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TYOLOGY OF DIDACTIC APPROACHES USED IN DIFFERENT AREAS OF ELDERLY EDUCATION: ANALYSIS OF INSTRUCTORS' NARRATIVES*

Introduction: Non-formal education of older adults in Poland is characterized by a high diversity of programs, institutions, methods, and forms of instruction. Absence of coherent standards and a unified vision means that the didactic approaches in this field require in-depth analysis and systematization.

Research Aim: The study aimed to identify dominant concepts and didactic models employed by educators working with older adults and to determine which approaches guide their decisions when designing and delivering classes.

Method: The grounded theory methodology was applied. A total of 17 interviews were conducted with instructors representing cultural and social institutions engaged in supporting and activating older adults.

Results: The analysis revealed heterogeneity in didactic practices. Two dominant orientations were identified: modernist approaches, focused on adaptation and development of practical skills, and humanistic approaches, supporting social integration, personal development, and self-actualization. Elements of recreational and culture-forming activities were also observed. Two distinct teaching styles emerged: a structural style, based on instruction, and a more flexible style, encouraging active participation. In practice, educators combined both, creating hybrid configurations. Instructors positioned themselves along a continuum between expert and facilitator roles, negotiating their position vis-à-vis the group.

Conclusions: The developed typology organizes the ways in which senior education is conceptualized and points to directions for further research on optimizing non-formal education and developing consistent guidelines for educational practice.

Keywords: non-formal education of older adults, didactic approaches, older people's centres, educators' perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Societies are progressively ageing. Therefore, non-formal education for older adults is gaining importance as a significant element of social policy and educational practice (Formosa, 2014). Although access to these forms of education has been steadily increasing, empirical research on actual didactic practices in work with older adults remains limited (Flauzino et al., 2020; Formosa, 2023; Hallam et al., 2016; Luppi, 2009; Schoultz, 2023; Szarota, 2022). Previous analyses have focused primarily on the value and goals of later-life education (Formosa, 2014, 2023; Hachem, 2020). However, questions concerning how and what is actually taught, which methods are used by educators, what content is chosen, and on what grounds didactic decisions are made remain insufficiently explored (Ahmad et al., 2022; Hallam et al., 2016; Schoultz, 2023). Kern (2018) notes that senior education is still in a pre-paradigmatic stage, lacking a shared vision. Despite numerous calls for research, theoretical frameworks and a coherent teaching model are still missing (Flauzino et al., 2020; Jacob et al., 2023; Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017). Even though strategies adopted by effective educators across contexts have been identified (e.g., Creech et al., 2014; Duay & Bryan, 2008; Ko, 2020), little attention has been devoted to the underlying pedagogical principles.

In the international perspective, studies reveal a variety of didactic approaches – from transmissive and lecture-based to collaborative methods, peer learning, autobiographical reflection, and learner-centered approaches that foster autonomy and exploration (Creech et al., 2014; Duay & Bryan, 2008; Luppi, 2009; Schiller et al., 2020; Villar et al., 2010). Educators often act intuitively, combining different strategies and experimenting with teaching formats (Schoultz, 2023). Language courses provide a good example: while some educators prefer traditional grammar-translation methods, others emphasize communication, self-directed learning, and the use of authentic materials – including games, TV series, or music from participants' youth (Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018; Koutska, 2024; Schiller et al., 2020).

Divergent interpretations of goals and absence of established standards indicate that non-formal education for older adults requires systematization and deeper reflection on the approaches being applied (Kacetl & Klímová, 2021; Schoultz, 2023). Against this backdrop, it becomes crucial to analyze the didactic practices of instructors – their choices and beliefs shaping educational offerings (Hachem, 2020; Schoultz, 2023). Every aspect of teaching – from objectives and content to methods and the instructor's role – is an outcome of deliberate choices rooted in educators' convictions (Klimczak-Pawlak & Kossakowska-Pisarek, 2018). Exploring these assumptions is essential for advancing educational practice and reflecting on one's values, and the vision of teaching seems key to effectively supporting later-life learners (Hachem, 2020; Schoultz, 2023).

In Poland, access to non-formal education for older adults is broad and diverse – ranging from physical exercise and artistic workshops to language classes and computer training (Gołdys et al., 2012; GUS, 2023, 2024; Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017; Szarota, 2022). These activities are offered across various institutions: Universities of the Third Age, community centers, senior clubs, libraries, or day-care support centers (GUS, 2023, 2024). Institutions differ in their structures and the nature of their activities (Gołdys et al., 2012; GUS, 2024). The educational offer is dynamic and rich, often featuring innovative initiatives, which complicates the process of developing shared standards (Gołdys et al., 2012).

These institutions do not operate within unified central standards; the quality of services depends largely on local circumstances and leadership decisions (Gierszewski & Kluzowicz, 2021; Gołdys et al., 2012;). Scholars call for more in-depth reflection on contemporary learning spaces for older adults, on non-formal educational practices, and on their future development (Maćkiewicz & Wnęk-Gozdek, 2019; Szarota, 2022). Key questions concern the commonalities and divergences in educational practice, as well as which needs of older adults are being met and which remain unaddressed. Of particular importance is the risk of a single institutionally entrenched model of senior activation dominating the Polish context (Gołdys et al., 2012).

As at the global level, in Poland there is still no consistent concept of non-formal education for older adults. No tools for diagnosing and evaluating didactic practices exist (Gołdys et al., 2012; Szarota, 2022). There is also no consensus on content or pedagogical approaches, and the teaching process – including educators’ reflections on methods, sources of knowledge, or justifications for content choices – has rarely been analyzed.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

In this context, the following questions arise: Which educational concepts and models do educators draw upon when designing their classes? What strategies and values underlie their practices? These questions require a thorough exploration of educational practices in non-formal institutions from the perspective of the instructors themselves.

The aim of this study is to identify dominant didactic approaches, values, and educators’ beliefs, to reveal the underlying assumptions that shape course design, and to develop an initial typology of these approaches, reflecting the different concepts present in Polish senior education. Understanding how instructors conceptualize education, which models they consider optimal, and how they translate them into practice is crucial. As Schoultz (2023) observes, such reflections provide valuable insights into the actual assumptions driving their actions. The

study therefore adopted an exploratory aim, focused on reconstructing the ways in which educators conceptualise their work and enact it in practice.

The study also has an applied dimension. Its results may support instructors in consciously designing their courses (Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017). In the longer term, they may form the foundation for building a flexible, inclusive, and evidence-based model of non-formal education for older adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study included 17 educators engaged in non-formal education for older adults. They represented a variety of institutions: municipal senior centers, community cultural centers, clubs affiliated with social assistance centers and housing cooperatives, municipal offices, rural women's associations, and facilities running activity programs. These institutions operated in large cities, smaller towns, and rural areas, which ensured contextual diversity.

The educators differed in age (23–65 years), gender (11 women, 6 men), educational background (most held higher education degrees in fields such as pedagogy, psychology, arts education, and public health, though some had secondary or post-secondary education), and experience (ranging from 6 months to 21 years) in working with older adults. Most combined their educational activities with other professional work and also had experience teaching younger groups. Some held organizational and caregiving roles within pro-senior institutions. The sample included individuals with diverse professional trajectories, ranging from novice educators to specialists with extensive experience. The range of activities offered included computer courses (3 educators), arts and handicrafts (2), music and vocal training (1), theatre (1), recreational and movement-based classes (2), language courses (1), creative thinking workshops (1), folklore activities (1), and integrative/animation-oriented programs (5).

Field research was conducted in the spring of 2024 in institutions located in central Poland. It encompassed centres situated in urban agglomerations as well as facilities in medium-sized towns and rural areas. This approach made it possible to compare educational practices operating under diverse organisational and social conditions.

Participants were recruited purposively. Invitations to take part in the study were addressed to institutions offering regular activities for older adults, and the eligibility criteria included: (a) employment in, or ongoing collaboration with, an organisation providing cyclical educational programmes for seniors; (b) at least six months of teaching experience with older learners; (c) consent to participate in an in-depth interview; and (d) diversity of roles and types of classes taught. The sampling strategy was based on maximum variation, which enabled the research-

ers to capture a broad spectrum of educational practices and interpretations of the educator's role.

Data were collected through individual, semi-structured in-depth interviews (40–60 minutes). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. They were then analyzed with a focus on experiences, methods, and didactic reflections.

The interview guide covered issues related to the design and delivery of educational activities for older adults, the rationale behind the choice of specific teaching methods, ways of defining the educator's role, reflections on the effectiveness of undertaken actions, and difficulties encountered when working with groups of older adults. The interviews employed open exploratory questions, such as: "Please describe how you usually prepare your classes," "What is most important to you when working with a group?" and "What challenges do you most often encounter when working with seniors?"

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards applicable to social research. According to the guidelines of the institution overseeing the project and national regulations, approval from a bioethics committee was not required. The study did not involve medical interventions, experiments, or the collection of particularly sensitive data.

Each participant received detailed information about the aims, scope, and procedures of the study, and participation was entirely voluntary. Participants provided informed consent to take part in the research and to have the interviews recorded. They were assured anonymity, the possibility of withdrawal at any stage, and the right to refuse to answer any question. All transcripts were anonymised, and pseudonyms (R1–R17) were assigned to each respondent. Data were stored in accordance with applicable personal data protection regulations.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis followed grounded theory procedures (Charmaz, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 2009). During the open coding stage, codes were derived from the empirical data without prior theoretical assumptions. The coding process involved a detailed reading of the interview material and assigning short labels that captured the actions, experiences, and meanings expressed by the instructors. Codes were created based on both literal excerpts from the interviews and their analytical interpretation, and were subsequently compared with one another to identify recurring patterns. In the axial coding process, they were grouped into categories reflecting patterns of didactic approaches and were further developed by determining their properties, scope, and relationships with other categories. This stage included repeated comparisons of subsequent data fragments with emerging categories, which allowed for their gradual refinement and organisation in line with

Charmaz's (2009) constructivist perspective. Coding continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, that is, the point at which new data no longer contributed additional insights to the emerging categories and their content became sufficiently stable.

At the stage of selective coding, the relationships among categories were analyzed, which made it possible to develop a preliminary typology of didactic approaches integrating the key processes and logics guiding instructors' actions. This process involved multiple returns to the empirical material to verify and refine the interpretations. The analysis was iterative, and to enhance credibility, multiple coding and consultations with experts in older adult education were conducted (Hall & Callery, 2001; Konecki, 2000), which made it possible to assess the coherence of the emerging categories and their adequacy in relation to the data. The final typology involved four stages: identification of key aspects of educational concepts, grouping of cases, analysis of meanings attributed to educational practices, and development of the characteristics of didactic approach types.

To illustrate the analytical procedure, Table 1 below presents an example of the coding process following Charmaz's grounded theory approach – from data excerpts, through open codes and categories, to the emergent types of didactic approaches.

Table 1
Example of coding process

Data excerpt (interview quote)	Open codes – units of meaning	Categories (focused/axial codes) – grouping of codes	Type of didactic approach (selective coding)
“I try to teach seniors how to function in this world full of technological solutions.”	functioning in digital world; practical skills; reducing dependence on others	adaptation to contemporary conditions; strengthening autonomy; functional competences	Pragmatic-developmental
“They need to master the basics.”	basic knowledge; hierarchy of content; sequential teaching; standardisation of material structured	knowledge; program linearity; standardisation	Pragmatic-developmental
“First I explain and show how to do something, and then we do it together.”	demonstration; step-by-step instruction	instructional model of teaching; dominance of the expert role	Pragmatic-developmental
“There is always something you can find in a person that they do well, and you can build on that.”	identifying strengths; empowering participants	supporting self-awareness and expression	personal-development-oriented

“Zumba is, above all, fun.”	activity as a source of joy; pleasurable movement; no	performance pressure physical activation; health promotion and well-being	Recreation-al-health-oriented
“By taking part in a folklore group, I cultivate old traditions.”	preserving traditions; cultural rootedness; community belonging	reproducing and reinforcing local culture	Tradition-al-community-based
“We meet to talk and spend time together.”	social contact; being together without a formal programme	freedom of participation; spending time together	Informal-social

Note. Author’s own study.

RESULTS

The analysis was presented in a narrative form, accompanied by quotations from the interviews that illustrate how instructors conceptualize their didactic practice. The structure of the findings reflects five types of approaches to teaching older adults. Each is grounded in its own logic and emphasizes different principles and values guiding instructors in their choice of goals, content, and teaching methods.

Pragmatic–Developmental Approach

This approach focuses on transmitting practical skills that support daily functioning and help older adults navigate a dynamically changing world. Educational goals are clearly defined, with a common emphasis on developing technological, linguistic, and social competences. Educators highlight the importance of these skills for managing everyday matters and maintaining family and social contact, which demonstrates the instrumental nature of their objectives: “I try to teach seniors how to function in this world full of technological solutions” (R12); “I teach what will make their lives easier” (R13) explained one instructor, while another emphasized the social dimension: “It’s like a window to the world for them, because everyday life now takes place largely in the virtual sphere” (R1). In a similar spirit, a language instructor noted that learning allows participants to “better understand the world around them” and becomes a tool for active participation in social life (R3).

Content within this approach is predetermined, structured, and subordinated to predefined competencies. Programs rely on standards and textbooks – “The textbook is the foundation” (R1) – and their implementation is systematic, regardless of attendance or individual limitations (“The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on”, R1). Instructors stress the need for standardized knowledge and consistent progression: “The most important thing is that seniors master the basics; without

that, we can't move forward" (R3). Although programs are nominally adapted to participants' needs, flexibility is limited to choosing topics within the approved scope and to preferences expressed within pre-planned modules.

Teaching methods are primarily based on instruction and demonstration, supported by practical exercises. The dominant pattern is "I show, you repeat," with strong emphasis on pacing and repetition: "I try to ensure that every participant has time to absorb the material" (R1). Step-by-step guidance is also crucial: "We start from the basics, because for them it's often something new" (R12). Tasks are sometimes differentiated by level – "I always had extra tasks, either easier or harder" (R15) – allowing participants to progress at their own pace. Instructors also stress the importance of supportive attitudes and creating safe learning conditions: "We are here to learn, and making mistakes is part of the process" (R1). They also underline the need to motivate seniors to engage and overcome inner resistance: "Leaving the comfort zone, breaking shyness – that's hard for everyone, not just seniors" (R3). Thus, the structural nature of teaching is partially softened by an affective component designed to reduce anxiety and strengthen the sense of security.

The educator's role oscillates between expert and guide. Some prefer a more authoritative style, structured around clearly defined stages and schedules, while others introduce elements of flexibility: "My role begins with showing what technology can offer, and then we jointly decide what they want to learn" (R12). In both cases, however, support remains central, enabling seniors to gradually become familiar with new content and gain confidence in their abilities.

Personal Development-Oriented Approach

This approach emphasizes supporting older adults in self-realization, life reflection, and building self-confidence. It is reflective and often therapeutic in nature, creating space for emotional expression and the discovery of new aspects of the self. Artistic activities – such as poetry writing, theater, or handicrafts – are typical examples, as they foster passion and the development of interests in later life.

The goals of this approach center on encouraging self-expression and self-discovery. As a theater instructor explained: "Working together on a performance allows them to open up" (R11), while an art therapy facilitator added: "Art gives them the possibility to express what they cannot say in words (...) it helps soothe emotions, which often intensify in old age" (R10). Alongside personal growth, the sense of community is also vital: "The most important thing is that they leave their homes and meet others" (R11).

Content is flexible and adapted based on observation of the group and participants' current needs: "We are very attentive to the group – we look at what they need, what they enjoy, what they feel like doing" (R11). Instructors abandon rigid lesson plans – "There's no such thing as a class script. It doesn't work like in school" (R10) – and aim to make activities meaningful and engaging. One facilita-

tor, for example, chose musical repertoires that had personal significance for participants, “referring to their life stories,” which strengthened emotional resonance and self-expression (R8). Content thus becomes not merely a set of exercises, but a tool for reflection and working through experiences.

Methods rely on interaction, free expression, and creative exploration. Theater classes offer the opportunity “to take on a role and become someone else for a moment,” broadening perspectives and openness to new experiences (R11). In other activities, seniors develop their own techniques, pursue individual artistic projects, while educators ensure a safe environment: “The point is that they feel safe, that they can show what they feel without fear of judgment” (R10). Positive motivation and feedback are crucial – “I want my students to know that even a small step forward is progress” (R8) – helping participants discover and overcome barriers. Balancing independence with support is also emphasized: “Everyone works individually, but if they need help, I’m there” (R6).

The role of the educator differs from the traditional instructor model – closer to that of a facilitator, and at times a therapist. The educator focuses on creating an atmosphere of trust and community, while supporting participants in overcoming emotional barriers. What matters most is not merely transmitting knowledge, but accompanying participants in discovering themselves and regaining self-confidence.

Activation, Recreation, and Health-Oriented Approach

This approach places strong emphasis on health and well-being, combining regular physical activity with elements of play, relaxation, and prevention. The educational goal is not only to maintain physical fitness, but also to improve quality of life and prepare participants for age-related changes, such as declining stamina or increased risk of illness. As one instructor stressed, the classes help participants “discover new possibilities,” thereby increasing their independence and sense of control over their health (R14).

Content is selected based on proven activation models, but also shaped by group observation and responsiveness to participants’ needs. Some classes follow a structured program with clearly defined and systematically delivered content, although instructors aim to strike a “balance between accessibility and challenge” (R16) to foster growth without overburdening participants. In other cases, the program is more open and evolves with the group. For example, a dance instructor explained that when planning sessions, she incorporated activities identified by seniors as “favorites” and adjusted new elements to the group’s level (R9). Thus, content is not imposed top-down but becomes a dynamically co-created learning experience.

Methods rely mainly on demonstration and instruction – participants observe the educator and repeat movements or follow commands, with strong emphasis

on safety and the ability to adjust exercise intensity. “I want everyone to know they can do as much as their health allows” (R14), noted one instructor, underlining individualization of effort. Precision in explaining techniques is stressed, especially in activities requiring accuracy, such as yoga or stretching. Alongside technical correctness, the atmosphere of recreation and enjoyment is equally important; hence, sessions often take the form of play. “Zumba is above all fun” (R9), observed one facilitator. This sense of lightness and informality is considered key to sustaining motivation. At the same time, classes are designed to remain accessible, dynamic, and engaging.

The educator’s role combines guide, animator, and motivator. Instructors not only demonstrate and explain exercises but also foster participants’ psychological comfort, support their confidence, and inspire them to embrace new challenges. One respondent described her role as that of a “coach” (R14), who helps maintain long-term engagement while creating a safe environment in which activity becomes a source of satisfaction rather than a burden.

Traditional–Community Approach

This approach emphasizes community but is distinguished by its strong rootedness in regional traditions. It aims to nurture cultural identity and strengthen social bonds. Education is both symbolic and practical, reinforcing older adults’ embeddedness in their local community by involving them in the preservation of cultural heritage. As one instructor explained, seniors act as guardians of local identity and tradition: “By working with seniors in a folklore group, I cultivate old traditions and preserve dialect” (R7). Goals also include supporting well-being and fostering the joy of shared activity.

Content is centered on the local calendar – holidays, anniversaries, and events – as well as traditional cultural forms: songs, dances, handicrafts. The program is predetermined, providing participants with a sense of stability and continuity, but allows for choice of activities according to skills and interests. As one instructor noted, topics are drawn from “childhood memories, family customs” and passed down through generations (R7). This anchoring in familiar content strengthens participants’ sense of belonging and meaning.

Methods are based on group activities – singing, dancing, preparing handicrafts for fairs or competitions (“the most beautiful tablecloth”, R16). Although scenarios are planned, instructors leave space for spontaneity and play, which naturally engages participants while ensuring they feel at ease. Some meetings are intergenerational, further reinforcing local ties and enabling the transmission of traditions to younger generations.

The educator acts as guide and organizer of group activities, but also as a “master of ceremonies,” ensuring integration and shared enjoyment. The instructor determines the program and activity forms, animates meetings, and sets the rhythm.

At the same time, they encourage participants in discovering the value of community. Thus, the educator's role is to facilitate both the experience and transmission of heritage while creating safe and joyful conditions for collective activity.

Informal-Social Approach

This approach prioritizes relationships and combating loneliness. Meetings are relaxed and social in nature, serving primarily the purpose of "being together." The goal is to create a space where older adults can experience closeness and mutual support. Meetings offer opportunities for conversation, sharing experiences, having fun, and breaking isolation – "they give a chance to spend time with someone" (R16). As one respondent explained, it is about "getting out of the house" (R17), while another added: "The classes themselves don't matter much; what matters is that they meet with someone" (R4). Others stressed that the key aim is "for seniors to meet, to feel they are not alone" (R2), or "to enjoy themselves and the company of others" (R16).

Content is flexible and almost entirely shaped by participants' preferences. It may include handicrafts, games, dance, walks, or watching films – anything that fosters connection and enjoyment. As one respondent said: "I choose easy and enjoyable topics" (R4). Another noted: "I get many suggestions from seniors," which are incorporated into activities, especially in connection with upcoming holidays or local events (R16). As a result, the program remains open, dynamic, and closely aligned with participants' lives.

Methods are informal and relaxed – there are no lectures, workshops, rigid scripts, or pressure to achieve results. Instructors create an atmosphere akin to friendly gatherings. "We meet to talk, to spend time together" (R4), emphasized one facilitator. Participants themselves decide on the form of activity and degree of involvement, with sessions taking an open format: one can join in, skip certain activities, or simply observe. This absence of obligation makes the approach attractive.

The educator's role is that of facilitator and organizer of activities, rather than teacher. Often, they act as companion or animator of outings. "I try to give my participants as much fun as possible" (R16), said one respondent, highlighting that the goal is not knowledge transmission but providing enjoyment and lightness in shared time. The educator thus serves as host, responsible for atmosphere and enabling seniors to build networks of support.

DISCUSSION

The study confirms that non-formal education of older adults in Poland does not constitute a homogeneous field of practice but rather a dynamic space where different logics of action coexist and intersect. The identified didactic approaches – ranging from instrumental-adaptive to humanistic and developmental – do not

form closed models; instead, they operate as ideal types that, in practice, merge into hybrid configurations. This phenomenon resonates with the tendency observed in the literature to blur the boundaries between didactic paradigms and points to the pluralism of practices highlighted by, among others, Hachem (2020) and Schoultz (2023). Educators, operating within specific institutional and local conditions, balance between strategies reproducing patterns of formal education and approaches fostering social integration, expression, self-realization, and participants' well-being (Szarota, 2022).

One of the key findings is that didactic practices are shaped by the thematic domain. It shows that different strategies dominate in digital education, artistic activities, or health-related programs. This confirms Schoultz's (2023) observation that didactics in senior education cannot be governed by universal principles but are determined by the specific goals assigned to each activity.

At the level of goals, stratification between three logics was visible: instrumental (e.g., mastering foreign languages, digital skills, improving physical fitness, maintaining activity), integrative (e.g., counteracting loneliness, supporting community ties), and personalist (e.g., self-realization, expression, talent development). Many educational activities remain anchored in the first two logics, while reflective-therapeutic and critical forms of education are underrepresented. Topics such as transformations of social roles, health, aging, civic participation, or biographical reflection – areas widely recommended in the literature (Findsen, 2011; Formosa, 2011, 2023; Formosa & Galea, 2020; Hachem & Manninen, 2020; Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017; Muszyński, 2016) – are insufficiently addressed. Likewise, activities promoting local community engagement, grassroots initiatives, peer education, or intergenerational exchange remain underdeveloped. Similar deficits in transformative education were previously diagnosed by Goldys et al. (2012) who noted that in Poland, educational practices often reproduce an activation-recreational model at the expense of more demanding content (cf. GUS, 2023, 2024; Maćkiewicz & Wnęk-Gozdek, 2019).

From the perspective of methods, patterns of formal education – such as instruction, lecture, and demonstration – predominate. This stems both from the professional biographies of educators, who are often retired teachers, and from the lack of established methodological frameworks for senior education (Formosa, 2020; Maćkiewicz & Wnęk-Gozdek, 2019). Even in artistic or community-oriented activities, the structures of a “lesson” and “school” logic remain visible. At the same time, however, there is a clear effort to create safe and supportive learning spaces. Educators emphasized the importance of positive feedback, individualization, adjustment of pace, and attention to participants' emotional comfort – findings consistent with previous research (Creech et al., 2014; Duay & Bryan, 2008; Hallam et al., 2016). It is therefore possible to speak of a hybridization of methods: established didactic patterns coexist with attempts to open learning toward dialogue and an animative character.

The study also reveals limited involvement of older adults in co-creating programs and content. While some examples of incorporating participants' suggestions were observed – mainly in animative and community-based approaches – most decisions were made by instructors, guided by their own intuition and experience. Yet the literature emphasizes the importance of participatory approaches and redefining power relations (Hachem, 2020; Marsden, 2011; Schiller et al., 2020). Only flexible responsiveness to participants' needs and redefining educational goals during activities can transform education into a democratic space (Malec-Rawiński & Bartosz, 2017; Marsden, 2011; Szarota, 2022). Another limitation lies in the absence of systematic needs assessment, which may reinforce stereotypical assumptions and restrict the tailoring of educational activities (Creech et al., 2014; Hallam et al., 2016).

The analysis shows that educators position themselves between the role of expert and facilitator. On the one hand, they maintain authority and responsibility for structuring the learning process; on the other, they seek to foster dialogue and collaboration. This hybridity of roles, though difficult to classify unambiguously, combines elements of authoritative instruction with less directive animation.

Non-formal education of older adults in Poland thus emerges as a dynamic and evolving field, where traditional institutional patterns coexist with new participant expectations and international trends. The findings align with Formosa's (2023) diagnosis that senior education stands at a crossroads: on the one hand, it responds to the need for integration and adaptation; on the other, it faces new generations of older adults who expect education that is more inclusive, holistic, emancipatory, and autonomy-supporting (cf. Formosa, 2012, 2023; Hachem, 2020; Marsden, 2011; Schiller et al., 2020). Openness, hybridity, and fluid boundaries may become strengths of a modern concept of education – provided that educators remain aware of the models from which they draw (Schultz, 2023).

The results contribute to the international debate on the future of education in aging societies, underscoring the need to move beyond paradigms reproducing hierarchical relations and traditional didactic patterns toward participatory, inclusive, and critically reflective models. The strength of senior education does not have to lie in coherence or adherence to a single framework but rather in the readiness to explore, experiment, and respond to the evolving needs of successive generations of older adults (Formosa, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrates that non-formal education of older adults in Poland is a diverse and still emerging field. Didactic practices are difficult to capture within unambiguous classifications. Hybridity of approaches and fluidity of instructor

roles can be interpreted as a process of continuous negotiation between institutional expectations, group dynamics, and educators' personal visions and professional experience.

At the same time, the study reveals dominance of didactics oriented toward adaptation and social integration, with insufficient development of activities fostering reflection, subjectivity, and civic participation – elements highlighted in the literature as crucial for fully realizing the potential of education in aging societies. This imbalance exposes tensions between directive teaching and participatory partnership, top-down instruction and grassroots initiatives, segregation and intergenerational exchange, adaptive functions and support for self-realization and critical reflection.

The typology developed in this study, though based on ideal models, captures recurring patterns of thinking and acting among educators. It may serve as both an analytical tool and a practical orientation – helping educators consciously define the kinds of learning opportunities they wish to offer and the values they aim to implement. The findings – considered as a preliminary diagnosis – suggest that further development of senior education requires deeper reflection on the role of didactics and greater awareness in designing programs that balance adaptive, integrative, and emancipatory functions.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. The interviews, focusing on instructors' strategies, may not fully reflect their actual educational practices. Respondents' accounts, although grounded in extensive experience, may be partially biased or influenced by personal interests. Since the analysis is based on educators' self-reports, it cannot be assumed that the values they espouse necessarily translate into practice. Further, broader studies are needed – ones that incorporate the voices of older adults themselves and allow for verification of the preliminary typology of didactic models.

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TYPOLOGIA PODEJŚĆ DYDAKTYCZNYCH STOSOWANYCH W RÓŻNYCH OBSZARACH EDUKACJI OSÓB STARSZYCH: ANALIZA NARRACJI INSTRUKTORÓW

Wprowadzenie: Edukacja pozaformalna osób starszych w Polsce charakteryzuje się dużą różnorodnością oferty, instytucji, metod i form pracy. Brak spójnych standardów i jednolitej wizji sprawia, że podejścia dydaktyczne w tym obszarze wymagają pogłębionej analizy i systematyzacji.

Cel badań: Celem badania było zidentyfikowanie dominujących koncepcji i modeli dydaktycznych stosowanych przez edukatorów pracujących z seniorami oraz określenie, jakie podejścia kierują ich decyzjami przy projektowaniu i prowadzeniu zajęć.

Metoda badań: Zastosowano metodologię teorii ugruntowanej. Przeprowadzono 17 wywiadów z instruktorami reprezentującymi instytucje kulturalne i społeczne zajmujące się wsparciem oraz aktywizacją seniorów.

Wyniki: Analiza ukazała heterogeniczność praktyk dydaktycznych. Zidentyfikowano dwa dominujące nurty: podejścia modernistyczne, ukierunkowane na adaptację i rozwój umiejętności praktycznych oraz podejścia humanistyczne, wspierające integrację społeczną, rozwój osobisty i samorealizację. Ujawniono także obecność elementów rekreacyjnych i kulturotwórczych. Wyłoniły się dwa style pracy: strukturalny, oparty na instruktażu oraz bardziej elastyczny, sprzyjający aktywnemu uczestnictwu; w praktyce edukatorzy łączyli oba podejścia, tworząc konfiguracje hybrydowe. Instruktorzy lokowali się między rolą eksperta a facylitatora, negocjując swoją pozycję wobec grupy.

Wnioski: Opracowana typologia porządkuje sposoby rozumienia edukacji seniorów i wskazuje kierunki dalszych badań nad optymalizacją edukacji pozaformalnej oraz tworzeniem spójnych wytycznych dla praktyki edukacyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja pozaformalna starszych dorosłych, podejścia dydaktyczne, centra seniora, perspektywa edukatorów

