

A Case Study of Third-Age Adult Women and Education in Costa Rica:  
A Catalyst for Social Change

A thesis presented to  
the faculty of  
the Center for International Studies of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts

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June 2009

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A Catalyst for Social Change

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## ABSTRACT

EAMES, KERRI A., M.A., June 2009, Latin American Studies

A Case Study of Third-Age Adult Women and Education in Costa Rica: A Catalyst for Social Change (103 pp.)

Director of Thesis: Risa C. Whitson

Education affects both the individual and the nation. Educational programs strengthen community desires and outcomes, and promote the understanding of a community's culture and history. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Costa Rica is forging new paths in adult education. Adult education programs sponsored by universities have a profound impact on the lives of the older adults, particularly women, who participate in them. This is due to the fact that the educational atmosphere provides a space in which each individual can discover, express and appreciate new ideas, values and beliefs. This is very important to ensure that development is effective at the national, personal and community levels. Women's participation in the adult education program at the University of Costa Rica entitled, *Integral Education for Older Adults*, demonstrates the actions women take to integrate education into their lives, and the societal implications of this phenomenon.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis has been a challenging yet rewarding experience. I would first like to start by thanking my grandmother Myrtle T. Eames who is my favorite older adult, and the inspiration behind my thesis.

Secondly, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Risa Whitson. I cannot put into words how valuable her support and guidance has been over the past year and a half. I would not have completed this thesis without her constant encouragement, constructive criticisms, and her dedication to upholding our timeline.

Thirdly, *gracias* goes to Dr. Edna Wangui, Dr. Jaylynne Hutchinson and Dr. Betsy Partyka, the other members of my committee. They provided me with helpful insight, support, and their unique perspectives with regards to my research.

Finally, I would like to thank the department of Latin American Studies and the Institutional Review Board for making my research in Costa Rica possible. I would also like to thank my colleagues in Latin American Studies and my friends and family in New York and Costa Rica for sharing my passions, encouraging me throughout the thesis-writing process, and for motivating me to succeed in my research endeavors. *Sí Se Puede.*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

While there have been numerous advancements in Latin America in the past decades, many nations are still developing at a slower pace than their European and Anglo-American counterparts. Many people are denied an education, particularly women, since maintaining social norms, such as women's traditional roles in the domestic sphere, is more important than educational advancements (Williamson 2006). Education affects both the individual and the nation, and contains many benefits and consequences of a modernizing world (Reardon 2007; Williamson 2006; Dewey 1897). Educational programs strengthen community desires and outcomes, and promote the understanding of a community's culture and history (Reardon 2007).

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Costa Rica is forging new paths in adult education. Costa Rica is a Central American nation that has a flourishing urban culture and a strong desire for increasing its levels of development. Women are an integral part of each community in Costa Rica, and through education, development and change most certainly will occur. Development, however, can only occur when the students, in this case the Costa Rican women, take the knowledge acquired through the programs and actively participate in the betterment of their communities (Zapparolli 2005; John Dewey 1898; Freire 2000).

Adult education programs sponsored by universities have a profound impact on the lives of the women who participate in them, and educated women in turn impact their communities. This is due to the fact that the educational atmosphere provides a space in which each individual can discover, express and appreciate new ideas, values and beliefs

(Freire 2000; Horton 2003). This is very important to ensure that development is effective at the national level as well as at the more personal levels of the community and the family.

### *Research Questions*

This thesis will analyze the effect of adult education programs on older women (+50) in Costa Rican society. In particular this thesis will look into the reasons why older women in Costa Rica are choosing to return to school, and what the societal implications are of such actions. In order to do this I will address the following questions: What social factors contribute to older women's enrollment and success in the integral education program for older adults at the University of Costa Rica (UCR)? What inhibits their success? What actions (physical, mental and emotional) do these women take in order to integrate education into their lives? I will also look into how family relations within the Costa Rican culture are affected as a result of the educational endeavors taken by these Costa Rican women.

The program chosen for investigation is a program strictly for adults entitled, *Integral Education for Older Adults*. In this program 80% of the students are women. These women are creating changes within themselves as well as within the community through education. The program *Integral Education for Older Adults* is located at the University of Costa Rica in San Pedro, Costa Rica.

Costa Rica is a unique Central American nation. After abolishing its army in 1949, Costa Rica followed an agenda of social reform. While most Latin American nations in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century directed their funds towards the maintenance of armies,

and economic stimulus initiatives, Costa Rica redirected its funds, which were once used to maintain the army, to education, healthcare and pension plans. This small democratic nation is known for its critically conscious choices regarding peace, equity, access to education, and the importance of democracy. State officials in Costa Rica are elected democratically, the voting rate is at 80 percent, education is free through the age of 12 and compulsory through age 14 (Helmuth 2000).

Besides having a democratic government dedicated to the maintenance of social programs, high educational expectations and redirected army funds, the past few decades have witnessed escalated levels of tourism with the assistance of the United States. This makes Costa Rica one of the most highly visited countries in Latin America, with surplus revenue coming from the tourism sector. This surplus is then directed towards its educational programs. Nearly 30 percent of its Gross Domestic Product is devoted to education, which is one of the highest educational allotments in Latin America. Costa Rica's president Oscar Arias affirms that the primary means to further Costa Rican development is through education (Cox 2007).

The second chapter contains a literature review that defines social and community development, discusses the theories of Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, and explains the importance of educating the elderly. Adult education is addressed, and the program "Integral Education for Older Adults" located at the UCR is introduced as a fantastic program for the mature adult.

The third chapter contextualizes Costa Rica in relation to adult education in other nations around the world, and especially in Latin America. This chapter provides a

history of Costa Rica's educational pursuits and shows how and why adult education became so important in its society.

The fourth chapter provides the methodology used for this thesis. Qualitative methodology is defined along with the specific methods used, and a detailed account of the data collection process is given. The work location is explained in detail, and the reasoning behind the selection of the program *Integral Education for the Older Adult* at the UCR will be justified.

Lastly, chapter five contains the results and analysis of all data. In this chapter I demonstrate that education for older adults is a catalyst for social change. The program *Integral Education for Older Adults* is addressed to a larger extent, discussing its founding, funding and course offerings. This is followed by a section that contains the motivating factors behind the older adult women's return to school, and the factors that contribute to and hinder their success. Another section discusses the actions older adult women take to integrate education into their lives.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Introduction*

According to Paulo Freire (2000), education is a driver of development, and the right to access education is universal regardless of gender. Education is the practice of freedom<sup>1</sup> through which people are able to discover themselves, develop their own identities, and contribute to society and the world (Castro 2007; Freire 2000; Dewey 1897). Both Freire and Myles Horton believe that education is a process, and through education and group discussion within the community, the society is changed through a progression of social consciousness (Singer and Pezone 2007).

As a result of educational initiatives, society is transformed, and people's presence in the world is recognized, transformed and affirmed. Education has a humanistic basis that focuses on learning and understanding (Freire 2000). It reflects the value structure of a society or culture, and encompasses its complexities. In all countries and cultures of the world, education expresses societal norms and often privileges those with higher socioeconomic status (Williamson 2006, 195-200; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997, 2007-276).

This literature review will define development and education, and show how the education of third-age adult women and social development are intrinsically linked. This

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom has many definitions. For the purpose of this thesis freedom can be defined as providing people with educational opportunities and settings where that they might be able to understand how and to what extent they have been oppressed or discriminated against by groups or individuals in society. This leads to social transformation which according to hooks (1994), "is rooted in the fundamental belief in a radically democratic idea of freedom and justice for all" (26).

chapter illustrates the role that older adults play in education and development, and highlights how women are both crucial participants in and leaders of social change.

The following journals, articles and books have been chosen to provide a background of concepts relevant to best understand the thesis questions pertaining to third generation women's enrollment and success in adult education programs. This literature review will provide the framework for the analysis of the data collected, and provide evidence that it is possible to transform society based on critical consciousness, the desire to impact the lives of others, and the belief in life-long learning.

#### *Defining Development*

In order to fully understand the body of literature that will be addressed, a definition of all major terms is pertinent. One of the most important terms in this thesis is development. Development can be broadly defined as giving people the tools they need in order to make their lives better. Education plays a major role in development, whether it is on a global, national, or community based scale (Bonal 2004; Estado de la educación costarricense 2005; King and Hill 1993; Simon 1997; Singer and Pezone 2007). Community and social development occur in Latin America and more specifically in Costa Rica through education. Social development is the process of organizing the populace by means of education and creating cooperation and sharing, in order to restructure and improve society (Singer and Pezone 2007). Community development values equality, opportunity and participation through the eliminations of barriers, so that people will be able to participate in the decision-making processes of the community

(Federation for Community Development Learning 2008). Such development leads to social change through an increase in participation and action in society.

Multiple scholars suggest that social and community development have been shown to greatly increase the quality of life of an individual (Buckingham-Hatfield 2000; *Sancho* 2007; Prins 2008), and the education of women is certainly a great contributor to and beneficiary of such development (Stevens et al., 2006). Research by Buckingham-Hatfield (2000) and Murray and Stewart (2002) expound the connections between women, development and education.

The academic discussion of how women's roles in society are being socially constructed. As Gregson et al. (1997) state: "From the moment they are born, humans are treated differently because of their sex" (50). As a result of social constructions within society, the topics of women and their role in development and education are entrenched in social issues, and each generation is brought up within the social constraints of gender roles. Women's roles in society need not be ambiguous but rather re-defined based on changing times. According to Buckingham-Hatfield (2000), Gregson et al. (1997), and Sen (1994), women's roles in society need to be redefined. This can be accomplished through equal contribution and a deeper concern for development by men and women alike. These scholars discuss the concept of *synergy*, or the working and bringing together of many elements to create a better more effective form of development. The health, personal well-being and life-long education of a population are crucial for social change and development, and must be placed at the forefront of action (Sen 1994).



Initiatives must be taken to foster opportunity, reduce vulnerability, and improve institutions to empower women and their communities. The path towards development needs to be inclusive and stress accountability and responsibility by all citizens who desire social change (Erskine and Phillipson 1980; hooks 1994).

*Education for Social Change: Horton and Freire*

The concept of education has been heavily debated throughout the course of history. Paulo Freire, an educational philosopher, addresses the concerns of the less fortunate, oppressed and dehumanized societal groups, while criticizing and isolating the educational tactics of the oppressors. Freire uses his critical pedagogy to reach out to millions of people worldwide. He believes that in order to be truly liberated, a process of *conscientization* must occur within the oppressed person. This process leads to reflection, action and transformation of oppressive social institutions that limit freedom.

A major theme discussed by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the problem of dehumanization. He suggests that modern society creates individuals who must struggle to be subjects within institutions that portray them as objects. The prescription to overcome this objectification is to consciously remove the fear of freedom. According to Freire (2000), the oppressed have a fear of embracing freedom, and the oppressors are afraid of losing their ability to oppress. Removing these fears is difficult but can be accomplished through education. The process of *conscientization* can remove the fear of freedom and lead to the transformation of the individual and the social institutions to which the individual has succumbed. This process can be defined as the

educational process by which individuals realize the gravity of their situation in society and make a conscious effort to transform it (Freire 2000).

Throughout the learning process of *conscientization* the oppressed realize that liberation will not be gained by chance, and that it takes a conscious effort inspired by the praxis of their quest to create change (Freire 2000). Nevertheless, transformation through education and eventual social change must be attempted with care, as it is very easy in the quest for freedom to cross the line from oppressed to oppressor. In the process of fighting for emancipation, the end goal can, and is, often lost in battle. Instead of purely seeking liberation, Freire explains that the oppressed often seek appeasement, or, due to the fear of freedom, they might decide that the best choice for transformation is to become an oppressor themselves (2000). Freedom from oppression requires responsibility and action via the quest for liberation (Freire 2000). This requires critical consciousness of the situation at hand, and the desire to become more fully human through direct action. Critical consciousness leads to the transformation of not only oneself, but also of society.

Compliance and conformity reinforce the theme of dichotomy between humans and the world. Oppression becomes accepted by the student, as the educator regulates the way in which the world enters into the student's consciousness (Freire 2000). Freire refers to this type of education as banking education. He defines it as a type of knowledge that acts as a "gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those who they consider to know nothing" (72). However, this is not true knowledge. True knowledge occurs through action and reflection by human beings upon their world

in order to change it. Therefore, true education and knowledge begin with the premise of praxis.

Praxis (Freire 2000) responds to the fundamental nature of consciousness. Action and reflection are both acts of cognition in which the individual through *conscientization* finally becomes aware of the dehumanizing and oppressive situation to which they have succumbed. This awareness leads to the next major theme addressed by Freire, that of dialogue. The essence of dialogue is the word, which consists of the components of praxis reflection, and action. Dialogicity is the essence of education. This is evidenced by women's social movements worldwide, and their actions to integrate education into their lives, and use said education to create change in their communities through communication and direct action (Leitinger 1997; Ortiz 2005).

According to Myles Horton (2003), "adult education is based primarily on an attempt to see people as they see themselves and to help generate within them the desires and determination to improve their conditions" (10). He sees education as the most powerful means to create social change, and believes that each individual must make the effort for change. They must solve their own problems, and decide what they really want.

Education must start at the foundation of people's experiences (Horton 2003; Freire 2000; hooks 1994). Education is unique in that it leads to sharing these experiences, learning from them, and promoting personal growth and social change. Horton and theorist Paulo Freire strongly affirm that education is all about change, but change cannot occur on its own (Horton 2003; Paulo Freire 2000). According to Myles Horton (2003):

[Education is about] helping people value their own experiences so they can be something to learn from. An unexamined experience is just a happening; it is something you know. Experiences don't educate, but you can tear experiences apart and try to figure out all that is in there. Then it becomes the best educational experience.  
(49)

The sharing of experiences puts the learning process in motion. Both learning through experience as well as through the uncovering of objective facts obtained through journal articles, books and lectures are valued; they must stand the test of critical thinking (Freire 2000; Horton 2003; Hooks 1994). The knowledge obtain must be utilized in “attacking...social and individual problems” (Horton 2003; 213). Educational power must be put into practice.

#### *Geriatric Education: Development and the Older Adult*

One of the major issues confronting society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the changing age demographic. Adults are living for longer periods of time due to new medicines (Findsen 2005). Also, life expectancy has been a major achievement of both the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Glendenning cited in Nussbaum and Coupland (2004) states: “Global predictions suggest that the over 60s will increase from 416 million in 1985 to 1.1 billion in 2025” (526). Adult education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is becoming very important and crucial; this is as a result of an aging global population that is looking for more learning opportunities as they reach the third stage of life. This section will address the changing age demographic in society, the need for an increase in the number of older adult centered educational programs offered at universities, and will draw connections between older adult education and social development.

According to Paulo Freire (2000) the mind must always remain active. He says that there are three major stages in life, the first being childhood, the second parenthood and the third is the third age/older adult.<sup>2</sup> Author Laslett (1989) identifies four stages. The first stage is that of childhood as well, the second age is that of adult maturity, which includes finding a job and earning money. The third stage is where the adult becomes self-fulfilled, and therefore able to seek hobbies, cultural interests, and life satisfaction. The fourth stage is that of dependency and eventual death.

Findsen (2005) adds to Freire (2000) and Laslett's (1989) discussion regarding the four ages by stating that many adults of third stage are hesitant about entering a formal educational institution at their age. They usually prefer more informal, vocational style programs. Older adults often feel uncomfortable in formal learning settings, especially at the university level. This is due to the fact that they are mixing with the younger generation, and they often reflect upon what school was like for them when they were younger. Many mature adults also become part of the social construct that says that the third-age adult is *too old to learn*. Despite their fears, through mingling with the different generations of students and faculty/staff at higher educational institutions, many bridges are built, creating stronger connections both socially and on an intergenerational basis (2005). Scholars Laslett (1989) and Findsen (2005) affirm this idea. As Laslett (1989) states,

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<sup>2</sup> Therefore the terms older adult and mature adult will be used interchangeably when referring to the adult 50 years and older or pensioned

[In] the 21<sup>st</sup> century third agers will prosper as larger numbers enter this domain of life with plenty of energy for and creativity in living. However, sooner or later, we all must die. What people desire is a fourth age which has dignity and caring as central components. Educators are guilty of largely ignoring this fourth age, yet there is a useful role here for the sensitive care of those who can no longer care properly for themselves. (Laslett, cited in Findsen 2005, 13)

Human aging is a process that lasts the entire lifespan, and the “quality of life in the later years is a product of a lifetime” (Bond & Coleman 1990, 288). Adult learning and development is a life-long process (Findsen 2005; Horton 2003; Finger and Asún 2001; Freire 2000; Smith and Pourchot 1998; Long 1983). According to Smith and Pourchot (1998):

Adult life is complex and richly colored by many variables that affect these developmental and learning processes. Adults move in and out of personal relationships, marry and divorce, raise children, establish careers and work in one or more occupations over a period of four or more decades, care for aging parents and/or grandchildren, and confront their own aging. They interact with various social, community, commercial, governmental, legal and educational institutions across the whole of their lives. (5)

Adults learn from their experiences, reflect and teach others, passing on their knowledge and wisdom that they have acquired over the years. Education has been proved to lead to a more productive and satisfying life (Freire 2000; Horton 2003; Findsen 2005; Coats 1996; Pourchot 1998). According to Myles Horton, it is pertinent to use education “as one of the main mechanisms for changing society” (2003, 11). The changes start with the individual as they change socially due to their educational endeavors and they spread their knowledge to the community upon returning home.

Knowledge in the realm of older adult learning can be defined as the development of freedom, individual growth, and self-actualization (Findsen 2005). The need of the older adult to be both understood and appreciated is imperative. If this occurs, the social

aspects of aging will be better understood, and life-long learning will continue to hold a “treasured place” in society (Findsen 2005, 19).

Education can enhance the quality of life of the older adult. Education leads to better health and better mental well-being. According to Withnall (2000),

[O]lder people are frequently marginalized in educational policy circles by continued emphasis on economic competitiveness in tandem with a moral panic about the financial support of an aging population which, although of major importance, tends to conceptualize later life as primarily a social problem.  
(89)

Why should society bother educating a group of older adults who have no plan of re-entering the work force? The older adult has every right to lead a healthy life that is both satisfying and rewarding, as well as have the equal right to all educational opportunities as any other person from the younger generations. Human potential and dignity is at stake as well. Every human being regardless of their age has the potential to make effective contributions to society (Withnall and Percy 1994; Elmore 2000). This is especially pertinent with reference to intergenerational reciprocity (Findsen 2005). By contributing to society and conversing with younger teachers and students, the older adult becomes free to express life experiences, and looks forward to much more personal growth regardless of age.

Educational opportunities are not only relevant, but crucial at the third stage of life. Although the older adult has an increased life expectancy, and therefore more leisure time, attitudes towards aging still continue to be viewed negatively in society. This negative attitude affects not only the older adult’s ability to continue developing on a personal scale, but alters their value in society and the ability to influence the lives of fellow community members (Nussbaum and Coupland 2004; Prins 2008).

Social development concerns responding to the educational needs of the older adult population led to a decree in France in the early 1970s, stating that universities would be opened to all individuals, regardless of age. Life-long education became a major priority, and since then, universities in nations such as Costa Rica, China and India have developed programs specifically for the older adult that encompass many goals pertaining to development. Costa Rica has also established a law (number 7539) that stipulates that the older adult has equal access to education, and that universities must offer courses from which the older adult can benefit (University of Costa Rica 2008).

These programs, according to Phillipson (Cited in Nussbaum and Coupland 2004):

[C]ontribute to the raising of the standard of living of elderly people by health building activities, sociocultural activities and research. [They] contribute to the improvement of living conditions of elderly people through multidisciplinary research...and the dissemination of information. (528)

This provides an example of education for social change, as the older adults are able to spend the rest of their lives in a meaningful way that benefits themselves as well as society. According to Paulo Freire (2000), older adults, as a result of education and intergenerational communication, look forward to the years of learning ahead of them. Life takes on a new meaning. They take a more biophilic personality. Biophilia means lover of life. This personality is associated with justice, togetherness and freedom. This type of person enjoys life instead of fearing death, and is also driven by the pursuit of freedom. She is against cultural silence and is motivated by the idea of change and transformation. The biophilic person has a clear and unmistakable purpose and identity that is centered on creativity and reality. This type of person with her love of life, and



constant effort for effective change has become fully humanized. They are able to think about the world, both consciously and critically; they are aware of their place in society; and they know what needs to be done in order to transform the world around them.

Therefore, educational gerontology is a very effective means to keep older adults alive, healthy, positive, and help him/her gracefully age as he/she heads into the last stage of life. Being that the fourth stage is dependency and death, older adults in this stage no longer look at life in a biophilic manner, rather they become necrophilic. Necrophilics are obsessed with death. This type of person is unable to truly reflect upon the consequences of his/her actions, is unable to become self-actualized, and no longer looks forward to what life has to offer (Freire 2000).

*Social Change: Education and the Women of the Third Age*

According to Nussbaum and Coupland (2004), “[t]he first task of education is to arouse self-awareness...to enhance the consciousness of the elderly in relation to themselves and to their social setting, to strengthen their self-esteem and to encourage their questioning or hidden aspirations” (530). This is particularly pertinent to older adult women. If women become more self-aware, confident, and in control of their thinking and capabilities, they become empowered to change their own life, and they realize that the “knowledge they have acquired over the years has been socially constructed” (Nussbaum and Coupland 2004). Education for older adult women is not completely homogeneous. Some are educated for re-entrance into the workforce, others are educated in self-reliance and self-esteem building, while others strive to be empowered for the purpose of creating social change within themselves and their communities. Others wish

to recover their “identity as culture bearers and culture creators” (Moody 1988, 259). The older adult wants to make a critical difference in society (Freire 2000; Prins 2008).

Autonomy, creativity and becoming critically conscious of societal roles and functions are major goals of older adults who are re-entering an institution of learning. These goals pertain specifically to older adult women (Freire 2000; Leitinger 1997; Prins 2008). They involve “questioning the place of power and control in the pursuit of knowledge in later life and taking into account the importance of life experience as a learning process” (Nussbaum and Coupland 2004, 537). This acknowledgment increases the self-esteem level of older adult women, leading to self-actualization, participation, dialogue, and *conscientization*, which are imperative elements of social change both on a personal and community level (Freire 2000; hooks 1994; Horton 2003; Nussbaum and Coupland 2004; Prins 2008; Stevens et al., 2006).

Education meets older adults’ need to belong and provides social compensation through the development of new relationships. This is particularly relevant to mature women. Older women, according to Deeg & Westendorp-de Seriere (cited in Stevens et al., 2006) “have a lower sense of self-efficacy and higher levels of anxiety and depression than older men” (495). They are also more likely to be widowed, and are often very lonely in the third and fourth stages of life. Educational programs for the older adult provide women with an outlet for their needs, setting goals and improving their quality of life. These programs provide encouragement, guidance and a new network of friendships and emotional support, which lead to a healthier more autonomous lifestyle that includes a more harmonious family life (Coats 1997; Stevens et al., 2006). Third generation adult

women, through continuing education, receive a new sense of self-worth and a reinvigorated desire to live and prosper (Freire 2000).

Many scholars strongly believe third age education to be a powerful means to improve the quality of life of both the older adult and society (Coats 1997; Fryer 1997; Stevens 2006). Through education older adults are able to cope with difficult situations, come to terms with their own lives, and understand the world around them (Freire 2000; Nussbaum and Coupland 2004; Long 1983; Maehl 2000). Adult learning programs provide the educational atmosphere where *conscientization* and dialogue occur, providing an opportunity for individuals to realize their potentials, and the strength to be assertive social activists in a crusade for social change.

## CHAPTER 3: COSTA RICA IN CONTEXT

### *Introduction*

Costa Rica, a Central American nation, no bigger than West Virginia, as shown in Figure 1, is an incredibly unique country. It has been deemed the *Switzerland of Central America* (Helmuth 2000) due to its peaceful tendencies, and is the leading Latin American nation in the implementation and success of social programs (Helmuth 2000; Lara 1995). Costa Rica has garnered the highest literacy rate in the region at a solid 97 percent (Cox 2007). This country has witnessed major social reforms, equality bills, augmented educational standards and expectations, abolishment of its standing army, peaceful transfer of power, massive hikes in tourism due to its economic and political stability, and a president who has won the Nobel Peace Prize for his leadership role in Central America. Costa Ricans attest that these accomplishments serve as evidence to their strong values of peace, unity and education (Helmuth 2000; Lara 1995; Wilson 1998).

In this chapter, it will be made clear that the educational system in Costa Rica is far from ordinary; rather it serves as a major catalyst for social change, leading to affirmative development initiatives in not only Costa Rica, in but the rest of Central America as well. I will argue that Costa Rica is a unique nation in comparison with its other Central American counterparts. I will also demonstrate how Costa Rica is a leading nation in the implementation of social programs, has a high literacy rate, a robust economy with the help of longtime ally, the United States, and prides itself on being a nation that values peace, unity and education above all else.



Figure 1. Map of Costa Rica

Source: Google Images 2008

### *Political Stability*

Costa Rica is currently stable politically. This directly correlates to the stability and achievements of its educational system. In order to better understand the context of Costa Rica's current political stability, which enabled its educational institution to become so strong, one must look at Costa Rica's early political stability, in order to draw connects between said stability. As Costa Rica began its new chapter as an independent nation free from Spanish domination in 1823, power of the newly formed nation changed hands 22 times within a 40 year time span. The country was without a national identity and lacked unity. In the 1850s the United States citizen William Walker and followers invaded Costa Rica, which resulted in the joining together of Costa Rican citizens in the ousting of foreign invaders. National unity, neutrality from conflict and the maintenance of peace became major national goals from the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through to the present (Helmuth 2000).

During the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Costa Rica entered what is known as the liberal period, characterized by participation of the public into politics, and a demand for public expression and social progress. In 1869 education became free and obligatory through the sixth grade, and by the end of the liberal period in the 1940s Costa Rica had the highest literacy level in the region of Central America due to education being the major national goal. Unfortunately though, the end of the liberal period was also characterized by "oligarchic collusion, ephemeral political parties and fraudulent electoral politics" (Yashar cited in Helmuth 2000). The separation of church and state occurred during the liberal period as well, coupled with economic prowess, authoritarian

rule, greediness and corrupt management of funds which led to civil unrest and resulted in strikes and coup attempts (Wilson 1998).

Despite Costa Ricans struggle for social and political reform, the election of 1948 resulted in electoral fraud yet again. On March 12<sup>th</sup> a month-long civil war broke out ending with 2,000 Costa Ricans dead, and a commitment by the Costa Rican citizens to elect presidents who would create social reform and abolish the army so that the values of peace, unity and democracy never again would be affected by violence and military/political corruption. In 1949 under the presidency of José Figueres, the standing army was abolished and a very strong alliance was developed with the United States (Cox 2007). This resulted in the distribution of more funds towards education, as the United States supplied provisions to be implemented in the public schools and universities in Costa Rica.

#### *Contemporary Political Support in Costa Rica*

President Figueres, who served from 1953-1958 and again from 1970-74, was enthralled with American culture. He was fascinated by its economic, social and governmental structures and wanted to emulate them in Costa Rica. He believed that there was a “capacity for social justice within the framework of free enterprise” (Rolbein in Helmuth 2000). President Figueres played a major role in influencing current president, Oscar Arias, to be a leading supporter of equal rights in education regardless of age, gender and socioeconomic level, and an advocate of social reform programs.

Stemming from the Costa Rican values of peace, unity and education, the current constitution written in 1949 echoes these sentiments. It is based on the United States’

constitution as it divides the government into three branches, the executive, legislative and judicial (Clark 2001). In Costa Rica the executive branch is composed of the president two vice-presidents and a 15 member cabinet. The composition of the executive branch is to spread out national responsibilities, encourage party members to become unified in decision-making and keep the president's power in check.

The constitution of 1949 marked the end of a month-long civil war, which was the only civil war in Costa Rican history. From there, Costa Rica became renowned world-wide for its peaceful transfers of power from one president to the next with minimal demonstrations. Throughout the years of civil war Costa Rican social reform skyrocketed, implementing the revenue once spent on the maintenance of the military into social programs such as health and education as well as infrastructure repair and social services. Costa Rica boasted not only the highest literacy rate in the region, but also the highest life expectancy level, and was deemed the most peaceful democratic nation in the region as well (Cox 2007; Helmuth 2000). With a stable economy and presidents in office who stressed social reform as the most important item on the agenda, the educational system from primary to higher education flourished, and healthcare became second best in the region (Cuba being number one) (Cox 2007; Helmuth 2000; Wilson 1998).

### *The Economy and Migration*

Not only has political stability been important in Costa Rica, but the path of Costa Rica's economic development has also led to an increase in the percentage of funds that have been allotted to strengthening the educational institution. This section will outline



the economic development of Costa Rica, emphasizing the United States' influence, migration patterns, changing exports and allocation of revenue for social reform. Firstly, the Costa Rican economic development model has a long consistent history of state interventions from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, through the liberal period (1870-1940), the social reform period (1940-1950), the civil war (1948), and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the early 1800s coffee was introduced in Costa Rica and became the staple of the economy. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century coffee accounted for more than 90 percent of the income earned from exports (Wilson 1998). In order to increase the amount of coffee grown in Costa Rica, the government intervened to improve the infrastructure. By investing more money in the infrastructure, coffee was easily transported. Government initiatives led to the expansion and success of the coffee industry.

Following infrastructure repair and the expansion of coffee exports, the government turned to railroads. A railway system was built from the Atlantic coast to the coffee growing regions in the central plateau of Costa Rica. In order to afford the high costs, bananas were cultivated in the areas surrounding the railway. The increased profits generated in Costa Rica through banana and coffee sales attracted foreign investors, and the coffee plantations developed a new oligarchy of coffee growers as well. Ties with the United States began during this time as companies relied on financing from U.S. banks. The United States invested and loaned large sums of money in order to stimulate the Costa Rican economy and during the World Wars, Costa Rica received a lot of revenue as a main goods producer (Cox 2007; Helmuth 2000). This is important, as the Costa Ricans knew that if they incurred future economic problems, the United States would

donate or loan money to them in order to stimulate economic growth once more. As a result, the Costa Rican government spent money on educational programs and economic endeavors. Besides American influences, during this time period (the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), an estimated 25 percent of Costa Rica's population growth came from immigrants arriving from a diverse array of countries. These individuals from countries including Germany, Italy, England, Jamaica, China, etc., arrived in Costa Rica hoping to take advantage of the enhanced Costa Rican economy (Leitinger 1997).

After the civil war of 1948, the Costa Rican economy finally surpassed that of other Central American nations. The new constitution, new political system, and the goals of social reform, along with a stable economy and the alliance built with the United States, allowed for a highly developed educational institution (Helmuth 2000; Wilson 1998). In addition to drastic improvements in education, which will be explored further in this chapter, a social security system was put into place, rivaled by no other Latin American nations, and free healthcare for all citizens was guaranteed (Wilson 1998)

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the economy continued to surge, hitting occasional rough patches; but between the economic assistance of the United States and rising levels of tourism, the Costa Rican economy remained stable. Currently, tourism is the highest generator of income due to Costa Rica's natural beauty, nonviolent atmosphere and high levels of biodiversity. Although Costa Rica is in debt, due to money borrowed during the railroad construction, and was affected by the Latin American economic crisis of the 1980s, Costa Rica still makes many sacrifices in order to

give its citizens greater educational opportunities (Clark 2001; Cox 2007; Helmuth 2000 Lara 1995; Wilson 1998).

Between an increasing population, a robust economy, political stability and a strong demand for social reform, Costa Rica began its quest to become the country with a peaceful educated population ready to be the example for all of Latin America.

### *Institution of Education*

Costa Rica's educational endeavors have been the impetus for much of the social change that has taken place. Its long tradition of emphasizing the importance of a good education resulted in the establishment the University of Santo Tomás in 1843, which was closed in 1888 for financial reasons, and reopened in 1940 as the UCR (Universidad de Costa Rica 2008c), based on the United States' institutions of higher learning. The UCR will be elaborated on further in this chapter. Shortly after the founding of Costa Rica's first university, equal education for men and women was mandated in 1847, although it took another century for women to actually receive equal access. In 1869 education became free and obligatory (Lara 1995; Wilson 1998). Costa Rica was very progressive in its educational endeavors, as public and private schools were built in not only urban areas, but the rural *campo* as well.

Radical reforms occurred in education after the civil war of 1948. According to Helmuth (2000) "[education] represented universal opportunity and became for many Costa Ricans the shining example of their country's highly developed culture and of their government's achievements" (29). Even prior to the civil war, the government dedicated a significant portion of its budget to education, specifically in the literacy crusades, which

resulted in Costa Rica having the highest literacy level in the region. Post-civil war Costa Rica witnessed a solid 30 percent of the budget being dedicated towards the improving educational institution, which is supported by the Costa Rican reverence for education as a major cultural value. Under the leadership of Figueres and the reforms of both presidents Calderón and Figueres, education became solidified as a duty and responsibility of the state (Helmuth 2000). Not only were new schools being built, but teachers were offered pension packages. Costa Rica became known throughout the region as having more teachers than soldiers (Helmuth 2000, Lara 1995).

Besides the building of *colegios* (high schools) and the hiring of teachers, the 1940s witnessed the reopening the University of Santo Tomás. Higher education became a major focal point for the Costa Rican government. Since the reform period (1940-70) Costa Rica currently boasts four state funded universities and dozens of private universities (more than 40 of them are located the greater San José area) (Cox 2007; Helmuth 2000). More than 100,000 students are enrolled in higher education currently, as tuition is based on a sliding scale, which has to do with family income (The University of Costa Rica 2008). According to Helmuth (2000): “A particularly noteworthy feature of the public university system in Costa Rica is the graduation requirement of 150 hours of community service for the bachelor’s degree, and 300 hours for the master’s degree” (32). This is important, as the students learn about giving back to the community in which they reside and to the government that pays for the majority of their education.

Since 1949, education, instead of being compulsory and free until the eighth grade, became compulsory until the eighth grade, and free until twelfth grade. According

to Helmuth (2000), “The state has declared its commitment to making educational opportunities equal through economic stimuli, and guarantees the autonomy of its universities” (30). In Costa Rica education is viewed as a fundamental right, and not solely a state obligation.

Costa Rica’s educational prowess led to a much more astute population, aware of the socioeconomic and political realities of the nation, and more able to create changes in society as well as maintain a strong consciousness of their values. According to Helmuth (2000), “While Costa Rica’s history has not been devoid of violence, at critical junctures Costa Ricans have consistently chosen peace and committed themselves to the process of social reform” (40). This is evidenced by their unified and peaceful political parties and educational institutions.

However, social reform has not always led to social justice with regards to women’s equality in education. Equality in education is not just about improving personal lives; rather it is about overcoming oppression faced in society. The educational atmosphere provides women with an opportunity for *conscientization* to occur, leading to the praxis of critical reflection and real action regarding the disadvantages they face in society. The women’s movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an example of how praxis leads to social change by means of pursuits of educational equality through demands and action. The women in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries knew that it was not enough for individual women to simply ask for the equal access to education, rather women of all ages and incomes joined together, gaining power and momentum. They became educated as to their human rights, they participated in strikes, and they relied on each other in

moments of adversity. These women took their words and converted them into action. As

Freire (2000) states:

When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating “blah.” It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action (87).

Through dialogue and unity, reflection and action occur in society, making the women’s movement in Costa Rica a steadfast example of what women are capable of accomplishing in society through unity, reflection, *conscientization*, and action.

*Social Progressivism, the Women’s Movement and a New Constitution:*

This section will demonstrate how the women’s movement and the establishment of a new constitution led to social reform and educational advancements in Costa Rican society. Costa Rica was not always considered an exception in its education pursuit and equality. Costa Rican women, up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century were severely repressed when they demanded equal access to education. The rallying for equal access and opportunities became dominant at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under the dictatorship of the Tinoco brothers (part of the coffee oligarchy) in 1919 there was a popular mobilization led by female educators and students in the San José area (Leitinger 1997; Biesanz, Biesanz and Biesanz 1999; Palmer and Molina 2004). The capital was particularly targeted, being that it was home to the high school which participated in the rebellions and protests: *El Colegio de Señoritas*. These demonstrations began what would later be known as the *Costa Rican Women’s Movement*. The events surrounding the fall of the

Tinoco dictatorship would often be reflected upon by women in mid to latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as they continued the fight for equality in education.

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the demands, protests and declarations for social change and educational equality became a direct threat to the survival of the military regime. These actions resulted in the closing of many schools and universities. There was a strong presence of women from the working-class contingent, as well as girls from artisan families. Physical violence escalated, but the female teachers defended the girls and pushed forward with their goals and objectives. Women students and teachers continued to resist all efforts of subversion inflicted by the dictators and their police force. Their resistance aided in the collapse of the dictatorship, and resulted in women being given more educational opportunities (at least on paper) as well as the right to vote thereafter (Palmer and Molina 2004).

It became evident to the women in San José, Costa Rica, that in order for social change to truly occur in Costa Rica, “one must first understand how three dominant institutions jointly and separately enforced and rationalized women’s political [and educational] rights” (Leitinger 1997,62). They realized that education would be the key component to social change, and that community involvement and knowledge of their rights as human beings in society would need to take precedence in order to change the masculine domineering institutions looming overhead.

Leading the resistance and promoting women’s equal rights in education and women’s suffrage was Angela Acuña. She became one of the founders of the Costa Rican Feminist League (*Liga Feminista Costarricense*) that was formed in 1923. She became

the leading advocate for women's emancipation. She, among other founders/members, reached out to the women in the community of San José, asking for their support in the struggle for equality (Palmer and Molina 2004, Leitinger 1997). This urban protest movement was a wakeup call for the women in the San José area. Her heroic leadership, as well as the support of the other women, almost won women the right to vote as well as educational reform promoting equality. The path was set for change, and the social movement continued for two more decades until demands for reform became law.

Demands for reform resulted in the Costa Rican social movement for equality in education which was started by women in Costa Rica who knew that the typically individualist way of life held by many Costa Ricans must become community focused. Dialogue and the formation of alliances topped the agenda, as women bound together to discuss the hidden agenda and the techniques of patriarchy for keeping women in line, undereducated, and solely confined to the domestic sphere. The women knew that it was not enough simply to demand change, rather they would educate each other about the current laws and agendas that would need to be amended and discuss in unity how to change a culture that has for so long been engrained in machismo (Palmer and Molina 2004).

Women in San José, Costa Rica at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to meet together in community units. The church served as a primary meeting place, as it was a public place to worship, which allowed the women to pray as well as to converse about their grievances (Ross 1998). These women, consisting of adults as well as university students formed alliances and organizations with the purpose of joining together in the



fight for equality. It was one of the first times in Costa Rican history where women from all classes and walks of life joined forces for a common cause, freedom and equality. Education and voting rights became their primary focus.

Through community organizing Costa Rican women became increasingly aware of the biases they faced in the macho society in which they lived. They desired to take a more active approach, a larger role in decision-making, as well as empowerment to change the educational system that kept them at a distant second to their male counterparts (Leitinger 1997; Ross 1998; Hipsher 1999).

Through discussion within the San José, Costa Rican community, in the mid-1920s-40s the women participating in the organizations for social change and equality realized how inadequate the Costa Rican laws were. Many of the women participants were unaware of their rights as citizens of Costa Rica, and remained ignorant to the cultural obstacles that stood in the way of change (Leitinger 1997). These cultural obstacles and the “hidden curriculum” of a male dominant society, led to the institutionalization of male domination in education and decisions whereby women did not earn the vote until 1949. Women had faith in the legal and educational approach to growth and change, but were unable to influence the nation’s decisions legally.

By the late 1940s Costa Rican women were finally given the right to vote, and equality in education became a law. These changes were a catalyst for the many organizations active today in promoting all Costa Rican women’s equality. Throughout the 1950s-70s women’s organizations formed rapidly. Two principle women’s organizations founded in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century were the “Centro Feminista de Información

y Acción” (Feminist Center for Information and Action), and the “Alianza de Mujeres Costarricenses” (Alliance of Costa Rican Women). The first is action oriented. It is a popular grassroots women’s organization whose goal is to solve problems in the quality of daily life, including women’s rights to fair and equal educational opportunities. And the latter is a non-profit organization, the oldest women’s organization in fact, whose headquarters are in San José. This organization conducts leadership training, and generates a monthly newsletter with popular education issues and suggestions for reform. The newsletter also provides popular education materials.

These organizations played crucial roles during the women’s movement. They and their participants resolved that “the key to understanding the specific situation of Costa Rican women lay in the daily problems these women face, their own definition of these problems, and their own solutions for them” (Leitinger 1997, 20). These beliefs were very similar to theorists Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, who believe that if people are given the proper tools and a place to organize, dialogues will prevail and solutions will be reached. Costa Rican women had the capacity to create change; it just remained untapped until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Critical thinking and analysis of the issues surrounding the hidden “macho” agenda took place vis-à-vis women’s organizations in Costa Rican society.

Nevertheless, the Costa Rican women decided they must not fear change or the freedom of equality, but become critically conscious, be prepared to act, argue and demand change to counter all the years of injustice against women in their society. According to Freire: “The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the

expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation” (Freire 2000, 36). Eventually upon observation of their own identities and through popular mass organization, these same women who just a few short decades earlier were abiding to the wishes of their husbands, and staying at home to be domestic engineers, finally decided to stake their mark in history.

There are many institutional barriers that need to be crossed in order to mainstream gender equality into the educational system. Of the Latin American nations, Costa Rica has rapidly progressed in the educational arena. This is due mainly to women’s organizations that have consistently fought to overcome and surmount the many institutional barriers that stood in the way of equality. There has been an increase in instructional programs that have been for the most part gender focused, and there has been an increase in programs for adults as well.

The vision of social reform remains clear and strong in Costa Rican society. Progress is being made, and is reaffirmed in the strong educational institution that improves upon the national goals of peace, unity and education. Costa Rica, due to its political and educational endeavors, will continue to be a model nation for its fellow Latin American neighbors, and at the strong urging of its citizens, will strive to make its educational system stronger and more equal for all, regardless of gender, race, age and economic class. According to Freire (2000), “human existence cannot be silent” (88). It takes conscious effort to truly transform a society. Through unity, hard work and action-reflection the right to transformation become a reality and the quest for freedom is realized through *conscientization* and dialogue. The Costa Rica women’s movement has

paved the way for current and future generations of women to make changes in their own lives and their communities. This movement serves an example as to what can happen when the silence is broken, and it demonstrates how change can occur when the united reflect and act through the imposition of their own truths and realities of freedom. The program *Integral Education for Older Adults* provides the older adult students with the space and atmosphere they need to become conscious of their own wants and desires, whereby creating change through the praxis of the quests.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

A combination of qualitative methodology, in conjunction with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, and Myles Horton's education for social change theory will be employed in order to answer my thesis question of how education affects women in Costa Rican society, and what the societal implications are of this phenomenon.

This chapter draws connections between the theories of Freire and Horton, and the qualitative methodology that is employed throughout this thesis. Upon conclusion of the methodology chapter it will be made clear that the educational program chosen for investigation in this thesis fits said methodology, as well as corresponds with Freire and Horton's theories pertaining to education for social change. This chapter will also show how the method of interviewing was the best option for data collection.

### *Selecting a Program of Study*

The program chosen for investigation is a program strictly for adults entitled, *Integral Education for the Older Adults*. In this program 85% of the students are women. These women are creating changes within themselves as well as the community through education. The program *Integral Education for Older Adults* caught my attention, as I found it to be a novel idea that the UCR offers a program geared specifically towards the continued education of Costa Rica's older population. This adult education program is located at the UCR in San Pedro, Costa Rica.

San Pedro is the urban capital of Montes de Oca County. It is located in the San José Province see Figure 2. I chose this location as it is the most urban area in Costa Rica. Nearly 40% of the population lives in urban San José, so I knew I would receive a good

amount of participants from that area (Hidalgo Capitán 2003; Central Intelligence Agency 2007; UCR 2008).



Figure 2. Map of San Pedro, Costa Rica

Source: Bikramyoga 2008

The adult education program at the UCR first opened its doors in February, 1986. It has been thriving for 22 years, and it grows annually. Currently there are over 1,600 students. The only prerequisite for the “Integral Program for the Older Adult” is that the older adult has to be at least 50 years old or retired in order to enroll. Dr. Alfonso Trejos Willis first came up with the idea for the program in 1983. He believed that the older individual should have a social space all of their own in which they can occupy their free time in a creative manner, as well as satisfy their personal potential both socially and intellectually (Trejos 1983).

The program *Integral Education for Older Adults* is part of the vice-rectory of Social Action (see figure 3). The mission of this department is to create a stronger relationship between the UCR and society, as well as act as a means by which permanent change can occur. The Social Action Vice-rectory is in charge of providing the necessary mechanisms for the creation of a strong academic institution that has the capacity to serve the community. Serving the community is accomplished through Social Action by means of open dialogue, building permanent relationships, understanding the needs of the community and its citizens, and listening to community and individual demands for change. All of these techniques lead to enrichment both at the university and individual levels (University of Costa Rica 2008).

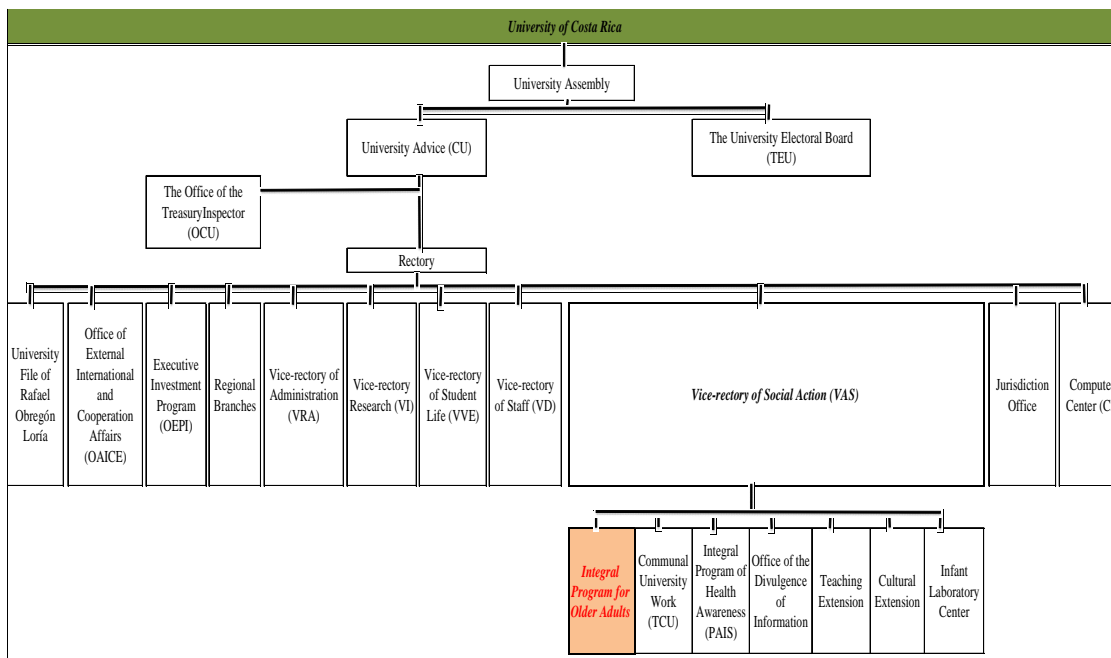


Figure 3. Institutional Breakdown of the University of Costa Rica

Source: University of Costa Rica 2008c.

Social Action facilitates the transmission and exchange of University faculty, staff, and students and creates a stronger more direct connection with the community (University of Costa Rica 2008, Catálogo 2008). In order to understand the connections between the students in the community, especially in regards to the program *Integral Program for the Older Adult*, and development, interviews were absolutely pertinent. For this reason, among many others, qualitative methodology is a good means to explain the social impact that the program for adults has in the lives of the adults and their fellow community members.

### Qualitative Methodology

Although theorists Paulo Freire and Myles Horton have two separate theories, there are many commonalities. Paulo Freire is best known for liberation theory and Myles



Horton for education for social change. They both are interested in education for the enrichment of both the student and teacher's lives and development, giving people the tools they need in order to make their lives and the lives of the people around them better.

Both theorists strongly believe that life experiences are extremely important and vital to development, growth and change. Therefore, in order to discover the importance of education in the lives of the participants and professors in the program for the older adult, I decided that interviewing was the best way to collect data and draw conclusions. Horton and Freire both state that education is extremely personal. Qualitative methodology stresses individual experiences and social processes and structures (Winchester 2003). According to Andrew Sayer (1992) in Winchester (2003), the behavior and experiences of an individual may be determined not so much by their personal characteristics "but by their position in social structure, together with their associated resources, constraints or rules" (4). Qualitative methods consist of the following investigating techniques: observation, participation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of all data retrieved.

#### *Data Collection Process*

I collected my data through observation in the classroom, and by means of in-depth, semi-structured key informant interviews with the faculty, staff and students who participate in the adult education program at the University of Costa Rica (UCR). I conducted my research in the native language of Costa Rica, Spanish.

The students I interviewed were those who were present at the time of matriculation in July/August of 2008. I simply asked those students who were seated by

themselves or in groups waiting to matriculate, if I could ask them a few questions pertaining to their education and the *Integral Program for Older Adults*. I met some initial student interviewees through the principal administrative assistant, María Viquez, in winter 2008 as well. She gave me a faculty list that included all of the contact information for both faculty and staff. I sent many emails and made phone calls, setting up interviews and asking for permission to observe their classes. I was able to organize 19 interviews, and I made one classroom observation (See Table 1). The only criteria I had for selecting my student interviewees was that they had taken, or were planning to take, a course in the adult education program at the UCR, and that they were women, which afforded me the opportunity to interview 85% of the participants in the *Integral Program for Older Adults*. I interviewed 11 students and 8 faculty/administrative staff.

I created a questionnaire (see appendix A1 and A2) to assist me in learning some basic information about my student interviewees. More than anything, the questionnaire served as an ice-breaker, developing a rapport between myself and all of the women that I interviewed. I included questions related to age, gender, marital status, education, country of origin, and questions regarding income.

The student and faculty interviews took between 15 minutes and an hour. They were conducted in the offices of the faculty members, the library, outside at the UCR, and in the Social Action building containing the adult education program. All of my interviewees were asked to participate on a volunteer basis after being thoroughly informed of the intentions of my study. My interviewees ranged from 55 years old to 78.

Table 1

## Interviewees

<b>Interviewees</b>				
	<i>Faculty/ Staff</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education Level</i>
1	Director	Marisol Rapso	Early 40's	Degree in Social Work/ Professor at UCR
2	Director (Institute of the Research and Education)	María Chaves	50-60's	University Level Doctorate
3	Head Administrative Assistant	María José Viquez	Late 20's	University Level
4	Administrative Assistant	Ana Lorena Quiros Calderón	Early 50's	University Level
5	Professor	Ana Orozco	Early 50's	University Level
6	Professor	Aneta Dikoska	Late 30's	University Level
7	Professor (Former Director of International Relations)	Murillo Manuel	Late 50's	University Level
8	Professor (Former Member of Ministry of Education)	Humberto	Late 60's	University Level Doctorate
9	Student	Marta	53	10th Grade
10	Student	Laura	57	University Level
11	Student	Mildred	64	University Level
12	Student	Olga	51	High School Level
13	Student	Carmen	60	University Level
14	Student	Kati	62	8th Grade
15	Student	Raquel	72	University Level Doctorate
16	Student	Leslie	61	5th Grade
17	Student	Lupita	80	9th Grade
18	Student	Camila	75	High School Level
19	Student	Myrtle	85	2nd Grade

Some of the women interviewed were recently retired from the UCR, others were widows who were looking for something to do to fill their time, others were women who have worked their whole lives and longed for the opportunity to continue their studies. I also interviewed faculty members. The majority of the faculty and staff in the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* are retired professors desiring to give back to their community by teaching, organizing, or developing courses for older adults.

Every interviewee brought with them a unique background and history which provided for interesting and insightful discussions. I asked each student interviewee questions about previous schooling, educational goals, prior work experience, and community involvement (Appendix B1 and B2). The interviews are extremely important in my thesis, as they were the tool through which I sought to gain valuable insight into the lives of the students, professors, and administrators.

#### *Data Analysis*

I used the interviews and classroom observations to gain insight as to how the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* benefits the students and society, leading to social change. Through the process of textual analysis I highlighted the trends that linked women, education and the Costa Rican community (Burck 2005). Also, by looking into the subjective experiences of the older adults, faculty and staff, new issues pertaining to the Costa Rican educational institution surfaced. For example, many of the interviewees discussed the changing age demographic, educational opportunities and their concerns about the future.

As a result of the interviews, I witnessed firsthand the effectiveness of these programs in the lives of the participants and the communities in which they reside. I investigated the implication of such programs on community and social development through interviewing, books, pamphlets, and the careful synthesis and analysis of all information and insight gained. I gained insight into the activities and assignments of the classes, and what the benefits are of such coursework.

### *Conclusion*

The interviews and observations were very successful, yet there were limitations and obstacles that arose during my research. Firstly, I attempted to follow a strictly adhered to format of questions with the first few interviewees, but was quick to realize that each interviewee was completely unique and should be allowed the freedom to steer the conversation at times. I asked the interviewees questions from a questionnaire that I had prepared, as well as from a list of open-ended questions that had been previously developed. As I listened to the accounts of the numerous interviewees, many new questions were formulated that were asked spontaneously, hence the reason I chose semi-structured interviewing as my technique. This was to ensure, as best stated by Burch (2005), “[the covering] of particular areas, but [leaving] room to follow feedback idiosyncratically so as to explore more particular meanings with research participants” (240). New information was elicited as a result of having provided the interviewees with open-ended, semi-structured questions.

The construction of open-ended questions also had its obstacles. What I discovered throughout the interviewing process was that the older adults really love to

talk. At times it was very difficult to re-direct the conversation back to the question I had asked in order to elicit a response relevant to my thesis. All of their personal stories were very interesting, but with the limited time I had to conduct my research, I could not take the time to listen to all of their life stories. I had to explain that as much as I wanted to get to know all of them, we must stick to the questions, and if they wanted to continue talking, I offered to meet at a later date to talk again if possible.

Sometimes a few of the older adults did not answer the questions in the manner I thought they would. This was due to linguistic barriers. Although this was a minor obstacle, occasionally I had a difficult time rephrasing certain questions when they asked me to elaborate for comprehensive purposes. Also, I conducted my research during the period of matriculation, resulting in a great deal of background noise, which at times hindered my efforts to transcribe some comments that could have been useful in this thesis. Also, the use of colloquialisms required contacting friends in Costa Rica who could translate the colloquialisms into standard Spanish for translation purposes.

Time was also an issue of major constraint. I spent only 4 weeks researching/interviewing, which was spread out over the course of a year. A lot can occur throughout the course of a year, especially in a popular education program. The most recent research was conducted at the end of July 2008. I spent two weeks interviewing older adults, faculty and staff, and observing the class entitled Pan-Eu-Ritma at the UCR. The two weeks I spent there did not provide for very much time to conduct the majority of my research. I would like to have spent more time with the older adults, faculty and

staff of the program *Integral Education for Older Adults*, and would have liked to have met with the director of the vice-rectory of Social Action.

Corresponding to the time constraint I faced while conducting my research, is the cultural value of time in Costa Rican society. Most Costa Ricans do not strictly adhere to a time schedule, even when they have an appointment at a certain time; rather they arrive at “la hora tica,” in other words, about a half hour later than the scheduled appointment time.

## CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Costa Rica has witnessed an age demographic shift over the past fifty years. In 1950 adults over the age of 60 represented 5.3 percent of the population, and Mideplan (1988) projects that by 2025, this group will represent 14.3 percent of the total population. This change in age demographic has resulted in an increased lifespan, as well as demands by the aging population in Costa Rica to become more actively involved in society. The older adults desire an increase in privileges and responsibilities, paired with a need to become more socially involved. This results and analysis chapter will argue that old age does not equal social decay; rather it will demonstrate how older adults are capable human beings responsible for changing and transforming society.

Education is a life-long process, which could mean that older adults are the most educated group of individuals in society. Education begins at birth, and is constantly encountered in daily activities through the discovery of new things, as well as in programs where an educational atmosphere is fostered. This will be addressed shortly when the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* is mentioned as a meaningful program of learning and discovery for the older adult. Continued formal education, in conjunction with the informal education attained on a daily basis, leads to social change. Education and mingling with the younger generation inspire communication and growth. This leads to immeasurable change and development in the lives of older adults and the community in which they reside.



*Introduction: Getting to Know the Program*

In order to show how education affects the lives of older adults, particularly older adult women, as well as how education serves as a catalyst for social change, it is important to get to know the program for older adults that act as facilitator, encouraging and inspiring older adults to create change. At the outset of educational change for third-age adults, the first university for the older adult opened in 1973 in Toulouse, France. The objective of the program was to mix university life with the social realities in France. Another aim of the program is to give older adults a space in which they can fully develop educationally, as well as be afforded the opportunity to participate in activities/classes with other members of society that fall in the same age bracket (Horton 2003; Ramírez 2008; Universidad de Costa Rica 2008a).

The establishment of the first “Third Age University” resulted in a surge of other universities and programs for the older adult worldwide, both in the public and private sphere. Within this context, in 1980 UCR Professor Alfonso Trejos Willis, presented a project to the Fourth University Congress of the UCR, introducing the idea of establishing a program for the older adult. In 1986 Dr. Willis’s ideas were passed, and the program was established (Ramírez 2008).



**Dr. Alfonso Trejos Willis**

*Figure 4.* Dr. Alfonso Trejos Willis, The UCR

Source: The University of Costa Rica 2008

The educational program for the older adult was established within the Social Action Vice-rectory. A few years earlier, in 1984, the Vice-rectory of Research initiated a multi-disciplined program supporting the study of the process of aging. This program was entitled, “Research Program on Aging,” through the Institute of Health Research (Ramírez 2008).

The program introduced by Dr. Willis was inspired by both the university in France as well as supported by the 1984 program at the UCR. In 1986 older adults began

taking both specific and regular courses at the UCR in the program entitled “The Integral Program for Older Adults.”<sup>3</sup> According to María José Viquez, the head administrative assistant of the program, “twenty-two years later the program is still thriving at the UCR with a current number of 1600 older adults enrolled, and a consistent demand for additional teachers and classes.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Marisol Rapso, the director of “The Integral Program for Older Adults” at the UCR, “there are not many programs for the third generation adult in Central America. There are a few programs on the islands, like in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, but on mainland Central America, no.” All of the interviewees, including the faculty and staff, have affirmed that this program for the older adult is extremely unique and one of the largest of its kind in Latin America. The director along with two of the administrators mentioned that since 2002 the specific courses, or the course that are vocational in style like dance, art, etc. have increased from 19 to 90 courses. The number of students has increased from 960 at the end of 2002, to nearly 2000 by the end of 2008. The dramatic increase in students and classes has surpassed the

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<sup>3</sup> Specific courses are more vocational in style. These courses include art, aerobics, dance, theater, computation, English etc. The majority of professors that teach specific courses are volunteers. Also, only older adults 50 years old or pensioned are able to take these classes. Regular classes are taught by paid faculty, and are Bachelor level courses open for formal matriculation by both full time university students and the older adults. These classes include history, mathematics, literature etc. The professors at the University of Costa Rica decide if they would like to allow the older adults permission to matriculate in their classes. They are aware that the older adults are not degree-seeking students, rather the primary purpose of taking the regular classes is to learn and share their life experiences with the younger generation. In each regular class there is room for 5 older adults to enroll.

<sup>4</sup> The quotes in this chapter have been translated from Spanish to English by the author. Pseudonyms are also being used in order to protect the privacy of the student interviewees, but the actual names of the faculty and staff will be used.

growth predictions made by the department of Social Action and the *Integral Education for Older Adults*.

Table 2

Specific Courses of the Program *Integral Education for Older Adults*

<b>Specific Courses of the Program <i>Integral Education for Older Adults</i></b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Cycle I (Courses)</b>	<b># Students</b>	<b>Cycle II (Courses)</b>	<b># Students</b>
2002	16	X	19	960
2003	18	452	20	X
2004	22	997	24	579
2005	33	1104	46	1384
2006	51	1350	62	1951
2007	74	X	X	X
2008 Approx.	90	2000	Ongoing	Ongoing

Source: Sancho 2007:50

### *Funding*

An important element to this program is its funding. Without the university covering most of the program costs, many older adults would miss out on the opportunity to return to school. The small amount of money that older adults pay is rather symbolic. The adult education program at the UCR demonstrates the Costa Rican reaction to the changing age demographic, as this program emphasizes the value on permanent education, as opposed to education for economic advancement.

According to administrative assistant Ana Lorena Quirós, in accordance with Marisol the director of the program *Integral Education for Older Adults*, each course

costs a mere 1,500 colones, or 3 dollars. There is a 3 dollar insurance fee as well that covers the older adult in case of a health emergency (See Table 1). The UCR also pays for field trips, gas and transportation. There are also more expensive courses. The aforementioned 3 dollar classes are taught, for the most part, by volunteers, whereas, the courses that are more expensive are taught by paid teachers/professors. Such classes include English and Computation. English classes cost 20 dollars a course and Computation 30 dollars. These courses last for 4 months, or an entire semester.

Table 3

Course Pricing for the Program *Integral Education for Older Adults*

<b>Course Pricing for the Program <i>Integral Education for Older Adults</i></b>			
<b>Course</b>	<b>Price (Colones)*</b>	<b>Price (USD)*</b>	<b>Payment</b>
Specific Courses	1,500	3.00	Per Course
Regular Courses	1,500	3.00	Per Course
English Courses	10,000	20.00	Per Course
Computer Courses	15,000	30.00	Per Course
Painting Techniques	15,000	30.00	Per Course
Student Fees	1,500	3.00	Semesterly

\*Estimate rate: 1.00 USD = 543 Colones

Source: Universidad de Costa Rica 2008b

The financial amount of the courses is rather minimal compared to the normal course fees that the UCR charges, as the UCR understands that the older adult is living on a pension, and therefore the price as was previously stated is symbolic. The UCR values

educating the older adult, and not only pays for some of the tuition costs, but also gives the older adult transportation tickets that allow the older adult to receive free public transportation. Kati, one of the adult students, mentions that they (older adults) present their tickets to the bus drivers and they are brought the university free of charge.

According to Olga, “Many adults, especially women in this country, have economic problems. Therefore, a good way to help the older women in Costa Rican society is to pay their bus tickets.” This waiving of bus fees was mentioned by the majority of the older adult interviewees as being a major benefit to the program. The free bus tickets represent a way in which the economically disinclined are able to afford the transportation around the city that they would otherwise not be able to afford. Many of the people in Costa Rica who struggle economically are women. Therefore, according to Laura and Kati, this is especially beneficial as 85 percent of all participants in the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* are women.

#### *Example Courses*

The UCR offers a variety of courses for the older adult such as both specialized and regular classes. The specialized courses are more vocational in style, as previously stated, and include, spiritual dance course that connects the mind, body and spirit, tropical dance, art classes, choir, computation and English. Kati, one of my adult interviewees was a secretary at the UCR for 20 years, where upon retiring she immediately began classes in the program *Integral Education for Older Adults*. She states:

I have been working with computers for 20 years, and everything I learned about them I taught myself. Granted, my co-workers helped me learn to a large extent, but since entering the program for older adults here at the UCR I actually UNDERSTAND computers, and I feel like I could earn a degree in computation with the skills I have acquired.

The regular classes are normal classes offered by the UCR that all students at the UCR are able to matriculate. The older adult does not have to take the quizzes, exams or do the homework if he/she chooses not to. They do not receive an official grade for the course. The purpose of the course is to allow the older adult to further their education, participate in class discussion/mingle with the younger generation, and make their own personal contribution.

Many of the adults choose to participate in every aspect of the class including the papers and tests. Yet, they are aware that they do not receive the grade and credit like their other classmates. According to María José, however, they do receive the joy of taking a course at the university level and they can add it to their resumés, as well as state their participation as a fact in social and business settings (María José).

#### *Reasons for Returning to School*

In the following sections I discuss the changing age demographic in Costa Rica, the reasons why older adults are returning to school, the factors that contribute, and inhibit their success, as well as the concept of life-long learning. It will be made clear that older adults have different and changing epistemological goals from the younger generations, but that they are still capable and intellectual human beings who are able to transform society with their wisdom.

Older adult women are returning to school for many reasons. Most of the students I interviewed mentioned that they wanted to join the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* because they wanted to make new friends that would then develop into life-long relationships. They also mentioned that they wanted to take part in mentally stimulating activities and classes that would not only fill their time, but would allow them to try something new. Other older adult women said they wanted to return to school because they had lost their husbands and wanted to overcome their loneliness and sadness to become more independent, self-actualized individuals. The students also mentioned their desires to increase their self-esteem and their wishes to overcome learning obstacles they had faced in their youth. Other students wanted to receive a certificate of completion for English or computer classes in order to obtain better opportunities in the job market. Some of them simply wanted to return to school because they heard about the program for older adults at the UCR from friends and wanted to explore its opportunities. The majority of the older adult women expressed their desires to return to school to become even better role-models for their grandchildren. This was their primary motivation.

Before further examining the reasons women give for returning to school, it is important to understand that there has long been a misconception in society that aging equals social decay. At the approximate age of 60 this process begins in Costa Rica, stripping the older adults of many societal privileges and responsibilities such as driving, working, paying bills etc. According to Eve, one of the instructors, “[s]ociety says that at 60 the older adult no longer has any responsibilities, and is left with nothing to do.” This capabilities myth leads to the assumption that, as best stated by María, “the older we get,



the less capable we become both physically and mentally.” Every interviewee I talked to stated that they feel young at heart and that they are still as capable as they were before, although it often takes longer to accomplish tasks than it did when they were younger.

In relation to the capabilities myth, the director of *Integral Education for Older Adults* mentions that the program’s goals are for the older adults to learn more about the aging process, and to come to the realization that physical changes that occur as one gets older do not necessarily equal mental decomposition. Also, as Marta, an interviewee in her early 50s states, “[f]rom the time we are born, we are in a constant aging cycle.” Daily events, birthdays, grade levels in school, physical changes, etc., characterize the inherent aging phenomenon that is natural, irreversible and inevitable (Lestón & Romero in *Sancho* 2007).

The changes that occur in the lives of the elderly are direct consequences of the lifestyles they lived. These changes are multidimensional, encompassing physical, biological, and psychological transformations. These changes, according to interviewees Lupita, María and Marta, affect the ways older adults are perceived in society. According to interviewees Kati and Raquel, by providing the older adult with a learning environment that promotes independence and autonomy, only then will the true evaluation of their health and well-being occur. The department of social action and the *Integral Education for Older Adults* are constantly observing through classes and interaction, as best stated by Ana Lorena, one of the program administrators: “The capacity that the older adult has to adapt to the changing world around them.” This is important, as the older adults combine their life-long knowledge with the knowledge

acquired at the UCR, in order to transform the society they live in. The adult education program at the UCR acts as a facilitator for social transformation and growth, by providing the older adults with a space in which they can share their personal stories and come to the realization that anyone at any age can create lasting transformation.

The belief that older adults become incapable of performing daily tasks as they get older is a myth. Interviewees Marisol and Aneta strongly affirm that there are limited changes in daily activities; they just take longer to perform. Marisol states:

The adult education program at the University of Costa Rica helps the older adult gain independence again. You reach a certain age when you depend on your kids, you cannot clean the house as fast, cook as fast, get dressed as fast, etc. The classes teach you how to live again. You learn to accept aging, as you enter the last stage of your life. Many people don't enter the program, because they think it is for really old people heading directly towards death's door, but you need to accept your age and be happy with your current life. There is a strong resistance among the population regarding education of third-age adults. Even the older people cannot accept the fact that people of the same age can get together to accomplish something, or take a class at their age with others of the same age or with the younger generation.

Currently in Costa Rica, the changing age demographic has led to an increase in the population of third-age adults. This is evidenced by the medical advancements that have occurred in Costa Rica during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. People in Costa Rica are living on average 15 years longer than the previous generation. Mildred states, "I am currently pensioned, and it is because of my age, NOT because of sickness." Being pensioned and healthy, as well as living 15-20 years longer, could have its repercussions, especially if the retirement age is kept the same. Such repercussions, according to interviewees Marisol, Eva, Ana and Lupita, will most likely occur in education, social security and health coverage in the near future if these changes are not accounted for.

### *Life-long Education*

The changing age demographic has resulted in a transformation of the educational system. This section will stress the importance of permanent education as discussed by Paulo Freire and Myles Horton, and demonstrate its affects on the mature adults. It will be made evident that education is a life-long process.

María, one of the oldest interviewees states that “you begin learning at birth and the only interruption to learning is death.” We all enter learning by trying to communicate with others, discover new things, and eventually attempt to change the world around us. The program *Integral Education for Older Adults* provides a learning atmosphere where educational needs are satisfied, and the educational capacities of the older adults are realized, resulting in the confirmation that education is indeed permanent and life-long (Horton 2003; *Sancho* 2007).

According to the faculty and staff in the department of Social Action, any person at any age can learn with a certain level of drive and dedication. The restrictions the older adult faces often are based, as previously stated, on the repercussions of previous years. Older adults want to remain important in their communities holding on to the privileges and responsibilities that they have accumulated throughout the course of their lives. All of the women I interviewed feel a strong responsibility towards the well-being of current and future generations. They believe that they have a responsibility to act as role models for their grandchildren in particular. Consistent with these responsibilities, Carmen, a woman in her early 60s, states:

Education is important for every person of every age group. My grandchildren ask me where I am going, and I am proud to say that I am going to the university. I only made it through primary school because I come from a family of ten, and I was told I needed to drop out of school in order to help take care of the family. I am very glad that this program for older adults' exists, as it has given me a chance to receive the formal education that I had only dreamed of being able to attain in my lifetime.

Carmen, one of the student interviewees, expressed her new-found desire to live life to its fullest, and wants to let everyone know that the Costa Rican culture and educational system are the best. For that reason she believes that the UCR should invest more money in the adult education program. Interviewees Laura, Mildred, Carmen and Kati, who make up the group of women ranging from 55 to 65 years of age, agree whole-heartedly. These women believe that the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* is a great program because it identifies and acts upon the needs of third-age adults. The program and the department of Social Action promote independence, respect, consideration and socialization. As a result of the aforementioned goals, the program has grown at the approximate rate of 150 people a semester over the past ten years. Ana, a professor of Pan-Eu-Ritmia, attests that education is a perfect means to attain these goals. She states:

The program for older adults at the University of Costa Rica helps older women in society to become more independent. I have a friend who was married to a macho man. He was possessive and never allowed her to work or socialize with friends. Now that he has passed away, I convinced her to come to the university with me. She signed up for a few classes with me, and now she dances, studies, socializes and is so happy. This program is like feminine liberation. Many widows shut themselves in the bathroom, they cry and they never leave their homes. Coming to this program changes their mentality and rejuvenates them.

Although education is a life-long process, the self-actualization of one's potential and the satisfaction of one's needs are very difficult to fully attain. The UCR's program, *Integral Program for Older Adults* understands the Costa Rican citizens' needs for independence, encouragement, fulfillment of their potentials, liberation from educational restrictions,

and the desire to occupy their free time with meaningful tasks. This is particularly pertinent as the life span of the older adult in Costa Rica continues to increase due to the many new advancements occurring in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Educational Effects on the Female*

The department of Social Action responds directly to the needs of the aging population in Costa Rica. One of its main goals is to create a stronger connection between the university and the community. This section will discuss the older adults concerns about their future, the changing age demographic, and their desire to create a stronger connection between community members, friends and family through dialogue and togetherness.

Every interviewee in my investigation stated numerous times that education, both formal and informal, leads to socialization and mutual respect, affording each older adult the opportunity to remain active members of society, role models for the younger generation, and strong and respected advocates of social action and community change.

I discovered through the analysis of the interviews how each of the adults changed socially, how the family and community were affected, and the factors that contribute to the success of the program and its participants. Mildred states:

My friends and family told me that I needed to find something to do to occupy my time, so that I am not stuck in my house all day with nothing to do. Since entering the adult education program here at the University of Costa Rica, I have a reason to get out of my house, I have gotten to know many people, and have made more friends over the few years than I have made throughout my lifetime. I ride the bus with my friends; we meet for coffee, go over to each other's houses, and help each other with the grandchildren. Not only have I gotten to know many people, I have also discovered new talents. I find myself talking to people around my community that I would have never talked to before, being more empathetic to peoples life choices and I am no longer afraid to stand up for myself. My self-esteem is very high, and who knew that I could paint?!

Support, motivation and guidance are crucial, especially for older adult women to be able to learn effectively, and as a result, influence the learning and lifestyle of others. These women support and motivate each other both inside and outside of the classroom, helping one another to adapt to a changing society, as well as helping to revive their cognitive capabilities.

Motivation and support lead to the satisfaction of needs, especially the needs of older adult women. This is crucial, especially since the majority of those interviewed mentioned that they are widows, had lost loved ones, or raised children who now live in other cities and/or countries and who no longer depend on them for anything. They expressed their desires to change the community they live in, bringing all people of varying ages together to create awareness of each other's needs, as well as the concerns of a transforming community. This, according to Eve, "requires motivation, determination, goals and objectives." Adult women who participate in *Integral Education for Older Adults*, become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, but they are also surrounded by other people who share many of their ideals and wishes to better society through intergenerational communication and community outreach through education.

These adult women have also discovered their own creativity, which is a crucial element to changing society for the better. The older adults, through the variety of courses and the many individuals that they befriend at the UCR become multi-faceted and experienced human beings who understand the needs of society through experience, awareness and compassion. According to Mildred, "there are many classes that inspire creativity, compassion and togetherness, including dance classes, theater, sexual

education, glass painting, yoga, aging with dignity workshops, history classes among many others.”

The mature adult is encouraged by their peers to share their experiences and think outside of the box. Creative ideas and personal stories, whether they pertain to crafts, politics, mathematics etc., are encouraged by the department of Social Action and the professors. With the encouragement of their fellow classmates, and with their educational goals intact, their self-esteem levels increase, and they gain more self respect, leading to drive, motivation, understanding, and a desire to help others receive the tools necessary to make their lives better, as was done for them by the caring individuals in the adult education program at the UCR. According to Mildred,

Through motivation, interaction and education, the young and the old become more united in the community. We help each other transform our communities for the better, and we help each other change and influence our ways of thinking, especially about the value of education in our lives, and in the lives of our family members.

Older adult women, through their own successful endeavors, new-found motivation, and rejuvenated self-esteem manifest within themselves the courage to aggressively pursue changes in society. These changes include the establishment of programs that promote community educational initiatives, encouraging intergenerational communication and petitioning to help the economically disinclined receive educational scholarships. Many of the adult women I interviewed want to become community leaders in order to demonstrate that older adults are capable intelligent human beings who are both independent and strong community leaders. To be accepted socially as leaders and to

create stronger interpersonal relationships according to María, Lupita, Carmen, Mildred, Olga, Laura and Kati are crucial elements for social change.

*Pan-Eu-Ritmia: Connecting the Mind, Body and Spirit*

By looking closely at this section, the similarities between the class I observed and the other specific courses in the program become unmistakably clear. The class that I observed is entitled Pan-Eu-Ritmia, whose goals include creating a family atmosphere, encouraging unity, self-actualization, aging with dignity, and the ability to persevere and overcome obstacles. These goals are also prevalent in the other courses for older adults, as they are the main goals set forth by the Vice-Rectorcy of Social Action. This course consists of the teaching of movements that draw from a meditative dance resulting in the creation of the perfect balance between the human being, nature and his/her own mind, body and spirit. At the same time, theoretical explanations are offered that explain the significance of the different movements witnessed in the dance. There are no prerequisites for this dance class, rather the main requirement is that each person have a profound desire to live life in a more conscientious and full manner (Universidad de Costa Rica 2008a).





*Figure 5:* Instructors and Students of Pan-Eu-Ritmia

Source: Kerri Eames

Pan-Eu-Ritmia is a sacred dance that began in Bulgaria hundreds of years ago. Although it usually contains 28 distinct movements, I had the pleasure of observing and learning the first ten. This dance is always taught and performed in small and large groups, never individually. This is due to the fact that the group is regarded as a family unit. According to Eve, one of the instructors, “The Pan-Eu-Ritmia group is like a family. We dance, eat, sing and depend on one another.” This class is not only physical exercise

with music, it connects the mind, body and spirit through tribal movements, togetherness, unity with the natural environment, and the establishment of a sound peace of mind.

One of the major goals of Pan-Eu-Ritmia, as I witnessed throughout my observations, is that the older adults are encouraged to do only what they physically and mentally are capable of, and to come to the realization that they need to accept the aging process and be happy with their current lifestyles. According to Ana, the lead instructor, “[m]any people entered Pan-Eu-Ritmia because they couldn’t get into yoga, tropical dance etc., but they ended up loving Pan-Eu-Ritmia, and often prefer it over other classes because it gives them peace of mind and tranquility.” Both instructors firmly believe that Pan-Eu-Ritmia, and all that it stands for, teaches both students and instructors how to age with dignity and grace.

Both Ana and Eve mentioned the fact that the entire program *Integral Education for Older Adults* within the vice-rectory of Social Action is still forming, and within its walls, Pan-Eu-Ritmia is gaining popularity. Ana, referred to the program for older adults at the UCR as an “infant,” even though there are almost 2000 student participants currently enrolled in the program. As the program continues to grow, older adults, especially the women students, are finally gaining independence, aging with dignity, and accepting their lives as they are currently. This mentality supports Freire’s (2000) biophilic personality, or lover of life. As older adults continue to take classes such as Pan-Eu-Ritma, they learn what it feels like to become more independent pensive adults, and they reach a moment when they truly reflect upon their own lives.

At one point the majority of the older adult women who participate in the adult education program at the UCR were mothers and/or wives, taking care of the household tasks, as well as working many different jobs outside of the home. They reached an age when they depend on their children, cannot cook or clean as fast as they could before, and they began to feel unneeded (Ana). A major goal of the department of Social Action as well as the program for older adults is to teach the older adult how to live again, and become more active members of their communities. As the older adult enters the 4<sup>th</sup> stage of life, according to Ana, “they want to travel more, cook less, make more decisions pertaining to the well-being of society, and create a lasting impact on the lives of friends and family.” As a result of both the specific and regular courses taken by mature adults at the UCR, older adults learn how to make more informed decisions pertinent to transforming the society that they live in.

#### *Successes*

The program has numerous successes and every adult interviewed provided a different unique success story from their own personal experiences. Each older adult who had taken a course previously at the UCR talked about how their talents had been discovered or re-discovered as well as rejuvenated, much like their spirits. By participating and working with their peers, their potentials are realized, and many even convert their knowledge and talents into their own small business. According to Kati,

I discovered many new talents here. I began to realize my potential, and I realized that I could convert what I have learned into a small business. I learned how to paint, make glass objects and many other things. I am also enrolled in English classes. Knowing English will allow me to re-enter the market at a higher level, or in other words, make more money. There are many jobs you can do if you know English.

Kati shares the same sentiments as many of the older adult students I interviewed. Olga and Lupita also talked about the value of English, and how they can take their newly acquired knowledge and use it to become more involved in the community. Many of the older adults mentioned setting up craft stations in the community and offering free lessons, while others talked about selling their paintings, or offering cheap English lessons to those who have the desire to learn.

Since the founding of the adult education program at the UCR, the program under the jurisdiction of Social Action has been preoccupied with attending the needs of society's oldest age group in order to better their quality of life, and help them to age gracefully (Universidad de Costa Rica 2008a). This includes, but is not limited to, participating in socially diverse activities, classes that assist and encourage personal growth and goal setting during aging, and learning to use all the accumulating all of the experiences to live a better more fulfilled life.

According to the students, faculty and staff of the program *Integral Education for Older Adults*, this permanent education has proved to be very successful in the lives of the individual participants and in the life of the program itself. According to Mildred, "This program is my lifeline, I love learning new things and teaching others. The program here at the UCR is the best." *Integral Education for Older Adults* at the UCR has found a way to inspire the older adult in a way that encourages them to never stop learning, and to look for the activities in the formal education system that brings out their passions and educational aspirations. This is a process that will often last for the rest of their lives (Universidad de Costa Rica 2008a).

### *Factors Inhibiting Success*

The adult education program at the UCR has many benefits, so it was challenging to uncover the difficulties. First of all, according to the director and administrative assistants of the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* the older adult loves participating in all of the classes, but many have said that they feel intimidated by the younger generation of students in the regular classes. This feeling usually subsides after a few weeks in the class, but it has often led the older adult to take more vocational classes, where the students are roughly the same age.

Although the age difference between older adults is of concern for many, the major predicament is the issue of space, both physical space and enrollment space. According to Raquel, “Sometimes when I sign up for a craft-based class, I have to paint, glue and put together my project on my small desk, as there are not enough big tables for everyone to sit at. It is not a big deal, but it would be nice to have more large tables in the future.” There are approximately 90 courses offered vocationally with an enrollment often as high as 2000 students. There is often a demand for more courses, but many times the UCR is either lacking rooms for the classes, or professors to teach the courses. There are so many students enrolled in each class that within the first few weeks the administrators are forced to reject enrollment in many of the most popular classes. Another issue is the lack of classroom space for some of the courses being taught. The desks are rather uncomfortable as well. The older adult has a difficult time remaining seated for long periods of time, and their work, especially craft projects, are often confined to their desks or small work tables. According to Marisol, despite all of these

difficulties, they make beautiful things, like foam-glass designs and paintings. They thoroughly enjoy their work, although there is not adequate space.

*Integrating Education into the Lives of Older Adult Women*

Of the almost 2000 adult students in the *Integral Education Program for Older Adults*, nearly 85 percent of them are women, and the majority of the women are widows or divorcees. Most of the women I interviewed expressed their longing to become and/or remain treasured members of the Costa Rican community.



*Figure 6: Older Adult Women at the UCR*

Source: Kerri Eames

As third-age adults are living longer and feeling healthier, continued education is easily integrated into their lives. As women in the Costa Rican community age, the majority of them become less responsible for the care of their entire family. Therefore, they are more

able to designate additional time to other activities, such as continued education programs that allow the older adult to remain mental astute and physically active. According to Mildred,

Since retirement (she was a nurse for 41 years), I try to fill my time with ambitious activities, and this is the perfect program that allows me to remain active and healthy. I like to sign up for the classes and workshops that teach me about my aging body and how to cope with the aging process.

Once the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* was offered beginning in the 1980s it continued to grow in popularity. As a result of the changing age demographic and increasing levels of health and personal well being, people became more conscious about the issues surrounding aging. Aging with dignity and mental sanity, as well as the establishment of life-long friendships and the desire to positively impact the community for future generations became major goals of older adults throughout the aging process. The program *Integral Education for Older Adults* reinforced their goals, and supported them in their endeavors for intergenerational growth and communication for social action and change.

*Societal Implications: Older Adult Women's Role in Society and the Home*

The program *Integral Education for Older Adults* and the entire Vice-Rectorry of Social Action, provide older adult women with what they have longed for: a space to talk about their desires and grievances, an opportunity to develop life-long friendships that by working together transform society, teachers that facilitate change, and opportunities for intergenerational communication.

By taking part in classes that include members of the younger generation as well as citizens of all social classes and backgrounds, many stereotypes are addressed and deemed erroneous. According to all of my student interviewees who have taken regular classes with the younger generation, and those who have had the opportunity to converse with younger students at the UCR, the younger generation is not as immature and apathetic to the needs of the community as the older generation has thought. According to Marisol, by mixing the generations together in the classroom, the younger generation has developed a deeper respect for their elders, stating that they are able to learn, think and contribute to class discussion as well as, or even better than they can (the younger generation). They agree that the best classes offered at the UCR are those with both generations present (Rapso 2000).

This revelation has permanently changed their views of the older population in Costa Rica. Returning to their respective communities after experiencing this valuable interaction, both generations become more aware of the needs and goals of their communities, transcending the age and gender barriers, working on behalf of the entire Costa Rican population. Carmen, Olga, Laura, Mildred and Kati express that since joining the program *Integral Education for Older Adults*, and having taken regular classes with the younger generation, they feel closer to their own grandchildren.

By returning to school, building lifelong relationships and feeling more connected to their grandchildren, the older adults in the Costa Rican community actively participate in community growth and development. The younger and older generations



create, through education and awareness of each other's desires, a more unified front to address the needs of their respective communities that transcend age and gender.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### *Community Impact and Conclusions: Breaking the Barriers*

According to Marisol, the director of *Integral Education for Older Adults*,

There are many goals for the future success of the program. Short term goals include finishing the strategy evaluations currently being done for the program, as well as to expand the program by offering more courses and workshops. As far as long term goals are concerned, the main goal is to find a more suitable classroom space, and to develop a stronger infrastructure in order to provide for the older adults as well as hire more instructors with the goal of providing more classes.

This program has managed to provide education that lasts a lifetime and the tools necessary for communication and growth with the younger generations. As a result, the quality of life for the population of older adults in Costa Rica has improved drastically.

Many barriers have been removed as a result of the implementation of the goals set forth by the department of Social Action for the adult education program at the UCR. As Jacobs (2008) best states: “As one barrier is partially removed, we relate a portion of our program to other barriers, breaking down barriers is not a goal in itself, but is necessary if we are to move in the direction of the goal” ( 2003, 218).

The adult education program at the UCR is all about breaking down barriers, and giving people a space in which they can converse in order to create change both at the personal level as well as developmentally within the Costa Rican society. It is necessary to keep the larger purpose in mind: education for liberation. Also, people need to find the faith within themselves in order to demand change. And through education, people learn how to teach and be taught as well as to be inspired by others. They must unite as one in order to successfully achieve their goals.

Upon conclusion of the adult education courses, the older adult returns to the community to share their experience with their fellow community members. They continue to receive an education through their own life experiences, and through those of the new friends they have made at the UCR. Education and Community togetherness provides a weapon in which the mature adult can use to fight on the behalf of those who do not have the power. According to Ana, “students invite others to their homes or out to drink coffee. They then talk about current events, and are always there for each other in time of need.” These reunions develop into life-long friendships. The older adult lives a healthier life as they feel accompanied. They want to live a healthy and sane life. Upon the conclusion of their time at the UCR, they understand that to age is a natural process and as they reach the final stage of life they will be prepared and feel fulfilled.

In order to address adult education for women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one must keep in mind the rights and equalities women have obtained throughout a long and hard struggle during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The younger generation is growing up with the right to vote, the right to run for cabinet positions in government, the mandate of a minimal education until the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, antidiscrimination laws based on gender and the right to equal access in higher education. Although equal pay for equal work still does not exist in Costa Rica, and women are still encouraged to stay at home and raise their children and take care of the domestic duties, some women are doing a bit of everything. Costa Rican history has witnessed extreme changes over the past century, many more changes especially pertaining to equality between men and women, than have witnessed their neighboring countries in Central America.

Yet, a gap still remains in education. The UCR has over the past few decades provided funding for a program for adults in which education for social action is of utmost importance. A space is provided at the UCR where adults can converse, take classes together and enjoy the aging process. This program and the adults who participate in it act as catalysts towards change. New skills are acquired that work concurrently with adult education's goals "to make decision making more participatory, to 'forge linkages' across and within social classes, and to reduce the concentration of power in the oligarchy" (Williamson 2006, 214). Concentrations of power in Costa Rica as well as the rest of Latin America exist not only between the government and its people, but also in the relationship between men and women. Educational level is what determines a woman's authority within society. Women in Costa Rica have generally worked in the domestic sector, but research shows that this traditional role is slowly but surely being questioned and changed due to the many organizations of women who have fought and are still fighting on a daily basis for equality (Biesanz, Biesanz and Biesanz 1999; Palmer and Molina 2004; Goodwin 2004; Williamson 2006).

As adult education programs are becoming more accepted in Costa Rica, a growing awareness of the disadvantages women face are becoming more apparent. Latin American women in general are being made aware of the challenges, trials, and tribulations placed upon them by societal norms, and are evoking a social change by means of adult education. Women in Costa Rica and throughout Latin America are rising up and contributing to the many social changes currently taking place in Latin America

by means of critical thought and participatory action (Seda-Santana 2000, Williamson 2006, 130-139).

Older adult women have experienced, according to Leslie, “a major change in self-esteem levels,” since joining the program *Integral Education for Older Adults*, this has given them the courage, strength and energy to communicate with people in all socioeconomic levels, genders and ages in order to reflect, act and transform society; according to Freire this is the praxis of social change (Freire 2000). Horton (2003) and Freire (2000) alike have long affirmed that if you give any individual a space to converse in order to address current issues, and provide them with instructors that act as facilitators, the older adults will take their newfound education back to their respective communities. While Horton and Freire were talking about class oppression, their theories also apply to the adult women in the program at the UCR, because said theories can also be related to other issues of oppression such as age discrimination.

Upon re-entrance into their communities older adults, teach and interact with their fellow community members and change will occur. According to Kati, “We older adults want to be respected, trusted and treasured. We want to share our knowledge and skills to make our communities better places to live. This program can be successful anywhere, as long as the older population is as compassionate and driven as we are to change our society.” Through community outreach and the desire to make the program more well-known among older adults in Costa Rica, program participants return to their communities in groups with the hopes of convincing others to return to school. Their efforts result in the betterment of their respective communities. The women join together

to help fellow community members who are lonely or in need to become part of the close-knit educational family at the UCR. This type of community outreach and friendship formation for the benefit of society is based on Freire's friendship circles that he created in Brazil. These friendships circles are multicultural, diverse, and cross the age and class divides.

By becoming critically conscious community members, education allows people to "feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly..." (Freire 2000, 124). This form of education can be viewed as the practice of freedom. Through risk-taking, engaging in dialogue, understanding other's educational views, and participating in holistic learning, the students and teachers become empowered and engaged instruments of change (hooks 1994).

The curriculum in the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* works at eliminating biases, encouraging men and women of all income levels to pursue their educational goals. This program focuses on adults 50 years and older, and fights against the societal implication that older adults are incapable of learning. It also provides a space for the older adults to converse about issues of age oppression that they face in society. By joining the program *Integral Education for Older Adults*, the passion for justice and the love of freedom motivate the older adults to change their communities. These factors also influenced the participants in the women's movement throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Costa Rica. The program has reached out to women who long for an opportunity to become more self-actualized and critically conscious of their roles in society in order to participate in the transformation of their community. They are

given space in education where they are able to define freedom for themselves, reflect upon their circumstances and join together in the pursuit of social change.

Transforming a society does not happen overnight. Costa Rica is still deemed a “macho” culture, which could account for the fact that only 15% of the program’s participants are men. Although equality in education is a major accomplishment of the women’s movement, changing the educational system requires mutual responsibility by both educators and students to challenge and change the system, based on how the pedagogical process is viewed by members of society (Horton 2003; hooks 1994). Men and women still view education differently. Some of my interviewees affirmed that men have always had the opportunity to receive a quality education without gender discrimination, and therefore they are entering the program at the UCR for pleasure, and not for changing society.

Women participants in the program *Integral Education for Older Adults* are using the educational space to talk about the instances where they have felt discriminated against as women in Costa Rican society, in order to transform their situations. There is little evidence at this point, based on the interviews I had with the women of the program, that both sexes are working together to understand each other’s sentiments and goals for transforming their societies. According to Freire in hooks (1994),

If the women are critical, they have to accept our contribution as men, as well as the workers have to accept our contribution as intellectuals, because it is a duty and right that I have to participate in the transformation of society. Then, if the women must have the main responsibility in their struggle they have to know that their struggle also belongs to us, that is, to those men who don’t accept the machista position in the world (57).

As education is regarded as the highest representation of national and community development, educational initiatives by all members of a community are extremely

important. These initiatives fuel social change and development, which, according to the Costa Rican government, are pertinent for the fortitude of future generations. Women, through dialogue, unity, education and action return to their communities where they interact with all age levels, share the knowledge acquired at the UCR, and create a space in the community where change can occur. The older adults actively participate in the betterment of their own lives as well as the lives of fellow community members, leading to the transformation of society through the praxis of their own desires. Education is truly the practice of freedom.



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## Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender:      female      male
3. Country of Origin  Costa Rica  Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Marital status:  married      single      other
5. Children:  
 yes      no
6. If yes: How old are they? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you work?  
 yes      no
8. If yes: Where and for how long have you been at this job?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Total individual income per year:  
 500,000 colones or less    501,000-800,000 colones  
 801,000-1,100,000 colones    1,101,000-4,000,000 colones  
 4,001,000 and higher
10. How many people depend of this income? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Where did you live most of your life?  
 rural area      urban area
12. What area are you living in now?  
 rural area      urban area
13. Education Completed:  
 elementary school    middle school  
  
 high school      undergraduate      other \_\_\_\_\_
14. How many adult education programs are you enrolled in at the University of Costa Rica?  
1     2     3     4 or more
15. Why have you chosen to further your education?  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*If you feel uncomfortable with any of these questions you do not need to respond to all of them.

## Apéndice A2: Cuestionario

\*Si se siente incómoda o insegura antes o durante el cuestionario usted puede 1) negarse a contestar ciertas preguntas o 2) suspender su participación en cualquier momento..

1. ¿En qué año nació?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Sexo  
 femenino  masculino
3. ¿En qué país nació?  
 Costa Rica  Otro \_\_\_\_\_
4. Estado civil  
 casada  soltera  Otro \_\_\_\_\_
5. ¿Tiene hijos?  
 Sí  No
6. Si tiene hijos: ¿cuántos tiene?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Si tiene hijos: ¿cuáles son sus edades?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. ¿Tiene trabajo en este momento?  
 Sí  No
9. Si tiene trabajo: ¿cuántos días a la semana trabaja?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Si tiene trabajo: ¿cuántas horas al día trabaja?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Si tiene trabajo: ¿cuál es su profesión? Y ¿por cuánto tiempo ha trabajado en esta ocupación?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. ¿Cuánta plata gana al año? (normalmente) \_\_\_\_\_  
 500,000 colones o menos  
 501,000-800,000 colones  
 801,000-1,100,000 colones  
 1,101,000-4,000,000 colones  
 4,001,000 o mas



¿Cuáles son los ingresos del hogar al año? \_\_\_\_\_

13. ¿Cuántas personas mantiene con esta plata?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. ¿Dónde ha vivido la mayoría de su vida?

Area rural - campo       area urbana – ciudad

15. ¿Dónde está viviendo ahora?

Area rural - campo       area urbana – ciudad

16. ¿Cuál fue el último grado que completó en el colegio?

la primaria

la secundaria

la universidad

otro \_\_\_\_\_

17. ¿Cuántos años estuvo en la escuela? ¿Cuántos años ha estudiado?

\_\_\_\_\_

18. ¿Cuántas clases de educación integral para la adulta mayor está tomando ahora?

1

2

3

4 or more

19. ¿Ha tomado cursos del mismo programa durante este año o en otros años?

No       Sí  ¿Cuáles fueron? \_\_\_\_\_

20. ¿Está tomando cursos en otros programas en la UCR ahora?

No       Sí  ¿Cuáles son? \_\_\_\_\_

21. ¿Ha tomado cursos en otros programas en la UCR durante este año o en otros años?

No       Sí  ¿Cuáles fueron? \_\_\_\_\_

22. ¿Por qué decidió continuar su educación?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Apéndice B1: Preguntas para las Entrevistas

### Preguntas para los estudiantes

#### Información general

1. ¿Fue a la escuela cuando era más joven?
2. ¿A dónde fue?
3. ¿Cuántos años del colegio completó?
4. ¿Ha terminado la primaria? ¿Y la secundaria?
5. ¿Y sus padres?

#### La universidad y educación para adultos

6. ¿Qué ofrece la comunidad para facilitar la educación? ¿Qué ofrece la Universidad de Costa Rica? Por ejemplo- ¿Hay guarderías para sus hijos/nietos? ¿Hay becas en su programa?
7. ¿Por qué está regresando a los estudios?
8. ¿Cuáles son sus metas en cuanto a su educación? ¿Quiere conseguir un mejor trabajo? ¿Quiere ganar más dinero?

#### La familia y la comunidad

9. ¿Ha visto cambios en la comunidad desde que este programa fue implementado? Por ejemplo- ¿Las mujeres están participando más en las decisiones de la comunidad?- en la política, la economía, la educación etc.
10. ¿Cómo le está afectando esta educación que está recibiendo? Por ejemplo- emocionalmente, económicamente, con sus amistades, y/o las relaciones familiares etc.
11. ¿Está más consciente de las necesidades de la comunidad?- Sobre la educación, la salud, el bien estar de la familia, la calidad de vida etc.
12. ¿Ha cambiado su manera de pensar en algunas cosas? ¿Qué cosas?

### Metas del futuro

13. ¿Qué quiere hacer después de este programa?
14. ¿En general usted cree que la educación es muy importante?- ¿Cree que la educación es específicamente importante para sus hijos/nietos? ¿Y por qué?
15. ¿Cuáles son sus deseos en la vida? Por ejemplo- ¿Ud. quiere que sus hijos/nietos terminen el colegio y la universidad? ¿Quiere conseguir un mejor trabajo para que pueda pasar más tiempo con su familia? Solo está buscando algo para pasar tiempo?

### Preguntas para la facultad y la administración

#### Información factual

1. ¿Cuándo empezó este programa? ¿Quién lo organizó?
2. ¿Quién provee los fondos?
3. ¿Cuántos profesores y estudiantes hay?
4. ¿Cuánto tiempo ha trabajado aquí?

#### El aula y la enseñanza

5. ¿Puede decirme un poco sobre la clase que está enseñando?
6. ¿Por qué es la educación para adultos tan importante?
7. Entiendo que su trabajo consume mucho de su tiempo pero... ¿Ofrece tiempo a la comunidad sin pago?
8. ¿Por qué escogió ser profesor/a?
9. ¿En su opinión, cuáles de sus atributos personales contribuyen y mejoran la enseñanza en su aula?

#### El sistema educativo

10. ¿Hay dificultades en el sistema educativo? Y ¿Cuáles son?
11. ¿Cuál es el desafío más grande que enfrentan los estudiantes hoy en día? Y ¿por qué?

12. ¿Cuáles son las metas para el mejoramiento de la educación para la comunidad? A corto plazo (5 años) y a largo plazo (10 años).

## Appendix B2: Questions for the Interviews

### Questions for the faculty and administration

#### Background Information

1. When did this program begin? Who organized it?
2. Who provides the background?
3. How many professors and students are there?
4. How long have you worked here?

#### The classroom and teaching

5. Could you tell me about the class that you are teaching?
6. Why is adult education so important?
7. I understand that your work consumes much of your time but....do you offer unpaid time to the community?
8. Why did you choose to become a professor?
9. In your opinion, what are some of your personal attributes that contribute to and improve teaching in your classroom?

#### The educational system

10. Are there problems in the educational system? And what are they?
11. What is the biggest obstacle that the students confront today? And why?
12. What are the goals in regard to improving education for the community? Short term (5 years) and long term (10 years).

## Appendix B2: Interview Questions

### Questions for the Students

#### Background Information

1. Did you go to school when you were younger?
2. Where did you go?
3. How many years of school did you complete?
4. Did you finish primary school? Did you finish secondary school?
5. And your parents?

#### The University and Adult Education

6. What does the community offer in order to facilitate education? What does the University of Costa Rica offer? For example- Are there childcare facilities for your children/grandchildren? Are there scholarships in your program?
7. Why are you returning to school?
8. What are some of your educational goals? Do you want to receive a better job? Do you want to earn a higher salary?

### The Family and the Community

9. Have you witness changes in your community since this program has been implemented? For example- Are women participating more in community decision-making? In politics, the economy, education etc.
10. How is the education you are receiving affecting you? For example- emotionally, economically, and regarding your friendships and/or family relations etc.
11. Are you more conscious of the needs within your community? - Regarding education, health, family well-being, quality of life etc.
12. Have you changed the way you think about certain things? What things?

### Future Goals

13. What do you want to do after this program?
14. En general, do you think that education is very important? Do you think that education is especially important for your kids? Why?
15. What are some of your life goals? For example- Do you want your kids/grandkids to finish post-secondary school? Do you want to receive a better job so that you can spend more time with your family? Are you simply looking for a way to pass your time?