Eris DHAMO GRECA

ALBANIAN AGEING, UNDER THE EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

1. Introduction

*A*s in other parts of the world, the number of the elderly in Albania is rising. Nowadays, the percentage of the elderly in Europe is approximately 20%, while in Albania around 9% of the population is over 65 years old, a figure that is expected to rise every year. Not only the growth of the longevity and the decrease of births but even the increase of the awareness for a more dignified life, in accordance with the universal rights, influence the way that professionals of all fields reorient their studies in order to support and assist this target group.

We live with daily development and advances, with a high number of inventions and evolving that are not only scientific but are being applied daily on the premises we live and work. Home appliances, for an example, are one of these digital technology developments that we have the opportunity to touch in our daily lives. Because of the history of development of Albania and for the

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fact of introducing and applying new technologies recently, current seniors found themselves excluded from recognition and use of these daily innovations (including computers, smart phones, multifunctional TV's or the internet and understanding and perception in social networks). Discussions regarding the education experience with seniors are somewhat challenging, if we take under consideration the history of education in Albania or if we take under consideration the real changes to the educational system only during the last few years.

Annette Niederfranke (State Secretary, Ministry of Work and Social Affair, Germany) on her work suggests that the integration of elderly men and women in their position in society it is a special importance for the European Union, knowing that these countries, like our country, are still unprepared for the support of learning process throughout life, which should include education of the elderly. Strengthening and recent efforts coming from European Union suggest solidarity, and this solidarity shouldn't only come from the promotion of learning for each other of youth and elderly, but particularly in the transfer of experience and knowledge of the elderly among the elderly in other countries. This not will only include them directly in an education program, but it will be even more valuable for beneficiaries which will have the opportunity to learn from the best practices.

The third age as well as the fourth one is now a special period in the life of an individual. If we look at the characteristics of this age group, the first thing we would notice is the significant characteristics within the same generation. By imagining that part of these seniors are the ones newly retired and those that are living in their last days, certainly their potential of learning and doing things will be different. Grigory Klyucharev (Chair of Sociology Institute in Science Academy, Russia) expresses that the more problem a person undergoes throughout their lifetime, they present more learning opportunities. A characteristic about seniors is that they learn with different speed and methods from the youth. Mr. Klyucharev also expresses his opinion that "it is necessary to choose an environment where the seniors would feel comfortable during their learning process and the more comfort the environment will be, the education process will be more effective as well. As a rule, the work they do during their career comes to an end when they retire.

Tatiana Konolygina (Chef of Regional Board Orlov, Russia) refers that in Russia there are over 150 organizations open for senior education. For example: University of Golden Age is running in the Orlov region with a network of branches in villages. In Kursk a similar institution has also opened a branch network. The most wanted programs are those of preserving good

health and memory treatment.

Different social statuses (retired, widowed, etc.) of the elderly dictates the need of adoption with a new reality; which nowadays is an additional education; this is the reason why education goals of the third age are characterized by new needs associated with change. The main functions of education for the elderly are those concerning the problems with poverty and loneliness, as two main problems of this age group, structures of time available, attaining cross-generational dialogue, involvement in social engagement, education on healthy living and a range of directions that they must face in their current life. Currently there are no organizations in Albania that have a main role in educating the older generation with strategic programs and visions; certainly there are a number of institutions (public and private) which have in focus the support of this target group, but they are not recognized for offering education.

According to the recommendations that come from the European Union and specifically from the sections dealing with education and health, the design of a comprehensive social and political process involves different fields of actions such as building healthy public policy; developing personal skills; creating supportive environments; strengthening community actions; reorienting health services, and so on.

Adult Learning Theories

A part of being an effective teacher involves the better understanding of the way how adults study better (Lieb, 1991). Andragogy (the way adults learn) it's a theory that carries a number of assumptions about how adults learn. Andragogy emphasizes the value of the process of thinking. It uses methods of learning that are based on problem and interaction with them rather than didactic, and also highlights more equality between the educator and the person that wants to learn. Andragogy as a study of the way that adults learn has its origins in Europe in 1950. It was developed and then pioneered as a model theory of the way how to teach adults how to study by Malcolm Knowles, an American physician and theorist of adult teaching, in the 1970s, setting andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn""(Zmeyov 1998; Fidishun 2000).

What are the "principles of andragogy"?

Adults are internally motivated and are self-directed

Adults resist learning when they feel others are imposing information, ideas or actions on them (Fidishun, 2000). Our role is to facilitate their movement toward learning in a more responsible and self-directed way and also to encourage their internal motivation to learn.

They cannot be considered students, they have a whole experience of learning in a structured way (at least they have completed compulsory education) and have a lifetime of experience.

All the Gerontology experts that are interested in the education of adults have to:

- Build programs of learning that move from being more structured and with more responsibilities, to programs less structured and with fewer responsibilities, with an appropriate pace that is challenging and is not overloaded.
- Develop relationships with the students to choose the right approach to encourage asking questions and exploring concepts.
- Show interest in their thoughts and opinions. And, listen carefully to each question.
- Direct them to the right investigation before providing them with more facts.
- Provide regular, constructive and specific feedback (both positive and negative).
- Review the goals and accept their conclusions
- Encourage them to use resources such as libraries, magazines, the Internet and resources from other departments.
- Project or create tasks that reflect their interests which they must meet during the course. For example: to provide a service to the topic of choice, to present a case study based on one of the clients, to design an educational handout for the client; or to lead an activity of the session for a group of clients.
- Embrace their favorite style of learning. There are questionnaires that help them to identify their preferred style of learning, which they may discuss with their educator.

Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences

Adults want to be given the opportunity to use their existing foundation of knowledge and experience gained from life experiences and applies it to new experiences of learning.

All the Gerontology experts that are interested in the education of adults have to:

- Discover more about their students interests and past experiences (personal, work-related and studies).
- Help them to highlight those experiences that show problem solving, and also reflection and application of clinical reasoning processes.
- Facilitate reflective learning opportunities which Fidishun (2000) suggests that it may also help to consider existing prejudices and customs based on life experiences and" to lead them to a new understanding of the information presented."

Adults are goal – oriented

Adult students get ready to learn, when "they experience a need to learn in order to deal more satisfactorily with real life tasks or problems" (Knowles, 1980 p 44, cited as in Fidishun, 2000). Our role is to facilitate their readiness for learning and increase student awareness of the need for knowledge or skill.

All the Gerontology experts that are interested in the education of adults have to:

Provide meaningful learning experiences that are clearly associated with the person itself, with field goals and clients, as well as assessing and future life goals.

- Provide real case studies (through reporting and contact with the client) as a base from which to learn the theory, Occupational Therapy Methods, and functional implications of issues of importance.
- Ask questions that prompt reflection, investigation and research.

Adults are oriented by importance

Adults want to know the significance of what they are learning in connection with what they want to achieve. One way suggested by specialists, in order to help first testing the value of their practical experiences, is:

- Require reflections on what they expected to learn prior to their experience. What they learned after the experience and how they can apply what they have learned in the future, or how it can help them to meet their goals of learning.
- Offer some choices regarding the field project by providing two or more options, so learning can be more likely to reflect the interests of the student.

"Students really benefit from the so called- regular teaching sessions,

time spent going through various lectures, presented on certain topics-such as recognition or perception. They understand more about a subject when it is directly related to the work context. The way how it connects theory to practice, is invaluable". - S. Bartholomai, OT clinical educator, Ipswich Hospital (personal communication, May, 31st, 2007).

Adults are practical

Through practical experiences in the field, interacting with customers and real situations of their life, students move from the model of classes and textbooks towards those oriented lessons to solve problems, where they can firstly recognize that what they are learning is valid and applicable in the context of life and work. Clinical educators can:

- Clearly explain their clinical reasoning when making choices in connection with assessments and interventions and also when prioritizing the clinical needs of the client.
- Be clear about what the student is learning, as it is useful and applicable for the work and the group of clients that the clinical educators are working on.
- Promote active participation by allowing students to try instead of observing. Provide plenty of opportunities to practice assessment, interviewing and intervention processes with enough repetition in order to promote the development of confidence, skills and competencies.

Adults want to be respected

Respect can be demonstrated to the students by:
- Showing interest.
- Recognizing the richness of experiences that the student brings to the discussion.
- Considering and by associating with him/her as a colleague who is equal in life experiences.
- Encouraging the expression of ideas, reasoning and response in every possible case.

It is important to keep in mind that the student is still developing his clinical occupational therapy skills. However, with the theory and principles of adult learning in mind, the learning approach can be facilitated by moving from novice (beginners) to the more sophisticated methods of learning. This facilitates greater integration of information, knowledge and experience; the student learns how and when to learn, and evaluates to distinguish what is

important while working, so this should be appreciated by the moderator of the sessions; he must establish the priorities of the client's needs, goals and unsolved cases; when rules can be set aside and how/when access to occupational therapy practice and professional communication comes from rigorous modeling of behavior in a unique expression of therapy and professionalism (Fidishun, 2000; TEIP, 1991).

Ways of adult learning are different from those of children, to speak here for seniors, even them like adults are opted by some features which are:

1. Self-concept: with the maturing of a person his concepts move from being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.
2. Experience: As a person matures he or she accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
3. Willingness to learn. With maturation their willingness to learn becomes increasingly oriented to their developmental tasks of his social roles.
4. Orientation to learning. With maturation, prospects change from the postponement of the application of knowledge to immediate demand and in accordance with its orientation towards learning moves from focusing on a subject to the centering of a problem.
5. Motivation to learn: With the maturation of a person, the motivation to learn is internal (Knowles 1984:12).

All these cited above, are claimed to be the differences between andragogy and pedagogy and have been the subject of a considerable debate. Andragogy as a notion has been known since the 1830s, but the person that made it popular to English language readers was Malcolm Knowles. Andragogy can be perceived as an idea that gained reputation at a particular moment - and its reputation most likely says more about the ideological times, than it does about learning methods. Jarvis (1977a), Davenport (1993) and Tennant (1996) argued that there is no base in the adult learners' characteristics upon which to create a complete theory. It's not sure if Knowles has delivered us with a theory or a set of guiding principles for practice; As Tennant says there seems to be a failure to set and question these ideas within a logical and reliable theoretical structure; while Jarvis comments, throughout his writings there is a tendency to list characteristics of a phenomenon without questioning the literature of the arena (e.g. as in the case of andragogy) or seeing through the lens of a comprehensible theoretical structure. The conceptualizing of the way we learn on our own is a progressive method

and the way the adult learns isn't a particular set of phases; this means that there are life situations that influence reflection and exploration as main learning components.

2. The Goals of the Study

The study began from the primary objective of understanding the phenomenon of education of the elderly. We had to understand if this is a routine activity and if they are responsible and aware about the necessity or the challenge of a lifetime education. Initial assessment began from the current theories and literature on the educational process and the valuation of these theories on the reality of the elderly people of Tirana. A probably premeditated purpose will be that of the recognition and promotion of certain beneficial activities, which come from the best practices, proposed by the education and training institutes for the elderly. This goal in itself precedes the engagements that society and central and local government should undertake to promote education of the elderly, not only for a healthy lifestyle for them, but primarily to reduce costs to families and society in the assistance and the attention that they should provide towards the elderly.

3. Methodology

The methodology that will be used in this study is the qualitative method. The main goal is to recognize the depth of perception of education and not only that but also the need for deep scientific knowledge of the involvement of the elderly in this process. The appropriate method had to be selected based on this statement. This was accomplished by focusing on two main-lines; firstly in the study of literature from the most popular countries in this field and secondly on focus groups with the elderly to elaborate the issue of education, the evaluation of their perceptions and opportunities for education, but also the identification of areas of interest, where they identify more detailed information in order to be trained, to assist the achievement of a more comprehensive search, the triangulation of the research methods will be accomplished through development of short questionnaires with closed questions.

The Objectives of the Study
The following objectives have also served as issues for elaboration, or research questions. The modules of discussion for the focus groups were established on the basis of these objectives.

- Identification of the information on the education of the elderly.
- The perception of the elderly about the importance and the help that education can provide in dealing with various issues.
- Recognition and evaluation of the current educational commitments of the elderly.
- Identification of gender differences, educational or regional, in this new challenge.
- Identifying the attitude of older people on the process of education throughout life.

Sampling and data collection

Seniors over 60 years for women and 65 years for men, who live in Tirana, without default of origin or education were part of this study. Two focus groups were created. The first focus group was composed of 7 elderly people and the second focus group was composed of 5 elderly people. A short questionnaire was conducted, apart from the focus groups, based on the issues and perceptions on the education of the elderly of the focus groups.

General data for the sampling of the focus groups: The first focus group was conducted with elderly people who knew each other and often socialized together, and this certainly carries its own errors; but given the short time available and the elaboration of a new field; but also based on the characteristics of age, the data gathered from them were valuable and challenging for the work of the moderator. The second group was randomly selected, but had its limitations in terms of participation, where in some cases the necessary quorum was not realized (this was foreseen by the researcher because the months March-April, when the meetings were conducted are known for carrying viruses).

Another instrument used was the survey of 36 elderly, of which approximately 40% were male and 60% female. Initial selection of a female majority refers to the demographic characteristics of this age group that for a long time and throughout Europe has been the highest percentage of gender.

4. Analysis of the data

Today's seniors are aware of the many variables of the economic and social development of our societies and of the challenges that accompany these changes. They live in a world of rapid daily changes and for many of them, mainly the technological changes, are hard to understand.

Why is the education of the elderly important? This is a question that implies at least two contexts for the word "important". Education can be

socially important, which means that is important for the society as a whole, but it may be personally important as well - important for the student themselves (the elderly). The social importance of education is obvious in order to prepare an individual to live in the society, giving them the knowledge of the world around them, and (in some cases) with respect to their own self.

This then brings the question of what role the elderly play in society. Assuming the definition of the word "elderly", including the qualities of being retired, or at least not being materially productive, an elderly person contributes to society as a voter and as a consumer. In order to ensure that seniors remain capable, at least in these respects, they should be able to make good decisions about to whom and for what to vote and what should they do to protect their health and their finances. In the context of personal importance, this is a common trait of human nature, to require a sense of the personal progress and improvement, in order to maintain happiness and satisfaction with their life. Then, it can be beneficial, to make sure the elderly, who do not contribute significantly for the society in a productive sense, to meet this demand through education.

Seniors fail to learn foreign languages (new technological devices are not programmed in Albanian), they cannot learn about trends and changes in the economy, laws and politics but they have an essential need to learn to live with maximum comforts for a higher quality of life. The effects of education will be higher if they are realized in the language and the perceptions of the elderly and why not be organized and directed by the elderly, it is necessary to develop an appropriate concept.

Services for the elderly are not organized in a special institute for them, with social workers and other professionals specializing in the field of Gerontology. We have to pay attention to the development of educational methods to help seniors apply their energy in solving problems.

Although the elderly of Tirana don't have around them the friends that they grew up with, they use their experience and knowledge to limit their loneliness, and use these as valuable for everyday life. In fact there are no current studies, but results from the focus groups show that they have a very good memory, but also fear that they're not able to learn.

We often hear the elderly complaining about how young people function. The expression "in our time" is increasingly present whenever they wish to share an opinion or their own attitude. If you let them know about the new digital technologies that are available they will give you a series of reasons why they're not familiar and why they don't use them. It is characteristic that in households, in which they live with 1 or maybe 2 generations, the existence of these devices is evident and they are precisely the first ones

to ask family members to share their experiences in using these devices.

Regarding the use of Internet, there are elderly people who have learned to open and close the computer in a mechanical way and use one or two channels of communication with their children living outside Albania, while others, although in support of the use of these modern tools and methods of communication, consider the use of the Internet to be their biggest challenge in learning.

Before talking about new technologies and the use of internet, several findings need to be presented as they highlight the obstacles for familiarization with these tools for the elderly, including:

- They had no toy or modernized device in their childhood.
- Their only way of communication was direct contacts.
- Many of them have learned to read and write and have undergone formal education only for a few years.
- They have seen a computer only in the last years, and have never learned how to use it.

The areas of interest to men and women turned out to be different, this is also due to the strengthening of gender differences that this age displays naturally. Women were less attracted to formal education, and didn't show the same enthusiasm as men in terms of the organization and establishing of a program where they could learn everything that could have an impact on daily living.

In contrast to the studies carried out and from what the literature refers to, the elders in Tirana (but this might be the same for all of Albania), don't need a special field or subject of interest; as it might be the nature, the environment, or their conservative nature. This probably generates from the fact that they are still unaware about the possibilities of their organization and education.

If we start talking about computers or the internet, the first thing that we will see is nervousness, because they don't want to talk about this subject, because they don't understand it, and they will immediately start to explain and justify why they consider it a worthless tool.

They don't even prefer to use the computer for playing games, or reading the news (even in places where computers and the internet are available to the elderly, they don't prefer to use them).

They say, for example: "we don't understand these new inventions", "we do not have the patience to learn how to use them, "they are too complicated", "everything breaks if you press the wrong button", "we are too old to learn this things", "we are afraid that we might break them", "I struggled a lot

until I learned it and I have too many notes".

Currently education funds are one of the country's budget items that incur annual growth and in fact this is an action that must be congratulated, since education today is a reduced cost of tomorrow's society; is worth more in human and social capital of the society. Although it is right that considerable part of public funds is spent on these funds for education, governments should consider how other types of learning must be met, and ask if 1% of the public education budget is an appropriate action to address the learning needs for 9% of the population.

Conclusions

First of all I want to reemphasize the increase of the movements to educate older people all over the world as well as the increase of numerous studies, known by the term andragogy.

It is worth mentioning that the study was done in Tirana and does not take into account the interests of older people who live in rural areas and are generally associated with the land as long as they can, maybe until their death.

Although several studies have focused on the impact of the welfare of the elderly, in none of them taken in our country was not considered the role of education in helping older people to a better "management" of their lives.

New technologies have never had such an important role in society. They are changing the way we work, the encouragement, and organization of our daily lives, well-functioning being in contact (virtual) with other people and the learning. This new century (with the extraordinary influence of technology) proposed new challenges for everyone. Seniors are involved in society (as far as we can talk about their integration), and consequently in these challenges; therefore we must help them to achieve a better standard of living with new technologies, because education specialists say that man can be educated throughout the course of his life. Older people in developing countries and in our country cannot be left out of this, for them, overwhelming experience, so they also have to get used to new technologies.

Promoting education as a very effective tool for enhancing the quality of life is obvious; with a supportive and valuable technology a lot of older people will be able to live more independently and to have higher involvement opportunities in social life.

We should provoke debate and continuous contact between the elderly and young people with an easier education for the new things. Therefore, education should be oriented towards the skills they have and show and not towards what they lack – otherwise we would add to the stress and fear

of failure.

Adoption from experiences of older people in developed countries, mainly with the selection and orientation towards an educational area that will meet not only the needs but above all will provide pleasure, is a source that needs to be used.

Certainly that this considerable number of elderly people has different ways of thinking and learning; they have different approaches in terms of their social engagements (travel, volunteering, political commitments...); belong to different social, cultural and educational classes; these and many other factors must be present in the starting of the training program for their education.

This paper, in addition to the above I believe that has raised our awareness on a number of issues, such as:

- Is education necessary to address the need?
- Is this part of the long-term care for the elderly?
- Is it implemented in the current political attention?

Does it have to be evaluated in national level and do we need to start the efforts for the education of a society that is older, healthier, more capable, more committed and more independent?

"Give up the idea that only children should spend their time to study. Be a student so long as you still have something to learn, and this shall mean all your life. "- Henry L. Doherty

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Abstract

In Albania ageing will become a tomorrow challenge of the society and science and technology have done a lot to facilitate their life, but Albanian elderly aren't familiar with them. The core of this research paper is the education evaluation and perception of elderly about today's society changes, after exploring andragogy concepts. The methodology primarily went to literature study and secondly on use of focus groups with elderly. For better understanding a short questioner with closed questions was applied to triangulate data. Elderly education is a new concept for elderly. Training in the use of electronic or computer equipment was an area of high interest to them. The organization of the education for a healthy ageing, independent and well integrated was not only a conclusion but even a possible recommendation of this study, according to the earliest study made on Albanian contents.

Резиме

Стареењето наскоро ќе претставува предизвик и за албанското општество. Науката и технологијата значително го олеснуваат извршувањето на секојдневните активности, но постарата популација не е запознаена со нејзината употреба.

Во сржта на овој труд е евалуацијата на образованието и сфаќањата на старата популација за современите промени, согласно проучените андрагошки концепти. Избраната методологија првенствено се состои од проучување на постојната литература, а потоа од примена на фокус-групи на стари лица. Со цел подобро разбирање на проблематиката беше спроведен краток прашалник составен од прашања со понудени можни одговори во прилог на методот на триангулација.

Едукацијата на постарата популација е нов концепт за оваа категорија на граѓани. Тие покажаа голем интерес за обуките за примена на електронската и компјутерската опрема. Организирањето на едукацијата за постарата популација со цел здраво, самостојно и добро интегрирано стареење може да биде заклучокот, но и можната препорака на овој труд, согласно истражувањата направени кај албанската популација.

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