

## Module 4: Content Materials

Women's economic, social and personal resources are more vulnerable as they age compared to those of men, as women tend to be limited by female gender roles their entire life. Older women learn in order to meet their personal needs and produce an impact on communities to which they belong (couple, family, local community, etc.). Knowing why and what older women want to learn is basic for developing an educational programme for them. In addition, all groups from the edge of society enrol in education not only for acquiring knowledge and skills but for developing informed attitudes towards their own life. This is particularly true of older female learners who tend to comply with the prevailing denigrating social stereotypes about gender and old age. They need to learn how to oppose them and become more self-confident as a person and an older woman.

Thus, developing education programmes for any marginalized social group, women included, is always somehow subversive and going against the existing situation.

### 1. ANALYSING NEEDS, WISHES, AND ASPIRATIONS

Programming contents of educational programmes for adults requires a fair number of decisions that can take place among organizations, people, and activities (Caffarella, 1994). Analysing older female learners' needs (related to both deficiencies and personal growth) and aspirations starts with the developer widening their frame of reference: by gathering documents, archive documents, videos, feature and documentary films, TV show talks, newspaper articles, scientific studies, studying relevant concepts, project outputs, etc.

Once the information is gathered, programme developers meet with the potential learning group members in different formal and informal settings. They listen to what they say, trying to identify the learners' hopes and fears. To this end, the programme developer can use a guided interview or just ask questions and subquestions, reacting to the women's answers, opinions and body language. That way the programme developers come closer to older female learners' reality. This is a circular activity that is repeated at all stages of programme development.

Older women's learning needs are mainly associated with their social capital: Older women want to understand themselves and want to learn how to improve their relationships with their husband, family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues. Regarding women's cultural capital, older women's learning is likely to be connected with learning to learn, opening up to life situations, recognizing and opposing ageist attitudes. Such competencies are best learned before an older woman becomes frail (approximately at the age of 70). If an older woman has a higher level of single capital, she is more ready to go on learning within that capital. Educators should animate older female learners through contents that belong to their prevailing social and cultural capital.

For a report prepared by French students at the Slovenian Third Age University in the study year 2018/2019, a female student found in an evaluation that female learners prefer contents relating to French



culture and civilization, and current events in the local environment, but were strongly rejecting political and economic contents which, on the other hand, men liked very much.

Generally, older female learners are more willing than male learners to acquire several competencies at the same time. Additionally, older women usually self-directed learners and do not mind delayed gratification for their learning. Men, on the contrary, usually search for immediate gratification and tend to enroll in education programmes for a limited period of time.

## 2. IDENTIFYING ENGENDERED EDUCATIONAL TOPICS

Problems faced in real life are complex, therefore they require to be approached through multidisciplinary knowledge.

In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), Paulo Freire argues that it is necessary to understand pedagogy as going beyond education and extend it to reference sciences like sociology, political theory, cultural studies, gerontology, development studies, philosophy, communication, etc. In these and other sciences it is possible to search for contents related to older women. They can bring answers to a number of issues concerning older women.

Programming contents for older women's education that are true to their age and gender and true to their everyday life is most efficient in non-formal education. Moreover, programming contents for education of older women involves intimate knowledge of the learning group where learning is to take place.

How can we analyse the social and cultural gender capital of older women? Older women's learning needs are potentially related to various or even all areas of their life. Topics can be physiological (concerning the body, its functioning, the five senses, etc.), psychological (inner life), social (relationships within communities like couple, family, and friends; gender neutral language, etc.), environmental (physical, built environment, etc.), cultural (personal history, cultural practices, experiences, acquired competencies, social roles, cultural prejudices, social stereotypes about older women in everyday life, press, art, etc.), or economic (the right of older women to education and work, etc.). The most important topic, however, to be dealt with is gender equality (justice, old age and the battle against gender discrimination).

## 3. HOW DEVELOP AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME FROM YOUR FINDINGS

The implementation based on the previous programming phase is focused on the reality of older women's lives. Important aspects of female learners' reality are then included in the form of pictures, subjects for discussion, role plays, overall topics, pedagogical methods and approaches. The gathered material is arranged in such a way that the learners can gain some "critical distance": It should be based on theories, though delivered in a simple, understandable language with many examples illustrating a single concept. When designing the programme, methods that support the creation and maintaining a sense of community within the study groups (cooperative learning, exploratory and project learning, etc.) are methods of choice.

In this context, the capital the learners bring to the classroom can be addressed, as social inequalities are based on the three forms of capital.:

- economic capital: possession and revenue
- social capital: social network that can be mobilised when needed. Not all relations are of the same value. Some are more efficient than others, creating inequalities.
- cultural capital: language skills, artistic skills, etc.

### Literature and references

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