

## Blog

# Is (older) adult education just about methods? Lessons learned from the P3AE training

Within the EU P3AE project Slovenian Third Age University has recently conducted **a five-day international training** in older adult education with participants from Latvia, Lithuania and Spain.

It was not easy to meet their needs and expectations. First and foremost they belonged to different educational cultures and various professional backgrounds. Some would appreciate abstract thinking and discussion, some would prefer having class demonstration, for some of them adult education and older adult education simply equated learning methods. Some were happy to discover theory behind what they had already been doing, some were interested in adult education, but not older adult education...some were teachers, some were not. Most of the participants liked group work, some did not...most of them respected older people as fully human beings, while one participant overtly hated them. He hated the training as well. So many dissimilarities trigger unexpected learning.

In educational events learning is ideally triggered on both sides; both presenters and participants learn. They learn from the questions posed and the way participants think...from their facial expressions, their illustrative examples and generalisations, too. Presenters learn a lot about group dynamics, the differences of the frames of reference, life positions, life scripts, etc. Finally, presenters learn due to their intensive rethinking the issues and theories and...

### Rethinking older people and their education

Older people are thought to have **memory problems**? But, they do memorise, though in a different way. Memorizing the educational material belongs to mechanical learning which is easy for young students who are able to memorise things without being involved.

Older people have **their own experiential knowledge** which interferes with what is being learned. Therefore it is difficult to expect them to easily and exactly memorise and reproduce words, sentences, lines, numbers etc. unless they have been involved in this type of activity for a long time (actors). Their memory gets stimulated whenever their **crystalized intelligence** is addressed. **It is contextual, situational.** (Aristotle)

"As you said... You will remember.... You have probably read...." are words addressing older adults' experiential knowledge..

**Older people are experienced learners.** Nevertheless it is recommended that different learning strategies they use are discussed in the learning group from time to time. It is important to know **what they have learned but also how they have learned something.**

Older people might have well developed **the ability of abstract thinking.** Let us use their abstract thinking and **incorporate their conclusions and statements as well as their examples into our educational programmes.** They should become our own.

Older students come from **different professional and educational backgrounds.** Their professional knowledge and opinion are to be incorporated in the programme, designing and delivery whenever possible.

Older students might have **the ability to see life from a wider perspective.**

Asked and motivated, they might want to get involved in paid work, might act as volunteers and active citizens. Moreover, older students **are likely to have sight problems.** Letters and spacing should not be extremely small.

Older students might be **dyslexics** with scotopic sensitivity as many others of all ages. Whenever possible, **use coloured sheets.**

Older students are from **different cultural backgrounds** (family, generation, the place of living, their former employments and functions) resulting from political, social, religious, historical circumstances and generally life circumstances. Older adult educators should be aware of this.

Older students, like others, might have **psychological problems.** They might have difficulties constructing positive relationships in the group due to emotional deficiencies, their life position, their self-identity, declining health etc. Some can be caring, some not. Some do not care. Older students, might have **different abilities for managing conflicts and different patterns of communication.**

**Their marital status might differ:** they are married, have a partner, live with grown up children, children have left their spouse, etc.