becoming a fuller human being; individual learning which has a value in itself' and has the potential "to make the later years the capstone of (people's) lives". Such learning, Laslett (1989: 171) believes, constitutes education which has a value in itself. "All knowledge acquired and skills perfected are sources of satisfaction without reference to their usefulness or to anything else". The growth of organisations such as U3A and Elderhostel (in this country, the New Zealand College for Seniors), are expressions of such interest in learning.

In a project which looked at the establishment and development of U3A in Auckland (Heppner,1993) I found that a continually growing number of Auckland's older population, now freed from the constraints on time and energy of their working years, were developing interests and talents which had been pushed aside or languished unrecognised. From participation in study groups, people I spoke to talked of their joy in extending their knowledge of literature, music, art, geology, ancient, modern or local history; or developing skills as writers or in the use of computers. They also referred to a sharing of information and of the value of using skills and knowledge gained in working years, all of which mitigated the trauma of retirement and associated feelings of uselessness. People referred to the positive influences of U3A; how their involvement with this learning programme encouraged forward thinking and reduced the tendency to look backwards.

There are a number of factors of the Auckland U3A which have facilitated the growth of this learning exchange and make it an attractive model. Being a community based organisation increases its accessibility. It also reduces the need for older people to travel long distances and encounter associated car-parking problems. Secondly, participants spoke of the enormous satisfaction gained from being active in the process of learning and in the exchange of knowledge. The third, and not inconsequential consideration, is that as there are no expensive tutors or facilities to pay for, participation is inexpensive.

From a wish to provide a New Zealand link for Elderhostel in America, the New Zealand College for Seniors has grown to involve eight universities and polytechnics. Established in response to the growing recognition that "in order to stay healthy older people need exercise their minds as well as their bodies ... the College now advertises more than 25 domestic courses and promotes tours to other countries" (Brochure,1996:3). In a quote from an American catalogue Friedan (1993:589) noted:

Elderhostel is an education adventure for older adults looking for something different. Later years should be a time of new beginnings, opportunities and challenges. It offers people a way of expanding horizons ... all you need is an adventuresome spirit and a yearning to be challenged by new ideas and experiences.

Programs are developed around a specific theme or topic of academic expertise, frequently involving field trips (Swindell, 1991). The rapid growth of the Elderhostel movement in America is seen as evidence that learning within an atmosphere which is stimulating, provides congenial company and varied activities "is desired and appreciated by older people" (Peterson, 1985:14). The rapid acceptance by American tertiary institutions and professors who teach the programmes in their holidays, reflects a willingness to teach people who are enthusiastic and rich in life experience; a contrast to the single minded, career oriented attitude of younger students (Moody, 1986:210).

U3A and Elderhostel are both learning programmes which have the vital component of socialisation incorporated within their structure. It is social contact which replaces the social network of the workplace and which creates an opportunity to share occasions of joy, and to provide support in times of loneliness or sadness. The need for such human interaction is argued by Laslett (1984:39), who stated that there was consistent evidence that the stimulus effect which contact with others gives elderly persons, defers dependency. "Stimulus by education, Laslett contended was far cheaper than maintenance inside or outside institutions".

Drawing heavily for leadership on those sectors of society from which Laslett (1985) argued ideas and direction for education for older people should emerge, U3A and Elderhostel are both learning organisations which predominantly are of interest to those of the middle class and people who in their earlier years achieved higher levels of educational attainment. While they may be criticised for appealing to a small sector of the older population, the existence and viability of such initiatives show us that the participants "derive benefit from the various programs" (Swindell,1991:183). Whether the benefits of such programs are intellectual, social or of another kind, Swindell (ibid) believes is not important. What the programmes do, is cater for a demonstrated need. The higher levels of formal education of each cohort of older people in Western societies is likely to ensure that a growing number of people will have an opportunity to have at least some of their learning needs met in programmes such as U3A or Elderhostel.

As it has been found that socio-economic status has an influence on participation in continued learning, attention must be paid to educational activities for those of the lower socio-economic spectrum, people whom it may be imagined are more likely to be subjected to the social-services model of education. If education is to benefit all individuals and the wider society, then special efforts must be made to determine what would interest that still large sector of the older population who were indifferent or opposed to formal education in earlier years (Swindell, 1991).

While in certain circumstances a social services model of education may be appropriate, to limit thinking to that framework runs the risk that older people are age-segregated and welfarised. In programmes which imply diminution and patronage, the older people may be regarded as not being of full human stature, "not quite whole people, not people like us" (Fennell, Phillipson and Evers, 1991:6). To move beyond activities that focus on need (and do nothing to address the processes which create the need), education programmes must focus less on the problems of older people and develop a range of participatory programmes which meet the diverse physical, social, cultural, intellectual and psychological needs of the older population. In New Zealand, Maori and Pacific Island people also must be encouraged to identify those educational activities that would positively affect the health and well-being of those communities.

One British discussion paper originating from the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) (1993), pointed to a potential area for development. In relation to a subject of general and widespread concern today, NIACE made proposals for greater adult involvement in matters of environmental concern. It is an area of growing importance, and one which is closely associated with recreational activities of many New Zealanders. It was NIACE's belief that as awareness of environmental issues was weaker among older adults, there is considerable potential for programmes which could change these attitudes. Associated with such education is the opportunity for older people to participate in programmes and activities which help us to redress the negative effects of past practices and perhaps to participate in research programmes which increase our understanding of environmental issues.

The extent to which an environmental or any other learning programme caters for the educational possibilities of older New Zealanders, is unknown. The latest research on participation of older New Zealanders in educational activities that I have located, is a paper written in 1986 by David Battersby - an educator now writing on educational gerontology from outside of New Zealand. The survey (Battersby, 1986) was undertaken because little was known about courses or activities in which older adults participated. Thus, we do not know the extent to which the social, cultural, knowledge or re-training needs of older adults are being catered for. Similarly there is little advocacy for learning which caters for learning opportunities which have the potential to minimise isolation, increase fulfilment and provide some purpose for the increasing number of years we live beyond primary employment.

Conclusion

Demographic changes of the twentieth century demand that we modify outdated social structures which now limit the economic and developmental opportunities of older people. For our growing, ageing population, there is a pressing need to modify outdated social institutions which create dependency, isolation and segregation. In a society which values all sectors of the population, older people should not be able to report to the Minister of Senior Citizens that they felt they were "treated with a lack of respect and understanding; that their needs were often overlooked; that they felt they were a burden on society, dependent, finished and useless" (Report to the Minister for Senior Citizens, 1991:22). The challenge associated with the emergence of the Third Age is to ensure that all of those who experience the privilege of growing older, have the opportunity for meaningful participation, intellectual stimulation and social integration. Research findings which now tell us that a sound body is associated with a sound mind and that cognitive involvement defers dependency, would indicate that we need "a serious rethink on how best to overcome the view, so rampant in society today, that old age is a defeated stage of life" (Swindell, 1991: 178).

Participation in education programmes has the ability to assist older people to achieve the five elements of involvement, satisfaction, autonomy, integration and creativity, identified by Earle (1995) as being necessary for successful ageing. For those no longer tied to the demands and commitments of the Second Age, it is a time to seek new endeavours which allow older people to

remain involved and participating members of society. A constructive view of later years - one based on equality of educational opportunity - requires that as older people are individuals with the capacity for personal development and the need for self-fulfillment, positive learning opportunities which cater for these needs are made available. What is necessary is an expansion of learning programmes which increase people's ability to take part in new interests, diminish the effects of disengagement from the full-time work-force and help in re-engagement (Marcus and Havighurst, 1980). The provision of training and re-training opportunities for people over fifty years of age recognises that although people may no longer wish to contribute at the same level they have in earlier years, people retain a capacity to contribute and serve. Furthermore, continued access to learning may enable individuals to resolve difficulties in their lives and to gain greater power over their lives. This has the added ability of facilitating continued citizenship and group empowerment.

For a "society that seeks to continue to grow and improve the quality of life for citizens of all ages" (Lowy and O'Connor, 1986: xix), educational opportunity for all is a necessity. "To deny self development is to risk hopelessness, irresponsibility and nihilism" (Moody, 1985: 42).

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