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Inclusion in education later in life. Why older adults engage in education activities?

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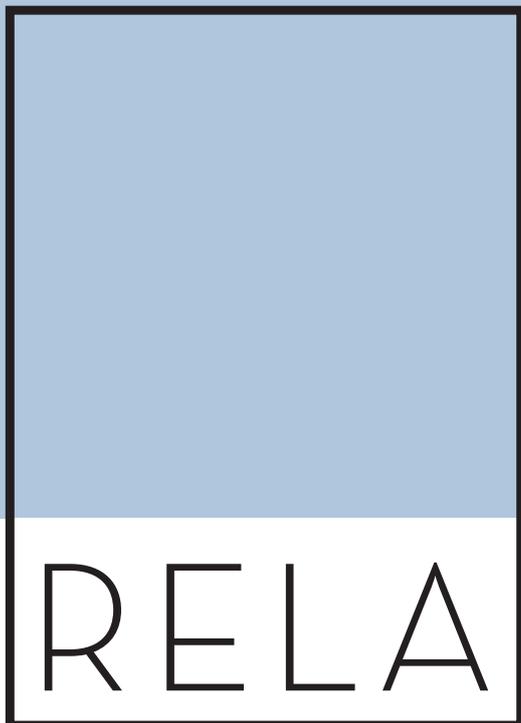
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Inclusion in education later in life: Why older adults engage in education activities

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Abstract

The connection between education and wellbeing is presented as a general argument for the participation of older adults in education, but is this reason why older adults themselves choose to engage in education activities? This paper combines the results from two previous empirical studies and addresses how older adults account for their participation in education activities. The first empirical data set comprises a survey completed by 232 Swedish pensioners. The second empirical data set comprises stories by 53 Swedish pensioners about their participation at Senior University. The same dominant arguments for their participation in education emerged in both studies; namely (i) staying active and (ii) socialising. However, this observation can be understood in terms of motives and benefits, something which indicates a possible fusion of extrinsic- and intrinsic motivation. A closer reading of the narratives reveals that many participants enrolled in Senior University because other family members, friends, and former work-colleagues had enrolled. This suggests that what on the surface may appear as an individual's choice could, in fact, be explained by social factors.

Keywords: Health and wellbeing; learning late in life; motivation and inclusion; older adults' learning

Introduction

Current age demographics in Sweden include a large proportion of senior citizens who are physically and cognitively better equipped than previous generations. This has led to a situation which is historically unique. At the same time, an ageing population is often presented as a problem, since it puts pressure on pension systems and healthcare



systems. When problems related to changes in our demographic profile are discussed, education and learning is often presented as the solution. Education that takes place later in life is regarded as a means to ensure a prolonged working life as well as a means to promote increased wellbeing in the post-work population. The connection between education and health has been established in previous research studies and will be described in more detail later in this paper. When we consider the connection between education and health, we are prompted to question whether the health benefits associated with learning later in life is also an argument that is used by older adults as they participate in education activities. The aim of this paper is to explore this very question, by examining older adults' accounts of why they participate in education. This will allow us to develop strategies which can be used to include a greater proportion of older learners in education activities. This paper is based on two previous studies: the first was conducted in the context of Swedish national organisations for retirees and the second was conducted in the context of the Swedish Senior University.

Older adults' learning

What do we mean when we refer to lifelong learning for older adults? A common categorization is that it can be divided between formal-, non-formal-, and informal learning activities. Findsen and Formosa (2011) suggested an alternative distinction by claiming that lifelong learning concerns learning throughout life and in several different areas, while lifelong education is organized and intentional learning for a specific purpose. It has been previously recognized that non-formal learning activities are preferred by older adult participants (Jenkins & Mostafa, 2014; Bjursell, 2018), but no matter the formality of the process, note that learning may be incidental, unanticipated, or imposed (Boulton-Lewis, 2010). Below, the terms learning and education are used interchangeably, depending on the particular terms used in the referenced studies. When we discuss the empirical studies, the term education activity is used to refer to both formal- and non-formal education settings. It is assumed that an education setting will stimulate learning of some kind, although it may be difficult to fully describe all aspects of the "unruly" learning process.

Education and learning later in life

The post-work population is a heterogeneous group, but there currently remains a lack of knowledge about this heterogeneity in relation to education and learning. Previous studies have tended to treat older adults as a single group, but changed demographics means that, just in terms of age, the 'post-work population' consists of a group of people who span several generations. In addition to age, other variables can be used to differentiate across this group; such as gender, class, ethnicity, and able-bodiedness. Although the current demographic situation is new, theories about older adults' learning have a long history. For example, based on the idea that teaching older adults is qualitatively different from teaching adults, the theory of geragogy has been introduced. The basic premise in geragogy is that learning should be based on enjoyment and curiosity, and consequently, tutors should stimulate learner engagement with positive comments and encouragement. Geragogy further provides tutors with a set of principles that can guide them in how they might structure a course. For example, to present the outcomes of a course before the course is taught. Other principles refer to (i) using of a variety of teaching methods, (ii) adopting a flexible approach, (iii) taking the learners'

past experiences into consideration, since they can be useful in grounding the learners' understanding, (iv) maintaining a clear focus on the topic, (v) adapting the course structure to the learners' pace, and (vi) paying attention to cases where a participant may need to "unlearn" certain information from the past. Geragogy has been subject to some criticism, for example, by Formosa (2012), who states that this theory promotes a distinctly top-down approach, where teachers are expected to satisfy older adults' need for stimulation. This approach can also be seen as counter-productive in the sense that it treats participants as consumers of education, rather than creators of knowledge.

In the context of older adults' learning, the *learning atmosphere* is also very important, since older adults bring with them their past education experiences which may influence their approach to learning later in life. Research on older adults' transition back into a classroom setting after a long period of absence has revealed that these learners undergo a shift in attitude, from being an independent adult to becoming a submissive learner. This shift takes place in accordance with the educational experience of their youth (Formosa, 2012). Negative classroom experiences from the (past) formal school system that are recalled later in life are not conducive to older adults' learning. In contrast to formal educational settings, older adults are reported to thrive in settings that enable peer-teaching, where the curriculum is developed in consensus with the group of learners, and where they can learn through activities that are perceived as being meaningful. Older adults are positive towards peer teaching for example, which is a learner-centred activity where members of an educational community plan and facilitate learning opportunities for one other (Brady, Holt & Welt, 2003). A positive rapport between tutor and learner and a feeling of social inclusion generates a great deal of motivation within older learners and provides them with a sense of community. Participation in non-formal lifelong learning provides older learners with a compensatory strategy which they can use to strengthen their reserve capacities, allowing them to be autonomous and feel fulfilled in their everyday life (Narushima, Liu & Diestelkamp, 2018a). Furthermore, flexibility is a key condition for older adults' motivation to participate in education (Bjursell et al., 2014). Flexibility can be particularly important if one is to make adjustments to one's life in response to external changes, as well as changes within the individual, including physical- and psychological changes. The ability to have control over one's time and the activities that one engages in enables older adults to adjust to changes in their surroundings, such as losing a spouse or having to take care of grandchildren.

Participation in education activities

Although the ability to learn remains throughout one's life, one may change the way in which one participates in education or educational activities. The interest that many individuals show in education remains, however, consistent. This is something which is illustrated, for example, by the growing global University of the Third Age (U3A) movement (Formosa, 2019). Whilst U3As support wellbeing, there exist problematic issues concerning gender, social class, ageism, and ethnic biases (Formosa, 2014). With respect to gender, many people hold the notion that it is mainly older women who participate in education. However, one study of participation in education later in life shows that gender cannot necessarily be used to predict participation (Bjursell et al., 2017). The only factor relevant to predicting participation in education, according to the latter study, consisted of the individual's previous level of educational attainment: the higher the level of educational attainment achieved earlier in life, the more probable it was that the individual would take part in educational activities later in life. This

insight, that the level of educational attainment correlates positively with participation in education later in life, has been repeatedly demonstrated in studies from different countries. This observation has prompted a number of initiatives, even initiatives to include marginalized groups, so that they too can benefit from the positive effects that education brings about in people's lives. The inclusion of older men with low levels of educational attainment in education has been facilitated, for example, by the social movement called 'the Men's Shed', initially developed in Australia (Ahl, Hedegaard & Golding, 2017; Golding, 2015). Inter-generational learning is another way which organisations can create attractive and meaningful learning contexts for different generations, including the older adults (Boström, 2003, 2012, 2014, 2017; Lüscher, et al., 2017; Schmidt-Hertha, Jelenc Krasovec, & Formosa, 2014). Changes in society may also bring about conditions where further education is needed later in life, for example, note that the development of new technology often demands new skills in the users of such technology. A study of older adults' access to and use of information and communication technology (ICT) revealed a positive correlation between levels of material resources (e.g., income), discursive resources (e.g., English skills) and social resources (e.g., social networks) and access to ICT (Olsson, Samuelsson & Viscovi, 2019). The same study identified a negative correlation between age, access, and literacy. With increasing age, both access and literacy w.r.t. ICT decreases. This raises questions about the role of education regarding inclusion and participation in a continuously digitalizing society.

While there exist studies on a number of the sub-groups within the category of 'older adult learners', more knowledge about the post-work population with regard to education and learning is needed. In a systematic review of how older adults were portrayed in adult education journals, three main themes were found (Chen, Kim, Moon & Merriam, 2008) - namely, (i) older adults portrayed as a homogeneous group in terms of age, gender, race, class, ethnicity, and able-bodiedness; (ii) older adults viewed as capable and motivated learners with few cognitive or physical limitations; and (iii), programmatic responses provided by older adults and driven by the life context of older adulthood. Although Chen and colleague's review was concluded over ten years ago, these themes still inform ideas about older adults in education. This stands in contrast to identified barriers that prevent participation in education, where the most significant barriers are those associated with physical disabilities (Purdie & Boulton-Lewis, 2003). Elsewhere, Narushima and colleagues (2013a) reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and developing an affordable, accessible, and inclusive continuing education program in local communities, if successful and active aging for everyone is to be achieved. There is thus a need to include different groups of older adults in such research, and it is also necessary to study a number of different educational settings where older learners are to be found, including the reasons why they decide to engage in education and learning.

Motives for learning later in life

Participation in education and learning later in life has been shown to bring positive effects, thereby stimulating academic research interest in this area. There are several reasons why older adults might wish to engage in learning. Such reasons may differ between individuals and groups, especially since the so-called 'post-work population' is quite heterogeneous in its makeup and contains a diversity of experience. Amongst a wide range of different variables, the individual's health and attitude towards learning were found to be the most important factors for 'active aging' (Boulton-Lewis, Buys &

Lovie-Kitchin, 2006). But while good health and a positive attitude may prerequisites for participation, they are not necessarily reasons for participation. So why do older adults people engage in education? In the 1980s, McClusky (1982) suggested a hierarchical theory of educational needs. This theory was developed in response to the claim that education for and of the older adult was *ad hoc* in character - that is, it lacked systematic design. The proposed theory would support the dynamics of participation and program development, and assist older adults in creating margins of power for the attainment and maintenance of wellbeing and continued growth. The educational needs included were:

- Coping Needs: dealing with changes in the condition of the individual and to overcome obsolescence in dealing with societal changes.
- Expressive Needs: activities undertaken for their own sake and allowing the person to express herself or himself, with enjoyment as the reward.
- Contributive Needs: a response to altruistic desires to assist others in coping with problems or in achieving their developmental tasks.
- Influence Needs: getting involved in the general functioning of society and community groups, which promote a sense of generativity.
- Transcendence Needs: gaining deeper understanding of the meaning of life and a review of what life has been.

Similar to Formosa's (2012) critique on geragogy, namely that the approach is based on an asymmetric power relation, McClusky's (1982) theory also assumes a top-down approach with respect to older adults, since they are treated as 'receivers' of education. Both theories were developed in different time periods, something which could explain McClusky's approach as being informed by attitudes towards older adults at the time (the 1970s and 1980s). However, the needs identified in McClusky's theory are of interest, and deserve further exploration in relation to why people chose to participate in education. Within the current post-work population, most people are able to make decisions for themselves, except people at the later stages of serious illnesses. A lack of good health and physical disabilities are, in fact, barriers that prevent participation in education (Purdie & Boulton-Lewis, 2003).

The relationship between education and health has been highlighted in several research studies on older adults' learning. In a systematic review of health promotion interventions, it was found that 9 of the 10 most effective interventions consisted of group activities which included a dimension of educational- or support input (Cattan, White, Bond & Learmouth, 2005). A recent publication, based on a longitudinal study (over a period of 44 years) of risk for dementia in women, has shown how cognitive- and physical activities in a person's midlife period reduce the risk for dementia (Najar, et al., 2019). Five groups of cognitive activity were included in the study. These were intellectual-, artistic-, manual-, club-, and religious activities. A survey conducted in Canada (n=416) found that continuous participation in non-formal lifelong learning helped sustain older adults' psychological wellbeing (Narushima, Liu & Diestelkamp, 2018a, 2018b). Psychological wellbeing involves the individual's subjective evaluation of various aspects of life that contribute to positive functioning and self-actualization.

'Commitment to learning' can positively influence older adults' perceived life quality, as well as their ability to deal with changes in later life (Boulton-Lewis, 2010; Boulton-Lewis & Buys, 2015; Narushima, 2008; Narushima, Liu & Diestelkamp, 2018b). It has also been suggested that a positive correlation exists between 'duration of learning' and 'wellbeing' (Narushima, Liu & Diestelkamp, 2013b). Education is presumed to serve

preventive-, facilitative-, remedial-, and preparatory functions and it helps participants master the developmental tasks associated with their stage in life (Mehrotra, 2003). Keeping the mind active and social contact are common motives that is given by older adults who wish to remain engaged in learning (Boulton-Lewis & Buys, 2015; Boulton-Lewis, Buys & Lovie-Kitchin, 2006; Jenkins, 2011; Kim & Merriam, 2004; Narushima, 2008; Withnall, 2010; Åberg, 2018).

Adapting to a changing situation

In addition to a desire for keeping one's mind fit, interacting with others, and feeling good about life, external factors may also influence a person's decision to engage in education. Learning can be triggered by external events, such as the death of a spouse or other kinds of changes in a person's life situation. Another motive to participate in education could be based on the need for expanding one's current knowledge base, for enjoyment or out of necessity. A classic definition of motivation distinguishes intrinsic motivation from extrinsic motivation. *Intrinsic motivation* is what motivates a person to engage in an activity for its 'inherent satisfaction', while *extrinsic motivation* is associated with the performance of an activity that is directed at achieving some separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, one's adaptation to a particular situation does not necessarily stand in contrast to the notion that one might be intrinsically motivated to acquire self-understanding and self-fulfilment. Since participation in education and educational activities is voluntary for older adults who have retired, this participation can be understood as 'doing things for its own sake', based on the person's interest and sense of enjoyment. At the same time, we should recognize the fact that extrinsic- and intrinsic motivation can coexist in a fluid and interrelated way. Competence is necessary for any kind of motivation to exist, since a lack of competence may create feelings of helplessness; a state of complete lack of motivation. In fact, it has been shown that people need to feel both competent and autonomous if they are to experience intrinsic motivation (Dysvik, Kuvaas & Gagné, 2013). This condition is intriguing, especially when it is situated in an education context. An investigation into the nature of the motivation why someone might participate in education can be based on asking individuals who have completed a full working life and are now in an "autonomous" position, in the sense that they have greater control over their own time and the activities they choose to engage in; namely the post-work population (Boulton-Lewis, 2010; Withnall, 2006). The following research questions were key to such an investigation: Have members of the post-work population decided to participate in education after retirement? If so, what are their reasons for this participation? Why older adults participate in education activities, is examined in the two empirical studies that are described in the next section.

Empirical studies

This paper combines the empirical material that was collected in two different studies: (i) a survey about older adults' views on work and learning, and (ii) a collection of stories about older adults' participation at Senior University (also known as the University of the Third Age). The results from the survey were presented in a Swedish report (Bjursell et al., 2014). The survey data was also analysed and presented in a separate article (Bjursell et al., 2017). The second set of empirical data, a collection of personal narratives, has been introduced in a book chapter (Bjursell, 2019a) and a

separate article (Bjursell, 2019b). However, the specific narratives that are discussed in the present paper have not been presented before. It should be noted that the empirical material included in this paper is sourced from groups of people who already participate in activities of various kinds, and thus have margins of power for the attainment and maintenance of wellbeing and continued growth.

The studies were undertaken in a Swedish context. Sweden has a long tradition of adult education and, since the 1960s, has been ranked highly among European countries in terms of participation rates in adult education. The education system in Sweden comprises a formal national adult education system, labour market training schemes, and non-formal systems of adult education called *folkbildning* (a liberal or popular education movement) (Bjursell, 2019a). The basic premises in *folkbildning* are (i) education is open to all and (ii) adult education is voluntary – it relies on the motivation of the participants to study for their own personal and social development. The post-work population make up approximately one fifth of the population in Sweden, and this part of the population are active participants in *folkbildning* in general, including the Senior Universities. Senior Universities consist of a number of non-profit, volunteer associations which offer courses and activities to their members. The number of Senior Universities in Sweden is on the increase, as is the overall number of participants. Currently, there are 34 Senior Universities across the country. They are organised as associations and are formally linked to the Swedish Folkuniversitet system: one of ten educational associations that exist in the Swedish *folkbildning* system. In total, the 34 Senior Universities include 25,000 members (Bjursell, 2019a)

The survey

In the spring of 2013, we designed a survey that would provide an overview of Swedish pensioners' views on work and education. The survey was distributed in April and May of 2013 to the local unit of four major senior citizens organisations. These included Pensionärernas Riksorganisation (the Swedish National Pensioners' Organisation, 400,000 members), Sveriges Pensionärsförbund (270,000 members), Svenska Kommunal Pensionärernas Förbund (170,000 members), and Riksförbundet Pensionärs Gemenskap (15,000 members). A geographical limitation for the survey was set to include a region in the middle of Sweden. This was done so that the researchers could visit the organisations in person and hand out the survey directly to the respondents. The survey was handed out at ordinary meetings at the senior citizens organisations. In all, 381 surveys were handed out, and 232 responses were collected, giving a response rate of 61%

The survey started with establishing a number of background variables; gender, age, and level of education. Of the 232 individuals who participated in the study, 72 were men (31%) and 155 were women (66.8%). Five individuals (2.2%) did not provide their gender. 213 persons (91.9%) were between the ages of 66-85 years of age. One person did not answer this question. Seven people were older than 85, and 11 persons were younger than 66 years of age. In terms of level of education, 63 people (27.2%) had attended school for a period not exceeding six years, 75 individuals (32.3%) went to school for nine years, 54 people (23.3%) had attended upper secondary school, had a vocational education or similar, and 38 respondents (16.4%) held a university degree. Two individuals did not indicate what level of educational attainment they had achieved. In the survey, the respondents were asked to state if they had participated in work and/or education after retirement, what kind of education activities they engaged in, and the meaning they ascribed to these activities. The survey focused on formal and

non-formal education activities and did not include reference to informal learning - that is, the learning that continuously takes place in everyday life.

The study of narratives

In an effort to review the current situation of how participants view their own engagement in the Senior University movement, a request for narratives about participation was sent to the different associations across Sweden in the spring of 2018. The request was formulated as a simple question that was put to the members of Senior University associations: *Could they report on their thoughts about their participation in Senior University?* The majority of these associations have policies which prohibit the distribution of questionnaires to their members, but despite this, 53 letters were sent back in response (four by ordinary post, the rest by email). These letters contained a range of responses; including short comments of a few lines to one response which was five pages in length. The letters were authored by 38 women and 15 men. The excerpts from the letters that are provided below have been kept anonymous, but the gender of the author is indicated by “f” - female, and “m” male. Each letter was ascribed a unique number so as to indicate to the reader when multiple excerpts or quotations are made from the same letter.

Both participants and Senior University lecturers responded to the request for stories, and, in some instances, certain respondents held the roles of both participant and lecturer. It was common for the respondents to have received some form of academic training earlier in life and some sort of professional career, for example, as an engineer, physician, sociologist, or veterinarian, amongst others. Many had worked as teachers. The majority of the respondents who shared their thoughts and experiences were between 70 and 80 years old. The oldest respondent was 93 years of age. It should be pointed out that the collection of narratives and reflections that was shared with the author does not constitute the result of a systematic investigation, but, rather, establishes an exploratory examination of why one might choose to participate in the Senior University movement.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that must be taken into consideration when one evaluates the result of the study. The survey study was conducted in a defined geographical and organisational context. The survey was only distributed in Jönköping County, Sweden. Consequently, if there are differences between groups of pensioners based on their geographical location across Sweden, such differences cannot be remarked upon in this report. The manner in which the survey was completed was somewhat different, depending on the situation in each organisation. This entailed that the questionnaire was completed by the respondents under different conditions. The decision to contact pensioners' associations as a way of distributing the survey was based on the fact that they are large organisations which represent a large number of individuals. Individuals who cannot or choose not to be a member of a pensioner's association are thus not represented.

The examination of the narratives included in the present study allows the researcher to engage in an exploratory interrogation of the topic on hand by using a 'sample of convenience'. By asking individuals to share their story, the empirical material that is ultimately collected is limited in the sense that those individuals who

actually chose to share their story might have a specific reason for doing so. Note that the stories that were collected tended to reveal a strongly positive attitude towards participating in education activities. This *could* be representative of the larger population of Senior University members, but we are forced to admit that the results of the present study are not generalizable because of this limitation on the empirical material that was included in this study. While we mention this as a possible limitation, the purpose of studying narratives is to present detailed and complex material, rather than produce a statistical overview.

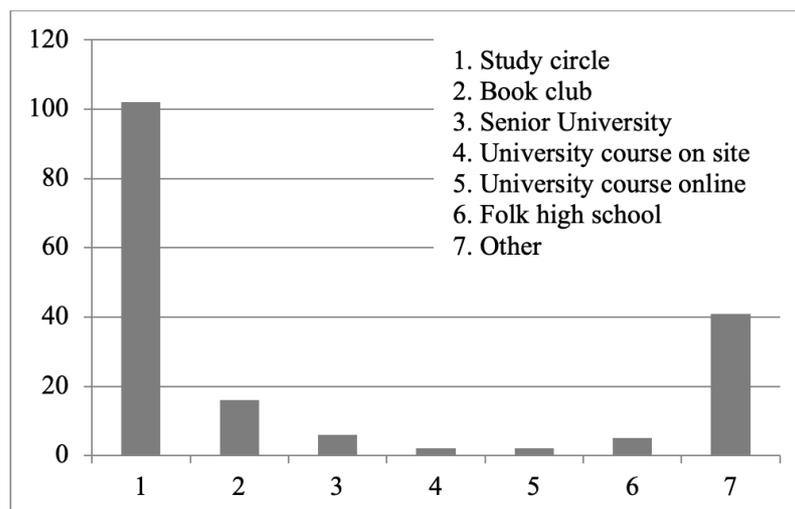
Results

In this section, the results from the two studies are presented in descriptive form. First, the results of the survey study are reported on, which is then followed by the results of the analysis of the stories that were collected. In the discussion that follows, these results are placed in relation to previous research into why older adults participate in education activities.

The survey results

In the survey, the respondents could indicate whether they participated in formal and/or non-formal education activities and they were given the option to fill in multiple answers, if necessary. The options that were provided in the survey were common education activities in the Swedish lifelong learning system. These included study circle, book club, Senior University, university courses on site, university courses online, folk high school, or other education activities.

Figure 1. Participation in formal and/or non-formal education activities (multiple responses were possible).



Participation in a study circle was most common in this group. There were 102 individuals (44.0%) who participated in a study circle. There were 16 individuals (6.9%) who indicated that they participated in a book club, and six individuals (2.6%) were enrolled at Senior University. With respect to participation in higher education,

two individuals (0.9%) attended to a course at university and 2 (0.9%) participated in online courses. There were five people (2.2%) who were currently participating in folk high schools. Finally, 41 individuals (17.7%) indicated that they were involved in other forms of education activities. The comments that were provided by the respondents reported that these included training for assignments within the pensioners' association, but other forms of education are also included in this answer alternative. Figure 1 in fact shows that non-formal education is the dominant form of education participation, namely, study circle, book club, and Senior University courses. Only a few respondents reported that they were participating in formal educational activities via university courses or courses at folk high school.

In the survey, the respondents also indicated their motives why they participate in formal- and non-formal education activities. In the survey, a number of arguments why older adults participate in various education activities were provided. These arguments were based on the research groups experience of older adults' learning. These arguments were then examined by researchers in gerontology, who provided further opinions on whether the arguments could be related to the literature on the subject, as well as practice. The respondents were provided opportunity to include their own argument in the survey, if none of the alternatives that were provided to them in the survey were suitable (i.e., 'other reason'). Table 1 below presents the arguments. Note that their order of appearance in the survey is not reflected in the table; instead, they are presented in terms of their frequency of use.

Table 1. Arguments why the respondents participate in formal and non-formal education activities (multiple responses were possible)

Ranking	Statement	Number of responses
1.	I think it is important to participate in various activities.	93
2.	I get an opportunity to meet new people.	74
3.	I want to learn more about an area of interest.	67
4.	I get an opportunity to meet old friends.	45
5.	I am in need of new knowledge in an area.	34
6.	I want to share my knowledge in an area.	23
7.	I am in education for a job/an assignment.	13
8.	I participate to support a partner or a friend.	7
9.	Other reason	7

The most frequent response was 'to participate in activities of different kinds' (93), thereby indicating that staying active was important to the respondents. This was followed by 'the opportunity to meet new people' (74), 'to learn more about an area of interest' (67), 'to meet old friends' (45), 'the need for new knowledge' (34), 'to share one's knowledge' (23), 'learning for work/assignments' (13), 'to support a partner or a

friend' (7), and 'other reasons' (7). It is noteworthy that the importance of 'engaging in activities' and 'the opportunity to meet new people' was mentioned more frequently than the actual content in the course ('to learn about an area of interest' - that is, a particular subject). The three most common arguments are in harmony with the observation that the study circle is the dominant education activity form, since the study circle is based on active participation, social interaction, and the content of study.

Narratives from Senior University

When the stories sent in by Senior University participants are summarized, two overarching motives for participation emerge: (i) 'a desire for *bildung*' and (ii) 'social fellowship'. The participants wish to educate themselves by increasing their knowledge of a particular area, either via further development of a subject that is already known to the participant, or by becoming proficient in an area that is new to them. Their participation also offers them a social context; and, for some, this dimension is as equally important as the subject content which they endeavour to study. A description of the meaning of '*bildung*' and 'social fellowship' has been presented in previous papers (Bjursell, 2019a, 2019b). One Senior University participant reported that 'the reason to continue with learning for the elderly is to maintain and develop one's knowledge and to be a part of society, and it is social and promotes good health and it gives one a more meaningful life' (SU2018: f18). While this respondent revealed profound insight into the benefits of education, other respondents were more down-to-earth when they described how they initially enrolled at Senior University. Several of the respondents who wrote about their participation at Senior University had family members who were already part of the Senior University movement: 'My husband was a member before I was and so I followed along too when I retired nine years ago.' (SU2018: f50); 'When my wife retired in 2008, we decided together to apply to become members of the Senior University in Norrköping.' (SU2018: m30). Others had former work colleagues who were members and recommended that they join Senior University: 'I knew about Senior University even before I retired. Some of my older work colleges told me about the fun courses and excursions.' (SU2018: f36); 'I heard about the Senior University from an ex-work college and from my husband, who retired before I did.' (SU2018: f13). Recommendations also came from friends and acquaintances: 'I was tipped off by a friend.' (SU2018: m39); 'Recommendations made by acquaintances.' (SU2018: f32).

Amongst those respondents who were not informed about Senior University from family, friends, or colleagues, a number of different pathways led them to Senior University. Information about Senior University is sometimes distributed by various *folkbildning* organisations and one respondent learnt about Senior University this way: 'When *Folkuniversitetet* had an information evening several years ago I attended and it was there that I learnt about Senior University.' (SU2018: f51). Some people joined the organisation after being asked to perform certain tasks: 'I was asked to lecture on a course for autumn term, 2017.' (SU2018: f37); 'I was "recruited" as the IT technician for the association.' (SU2018: m24). One respondent reported that a survey had been sent out by the organisation and this piqued the respondent's interest, who joined the organisation after that: 'I was widowed and retired almost at the same time and found out about the Senior University in Uppsala via a questionnaire that was sent out to recent retirees.' (SU2018: f19). The content of the courses is also something that draws certain participants to the organisation: 'I saw the course catalogue when I retired and thought that there was a lot of nice things to do at a reasonable price.' (SU2018: f09).

One person stated that a German language course, a gift from his children, was the reason why he started participating in an education activity: ‘When I retired in 2008, our children gave me a birthday gift which was enrolment on the senior universities German language course. I started in the spring of 2009, and I am still enrolled.’ (SU2018: m28). This person chose to continue with his studies after completing his first course. Another motive why certain participants enrol at Senior University is the perceived connection between keeping oneself active and maintaining good health. In several of the stories, it was mentioned that it is important to keep one’s mind active: ‘Stimulation is extremely important for improved wellbeing and to get input for one’s thoughts. Now there is time for reflection.’ (SU2018: f20). Another respondent claimed that she ‘believes that you can keep your brain healthier by learning new things and not least by having contact with other people with whom you might not normally socialise – you can’t just solve crossword puzzles.’ (SU2018: f06). A third participant stated that ‘being a part of an association or the equivalent is also a very important health factor. It contributes to having a meaningful and rewarding life in one’s old age.’ (SU2018: f05).

Discussion: Participation in education in later life

The findings presented above show that older adults have many different motives as to why they engage in an education activity. On an overall level, two clusters of motives why they participate in education activities can be identified; namely, (i) staying active and (ii) socialising. This observation corresponds well with previous studies. In the subsequent sections, these two motives are further examined and is followed by a more detailed discussion of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation.

‘Staying active’ and ‘socialising’

The two broad notions of ‘staying active’ and ‘socialising’ capture the general motives why older adults wish to participate in education activities. This observation corresponds to what is reported on in the literature (Boulton-Lewis & Buys 2015; Kim & Merriam, 2004; Åberg, 2018). In the survey used in the present study, ‘staying active’ and ‘socialising’ were ranked as the top two motives why the respondents participate in education activities and they were also found in the narratives that were provided by people attending Senior University. However, since these two general motives repeatedly appear in studies into the motives why older adults participate in education activities, they deserve much closer scrutiny to establish what they signify. ‘Socialising’ was defined by some participants as the basis for expanding the mind and engaging in self-fulfilment (Bjursell, 2019b). For example, interaction with others can be a prerequisite to engaging in dialogue on a topic or about existential questions in life. Engaging in education activities, as introduction or entrance to social networks, can also be understood as a way of preventing isolation, and is thus connected to issues of ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’. Note that ‘socialising’ is not merely understood as a physical activity. If that were the case, we would not expect that ‘socialising’ be something that is used to ‘expand the mental space’ (Narushima, Liu & Diestelkamp, 2018b). Notwithstanding this, it could still contribute to wellbeing in other ways. Just as we note that ‘socialising’ is a complex notion, the concept of ‘staying active’ is also complex since it encompasses both a person’s ‘physical’ and ‘psychological’ wellbeing. While ‘health’ is not explicitly mentioned in the empirical material as a motive, ‘staying active’ and ‘keeping one’s mind fit’ are mentioned as central reasons why certain

respondents participate in education activities. In the survey, ‘health’ was not added as a response option which could explain why it was not mentioned directly, but it could be implied in the alternative ‘I think it is important to participate in various activities’. In the narratives, ‘health’ was not mentioned either. Instead, the participants reported that ‘to stay active’ and ‘to keep one’s mind fit’ were important considerations and were offered as reasons why some respondents attended Senior University courses. Ways of keeping the mind active include learning new subjects, improving one’s knowledge of a particular area by engaging in further studies, enrolling in higher education, and having *bildung* as a personal goal, the importance of ‘keeping one’s mind fit’ corresponds to discussions in previous studies (Boulton-Lewis & Buys 2015; Boulton-Lewis, Buys & Lovie-Kitchin, 2006; Jenkins, 2011; Narushima, 2008; Withnall, 2010). ‘Staying active’ is associated with ‘wellbeing’ (that is, ‘feeling good about life’) rather than ‘health’ *per se* (that is, minimising the risk of death or physical decline). ‘Perceived life quality’ and ‘the ability to deal with change’ are important dimensions of wellbeing (Boulton-Lewis, 2010; Boulton-Lewis & Buys, 2015; Narushima, 2008; Narushima, Liu, & Diestelkamp, 2013a, 2018a). The studies that argue for a connection between ‘education’ and ‘health’ do not necessarily specifically enquire about education, but, instead, examine health later in life from a broader perspective (Cattan, et al., 2005; Najjar, et al., 2019). ‘To stay healthy’ may be a motive of specific relevance to older adults, as the current literature and the empirical material included in the present study demonstrate. But given this, to claim that ‘health’ is a direct motive may be problematic; is ‘health’ the reason why older adults participate in education activities or is it the case that ‘health’ is a positive outcome of participation?

Extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation

‘To be motivated means *to be moved* to do something’ (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 54, italics in the original). The title of this section may hint at a dichotomy, but the reader is kindly reminded that extrinsic- and intrinsic motivation may coexist in a fluid and interrelated way and should be understood as parts of a process. In addition, extrinsic motivation can either reflect external control or true self-regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Take the example of ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’. ‘Health’ and ‘wellbeing’ have been identified as experienced benefits when older adults participate in learning activities. There is evidence for the connection between participating in education activities, (as a way to stay physically and mentally active), and ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’. However, the mere identification of these benefits might not be enough to understand an individual’s motive for participation. In the narrative material, the stories reveal that the participants know this and that they want to benefit from active participation. This may well be understood as an instance of extrinsic motivation; they do something so as to achieve a separable outcome. But the narratives also give the impression that participation is voluntary, and that education is an activity that brings about inherent satisfaction. This could be an indication that (i) participation in education reflects true self-regulation (extrinsic motivation, but not controlled by others), or that (ii) with respect to ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’, the participants have internalized a notion of achieving a certain outcome as intrinsic motivation, so that they feel that they are participating in the education activity *for its own sake*. In addition, a person’s motivation why they might engage in education may have multiple and changing aspects. This is especially true in later life, when a person may be subject to a variety of changes in their outer- and inner lives. Participation in different education activities is often just one of many contexts that older adults find themselves in.

When the narrative material is closely examined, we note that several of the explanations why certain participants came to enrol at Senior University are quite simple. It was frequently reported that participants had joined education activities because others had done so (family, friends, or former work-colleagues) or that it was mere happenstance that they heard about Senior University courses, or were invited by someone else (to take care of the IT-system or hold a lecture). This stands in contrast to the grand idea of participating so as to ‘improve one’s life’. It seems that it was almost by chance that these respondents came to engage in education activities; but once they had enrolled, they found joy and fulfilment in the activity. Note that those individuals who did not find joy and fulfilment are most probably not represented in the empirical material, since the material represents older adults who chose to continue with the education activity). Nevertheless, the accounts of how the respondents enrolled at Senior University are social in character in the sense that they got to know about the organisation through a social network. Indirectly, an individual’s social network can be understood as representing social class, and statements about enrolling at Senior University because of family, friends, or former work-colleagues can be an indication that social class is a relevant factor to understand who enrolls in education activities and why they do so. Previous studies have shown that a person’s level of educational attainment can explain that person’s participation in education later in life; the higher the level, the more probable it is that an individual will continue in education activities (Bjursell, et al., 2017). This discussion suggests that what, on the surface, may appear to be the result of an individual’s motivation and choice may well be explained by social and contextual factors instead.

Conclusion

Education and learning have the potential to benefit a person later in life. When individuals participate in education activities, this does not only promote an increased sense of wellbeing at that moment in time; it also lays the foundation for the individual to develop themselves, in pace with the rest of society. ‘To stay active’ and ‘to socialize’ have been identified in the literature, as well as in the empirical studies included in the present study, as motives why people participate in education activities. However, the present study has also argued that it is necessary to unpack these broad concepts if one is to develop a richer understanding of why older adults engage in education activities. Furthermore, from practice, we know that it is crucial that older adults are able to control their own time and to choose the activities they wish to engage in. They are willing to do a great deal in this area, *if they can do it on their own terms*. We thus note that autonomy is an even more articulated need, as we age. Finally, the focus of this study has been on the motives why older adults participate in education activities, but in the discussion above, an additional question is raised about whether a person’s propensity to participate in education is dependent on the person’s social class instead of the person’s individual motivation. Efforts to support participation and inclusion in education should take this into consideration.

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