

Experiences of non-formal and informal online learning by “young old” women and men

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ABSTRACT: The empirical study investigates “young old” people’s accounts of their interest in and use of online non-formal and informal learning resources. Twenty-one women and thirty-one men, aged 65-74, were interviewed for this purpose. The study findings, obtained through Grounded Theory methodology, illustrate how the interviewees’ use of learning technologies and resources is seen as relevant and offers meaningful experiences. The interviewees share a positive view of the experience, a useful way of enhancing their cultural and leisure experiences and helping them in informal teaching activities. Their interest in and use of non-formal and informal online learning allow them to enrich their lives, in a mix of virtual and real experiences reflecting life wide learning. In some cases, the online experience compensates for sensorial and physical limitations. When at risk of isolation in real life, the online learning experience is seen as a risk of further isolation. The theoretical and practical implications of the results are also briefly discussed.

Keywords: Online education, Young old, Gender, Life wide learning, Non-formal and informal learning.

1. Introduction

Today lifelong learning includes situations and sources which are merged and mixed into everyday life. The concept of “lifelong learning” is thus complemented with the concept of “lifewide learning”, a continuous life process stemming not only from formal and informal intentional learning, but also from unintentional learning, occurring potentially everywhere. «Learning of adults happens not only lifelong, but also lifewide in a multitude of traditional and non-traditional, formal and informal settings (workplaces, leisure-time, families, churches, market-places, television, the life)»¹: to the list written by Reischmann, we can add the formal, non-formal, and informal learning resources available on the Internet.

While exceptionally septuagenarians or even octogenarians may pursue college degrees, older people interested in intellectual development alone may find many

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1. J. REISCHMANN, *Lifelong and Lifewide Learning - a Perspective*, in *Lifelong Education and Lifelong Learning in Thailand*, edited by S. Charungkaittikul, Bangkok 2014, p. 294.