

A WEB PORTAL BY SENIORS, FOR SENIORS



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ABSTRACT

University of the Third Age at the University of Wrocław connects students over the age of 60 interested in expanding areas of their psychophysical, intellectual, and creative activity. The workshop of journalism at the aforementioned university, conducted by the author of the article, has contributed to what the University of Wrocław has to offer. The web portal created by the seniors and for the seniors at the classes of journalism has become a platform for the presentation and exchange of views and reflections between the participants of the workshop.

Key words: late adulthood, old age, seniors, University of the Third Age, web portal, journalism workshop

THE NEED FOR CREATIVITY IN OLD AGE

Old age as a period of peace, freedom and leisure grants an opportunity to develop one's interests. Numerous gerontology studies have shown that the manner of spending time during retirement often correlates with earlier interests, preferences and needs of elderly people (Nowicka, 2008, p. 21). Just as one reverts to theoretical cognitive interests and refreshes them, so can he/she also come across new challenges. "The beauty of the period of late adulthood stems from the thought borne of the will to live actively and the need to pursue dreams that had no means of realization in earlier periods of existence" (Semków, 2011, p. 20).

One of the needs of a human being is a need for creativity, which enables self-fulfillment and a sense of "experiencing oneself as the center of the whole world, as the true source of one's actions" (Fromm, 1989, p. 65).

Currently creativity has ceased to be an exclusive domain of artists. Children, teenagers, adults and elderly people all create. Unfortunately, creative work of seniors is most often hidden inside a closet. However, after it is shown and made public on mass media, it becomes something more than merely a piece of writing accessible to a wider audience. It becomes a source of pride, something to show one's friends and family, and - above all - it serves as a means of self-appreciation. "Results of creative work often surprise the creators themselves - they did not realize that they could do so much, that so much could be achieved. It is a great pleasure to exceed your current capabilities, a tangible sign of self-development. It is a source of deep satisfaction and also transcends into other areas of life. It gives joy, a desire to take on new challenges and in the case of health problems or the turmoil of life, a huge motivation to overcome them in order to quickly return to

that activity which has enriched life to such an extent" (Peikert, 2011, p. 5).

Seniors who engage in creative activities in this way fulfill the concept of positive ageing. In accordance with it one can influence the course of one's own ageing, despite the problems and deficiencies that arise during the course of one's life.

The purpose of a human is as a matter of fact pursuit of happiness (welfare) through acceptance and affirmation of their existence at all stages. This means the ability to experience positive emotions and giving meaning to one's life. In the theory of active ageing (*World Health Organization*, 2012) continuous self-development and maintaining social contacts are considered to be key actions. This attitude makes it possible for the elderly not only to self-determine, but also to participate in social life and grants them a feeling of safety.

ACTIVITY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF WROCLAW

The criteria for old age are nowadays very ambiguous. This is due to the difficulty in establishing a clear threshold of old age and stages of this period, since people age at an individual pace (Straś-Romanowska, 2004). The beginning of old age is most often established as 60 or 65 years of age (*World Health Organization*, Stuart-Hamilton, 2000). Some researchers distinguish two phases in the course of ageing: early old age – up to 75 years of age and late old age – over 75 years (Peđich, 2000).

An age of 60 years allows one to be admitted to the universities of the third age. These are educational institutions affiliated with universities or organizational units in the administrative structure of higher education. Based on the idea of lifelong learning, they aim to disseminate knowledge from different fields of science at a high level. They allow one to make new acquaintances and grant a possibility of intergenerational integration. This non-formal education is of great importance to a positive attitude to life and to effective problem solving by elderly people (Hrapkova, 2010).

At present there are nearly 110 universities of the third age in Poland, which in total amounts to 25,000 members. The first such facility was founded in France in 1973. Soon after more universities began to appear in France, as well as other countries of Europe and the world. In 1976 the University of the Third Age at the UWr of today was initiated under the name College of the Third Age. Classes were held at ul. Mazowiecka in Wrocław. In 1984 the Study of the Third Age was granted a status of University of the Third Age. A few years later the headquarters was moved to the Institute of Pedagogy at ul. Davida 1 and the facility was included in the structure of the university and subject directly to the Vice-Rector for Teaching.

The University of the Third Age brings together people over 60 years old who still wish to continue to develop intellectually, socially and psychophysically. It gives the possibilities to refresh and enhance one's knowledge, as well as acquisition of new knowledge and engagement in diverse activities. At UTA lectures, seminars, workshops and foreign language courses are held. The seniors them-

selves create various sections, of which they are both leaders and participants. They make use of cultural activities the city offers, take part in sports and art events and go on sightseeing tours in the country.

CLASSES IN JOURNALISM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WROCLAW UTA

UTA members at UWr are cognitively active, they exhibit the need for continuous expansion of knowledge and experiencing new challenges. Such as e.g. participation in the journalism workshops and creating content for a web portal. It is worth mentioning that among the many workshops offered by UTA, up until 2014 there had been no journalism workshops. The author of the article, as a journalist and an andragogist, decided to fill this gap. After obtaining the permission of the institution she began conducting classes. The University of the Third Age publishes *Kurier UTA* – a popular science magazine for the members, but also co-edited by them. The magazine comes out irregularly, one of the reasons for this is the quantity of texts submitted by seniors is small. This fact also influences the character of classes.

Before the beginning of the workshop, the instructor prepared a schedule which takes into account the specific subject matter. She also set a number of goals that should guide this form of education. They included:

- developing the creative potential of seniors,
- identifying creative ways to spend free time,
- expanding on the experience in listening, speaking and being listened to,
- learning the skills of editing journalistic forms of expression,
- exercise of memory and concentration,
- strengthening self-esteem,
- acquisition of self-confidence.

In formulating the objectives the educational and emotional needs of seniors were taken into account: acquisition of knowledge and new skills, the ability to apply knowledge in practice (task-oriented situations), participation in cultural events, the opportunity to present their own opinion and their own creativity, possibility to exchange views (discussions), teamwork, competition and appreciation.

The workshops have been taking place since 2014, once a week, in a group of approximately 10 to 15 people. These involve both seniors who continue their education as well as new listeners – enrollment for classes is held each semester. During the workshop material typical for the work of a journalist and reporter is presented. Seniors carry out the so-called street surveys, write film and theater reviews. They have also made a series of interviews with people significant to UTA in the University of Wroclaw which were published in the jubilee edition of the *Kurier UTA*.

The journalism classes consist of two parts: lecture and exercise. The lecture allows seniors to familiarize themselves with the subject on a theoretical level. The exercise is intended for practical training.

This formula works well in the education of adults – students of universities of the third age who have grown accustomed to it as they participated in other activities. This is confirmed by the results of research regarding the substantive needs/expectations in education of seniors: “Teaching should be preceded by a thorough diagnosis in terms of expectations, psychophysical capabilities and the actual needs of the student in order to optimally adjust the proposed content, program and methods” (Jaroszewska, 2012 p. 21-34).

Workshop participants are motivated to learn and work during the classes through cognitive curiosity and task-oriented situations. They are interested in media phenomena and also exhibit the need to know how a journalist presents a set topic. Only when they acquire this knowledge are they ready to use it in the exercises.

The degree of focus on the goal is dependent on several factors: positive support, competition inside the group and the so-called hard effects of work, which are publications in the local media and on the website dziennikseniora.pl.

PORTAL OF THE SENIORS

Dziennikseniora.pl is an innovative project of a website for students of the University of the Third Age at the University of Wrocław. It was created as part of the workshop of journalism at the University of Wrocław UTA conducted by the author of the article. The articles written by the seniors are published therein. The duties of the instructor of the workshop is editing articles before publishing and – in some cases – rewriting them. This applies to students who do not use a personal computer or do not have access to it. The project has been prepared and is being developed with the author’s own funds and thanks to the sponsors who designed the project website and ensure technical maintenance as well as support for the Internet domain.

The editorial team consists of the participants of the journalism workshops – people aged 60+ who are students of UTA at the University of Wrocław. In the *Editorial Board* sidebar pictures of each of the twelve editors appear together with their biographical notes, which provides the seniors a sense of personal competence and accomplishment. Additionally it convinces them that their goals are worth pursuing (Brzeziński, & Brzezińska, 2001, p. 117). On the web portal articles from various journalistic genres are published : interviews, reviews, essays, short stories, surveys, photographic coverage.

Not all editors publish with equal frequency. One of the reasons is lack of time. The students of UTA at UWr participate in many activities, some also perform time-consuming tasks in the administration and often they have family duties to take care of as well. Another reason is lack of topics which seem to be worth discussing in a bigger group than the workshop. Several editors are not convinced that they are sufficiently competent to publish content on public media. The instructor of the workshop is working to change these beliefs. Positive reinforcement, individual consultations through by telephone, e-mail or in person are incentives for the seniors to act. This approach is consistent with the view that “the need for an

individual approach to each student seems to be (...) the main need" (Szmigielska, Bąk, & Hołda, 2012, p. 146).

Seniors who feel better in the role of press photographers rather than journalists can post their pictures on the site. *Kurier UTA* also has its own fanpage on which news of upcoming articles and readers' comments appear.

EVALUATION OF THE CLASSES

An important aspect of working with seniors is the evaluation of the classes and activities "This process of collection, analysis and interpretation of data related to the assessment of the effectiveness of the ongoing endeavours being a part of educational projects" (Potocka, & Nowak, 2001, p. 24). Evaluation can be made verbally or in writing. It helps to determine "whether the planned activities were realized and how their realization reflected the expectation" (Gołębnik, 2002, p. 79).

With the evaluation conducted in anonymous questionnaires including four closed questions and one open question one can receive feedback that is helpful to the instructor in improving the classes in the next academic year. The questions in the surveys (at the end of the academic year 2014/2015) were:

1. How do you assess the conduct and preparation of the instructor leading the workshop? (Possible answers: very well, fairly well, moderately, quite wrong, very wrong)
Very well - 8 replies out of 8 surveys;
2. Has the workshop provided you new knowledge and skills in the specifics of journalistic work? (Possible answers: yes, no, a little, I don't know)
Yes - 7 replies out of 8 surveys, 1 reply - a little;
3. What is the atmosphere in the classroom? (Possible answers: pleasant, unpleasant, I do not know)
Pleasant - 8 replies out of 8 surveys;
4. How do you like the idea of the continuation of journalism workshops in the next year? (Possible answers: a good idea, bad idea, I do not know)
Good idea - 8 replies out of 8 surveys;
5. What is your opinion on the conduct of the classes, discussed topics etc?
The workshops are conducted in a very tidy manner and everything is discussed in detail. You can learn a lot of good things from it;
The subject matter is professional. I personally learned (in addition to the surveys and reviews) to pay closer attention to what I write and how I write. I didn't do so before;
I'd love to take part in the next round of classes. I hope to find people willing to cooperate with the Kurier UTA and classes allow for such cooperation to happen;
The atmosphere and the classes are conducted very interestingly. We ask for a workshop of this kind next year 2015/2016;
It was interesting during the classes, but the participants spoke too often and listened too rarely. My general opinion is very positive, though there could've been more interesting topics for the participants to work on.

Another survey was applied at the end of the year 2015/2016. The questions were the same. The answers to closed questions were repeated compared to the previous academic year. Only in question 2 the answers changed to: Yes - 12 replies out of 12 surveys.

In question 5 the following responses appeared:

The course is conducted on a high level and in a pleasant atmosphere;

Throughout this year I experienced a number of different forms of journalism I didn't use to know about or how to define professionally. I learned that at the workshop. I also grew in confidence to write publicly;

A precious thing is the ability to upload content on www.dziennikseniora.pl. The workshop prepares you exactly for that kind of activity;

Excellent educational form supported by thorough training. Great partnership and an atmosphere of mutual goodwill.

From the evaluation of activities it can be deduced that the participants of the journalism workshop have acquired knowledge allowing them to carry out various forms of journalism. They have developed their creative potential and through the possibility to publish articles on the web portal dziennikseniora.pl, satisfied the need for self-fulfilment and accomplishment. Through numerous discussions in the group they have deepened their experience in listening, speaking and being listened to.

The exercises in memory and concentration have taken place in the course of practical classes, e.g. during short interviews at the workshop.

IN CONCLUSION

Seniors who participate in the journalism workshop have had no prior experience with this field of profession. Participation in the activities provided them with not only new knowledge, but also opened the way for an active participation in cultural and social life. The effects were evidenced by the written material: reviews of watched films and spectacles, reports, interviews. The online platform dziennikseniora.pl developed by the author of article allowed seniors to publish their own content through a medium with a global reach.

Activity of the seniors validates the thesis about the need for creative activity in old age which contributes to self-fulfillment and a sense of satisfaction. In this way is the idea of lifelong learning being shaped and continues to exist.

The opinion of the participants of the workshop/editors of the web portal on their creative activity is also reflected in their entries on Facebook. The seniors provide links to their texts, publish photos from the classes and the certificates they received at the end of the academic year. It's clear that they have enjoyed participating in the classes and editing the portal.

The editorial board of the portal has also invited the students from other universities of the third age to cooperate. We hope for the web portal to become a platform that brings elderly people together, regardless of their place of residence.

We look forward to the activity, because as shown by past research and analyses, interest in new technologies among elderly people is constantly increasing.

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