Later life learning and the link with lifelong learning

Active ageing
Definitions

- *Life-long learning in old age* can be defined as personally and socially motivated experience-based learning. It includes every targeted learning activity that serves to continuously improve skills, abilities and competencies.

- *Education in later life* can be defined as acquiring knowledge and new skills in a conscious and targeted manner. Education is a broader term than learning as it implies the development of reflexive practices within learning relationships.
Three Models of Lifelong Learning  
*(Hans Schuetze 2007)*

1. The human capital model where lifelong learning refers to continuous work-related training and skill development. (Employability)

2. Lifelong learning as a system of learning for citizens of democratic countries that includes opportunities for embracing modern technologies. (Knowledge society)

3. The emancipatory/social justice model. LL is available for everyone in the interests of equality in a democratic society. (Active citizenship)
Starting points: Changes of age(ing)

- Demographic changes
- New scientific findings
- Higher educational levels
- Disappearance of the „three boxes“
50+ Adults Represent Three Distinct Generations
Low educational status of older age cohorts: Average years of schooling, by age group

Persons with low educational attainment, by age group, %, 65 years or over

ISCED levels 0-2: pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education.
Deficit models of ageing

- „When the age is in, the wit is out“ (William Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing)
- In the normal course of ageing, people gradually withdraw from social roles as a natural response to lessened capabilities and diminished interest (e.g. Disengagement Theory)
You can’t teach an old dog new tricks

Theoretical age gradients

e.g. P.B. Baltes et al. 1999; J.L. Horn 1982
At what age is there a reliably detectable age decrement in ability?

The Seattle Longitudinal Study

25-67 years

25-88 years
Age dynamics in scientific creativity: Nobel laureates 1875-2008

Findings show fundamental shifts in the life cycle of research productivity.

Jones BJ, Weinberg BA (2011)
From age-differentiated to age-integrated structures ("Disappearance of the three boxes")

M. Riley & J. Riley, 1994, p.26
Effects of learning in later life

- Maintaining and strengthening one’s health; preparing for a restricted mobility;
- Recognising and imparting one’s own competences in volunteering and in intergenerational dialogues;
- Learning to operate new media (research, networking).
Why should the elderly learn?

Positive effects of learning on Health

- intellectual abilities by minimizing memory losses or even reversing them (Kotulak 1997)
- likeliness to seek medical assistance sooner and more effectively prevent and treat ailments by self-diagnosis
- recovery from diseases
- fitness and exercising
- satisfaction with health (Khaw 1997)
Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) 2005

- Individuals with low education are 70% more likely to be physically inactive, and 50% more likely to be obese than individuals with a higher education.

- Cognitive ability is strongly associated with education – the higher educated are more cognitively skilled than the lower educated.

- All countries reveal a positive relation between well-being and education level.

- The level of education is inversely associated with the reported medication. In the category primary school 27% of individuals indicated that they take none of the listed drugs. Among individuals with tertiary education 46% do not take drugs.
Why should the elderly learn?

Positive effects of learning on **Social Inclusion:**

- participation in social & political activities
- counteract risk of poverty
- improve equal opportunities
- challenge negative images of ageing (Withnall 2010)

Educational participation is not only enriching for people who attend courses or attain knowledge for themselves, but it also has “**spread effects**”, impacting the entire social context.
Why should the elderly learn?

Positive effects of learning on **Computer Literacy:**

- seniors are not technology adverse; however, they want technology that supports activities that they are already familiar with.
- they were willing to learn new technology as long as it has great usability.
- Social supports ist important for learning computer skills and develop lasting interest in computing technologies (Ng Ch-hung 2007).
Can Adult Education Delay Retirement from the Labour Market?

- Adult education has no effect on the timing of retirement from the labour force.
- Higher education has a positive effect.

Outlook:  
Society benefits substantially

Longlife education affect a society by generation skills which

- are relevant for the labour market (produce earnings)
- improve democracy by active participation in society
- „spillover“ on colleagues, family & friends
- delevop individuals (self-esteem, confidence)
- improve health
- reduces educational inequality, esp. If directed to low skilled
Concluding comments

- Learning as a lifelong activity – dipping in and out
- Reducing the association with work
- Learning as a form of social linking
- The distinctive role of learning – self-reflective sensibility for the unknown
- Learning is not only directed towards better functioning in daily life or self control but also towards a new culture of aging which includes social participation in civil society
Adult learner?
Future adult learners?
Marcel Proust (1871-1922)

„The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.“

Thank you for your attention!