

Elderly education

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The fact of an ageing Maltese population should encourage the government to spend more resources on Elderly Education in the light of lifelong learning. Keeping in mind that the 'Third Generation' is increasing, society should stop relying mainly on the younger generations as it used to do in the past.

Elderly education should be given more importance by our society, and effort should be done in order to motivate elders of the community to enrich their lives through opportunities to learn and make new friends.

Thereby we will enhance their ability to participate in, and contribute to society. Accordingly society should provide appropriate learning opportunities, which are accessible by the elderly taking into consideration the following aspects: time, location, fees and most importantly teaching methodology. Also, educators interested in elderly education should ensure they take into consideration the cultural aspects and life experiences of these people. Succeeding to achieve the above, elderly people will be encouraged to actively participate in all spheres of social and economic life.

A common question people tend to ask is: What are old people still capable of doing and learning? Gerontologists confirm that biological age is not a determining factor when it comes to old people active participation in life. In fact, gerontologists state that factors like education, social and biographical background tend to influence elderly people participation in life. Whether an elderly person aspires to learn depends on the previous mentioned factors. (Seppmann, 1999) Definitely, the right teaching methodology should be applied and this leads us to collaborative learning.

Collaborative Learning In the following four paragraphs we are going to discuss one of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of adult/elderly education. Elderly education should be collaborative or participatory in nature (Brookfield, 1986). Collaborative learning has its origins in a number of movements and philosophies, most of which has influenced progressive adult education. It requires that both facilitators and learners become active participants in the educational process.

'The hierarchy between facilitators and learners should be eliminated' (Whipple, 1987), a sense of community should be emphasized, and knowledge should be created rather than transferred. Furthermore, knowledge is considered to be located in the community rather than in the individual (Whipple, 1987). Collaborative learning requires that there is formal / structured learning rather than autonomous learning, thus it becomes the responsibility of the instructor to create a climate in which collaborative learning can occur.

Three important elements to promote collaborative learning in structured settings are the environment, the role of the facilitator and the role of the learner. The environment should be unthreatening and democratic, discouraging individual competition and encouraging respect for the ideas and opinions of others. The teachers should become facilitators and hence they must develop methods of sharing their knowledge without diminishing the attempts of learners to acquire their own.

The learners have also a significant role too. In collaborative learning, the learner must accept certain changes such as becoming from listener,

observer and note taker to problem solver, contributor and discussant, from competition to collaboration with peers, and from viewing teachers and textbooks as the only resource to viewing peers, oneself and the thinking of the group as additional resources. Keeping in mind all the above, we will now examine what the current Maltese educational sector offers for elderly people.