

‘Reimagining or Imagining Older Adult Education Research: Getting Older Adult Education into Policy Research’

Margaret McDonough-Glenn¹

¹ University of Sydney

As we approach the beginnings of the second decade of the 21st Century, how can we advance research into older adult education? By the late 20th Century, changes in demography ensured that older adults have become a significant cohort in Western society. The 20 or 30 years post retirement could be an age of fulfilment not available to earlier generations. Education for those older adults must be reimagined. The Australian Parliament attempted this in the nineties and early 21st Century with its inquiries into adult education and lifelong learning; but left this work unfinished. It has been thirty years since the first Senate report, ‘Come in Cinderella’ (1991); it has been twenty-four years since the second Senate report, ‘Beyond Cinderella’ (1997); and seventeen years since the not completed last Senate report, ‘Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning’ (2004). Using history of policy and policy analysis, older adult education policy will be studied and analysed. Can this area of research be reimagined and help prompt further research and a new effective Senate inquiry? This subject must be reimagined to inspire governments to address this cohort of older adults. This paper will look into issues of social inclusiveness, the idea of ‘An Educational Charter for the Elderly’ and the unfinished business of the Senate inquiries. The first issue social inclusiveness must encourage participation by the middle class and the working class, but also older adults to be given educational opportunities relative to the general population. The second ‘An Educational Charter for the Elderly’ will be discussed, but particularly ‘A fair share of the budget’ given the elderly needs and past contributions. Thirdly, the past Senate reports will be discussed including directions for a future Senate inquiry. We need to ‘reimagine’ older adults and older adult education, if it was ever imagined in the first place.