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### The Teacher's Perspective in Older Education: The Experience of Teaching in a University for Older People in Spain

Feliciano Villar<sup>a</sup>; Montserrat Celdrán<sup>a</sup>; Sacramento Pinazo<sup>b</sup>; Carme Triadó<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain <sup>b</sup> Department of Social Psychology, University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

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## **THE TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE IN OLDER EDUCATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING IN A UNIVERSITY FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN SPAIN**

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**Feliciano Villar**  
**Montserrat Celdrán**

Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology,  
University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

**Sacramento Pinazo**

Department of Social Psychology, University of Valencia,  
Valencia, Spain

**Carme Triadó**

Department of Developmental and Educational Psychology,  
University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

*The aim of this study was to explore university lecturers' descriptions of their teaching experience with older students. Twelve teachers of the Nau Gran (a university program for older people [UPOP] in Valencia, Spain) were interviewed. We analyzed their responses to questions about their experience of teaching older adults, the rewarding aspects of that experience and the teaching strategies they used. Teachers described their experience as extremely positive and rewarding, and often contrasted the active, interested, and grateful older students with the relatively*

Address correspondence to Feliciano Villar, Departamento de Psicología Evolutiva y de la Educación, Universidad de Barcelona, Passeig de la Vall d'Hebron 171, 08035 Barcelona, Spain. E-mail: fvillar@ub.edu

*passive regular younger students. The teachers also mentioned how they adapted their teaching to suit a more motivated and participative audience in classes for older people.*

The period after retirement is, in many ways, an ideal time to learn. Most retired people do not have time constraints, are relatively healthy, and may have the motivation to pursue interests that could have been put on hold in earlier stages of life, when work and child-care commitments were the priority in most cases. For older students, learning is no longer compulsory, nor is it motivated by financial or career-related interests. Therefore, older students can choose to learn or not learn, and they can also select the topics in which they are interested. Social policies have stressed the interest of older people in learning and education in recent years. For instance, the United Nations (2002) stated in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing that education in older age is a way to integrate older generations into a society for all ages and to promote their social participation and civic engagement.

Hence, educational programs for older people are an excellent instrument for satisfying the interests and learning needs of older citizens and for enhancing their ability to participate in their communities (Mehrotra, 2003). In this context, the number and variety of educational programs and courses for older people have increased sharply in recent decades, sponsored by a wide range of organizations. Among such organizations, universities are key providers of formal educational opportunities for older people, because their mission is to create and transmit knowledge. To achieve this goal, universities must diversify their educational offerings, include lifelong learning, and open their doors to adults who wish either to resume their studies or to satisfy their need for learning in different areas of culture (Delors, 1996).

In Europe, the first university for the third age (U3A) dates back to the early 1970s, when Pierre Vellas from the University of Toulouse designed a special educational program for older people. In the early 1980s, Peter Laslett introduced the scheme into Britain and founded the first English U3A. The French approach (followed by most continental European countries) replicates the structure and organization of regular universities. The curriculum is generally planned by professional staff and taught by the regular higher education faculty. In contrast, in the English model (followed by other English-speaking countries, such as Australia or South Africa) the initiative and

organization, including the teaching, were driven not by academics but by the older learners themselves. This embodied a tradition of volunteering and mutual help. Regardless of the model they follow, university programs for older people (UPOP) have multiplied in recent decades to become a global movement (Hori & Cusack, 2006; Huang, 2005; Orte, Ballester, & Touza, 2004; Principi & Lemura, 2009; Swindell, 1993; Yenerall, 2003).

However, empirical research in this field is not keeping up with the growing interest in older education and older students. For instance, Chen, Kim, Moon, & Merriam (2008) sought and analyzed articles on older students that were published by adult education journals from 1980 to 2006. They found that relatively few empirical studies had been undertaken in the field: only 26 of the 93 papers that they reviewed were empirical studies. Furthermore, such studies dealt with a relatively narrow range of research issues. The two most studied topics were the profile of the participants and the main characteristics of the educational programs offered (e.g., Alfageme, 2007; Huang, 2005) and the motivational orientations of adult learners (Kim & Merriam, 2004; Mulenga & Liang, 2008; Scala 1996).

Other potential areas of interest have not attracted the same degree of research attention. For instance, few studies have examined how teachers carry out their tasks in UPOPs or investigated their view of older adult education. Recently, some studies have explored the role of older people as teachers. This is known as *peer teaching* (Brady, Holt, & Welt, 2003; Choi, 2009; Lamb & Brady, 2005; Simson, Thompson, & Wilson, 2001). This kind of teaching is relatively common in American Learning in Retirement Institutes (Martin, 2003) or in the British approach to Universities for Older People. However, there has been little research into the teachers' perspectives in UPOP that follow the aforementioned French model. In that model, teachers are usually regular higher education faculty, and the teaching methodology tends to be more lecture-oriented.

Some studies (e.g., Duay & Brian, 2008) suggest that the instructor might be one of the key components of the learning experience for older adults, and may be even more important than the content that is taught. Among the qualities of effective instructors, older students in Duay and Brian's (2008) study emphasized that instructors should be enthusiastic and knowledgeable, clear and easy to follow, and respectful of their students' knowledge and experience. According to older students, an instructor with these qualities becomes an important motivator to attend classes and to enjoy the learning experience.

Dealing with older learners involves a number of challenges for instructors, and particularly for instructors who are accustomed to younger university students. First, aging is associated with changes in physical and cognitive abilities that may make learning in later life more difficult than learning at younger ages. Based on these changes, some authors (Glass, 1996; Jones & Bayen, 1998; Twitchell, Cherry, & Trott, 1996) have offered some suggestions for designing instruction for seniors, which are basically aimed at simplifying the teaching and learning process. Second, reasons to study in older age are not linked to certification or the instrumental value of what is learned, but to expressive motivations such as cognitive interest in the subject, intellectual curiosity, personal growth, and the satisfaction drawn from the process of learning (Jarvis & Walker, 1997; Kim & Merriam, 2004; Yenerall, 2003). This could also explain why older students seem to prefer pressure-free learning environments, with no assignments, tests, or compulsory evaluations (Duay & Brian, 2008). Finally, in addition to these cognitive and motivational trends, diversity is a major challenge that teachers of older students have to face. Teachers have to deal with a wide range of educational backgrounds, expertise, and learning abilities that have been developed during six, seven, or eight decades of life experiences.

According to Brady et al. (2003), these characteristics point to a more basic challenge that has to do with the ambiguity of the teacher's mission. The teachers who participated in their study mentioned the tension between community-oriented and academic classes and between their role as an entertainer or as an educator. How each teacher resolves this tension is related to how they perceive their students, what kind of learning methods are preferred in class, and the final success of the educational experience, both for the teachers and the older students.

Despite these challenges, in a study with regular university teachers, Kalab (1986) identified a number of rewards or opportunities in teaching older adults, such as enhanced personal satisfaction through contact with an appreciative audience; exposure to the first-hand experiential knowledge of older citizens that complements and sometimes calls into question theoretical knowledge; and the wealth of first-hand experiences, anecdotal material, and case descriptions that are obtained for use in other lectures. In the same vein, Simson et al. (2001) found that teachers evaluated their task in a very positive way. In their study, 97% of the participants indicated that they would teach such classes again. Among the many rewards identified by teachers, the study emphasized a sense of personal satisfaction, intellectual stimulation, and increased enjoyment of teaching, which helped to

compensate for the difficulties associated with teaching older adults. However, the study dealt with peer teaching, in which both teachers and students were older adults.

The objective of the present study was to explore regular university lecturers' descriptions of their teaching experience with older students in UPOPs. An analysis of their reflections on this topic should provide insights into how educators contribute to the success of older university students and what kind of rewards they gain from teaching in UPOPs.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

Ten teachers of the Nau Gran participated in this qualitative study. The Nau Gran is the University of Valencia's (Spain) program for older people. It was set up in 1999 and is structured in the same way as the French model of UPOP outlined above, in which teachers are recruited from the regular university faculty. To enroll in the Nau Gran, candidates must be 55 years old or older. This is the only admission requirement. The program is funded by public and private institutions.

When this study was conducted, around 900 students were enrolled on the program, which offered seven different learning pathways structured as three-year degrees. These degrees were made up of older-people-only compulsory courses and elective courses selected from regular university degree requirements, in which older participants mixed with ordinary students and shared instructors and contents. Teachers were paid 50 euros per hour for the older-people-only courses.

Participants were chosen through purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria: (a) at least 10 years of experience teaching regular university courses; (b) at least three years of experience teaching in UPOP; (c) participants taught older-people-only courses in the UPOP; (d) participants included an equivalent number of male and female teachers; (e) participants included teachers of the different degrees taught in the UPOP.

As shown in Table 1, the sample consisted of six females and four males who ranged in age from 41 to 68 years with a mean age of 49.4 years. Their mean length of experience in the UPOP was 4.2 years, and the range was from 3 to 6 years. Respondents were involved in teaching at the UPOP at the time of the study and were members of the psychology (three respondents), humanities (three respondents), health sciences (two respondents) and social sciences (two respondents) departments.

**Table 1. Participants in the study: sex, age, degree in which they taught and years of experience in UPOP**

	Sex	Age	Degree	Years of experience in UPOP
TEACHER 1	Woman	43	Humanities	6
TEACHER 2	Woman	47	Psychology	3
TEACHER 3	Woman	41	Social sciences	4
TEACHER 4	Man	68	Psychology	6
TEACHER 5	Man	50	Social sciences	5
TEACHER 6	Woman	46	Health sciences	3
TEACHER 7	Woman	55	Health sciences	3
TEACHER 8	Man	56	Humanities	5
TEACHER 9	Man	45	Psychology	3
TEACHER 10	Man	56	Psychology	4

### *Procedure and Instruments*

The research team contacted the director of the Nau Gran to select the participants. The director introduced the team to 10 teachers who met the criteria for participation. An informed consent form was duly signed by each of the interviewees that indicated their willingness to participate.

Data were gathered by means of an open-ended interview. Only two members of the research team conducted the interviews, which were held over a two-month period. Each interview lasted from 25 to 40 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and pseudonyms were used instead of real names to protect confidentiality. The university's Commission for Research Ethics reviewed and approved the entire research protocol prior to the recruitment of participants for the study.

After questions on sociodemographic data, participants were interviewed about different aspects of their participation in the university for older people. Only answers to three topics are analyzed in this article: their experience of teaching older adults, the rewards gained from that experience, and the teaching strategies used with older adults.

### *Data Analysis*

Interviews were transcribed and content-analyzed with the help of Nvivo 2.0 software. Transcripts were first read and reread by a team of two researchers to identify the main themes and recurring ideas (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ideas were grouped

and regrouped a number of times on the basis of similarities and differences. A scheme of categories and codes emerged that mirrored this thematic grouping and revealed a preliminary set of high-level and subordinate themes. During the process of data analysis, the members of the research team constantly checked the codes that were assigned to data segments. Transcriptions and codes were subsequently given to a different two-researcher team, and their classification was compared to that of the original one. There were no major differences in coding, and any minor differences were resolved by discussion between teams.

## **RESULTS**

The most important theme that emerged from our analysis was related to the profile of the older students. Teachers gave a vivid and positive impression of their older students; they stated that teaching older students led to rewards that were associated with teaching in a UPOP and with the teaching strategies or methods used with this particular kind of student.

### ***What is an Older Student Like?***

The key characteristic of older students, according to our respondents, is their extremely high degree of enthusiasm and interest in learning. Older students experience UPOP classes as a thrill and as a challenge on which they focus attentively. Such active involvement makes them adopt an active stance in class: they rarely miss a class and participate by asking questions, doing the tasks set by the teacher, discussing the topics raised in class, and investing a great deal of effort and time in UPOP-related learning activities:

I very much like the curiosity of my older students; they are really hungry for learning. They are interested; at home they look up the topics that we deal with. Sometimes I warn them not to go into some topics too deeply, because they are too complicated or tricky, but they say: "No, I'm going to make the effort, I'm interested in what you're explaining." [Teacher 1]

The most positive thing I've seen is the extraordinary interest they show. Some of them come and take notes, they ask a lot of questions, and sometimes I even have to stop them from discussing themes for hours, because they participate and participate . . . [Teacher 2]

The respondents also stressed a second characteristic that was closely related to enthusiasm and interest: critical reflection. Teachers perceived that their older students had a great deal of knowledge and life experience, which facilitated a critical approach to contents. Students even challenged the teacher's version when they did not agree:

They're interested in what you say. And they criticize it; they frequently question what you say by giving examples from their former job or their personal experience. [Teacher 3]

Although older students' basic motivation to learn seems to be intrinsic—or they learn for the sake of learning—some teachers also emphasized that the students need to find relations between what they are learning and their practical daily concerns. Life experience seemed to be the link between intrinsic motivation and practical daily-life interest:

They do not come simply to listen to me, to have an entertaining time, but . . . they come to find something that fits in with what their life has been. [Teacher 4]

In their description of UPOP students, most respondents (8 out of 10) described their experience with younger students as a point of reference. This comparison was constructed as a sharp contrast between the positive characteristics of older students and the not-so-positive ones (or at least ones with clear room for improvement) of the regular students. Older students are active participants, and younger ones are portrayed as passive and seemingly not particularly interested in academic contents.

Their attitude is totally different to what I'm used to with my younger students. Younger students are very distant, as if they were not interested at all, as if they can totally ignore what you are saying. I sometimes compare . . . the difference is the following . . . I mean . . . younger students are like mailboxes: you drop anything you want to drop, they open their mouths and swallow it . . . and you don't ever know it this has been for good or for bad. Older students are far more critical; they not only give their opinion, but question what you're saying. In a very correct and polite way, of course, but they question you! [Teacher 5]

According to our respondents, differences in motivation could account for the differences in attitude between older students, whose motivation is intrinsic and who perceive their learning experience as a gift, and their younger counterparts, who are stressed by exams and

by the perception that university is an instrument to increase their chances of getting a good job:

Older students come to fulfil a dream, whereas younger students come to pass exams. So, they are only interested in what is required to pass the course, they don't show the level of involvement, participation and curiosity that is normal among my Nau Gran students. It's a pity, but it's true. [Teacher 6]

Older students are out of the labor market. They want to complete their knowledge, they are very curious, but you cannot demand too much. Younger students need their studies for work, for them university is only a way to acquire the tools they need to be good professionals in the future. [Teacher 7]

This general portrait of older students is directly related to the rewards that teachers draw from their experience in UPOP and how they teach this particular group of students.

### *Rewards of Teaching in an UPOP*

All the interviewees described their experience in UPOP in very positive terms. In addition, they all recommended the experience and were willing to go on teaching groups of older students. The rewards they mentioned were related to their perceptions of the older students' attitudes. Comparisons with teaching younger students were used to emphasize how satisfying it was to be a member of the UPOP teaching staff.

Among the academic rewards, some participants mentioned that their effort as teachers had an immediate return in terms of activity, participation, and interest. In turn, this contributed to creating a sense of fulfilment, a feeling of having done a good job; and teachers were also intellectually stimulated by the lively class dynamics. Thus, teachers perceived that their older students learned and grew in class at the same time that they learned from their students. This process satisfied both students and teachers. Sometimes, teaching older adults even helped some of the participants to revive a passion for their profession, a passion that had been somewhat eroded by teaching in regular classes with more passive and less interested younger students:

I took advantage of their passion for learning, and it was contagious... at the end of the course, they were satisfied, and so was I, because I had learned a lot with them, so I'm very happy. The four hours I spend with them are the best hours of the week. [Teacher 1]

They ask me a lot and they give me a lot too. And I feel encouraged to clear up things that maybe were not fully understood, or to satisfy wishes I perceive in them. And their smiles, their satisfaction, for me it's important, it makes me feel happy. With younger students . . . well, it's pretty much the same routine every day, they don't give that kind of instant pay off. [Teacher 8]

Their interest is my satisfaction. It makes me optimistic about teaching again, it is like finding what I think teaching should always be, like regaining my teaching vocation through their curiosity, their attention, their involvement . . . Because you might have a lot of motivation, but if you don't find the same in your audience, as happens with my 18-year old students . . . things don't fully work, the class goes nowhere . . . But older students make you recover that enriching, active teaching, which is ideal for all teachers who enjoy their jobs. [Teacher 5]

A second reward that participants mentioned is related to the gratitude and appreciation of their effort that they received from their older students. Teachers felt that older students, unlike younger ones, did not take their teaching activities for granted:

They are very grateful . . . they thank you for the mere fact of giving a class, and that's surprising and very flattering, because you're not used to it. [Teacher 9]

Older students treat you like a king, they make you feel as if you're doing a really big thing for them, when in fact it's your job and you get paid. They make you feel important and recognized . . . and well . . . everyone has their own little bit of vanity . . . and this obviously is very satisfying and rewarding [Teacher 6]

Finally, some teachers that participated in our study mentioned that their experience with older students had changed their perspectives on older age. Their experiences had made them reflect about their own aging and generally gain a sense of optimism about the possibilities of their life after retirement:

I came to know more in more detail about the reality of older people, their interests and life goals. And it is encouraging because I'm not that far from retirement any more. It's encouraging to see the attitude people can have at that age, their enthusiasm. For me, they are a model, an example to follow and a way to be more optimistic about life. [Teacher 10]

Because of my job, I've only had contact with illness. For me, older people were ill and dependent, that's what I saw every day at the hospital, people who were extremely old and extremely ill. But my older students are just the opposite, their interest in doing things, their tireless curiosity . . . Teaching them is a morale booster and provides a new way to understand older age as well. [Teacher 7]

### *Teaching Methods*

As in the case of rewards, in our participants' opinion, the particular characteristics of older learners required an adaptation of teaching strategies. To explain what kind of adaptation had taken place, they again compared the methods used with younger students to the ones they needed to use with older learners.

As shown above, our participants perceived that younger students aim to develop skills to get jobs. Therefore, teachers must test and evaluate whether these skills have been acquired. In contrast, older students were portrayed as being focused on personal growth and on the use of knowledge and skills to better understand the world that they live in, without needing any kind of formal evaluation. This difference makes teaching older learners a more relaxed and less rigid task. Instead of being guided by a predefined content and by a list of learning goals, the teachers stated that they gave participants more control of the learning process and took advantage of their curiosity and eagerness to participate. According to our participants, classes in third age universities are less lecture-oriented and more dialogical and participative. The role of professors of older students is not to instruct and complete a program, but to detect and fulfil students' needs in relation to the course topics and to organize the class around these needs. This could also mean that teachers have to remove or simplify certain contents such as those that are not of interest to an older audience or that do not make sense when learners are no longer in the labor market.

You have to adapt the contents to the level of your class . . . perhaps I make some contents easier. And the program is a bit freer, I ask them about their interests and I let them direct the class. Because I think that what I want to teach makes less sense than what they'd like to learn, and I try to focus on that. Maybe you start the class talking about one thing and end up dealing with a completely different topic, but I don't care about that because the goal is that they come out of the class happy and feeling that they have learned something interesting. [Teacher 1]

I always plan my classes in advance. But with older students . . . they don't let you follow your plan! They participate so much; they are so involved that schemes and plans are useless. And that's very good. Of course, not having exams makes things easier, and you can focus on feeding and stimulating minds rather than on training future professionals. [Teacher 2]

## **DISCUSSION**

The focus of this study was on the experience of teaching older students in an UPOP. Our results suggest that the benefits of the UPOP are not limited to older students, as many studies have already shown, but may also include teachers.

### ***Teaching Experience and Rewards***

Our participants described their experience at the UPOP in extremely positive terms. This seems to be based on a very optimistic portrait of older students. Teachers highlighted three aspects that are key to their experience: older students' extremely high motivation and interest in studying at university; their vast knowledge base and experience; and the absence of tests, grades, or diplomas as elements that interfere in the learning process. The combination of these three characteristics makes older students a very participative and critical audience who are easy to engage in discussions about the course topics.

The teachers' descriptions of their older students are similar to those found in previous studies using older learner samples. For instance, it has been assumed that learning among older adults is particularly guided by expressive or intrinsic motivations instead of being led by external or instrumental goals such as attaining a particular grade or a future job. Research seems to confirm these assumptions, and interest in the subject, intellectual curiosity, or learning for the sake of learning rank highest among the reasons and motivations of older learners (Jarvis & Walker, 1997; Kim & Merriam, 2004; Mulenga & Liang, 2008; Villar, Pinazo, Triadó, Celdrán, Solé, in press). In a similar vein, experience and knowledge have been mentioned as specific traits of older learners that teachers must use as a resource in class (Mehrotra, 2003). In contrast, references to limitations and a decline in capabilities are virtually absent from our participants' responses, although the literature on older people's education stresses that motor, sensory, or cognitive decline influence learning

and should be taken into account when teaching methods are adapted (e.g., Glass, 1996). In this respect, the views of the teachers participating in our study are unilaterally positive.

These views were constructed in discourse by comparing the teaching of older learners to experiences with regular, younger university students. The interviews did not include questions about younger students. However, teachers spontaneously referred to them in order to depict and delineate a more vivid and positive image of older learners with characteristics that contrasted with the usual behavior and attitude of their younger counterparts. The activity, high interest, participation, and present-oriented older learner contrasts with the passivity, apparently low commitment, lack of participation, and test or future job-oriented younger university students.

That stark contrast between teaching at regular universities and at the UPOP leads to a different set of rewards. Unlike the sometimes boring or frustrating regular teaching at the university, participants in our study describe their experience at UPOP as being stimulating and enjoyable, which counts as the most important reward. Thus, just as literature underlines the relevance of intrinsic motivation for older learners, this kind of motivation is also of key importance to their instructors. Hence, as older learners are said to learn for the sake of learning, our participants seem to teach for the sake of teaching. The joy and fulfilment that teachers gain from their task in UPOP stems directly from the commitment, participation, and growth that they see in their older students. In addition, the perceived appreciation and gratitude of the older students help to reinforce the teachers' satisfaction. Some participants even defined teaching older students as the attainment of an ideal of teaching in which teachers and students share goals, values, and fun; this is an ideal that cannot be attained in regular university courses. In this rather romantic view of teaching at UPOP, getting paid for teaching is out of the picture. Although they are paid, participants did not mention money as a reward nor as having any other role in their experience at UPOP.

### ***Teaching Methods***

Our study shows that dealing with a radically different type of student also has methodological implications. Teachers lecture less in their UA3 classes than in their regular classes. The enthusiastic and active older students make teachers favor more participative methods. The teacher is not a knowledge dispenser who is rarely challenged by their students, but a flexible actor who tries to relate relevant topics in the course syllabus to the interests and life experience of older students.

According to our interviewees, their role involves organizing participation, and leading discussion on significant points. These changes make the teacher-student relationship less hierarchical and allows students to share part of the control in their learning process.

This tendency to more egalitarian teaching had already been noted in studies of peer teachers (e.g., Brady et al., 2003; Choi, 2009). In this kind of teaching, the teacher and student are seen as equal experts; and the teachers are participants in a group of equals rather than leaders with a group of followers. Furthermore, these studies revealed that peer teaching appears to be linked to voluntarism and altruistic motives. Thus, giving back, making a contribution, or doing something for somebody are frequently mentioned as reasons for involvement in teaching older adults.

In comparison, the participants in our study seem to position their role as teachers in a middle point between the traditional lecture-oriented and hierarchical kind of teaching used with younger students and totally egalitarian peer teaching methods. They share control, encourage participation, and take advantage of students' experience, but they do not renounce their role as experts and leaders of the class. As seen above, their motives and rewards are not related to altruism and "doing something for older people;" they are linked to job satisfaction and growth drawn from teaching enthusiastic students. In this sense, our teachers see their role in UPOP as professional teachers rather than as volunteers.

Finally, participants in our study also mentioned that they simplified certain complicated and specialized contents, which made the course more accessible to everyone. However, limitations attributed to older age or specific to the kind of students they teach are not mentioned as the reason for this simplification. Rather, modifications are made due to the context of learning, which is not aimed at building competitive skills in the labor market or passing exams and evaluations. Hence, the simplifications are made as a way to adapt contents to the motives and previous experience of older learners.

### ***LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS***

As with any study, this research had some limitations. The first limitation was the sample size, which was too small to make generalizations. Further research with a larger sample size could affirm, refute, or elaborate upon any of the findings. Another limitation of the study was that the sample was from one university only. All participants taught at *La Nau Gran* UPOP, and the specificities and

functioning of that institution might have influenced their experience in a way that cannot be extended to other UPOP.

Any interpretation of the results should also take into account the fact that students of UPOP are a self-selected segment of the older population. For instance, students in the Nau Gran tend to be relatively young (half of them are 65 years old or less) and well educated: because 50% of them had completed some kind of higher studies (Villar, Pinazo, Triadó, Celdrán, & Solé, 2010). This figure is significantly higher than the 6.6% of the older Spanish population that have completed university studies (IMSERSO, 2009). This specificity of UPOP students, which some authors interpret as a form of under-cover discrimination (see, for instance, the discussion in Alfageme 2007), is likely to have an impact on the perception teachers have of their students, the quality of their teaching experience, and the methods they use. If attendance of UPOPs is promoted among less educated older adults, or among groups who do not normally attend formal educational programs (maybe the groups that are most in need of this kind of education), the teacher's perspective and the teaching methods could change accordingly.

In the same vein, educational programs with different aims to those generally held by the current UPOPs could alter the teachers' experience, their role, and way of conducting the class. Current UPOPs in Spain have been developed without any specific instrumental goal beyond the social and psychological gains linked to the educational experience. One might ask whether courses that are aimed at capacity building—in which older participants are trained to develop specific roles after the course and acquired skills are evaluated—would need a different teaching approach that is more similar to the one applied to regular formal and job oriented education for younger students.

Finally, taking into account the stark contrast that the participants perceived between older and younger students, it would be interesting to ascertain what happens from the teacher's point of view in intergenerational university classes. In such classes, younger and older students share not only the class but also contents, methodologies, and teachers. Do the necessities of younger students prevail over those of older students? How do teachers balance contrasting needs, aims, and attitudes toward education, and how is that balance reflected in the methods they use in class? In our opinion, studies on this topic are essential, particularly because intergenerationality and intergenerational education are included among the policy guidelines established by the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (Sidorenko & Walker, 2004).

Many issues of teaching older adults are open to debate and further research. An exploration of these issues may shed clearer light on the role of teachers in older education, which is a crucial but frequently neglected aspect of educational gerontology.

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