The Roles of Canadian Universities in Heterogeneous Third-Age Learning: A Call for Transformation

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Abstract

This article makes the case that Canadian universities—both within and beyond their campuses—must broaden their visions of third-age learners. Canadian third-age learners—defined for the purposes of this article as persons seeking formalized education who are in the stage of life beginning at retirement—are more numerous, active, financially stable, and diverse as well as healthier and better educated than at any other time in our history. It follows that Canadian universities have much to offer and gain by both deepening and broadening their involvement with these learners. I argue that universities must consider multi-pronged forms of collaboration and must be motivated, at all times, not by short-sighted financial concerns but by their core obligation to serve the public good by fostering community engagement.

Résumé

Cet article expose le bien-fondé, pour les universités canadiennes, tant sur leurs campus qu'à l'extérieur, d'élargir leur vision des apprenants du troisième âge. Au Canada, cette catégorie d'apprenants que l'on définit, pour les besoins de l'article, comme des personnes à la recherche d'un programme de formation structuré ayant atteint l'étape de la retraite, renferme une population plus nombreuse, active, stable sur le plan financier, en meilleure santé, plus instruite et plus diversifiée qu'à toute autre époque de notre histoire. Par conséquent, les universités canadiennes auraient plus à offrir et à gagner si elles approfondissaient et élargissaient leur implication auprès de ces apprenants. Nous soutenons que les universités doivent envisager des formes de collaboration à volets multiples et se montrer motivées en tout temps, non par des préoccupations financières imprévoyantes, mais par leur obligation première de bien servir le public en encourageant la participation de la collectivité.

Introduction

Various sectors of the Canadian university system seem to be envisioning university-community relationships as integral to the 21st-century university. Judging by everything from community resource guides to strategic research plans, from public declarations by presidents to faculty associations' conference themes, it would appear that Canadian universities are increasingly recognizing the benefits of eroding barriers between the "ivory tower" and the community surrounding it—whether to encourage the greater community to utilize campus resources, to provide meaningful research opportunities for students and faculty while addressing increasingly critical societal needs, or to address shared spatial needs and economic crunches. For example, as part of its community engagement strategy, the University of Guelph recently published a 95-page guide to campus services, including everything from community borrower privileges at its libraries and educational programs for children to "collaborations with local organizations, charities, businesses and residents" (University of Guelph, 2014). Thompson Rivers University's most recent strategic research plan is not atypical in devoting two of its six major objectives to such connections at the research level, espousing "linking of research to community . . . development" and "facilitat[ing] the development of partnerships with communities . . . for pursuing mutual objectives" (Thompson Rivers University, 2014, p. 2). In addition, both McGill University principal and vice-chancellor Suzanne Fortier and University of Toronto president Meric Gertler have recently affirmed their respective institutions' commitment to forging stronger relationships with their cities. In the context of acquiring for McGill a former hospital building that will soon be available, Fortier envisions the university as forming part of a team supporting efforts to enhance Montreal internationally (McGill University, 2014). Gertler sees partnerships as ways to "meet significant challenges" for cash-strapped cities and invites Toronto to make use of the university's research capacity and thereby provide the university with "real-world experiences" (Brown, 2014). Furthermore, the 2014 Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations Conference, which had a key theme of "expanding the scope of engagement with . . . local communities and the broader public," devoted a session to "reclaiming the civic university" (Fallis, 2014, p. 1). The pull of the local would seem to be approaching the force of the pull of the global.

However, closer scrutiny reveals the possibility of a disconnect and indicates the importance of rationale and process in community-university partnerships. Keil, Olds, and Addie (2012), for example, note city-university relationships "have started to shift as globalization and neoliberalization have left their imprint on Canada's economy" (p. 3), and they perceive an irony in the association: when the greatest need of cities in such partnerships is "enhanced civic leadership," universities are "focused on . . . revenue generation . . . practices and relations" (p. 34). George Fallis (2014) is similarly wary, warning that universities should reflect upon their motivations and proceed with caution as they reach out to their communities. While such collaborations have significant potential for mutual positive impact when a shared vision of the public good is the guiding principle, Fallis notes that some core values of the civic university system, such as serving the public good by enhancing culture and democratic life and acting as a counterweight to the authority of government and business, are being called into question. Universities, he states, are being increasingly perceived of as "institutions of the economy"—a role that "threatens to

overwhelm their role as an institution of democracy" (p. 6). Explicit in both articles is the contention that local collaboration for the result of social transformation for the greater public good, rather than for short-sighted economic reasons, must be at the forefront of every action around shared resources, research, teaching, and space.

Nowhere is the ground more fertile for productive collaboration than in the relationship between the civic university and third-age learners. This article, after providing a rationale, defining its parameters, and examining the history and growth of the relationship between third-age learners and universities, will argue (in part by providing an overview of two existing exemplars, one in Australia and the other in Canada) that Canadian universities, as institutions of democracy, must take deeper and more diverse approaches to third-age learning.

First, however, an overview of my own complex involvement in community-university relationships—as a teacher, researcher, and volunteer—may prove useful, as it has evolved over the several decades I have been employed in the English department at Thompson Rivers University. As a teacher, I have supervised students in service-learning placements at several community organizations, most notably our local professional theatre company, Western Canada Theatre (WCT). As a researcher, I have published articles about those placements and about how WCT and other theatre companies in small British Columbia cities engage with their universities and other components of their communities. These and other community experiences have been complemented by my more recent role as a volunteer; since 2007, I have taught Canadian literature courses for a local independent third-age learning organization, the Kamloops Adult Learners Society. Not only have these roles made me aware of the complexity of such relationships, but they have also cemented my belief in the power of civic-minded university-community collaborations to effect positive change.

Rationale

Beyond the important altruistic motives for universities to reinvigorate their relationships with senior learners, a variety of quantitative and qualitative indicators point to the general public good being best served when the educational needs of seniors are met. Ellis and Leahy (2011) report that a variety of studies demonstrate that health and well-being are positively affected by learning (p. 161). Merriam and Kee (2014) draw on research that indicates that older adults who are active and educated use fewer public resources and services (p. 131). A recent Cambridge University study (Norton, Matthews, Barnes, Yaffe, & Brayne, 2014) bolsters these findings, indicating approximately one-third of all Alzheimer's disease cases globally might be reduced by "public health interventions targeted at vascular risk factors, depression, *and* low educational attainment" (p. 794, emphasis added). Thus, universities, by engaging more deeply with third-age learners, can play an instrumental role in individual and societal public health.

What is often overlooked, however, is that the benefits of such engagement work both ways: that is, as Merriam and Kee report, lifelong learners in older age are likely to foster community well-being, sometimes to the extent that they are "productively aging"—that is, not only *not* draining public resources but *augmenting* them, by, for example, adding new knowledge to society (pp. 131–133). Thus, society's best interests are served when seniors' best interests are served educationally, and universities can be fundamental to meeting those interests.

Evolving Perspectives and Models of Third-Age Learning

Perhaps because of its shifting nature, an authoritative definition of the term "third-age learner" is difficult to access, and confusion with related terms adds a layer of complexity. One has only to observe the widely varying ages at which Canadians retire today to understand the elusiveness of prescribed parameters around this growing segment of the population. Formosa (2010), who acknowledges the definition as contentious, categorizes adults aged roughly from 50 to 75 who no longer have regular employment or family-raising responsibilities as members of the third age. Implicit in this definition is the belief that the fourth age, which ends with the end of life, begins at 75, although others put its commencement at age 80 or when mobility is seriously impaired. Furthermore, several related—but not synonymous—terms may muddy the waters. Third-age learning should not be confused with adult learning, which commonly refers to all learning resumed by adults after they have left their initial education, regardless of age; third-age learning has an age component—although it is vague, it is older. It is also important to distinguish third-age learning from the broader term "lifelong learning," which in educational circles has come to mean ongoing learning. Third-age learning may, in this context, be seen as an age-related subset of lifelong learning—ongoing learning confined to retirement. Of course, learning for all age categories and life stages happens in many settings—and third-agers continue to learn in a host of formal and informal situations removed from the classroom—but for the purposes of this article, "third-age learning" will refer to formalized (although not necessarily "for credit") education directed at those in the stage of life beginning at retirement; it will be used interchangeably with the term "education for seniors" and variants. No distinction between third and fourth age will be made, as seniors may be engaged members of third-age learning organizations when they are well into their 80s.

Much has changed for people in the third age of life with a thirst for ongoing knowledge sources since the first University of the Third Age (U3A) began in 1972 at the University of Toulouse, France. There, a political science professor successfully piloted a summer school for retired people—so successfully, in fact, that the eager students convinced him to launch a program for the next fall, although his intent had been to resume the program only the following summer (Huang, 2006, p. 825). The pace of the change was rapid: by 1975 the International Association of Universities of the Third Age was formed, and the movement had made its way to North America (Swindell & Thompson, 1995, pp. 429–430). The University of the Third Age has become an international organization with affiliate member groups on all five continents and in 23 countries; in the United Kingdom alone, there were 321,837 learners registered in 923 U3As as of 2012; and the Virtual University of the Third Age is well established.] (Third Age Trust, 2012). Beyond the U3A model, some organizations have made concerted efforts to organize education for seniors at a national level. In the United States, for example, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes, which began in 2001 by building on earlier American initiatives at the University of San Francisco and the University of Southern Maine, have spread to 119 campuses in every state (Bernard Osher Foundation, n.d.). When we keep in mind that perhaps only a minority of seniors' educational organizations are affiliated with the U3A, and that as many as 60 countries have such organizations (Formosa, 2014, p. 46) we can see that the proliferation of third-age learning organizations is, if not staggering, certainly not practically calculable.

In type, as well as in quantity, much has changed in the area of seniors' learning institutions. While the popularity of the university-controlled approach of the Toulouse model soon spread well beyond that city—by 1980, in fact, it had spread throughout France and the Union French University of the Third Age had been formed (Huang, 2006, p. 826)—there has also been a proliferation in independent models of lifelong learning in the ensuing decades. The basic breakdown into two categories—the university-controlled model and the independent, peer-learning model, which was adopted by Britain beginning in 1981 (Swindell & Thompson, 1995, p. 432)—begins to tell the story.

However, Formosa (2014) reports at least five other models with varying curricula, member participation, and levels of relationships to universities (p. 47). In fact, Taiwanese U3As have neither university nor independent status; they are under the auspices of local authorities. On the other hand, South American organizations are usually closely linked to a university, as in the French model; however, they diverge by placing emphasis on the most socially and economically marginalized elderly. U3As in China take a holistic approach, requiring health and exercise as well as academic courses, and draw on the expertise of paid older instructors as well as volunteers of various ages. Finnish U3As have university affiliations, but groups of older learners play a substantial role in shaping curriculum. In Malta, U3As feature both traditional university lectures and discussion groups led by members. Clearly, countries have put their own cultural imprint on third-age learning. Finally, in Quebec, U3As are "seriously intent on blurring the distinction between higher education and third-age learning" (Formosa, 2014, p. 47). Formosa provides the example of a bachelor of arts degree designed for senior learners that has been offered through a Montreal U3A with prerequisites of either "appropriate" earlier studies or "self-taught knowledge," as well as adequate knowledge of Canada's two official languages (2014, p. 47). Canadian universities can learn much about adaptation and flexibility from each of these variants on the traditional models. What has transpired since the inception of U3As is both a revolution and an evolution. Although the university-controlled model is evident in units in campuses worldwide, it has been modified to changing times; in addition, the popular British model has inspired groups of seniors to organize independently of universities and develop distinct schools that evolve organically as circumstances change. Fluidity and hybridity have replaced fixity.

As significantly, seniors themselves have changed in the intervening decades. Statistics Canada, in its 2007 *A Portrait of Seniors,* reported that the characteristics and needs of the growing number of people between the ages of 65 and 85 (and older) are significantly diverse. Furthermore, as Findsen (2006) notes, attempts to define older adults have been somewhat elusive: except for drawing retirement as a clear stage, most societies do not clearly or uniformly demarcate the beginning of older adulthood. Pointing out that individual notions of old age vary as the individual ages, Findsen reminds us that aging is both physiological and social, and, while the physical process is inevitable, cultural and social definitions dictate our responses to aging (2006, p. 66). Indications are that societal rethinking of previously held conceptions of seniors and their need for education is in order. As models for seniors' learning have expanded, so too must we expand the dimensions through which we view older people as learners.

The Statistics Canada report (2007) also suggests that, as baby boomers turn 65, the very definition of seniors needs reassessing. It highlights the ongoing nature of evolution

of seniors into a complex, vigorous subset of society that is increasingly financial stable, more active, and better educated. Studies such as Trentin's (2004), which monitored an online training experience for third-agers, support the Statistics Canada finding that they are very capable Internet users—and indicate they are even adept online learners, contrary to popular opinion. To further illustrate the rate of change, the report noted an increase in life expectancy at the age of 65 of 1.2 years, even over the short period between 1991 and 2003. The evidence is that the forecast that "Canada's seniors are poised to become an even more heterogeneous crowd than they are today" (Statistics Canada, 2007) has already borne fruit: transformation is ongoing. Canadian universities need to consider adaptation strategies that keep pace with these changes.

Continuing Education (and Variants) and ElderCollege Models

In some respects, Canadian universities have reached out to this heterogeneous group. The Toulouse model is evident in many aspects of continuing education or continuing studies (or, as it has been reinvented at my university, Community U) initiatives. These units usually administer courses and programs to a broad demographic of adult lifelong learners who are defined by what they are not: younger people pursuing degrees on a full-time (or close to full-time) basis. The University of British Columbia (UBC), for example, offers multiple physical and virtual platforms to serve "the adult education needs of lifelong learners" whether general-interest, academic, or career development. Learners are offered courses that last a day or a week, lecture series, or more formally structured options that can be applied to UBC's certificate in liberal studies (University of British Columbia, 2014). UBC's program, which seems to have incorporated some elements of the Maltese approach, does not lack for options for seniors.

In some cases, universities have formed affiliations with ElderColleges. The ElderCollege at Vancouver Island University (VIU), for example, began in 1993 as an independent organization with a goal of planning and operation by its members, as in the British model. Its partnership with what was then Malaspina College appears to have been one that largely allowed it this freedom. However, by 2002, the independent operation, because of financial difficulties, became "a Malaspina University College program, subject to all fees and operating costs" (Vancouver Island University, 2014). Although VIU's ElderCollege has lost some of its independence in its move toward a French model, its partnership with VIU certainly seems to be filling an important educational need for some seniors.

However, recent studies have indicated that, while Canadian governments have voiced a commitment to lifelong learning in general—for individual and societal development— there is a fissure between their words and the actual practices of Canadian universities (Nesbit, Dunlop, & Gibson, 2007, p. 38). Even within universities, mission statements and educational plans may not be mirrored in their actions. Using British Columbia as an example, Nesbit et al.'s 2007 study indicates that "most institutional approaches to lifelong learning . . . regard it rather passively as a remedial activity, peripheral to their main goal of educating younger students," and that the majority of opportunities are concentrated on employment creation and career enhancement (p. 46). Increasing financial pressure at all levels of universities, they indicate, means that units delegated with providing lifelong learning often find themselves undertaking those commitments as part of larger duties and with few resources (p. 47). Perhaps inevitably in such circumstances, the

nation's continuing education divisions have, over the past few decades, embraced "economically driven programming" (Fletcher, 2008, p. 32). Cost recovery, or even revenue generation, takes precedence over lofty rhetoric. In such situations, where lifelong learning as a whole is often an "off the side of the desk" pursuit, one would expect that third-age learning, specifically, could not be anything other than significantly marginalized.

The explicit philosophical and pedagogical distinctions between a university-administered program or slate of courses for seniors and one that follows the peer-learning, autonomous ideals of the British model must be considered. The former, driven by larger needs of the university, is inevitably more hierarchical and likely to be more costly and regimented. In fact, as suggested above, education driven solely by seniors' needs is likely to be rare; more commonly, third-age learning is subsumed in larger configurations. Even when the fundamental grade-free approach of non-credit courses is a feature of these programs, there is a basic distinction. The peer-learning model puts the control in the hands of the learners themselves; it is by nature more democratic and involving, as it is often largely self-funded (or financed by a blend of self-funding and contributions from a variety of agencies other than universities) and organized and run on a largely volunteer basis by the students themselves. When learners organize courses, deal with logistics such as finances and space acquisition, and teach and learn from each other, they invest in their own learning in ways that, while they add to their responsibilities, can also be liberating. In addition, as Findsen (2006) notes, they are often freeing their organization from the "bureaucratic mechanisms that impede collective decision making" (p. 71) that may be a function of larger institutions. Thus, both process and result differ considerably in the two models.

I am advocating not an either-or scenario but a "both and more" scenario—an examination of not only the French and British models but also the variations mentioned above, as well as the interstices between these approaches. The explosion in the numbers of seniors and the diversity of their educational needs necessitate broader recognition of older-adult education on the part of universities: in on-campus continuing education units, through community outreach into previously uncharted groups of seniors, and through partnerships with existing independent seniors' learning institutions. First, universities would be wise to work to close the gap between their words and their actions in the reinvented continuing education model by devoting more resources and imagination to education for retired people. Here, the South American model, which reaches out to historically marginalized seniors, comes to mind. For example, Findsen and Formosa (2011) point out that, globally, U3A participation is dominated by middle-class membership. Universities have the opportunity to utilize the social capital offered by segments of their cities' senior population that have previously experienced real or perceived barriers to higher education. Directing courses to ethnic minorities, for example, or to parts of cities with high poverty rates would seem a logical action for continuing education units, particularly in a country such as Canada that espouses multiculturalism and equality. In addition, by erasing the financial barriers inherent in the currently economically driven agenda of continuing education units, universities have the opportunity to expand the productive-aging capacity of their communities. As long as universities treat continuing education as remedial and marginal, they will lack the vision to make the most of the potential to halt marginalization and foster community well-being by engaging a broader demographic of senior students in their continuing education units. By empowering these

units to think beyond the bottom line and engage a broader demographic of senior students, Canadian universities would be taking important steps toward both realizing the potential for productive aging among seniors and demonstrating civic leadership.

Critically, given the heterogeneity of seniors and their educational needs, Canadian universities must also think beyond the continuing education model and the French model by partnering with non-education-focused seniors' organizations. For example, while existing programs undoubtedly accommodate some of the growing number of third-age learners, and improved programs and approaches will accommodate more of them, universities must recognize the physical barriers of seniors—especially older seniors—by going to the places where they are. Nesbit et al. (2007), for example, recommend development of collaborative networks with local groups to promote learning as fundamental to community change (p. 48). What better way to foster such development than by utilizing facilities in buildings in which groups of seniors live? The spectrum of such accommodations is wide, from independent living through assisted living and long-term care facilities; some residents, especially in the last two categories, are likely to have the desire for learning even if they lack the physical strength or transportation to travel. Mayo (2011) formulates such education as socially beneficial—"an education for prolonged citizenship" (p. xv). One means of eroding the barriers constructed by the ivory tower—barriers that not only hamper universities' visibility in their communities but also perpetuate marginalization—is for the universities themselves to get out of the towers and into the buildings of their communities.

Independent Learning Organizations and Universities

Keeping in mind the increasing number of seniors in Canada and their diversity of backgrounds and interests, universities must also respect and embrace seniors' educational organizations that wish to remain independent. In fact, such settings may provide universities with the greatest potential to rise above a revenue generation mindset, foster productive aging, and engage in genuine community partnership and development.

Given that an undeterminable number of independent learning organizations exist worldwide, a few examples are helpful to provide context and detail. Both organizations discussed here were selected because they have informal, non-hierarchical relationships with the universities in their respective communities—relationships that have proven advantageous to both parties while not being controlled by universities. As indicated in my introduction, my research interest in third-age learning is a direct result of my volunteer teaching with a local third-age learning organization, the Kamloops Adult Learners Society; thus, its inclusion in this article is both relevant and expedient. A comparison to an older independent learning organization beyond Canada's borders not only bolsters the case for informal collaboration but also provides a model to assist the younger organization to continue to work toward what the Australian researchers Ellis & Leahy (2011) describe as "a mutually beneficial relationship" (p. 154). In both scenarios, the groundwork has been laid, and, with the goals of reciprocity and the greater public good at the forefront of every step as the relationship proceeds, community growth can be the outcome of an ongoing relationship.

Whyalla and the University of South Australia

Australian U3As, from their beginnings in Melbourne in 1984, have tended to follow the British model. They now number over 200, including a virtual U3A (accessible globally) operating out of Griffith University, Queensland (Ellis and Leahy, 2011, pp. 154–155). In Australia, an alliance of U3As was formed in 2010, and in 2014 that body began receiving funding (U3A Alliance Australia, 2014, p. 11). Although the government assistance has come with an increase in bureaucracy that has initially proven challenging for the volunteer personnel of the U3As (U3A Alliance Australia, 2014, p. 11), this funding model is one that Canadian governments might well examine. As the example that follows attests, Canada has more to learn from Australia's approach to third-age learning.

Ellis and Leahy present a 2011 case study of a relationship between the Whyalla campus of the University of South Australia (UniSA) and the University of the Third Age Whyalla (U3A Whyalla) branch as an exemplar of sustainability. I suggest it is also an exemplar of freedom and democracy. U3A Whyalla has maintained its independence in a collaboration, begun in 1996, that Ellis and Leahy see as an all-too-rare instance of universities working *with*, rather than *for*, the community—a reciprocal, rather than a unilateral, involvement. UniSA provides some of the classrooms for the U3A, and UniSA staff provide some tutoring; however, the growing autonomy of the U3A is indicated in the fact that the number of its students and community members who tutor has increased over the years (p. 157). A qualitative research project found that Whyalla U3A members have appreciated the rent-free facilities as instrumental in keeping their tuition low, believed the interaction with younger students worthwhile, and found the high profile afforded by their central location beneficial (p. 159). This response indicates that the relationship with the university has played a role in the U3A branch maintaining its independence, as low tuition and high profile keep the program attractive and in the public eye. From the UniSA perspective, faculty found benefit from U3A involvement in their own classes (the U3A students have acted as model patients or clients in nursing and social work classes, for example) as well as their volunteerism in various university events (pp. 159–160). The interactivity the relationship facilitates, then, is perceived as beneficial by both parties. In sum, the quality of life for both partners is enhanced in these sustained relationships—with no loss of independence on the part of the U3A learners and at little or no financial cost to the university.

Ellis and Leahy (2011) report that larger studies of similar arrangements in Victoria, Australia, also display valuing of U3A learners on university campuses: faculty are appreciative that U3A learners provide "lifelong learning role models," that "the partnership . . . opens up avenues for academics pursuing the scholarship of engagement, as well as that of teaching and research," and that the learners are "unofficial word-of-mouth marketers" (pp. 161, 162). Formosa (2014) states that "sturdy independence and anti-authoritarian stance" (p. 45) are stamps of the British model, and these South Australian U3As seem to have retained that flavour, while avoiding insularity. At the same time, the University of South Australia is modelling and fostering community engagement.

The Kamloops Adult Learners Society and Thompson Rivers University

The relationship between a newer independent organization and the local university in a Canadian small city provides another example of important informal collaboration—with growth potential. The Kamloops Adult Learners Society (KALS, www.kals.ca), formed in 2005 with the criteria that the learners be retired and that peer-learning be a fundamental principle. With a student body (as of 2015) of approximately 200 enrolled in classes in community and senior centres, KALS has remained true to those principles—while modifying the second one—as it has evolved into a modified form of the British model: some of the courses have been taught by the membership and community members from the outset, but, increasingly, some have been taught by volunteer retired or current Thompson Rivers University (TRU) professors. By running itself, partnering with community organizations, and engaging volunteer instructors, KALS has kept tuition low (and thus made itself accessible to a greater portion of the seniors' community than many such institutions), made inroads into other seniors' organizations, and enriched the lives of individuals and the community in Kamloops.

Although Ellis and Leahy's study (2011) does not focus directly on the benefits to UniSA faculty of volunteer teaching Whyalla students, I can attest to the intrinsic rewards and transferable experiences I myself have received as a volunteer instructor for KALS and a researcher of the group. In addition to providing material for my research, this teaching has resulted in my being more experimental and less grade-focused in my TRU teaching, involved me in new community projects, provided me with networking opportunities, and, on a more personal note, given me a more promising model of older age than the one I previously held. As much learner as teacher, I am finding the intrinsic rewards manifold. Volunteer teaching for third-age organizations has much to offer university professors.

The UniSA-U3A model is one that KALS is, unknowingly—despite its spatial separation from TRU—emulating in some other important respects, perhaps foremost among them that the model comes with no memorandum of understanding. Instead, as Ellis and Leahy describe it, "The . . . relationship relies on informal cooperation, acceptance and mutual willingness to be of assistance to the partner" (2011, p. 164). In fact, in the KALS-TRU relationship there is no TRU administrative involvement; faculty are recruited by KALS members in an informal, word-of-mouth manner. This informal, collegial component in both relationships may well be a critical factor in the existing and future health of both relationships. Bureaucracies can fuel red tape, rigidity, and hierarchy.

As a younger institution than U3A Whyalla, KALS may take other lessons from the U3A branch's relationship with its local campus. Even as TRU's Community U model develops, the present coexistence can continue and develop. With the attitude of both partners that obstacles are meant to be circumvented, TRU could, for example, by making space available at its main campus, offer a centralized alternative to those learners not resident on Kamloops's North Shore, where the great majority of KALS classes are currently held; it could also foster some of the student-to-student relationships and volunteer opportunities that the UniSA-Whyalla U3A partnership has facilitated. TRU could also consider incentives that would make volunteering for KALS even more attractive to faculty. For its part, KALS has already shown openness to being research subjects; some of its members may well be open to the community-based participatory research model

that adult educators such as Fletcher (2008) advocate: a collaboration of all parties at all stages of the research, the model means joint ownership and decision-making, with each individual or group contributing according to their expertise (p. 35). KALS members, often involved as volunteers for numerous organizations in our small city—from professional theatre companies to community policing services—are also ripe for a wider audience for the role modelling they provide, and prime candidates for the word-of-mouth ambassadors that Ellis and Leahy report in South Australia. Their investment is not only in their learning and in the Kamloops Adult Learners Society but also in the wider community. Without the formalities and strictures that come with written agreements, TRU can foster the accessibility and sustainability of KALS, and KALS can assist TRU faculty and students with learning and research—and TRU administration with informal promotion and political advocacy. Formosa (2014) observes that British U3As have maintained their commitment to "remain free of universities, autonomous from local authorities, and . . . downplay traditional credentials" (p. 46). The independence of the Whyalla U3A and KALS can be safeguarded at the same time as they collaborate with their local universities.

In small cities in Australia and Canada, Whyalla U3A and KALS, at different stages in their evolution, offer their communities' universities qualitative reciprocity. The combined intellectual capacity of third-age learning and the university has significant potential for community enhancement, as well as serving as a model for future non-hierarchical community-university collaborations. Relationships formed and maintained on democratic principles of sustainability and independence are potent forces for mutual—and greater public—good.

Conclusions

Given the rapid pace at which seniors' learning institutions have developed, Swindell and Thompson's seminal 1995 article—a stock-taking overview of the state of U3As in several countries written roughly at the midpoint between the Toulouse initiative and the present day—may appear dated. On the contrary, however, many of its generalizations not only still hold true but also provide a blueprint for progress. The authors maintain that "one of the movement's greatest strengths is in its grassroots' autonomy" (p. 446). This, I believe, will continue to be a relevant insight well into the future. Despite their limitations, university-controlled mechanisms that resemble the French model have a place in the lives of some seniors—particularly if they take up the call to expand their vision and borders and incorporate some elements of the British model, such as those found in the Finnish, Maltese, and Quebec adaptations. However, the grassroots movement, precisely because it is generated and executed by the very people it serves, will continue to provide a crucial option; indeed, the growing number of independent organizations and the growing number of well educated, independent-minded seniors indicate that the British model and its adaptations will continue to flourish.

Formosa (2014) has indicated that some independents have been "victims of their own success"; their membership can become so large that finding sufficient space and enough volunteer administrators is proving challenging (p. 52). While creative reorganization may remedy the latter problem (as membership increases, administrative tasks may be broken down to be shared among more volunteers, for example), the former problem, as the South Australian example illustrates, may be alleviated if universities open themselves up to be sharers of space.

As the number and diversity of senior learners increase, the need for further research into senior learning institutions also increases. The diversity of the independent models is fertile ground for further research. For example, examination of the challenges, successes, and sustainability of varied staffing and funding models would assist in assuring the sustainability of this model—the new government funding arrangement in South Australia being but one such research possibility.

Swindell and Thompson (1995) also remind us that "U3A evolved because existing societal structures did not recognize, or could not provide for, the changing needs of new generations of older people" (p. 446). Here again, further research is needed—in this case on the state of community perspectives on and provisions for third-age learners, such as municipal governments' continuing education programs, courses at libraries, and the like—to ascertain if progress has been made on the wider societal level since 1995. However, it is clear that Canadian university administrations specifically, despite some progress, must do more to recognize the importance of their students who are third-age learners and to reach out to previously ignored segments of the senior population; if they do not, cash-strapped continuing education arms will have little choice but to continue to marginalize seniors' education and thereby give short shrift to what Fletcher (2008) describes as one of their "original core foci, that of social justice" (p. 31).

Furthermore, in the context of independent third-age learning organizations, administrations would do well to heed a study that cautions against Canadian universities overselling their ability to effect economic change in their cities at the expense of underselling their potential for vital partnerships with "community, environmental and labour groups" (Addie and Keil, 2014, p. 2). It is time for Canadian universities to recognize that partnerships with non-profit, high-impact third-age learning institutions that transcend short-term fiscal expediency and make profound, resonant impacts may serve as powerful models for other community collaborations. Universities can make a deeper and more sustained impact on the educational needs of today's larger, heterogeneous cohort of third-age learners—while at the same time enhancing the quality of life of their own campuses and communities—by embracing multiple approaches to seniors' education, particularly those that respect third-age learners' choices for independence.

Swindell and Thompson (1995) observe that "today's older people are better educated than earlier cohorts, are better equipped to seek the information they need, and are more confident in articulating their wants and needs" (p. 466). Canadian universities would do well to reflect on the studies that tell us this observation is even more relevant than it was two decades ago. For example, a 2010 Universities UK report envisions universities as key partners in the creation of "a new type of ageing for the 21st century" that acknowledges extended roles for seniors; universities, it asserts, can assist not only in well-being but also, for example, in "unlocking mental capital" by working with groups who work on behalf of seniors (p. 4). What Nesbit et al. (2007) recommend for all forms of lifelong learning is valid for the subset of third-age, or seniors', education: "enhancing the learning environment and promoting forms of education that acknowledge, accommodate, and respect lifelong learners' needs and interests" (p. 49). Universities have a civic duty to assist in maximizing the benefits of education for seniors for mutual benefit—and for the greater public good.✺

Acknowledgements

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