Aging: Our One Common Experience in Special Needs

In This Special Issue
- Ageism: Implications for Vocational Special Needs Education
- Older Adults with Learning Disabilities
- Age Discrimination: History & Trends
- Intergenerational Classroom
- Training/Retraining Mature Learners

Guest Editors
Jeff M. Allen, Michelle D. Sarkees-Wircenski, and Lynda L. West
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Readership includes vocational and special educators concerned with the vocational education of students with special needs; staff of state departments of vocational education and special education; and university faculty, staff and students.

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Message from the Guest Editors

When you look at the picture on the cover what do you see? A young woman? An old woman? Both? This issue of the Journal focuses on the aging process and its effects on society and the workforce. Aging is the one experience that we all have in common. Individuals are expected to live longer in the future. Many will undoubtedly work beyond the traditional retirement age. This means that the composition of workers will be a blend of people, both young and old. As people age, it is common for them to experience loss of hearing, loss of vision, and physical conditions which may affect learning and performance. Therefore, as individuals grow older, those who have never been identified as having “special needs” may in fact develop them. It is important, therefore, that educators prepare all individuals who are about to enter the workforce with information about the aging process and the implications for working with people who are older.

An important aspect of the aging of the global workforce is the issue of training and retraining. Many classes across this country report a wide variation in age of learners who are preparing to enter the labor force for the first time, obtaining further technical training, and/or upgrading their skills due to technological advancement and career changes. This means that educators, student services providers, industry partners, trainers, and adult service providers will have to be prepared to meet the needs of older individuals.

The challenges presented in the following articles will impact on all of us in our future professional and personal endeavors. It is time to “fill our backpack” for the long journey ahead. This means being open to new strategies of teaching and training to meet the growing needs of an aging population. At the same time, we should recognize that each of us is aging with every passing day. The issues that we read about today may become the realities that we will live in the future.

— Jeff Allen, Michelle Sarkees-Wircenski, and Lynda West

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