

# An Exploration into the Learning Processes of Retirees in Singapore

## Summary

### Introduction

In 1999, Singapore officially became an aging society. To face the problems caused by aging, the government of Singapore formulated a senior citizen policy with the vision of “active aging” at its Inter-Ministerial Committee meeting that year. As very few Singaporeans over the age of 65 had the opportunity to receive higher education (Chen, 2010), Young-At-Heart (YAH) Community College was established in 2005. This college provides courses for senior citizens with a lower educational background to help develop careers in their later years. Its mission is for senior citizens to feel young at heart and maintain the ideas of lifelong learning and that “50 is still young to learn”.

Previous research has stated that senior citizens with lower education are more reluctant to participate in learning activities and that the percentage of those with lower education who participate in continuing education is low (Chang & Lin, 2011; Fisher, 1986; Goodrow, 1975; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997). Past research on older adult education focused on those with higher education (Kim & Merriam, 2004). It is worth noting that since its foundation in 2005, YAH Community College has enrolled over 1,300 students in certified lifelong learning courses, among whom are many retirees with lower levels of education. In a 2009 survey of the graduates who had completed certified lifelong learning courses, 37.5% of the retirees continued to take additional courses (Huang, Wang, & Chang, 2011). This shows that YAH Community College has effectively encouraged many retirees to continue learning. This study was based on the andragogical theory to analyze the learning activities of senior citizens. The objectives of this study were as follows:

1. Explore the motivation for Singaporean retirees to enroll in YAH Community College.

2. Explore the reasons for Singaporean retirees to continue their education at YAH Community College.
3. Explore the changes Singaporean retirees experienced after learning at YAH Community College.

## Methods

This study utilized qualitative research methods to conduct semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interviews with retirees enrolled in lifelong learning courses at Singapore's YAH Community College. A total of twelve subjects (two men and ten women) between the ages of 53 and 74 (average age of 60.3) participated in this study. This study focused on three concrete questions: 1. For what reason did you learn at YAH Community College? 2. For what reason did you continue to further your learning? 3. After participating in the learning activity, what was the biggest change?

## Results

At the very beginning of their learning, the reasons retirees enrolled in courses included invitations from friends, seeing advertisements or media introductions, the fact that higher education was not required to enroll at the college, and the ability to take courses that are applicable in older age. The help they received from adult educators in adjusting to the new learning environment or solving life problems inspired them to continue their education. At this stage, learners are more dependent on adult educators (Grow, 1991).

Reasons interviewees gave for continuing to further their learning included applying their learning after study, benefiting others and benefiting themselves, finding interests and a group to belong to, developing a love of learning, and being willing to continue learning. In this stage, learners become more active participants with help from adult educators and role models to emulate (Grow, 1991).

After their study at YAH Community College, interviewees experienced

four major changes: 1. enhanced self-confidence and self-concept; 2. the learning of interpersonal communication, as well as of communication through new technologies and their applications; 3. the use of what they had learned in society; and 4. having the capacity for autonomous learning. The results show that learning can help senior citizens become more independent, more perceptive, more accomplished, more dedicated to making contributions, and more autonomous in their learning.

## Conclusion

Retired senior learners slowly became more mature during their learning, which can also help them become more autonomous rather than dependent in their learning. As they become more interested in learning, form groups, and find good role models, learners develop self-confidence, use what they have learned, contribute to society, expand their communications and thinking, and become more mature in their lives. During their learning process, learners became independent and autonomous learners. The changes they experienced came from expanding their futures, developing new abilities, and becoming more concerned about the community. These all helped senior citizens in their lives after retirement and are signs of their growing maturity.

## 參考文獻

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