

Older adult learning in Aotearoa New Zealand: Structure, trends and issues

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Task

- Discuss with fellow participant: three learning characteristics of older adults in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Feedback and further discuss.

Characteristics of Aotearoa New Zealand

- Small population (4-5 million) - size of Britain
- Colonised by Britain (bread basket for UK)
- Ethnically diverse: majority Pakeha (European); 15% Maori; 12% Pasifika; 5% Asian
- Auckland as magnet (1 / 3rd of population), especially for new immigrants
- Founded on egalitarian principles (equality of opportunity)
- Political stability (MMP voting system from late 90s)
- Strong tradition of social justice (e.g. Women's suffrage in 1893)
- Primacy of the Treaty of Waitangi (signed in 1840). Emergent principles of protection, partnership & participation.
- Current drive towards bi-culturalism, alongside multi-culturalism

Older adults in Aotearoa New Zealand

- 1 in 7 over 60 years
- Gaps between rich and poor increasing
- Great diversity of lifestyles
- Retirement voluntary for some; compulsory for others
- Considerable volunteering
- Most education participation is non-formal
- Both expressive and instrumental motives for learning

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

Informal learning across the generations



The third age of learning

■ Based on Peter Laslett's *A fresh map of life* (1989)

First age: early socialisation; dependency on others

Second age: adult maturity with multiple responsibilities
(family, work, social relationships)

Third age: fuller autonomy of individual; potential for
creativity

Fourth age: one of dependency

Critique: romanticised; overly-gendered and class
based

Third age learning in a social context

- Demographic changes
- Historical time & changing beliefs
- Advances in technology and communication
- Globalisation but also regionalism (iwi)
- Moral panic over 'the elderly' (dependence on the state)
- Ageism and discrimination
- Bids for self-determination (tino rangtiratanga)
- Advent of neo-liberalism (e.g. heightened accountability; contestability)

In your view, which of these factors has most highly influenced third age learning?

Adult education: major areas of activity

- Adult basic education
- Second chance education (e.g. New Start for mature-aged students)
- Personal development education
- Cultural education (e.g. for refugees on citizenship)
- Education for group facilitation & community development

(Tobias, 1996, in Benseman, Findsen & Scott, *The Fourth Sector*)

Types of adult education agencies for older people

- Self-help agencies: controlled by older adults themselves (e.g. U3A; Seniornet)
- Agencies that develop specific programmes for older adults (e.g. Age Concern)
- Mainstream providers developing programmes of potential appeal to older adults (e.g. CCEs in universities)
- Agencies that ignore older people (invisibility)

Note: Plenty of non-educational agencies engaged in education: Age Concern; City Councils; Grey Power.

Participation patterns: older adult education

- Varying definitions of “learning” and “education”. What counts as participation?
- In UK, plateau or decreasing participation of seniors in adult **education** (NIACE)
- Scant presence of older adults participation in higher education (Exception of Open University)
- West of Scotland research project indicates keenness to participate if policy context is favourable (Findsen & McCullough, 2008)
- Overall patterns echo of earlier generations: issues of prior education, social class, gender, ethnicity
- In **learning**, diverse and plentiful participation (e.g voluntary organisations)

ACE Priorities in general

These have been the priority targets from government for ACE (e.g. in school-based community education):

- Targeting learners whose initial learning was not successful
- Strengthening social cohesion
- Raising foundation skills
- Encouraging lifelong learning
- Strengthening communities by meeting identified community learning needs

Question: A good fit for older adult education?

TEC priorities for ACE in universities

- Providing specialised & research-informed higher level learning that contributes to the creation of an advanced & rapidly evolving knowledge economy
- Contributing to the knowledge society through the preservation, dissemination & application of university research
- Promoting the development of critical & reflective thinking, and active & informed citizenship, nationally and globally
- Facilitating pathways into and through university education
- Building capacity in the wider ACE sector

Question: So, what's happening in older adult education in universities? (Case study of the University of Waikato)

Sixty Plus in Hamilton



Map of national level organisations: adult education as a primary goal

- Literacy Aotearoa
- Rural Education Activities Programmes (REAPs)
- Community education in (high) schools
- NZ Workers' Educational Association
- Parents' Centres NZ Inc.
- Te Ataarangi (Maori oral language)
- Country Women's Institutes

Question: Which of these attract older adults?

Map of national level organisations: adult education as a subsidiary goal

- Community houses
- YMCA/YWCA
- Maori Women's Welfare League
- Relationship Counselling (formerly Marriage Guidance)
- Playcentre
- National Collective of Women's Refuges
- Combined Trade Unions

Question: how do these connect with older adult education?

What does older education look like?

- Philosophical diversity (individual vs collective)
- More on coping skills and individual development
- Less often a vocational emphasis (stereotype of expressive forms of learning)
- Plentiful in non-formal learning contexts (e.g. men's sheds)
- Little related to developing critical capacities among older adults

Observations about ACE in Aotearoa New Zealand

- Perceived as a learner-centred needs-based enterprise
- Struggling to deal with bi-culturalism
- Commitment still to voluntarism
- Commonly aligned to social movements (e.g. Maori self-determination)
- Ambivalent relationship with vocational education
- Becoming more credentialised?
- Has become more mainstreamed (e.g. Part of Tertiary Education Commission)
- Funding: inadequate; subject to political favour?

Question: Which of these most apply to older adults learning/education?

Suggested reading

- Boulton-Lewis, G. & Tam, M. (eds) (2012). *Active ageing, active learning: Issues and challenges*. Dordrecht: Springer.
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