Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
An investigation into the learning of a group of elderly New Zealanders

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education at Massey University

by Donald Nalder

1998
Keywords
bowling club; educational gerontology; elderly; New Zealand elderly.

Abstract
It would appear that no basic research into educational gerontology has been conducted in New Zealand although a few facts about the elderly and their learning can be found in studies about continuing education. This study is an attempt to redress the position.

Sixty-nine people over sixty years of age, mainly from a bowling club, completed a questionnaire relating to their learning and their backgrounds. They provide a picture of physically active and socially involved late adulthood.

Retired people appear to differ mainly from those still working in having experienced more of life and in no longer having to cope with the pressures of work. Consequently, once adjustment to retirement has been made, they have the opportunity to pursue interests that were either unavailable during, or formed a minor part of, their working lives.

These people not only remain aware of current happenings but use a range of learning methods to advance knowledge of their interests - formal courses being but one. It seems highly improbable that age, gender, income level, or educational background can be used to predict the forms that retirees, such as these, will use for learning.
Acknowledgments

Without the help of the people named below this work would not have been completed.

*Brian Shaw* suggested that I should gain some background to educational gerontology by studying a special topic. To this end he introduced me to *Sue Watson* who became my tutor.

*Sue Watson* supervised the preparation of this thesis and must have interrupted her heavy schedule of work to give me assistance.

*Janet Gregory* was not actually called upon to help but was ready to assist when Sue was unavailable.

The *distance library staff* went to considerable trouble to supply requested journal articles and books, usually within a day or two.

Members of the bowling club who were involved particularly *Norm MacPherson* who acted as liaison with the club's executive.

*Tom Nalder* provided a great deal of assistance in the early stages.

*Alison Speakman* assisted with the compilation of data.

*Shirley Nalder* did not growl too often at the hours I spent at my computer and word processor.

I have to acknowledge the assistance given by those people and proffer my thanks to them.
Table of contents

Abstract ii
Acknowledgements iii
Table of contents iv
List of figures and tables v

Chapter 1 Introduction 1
Chapter 2 Literature review 4
Chapter 3 Method 12
Chapter 4 Results 18
Chapter 5 Discussion 55
Chapter 6 Conclusion 81
Appendix one The questionnaire form 87
Appendix two Summary of data 92
Appendix three References 97
Figures and tables

Figures

Figure 1  The difference between national and district age distributions  14
Figure 2  Sample's ages and gender compared with national figures  19
Figure 3  Comparison of incomes of women and men of the sample  22
Figure 4  a) Number of women with differing educational qualifications in each age group  26
   b) Number of men with differing educational qualifications in each age group  26
Figure 5  Comparison of the popularity of types of courses taken by respondents reported by Bird & Fenwick (1981) and those taken by sample respondents  32
Figure 6  Percentages of members of learning groups 1, 2 and 3 who regularly read the named types of reading material  50
Figure 7  A diagrammatic representation of a learning pattern inferred from the evidence  56

Tables

Table 1  Numbers of respondents at each age level by gender  18
Table 2  Comparison of the gender ratio for New Zealand the census district, the sample and the bowling club  19
Table 3  Marital status of women and men of the sample  20
Table 4  Tenure of housing  21
Table 5  National superannuation before tax  23
Table 6  Occupations of sample  23
Table 7  Educational qualifications of the sample shown by gender  27
Table 8  Service and social groups and numbers of members from the sample  27
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Sports and pastimes with numbers of participants from the sample involved in each</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>Number of group memberships per respondent, number of sports and total number of activities (sports plus groups) per respondent</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>Respondents' pattern of library usage with their regular reading interests</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>Number of formal courses per person by age</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>Comparison between Bird &amp; Fenwick's (1981) reasons for not attending courses and those of the present sample</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>Comparison of reasons given for taking courses between Bird &amp; Fenwick's (1981) work and the present study</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>Number of respondents involved in informal learning situations</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>Numbers of individuals in each learning group</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17</td>
<td>Organisations providing formal courses, courses taken and numbers of respondents involved in each course</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 18</td>
<td>Number of women and men of each age level who are, or have been, involved in formal courses</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 19</td>
<td>Informal situations used by the sample and the number of respondents involved with each</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 20</td>
<td>Number of women and men at each age level who have been involved in informal learning situations</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 21</td>
<td>Percentage composition of each age level of respondents who have been allocated to groups 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 22</td>
<td>Numbers of each gender in each learning group</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 23</td>
<td>Percentage composition on each income level of respondents from learning groups 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 24</td>
<td>A comparison of the medians and first and third quartiles of the incomes of learning groups 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 25</td>
<td>Percentage composition of respondents on each level of background education from learning groups 1, 2 and 3</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 26
Percentage composition of each type of former occupational group from learning groups 1, 2 and 3

Table 27
Percentage composition of respondents with war service and those without war service from learning groups 1, 2 and 3

Table 28
Percentage composition at each level of stated library use comparing learning groups 1, 2 and 3

Table 29
Percentage of respondents involved with given numbers of service, aid, social and cultural associations according to learning groups 1, 2 and 3.

Table 30
Distribution of the affiliations of individuals from learning groups 1, 2 and 3 who are involved with service, aid, social or cultural organisations which have a high learning component excluding those who have no organisational affiliations

Table 31
The percentage composition of those involved in sports administration from learning groups 1, 2 and 3, and of those who are not involved

Table 32
The percentage composition of those involved in group administration from learning groups 1, 2 and 3, and those not involved