

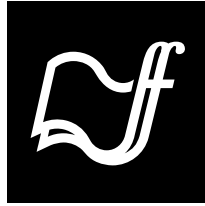


Univerza v Ljubljani

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# Intergenerational Learning and Education in Later Life





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# Editors' Introduction

Intergenerational learning and education is becoming an increasingly interesting but still relatively unexplored phenomenon. The international Grundtvig project (2008 – 2010) Tandems go! aimed to develop innovative practices of intergenerational learning in eight countries: Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Malta, Greece, France, and Portugal. The Slovenian project group established a network of associates among practitioners and researchers. The project was designed to put innovations into practice and then research the effects. We were particularly interested in combining intergenerational learning with education in later life. A group of researchers from the University of Ljubljana, Third Age University of Slovenia, and Matej Bel University from Banyska Bistrica prepared the theoretic platform for reflection on intergenerational learning and for the monitoring of intergenerational involvement outside of family structures.

This monograph comprises works aiming to answer some research questions:  
What are the characteristics of intergenerational projects and what is their importance?  
How is intergenerational solidarity manifested and how does the intergenerational learning and educational concept develop?  
What are the characteristics of education in later life and how do intergenerational projects fit into this concept?  
What is the participants' attitude toward the learning environment and does this change according to one's age?  
What is the mentor's role in education in later life and intergenerational groups?  
What are the findings in individual cases of intergenerational learning?

We have discussed the project with colleagues at professional meetings, observing that intergenerational learning is changing as a result of intergenerational transfers and changing multigenerational ties. What is particularly interesting are the didactic challenges in preparing intergenerational programmes. The importance of effective environments and mentors is discussed. One author describes the different roles of a mentor. A painter/professor and long-time mentor of a group of elders meditates on the development of the mentor role. The work concludes with two examples of good practice. In one of these, an intergenerational learning project involving students and elders at university is described, and in the other example, a similar project, but involving students and elders in primary school.

Intergenerational learning proves to be an effective strategy for animating various groups; it encourages responsibility and motivation for both group work and community work. Intergenerational cooperation provides not only financial support but also emotional and social support to various generations, helping them to enjoy a quality life.

*Nives Ličen and Jolana Gubalová*

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Dušana Findeisen

## Do We Understand the Role and Mission of Intergenerational Projects?

### Differences Between Projects and Permanent Activities

*Project* is one of the most-used terms in the post-modern fluid and fluctuating society of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In European culture the term *project* has not been in existence for a long time; therefore, we first need to approach it methodologically. Undoubtedly there are other English words whose meaning is rather close to the one of the word *project*: *intention, aim, objective, planning* and *program*. The French *projet* and Italian *progetto* both mean *intention, scheme* and also *plan*. In Italian, however, there are differences between *progetto*, meaning the intellectual elaboration of a plan, and *progettazione*, meaning the realization of a plan. On the other hand, in both English and German there is a somewhat dual meaning of the word *project*. There is a *project* meaning *intention* and there is a *project* meaning a *programme*. (Respectively, *purpose* and *project* in English and *Entwurf* and *Projekt* in German.) Having said that, the meaning of the word *project* as we know it today appeared sometime in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Boutinet 1999, pg.15-16).

A project may be in direct contrast with accepted activities which have become stable, permanent and repetitive in nature. Such already accepted activities also represent a much lesser degree of uncertainty. Thus, in 1984 the Slovenian Third Age University started off as a project (Findeisen 1999), but three years later transformed itself into a permanent activity with its own well determined organizational and financial structure, its own legal status, more or less permanent participants and activities, a clear mission statement, a well built conceptual background, etc. It has never lost its innovative nature; within its framework, new intergenerational and other projects have been born, with one of the recent ones being *Voluntary cultural mediators in Slovenian museums*, an intergenerational and voluntary project wherein intangible cultural heritage is passed from generations of older adults onto generations of younger adults (Bračun Sova 2009).

There are a number of assumptions as to the methodology of a project, regardless of its nature. Also in this area, projects may be and should be very different. They may or may not be intergenerational, educational, or local, with project methodology involving the following:

1. elaboration and realisation of the project are very close in time, and most of the time are simultaneous;
2. the situation to be approached and transformed through a project is unique and has not yet been approached in the way proposed by the project (Boutinet 1999, pg.252);



3. the project is characterized by its complex character and a high degree of uncertainty;
4. opportunities to be exploited by the project are to be searched for in an unlimited environment (Boutinet 1999, pg. 254);
5. the project has several authors and participants (Boutinet 1999, pg. 255).

Any project should focus on a specific project methodology encompassing:

- analysing and a diagnosing the (unique) situation;
- reaching a compromise between what is possible and the desired outcome;
- choosing strategies;
- experimentally conducting and evaluating the project;
- establishing and selecting pertinent and attainable aims and objectives;
- determining the horizon of the project (results and outcomes);
- choosing the instruments of evaluation;
- disseminating knowledge about the project as well as its results and outcomes.

Naturally, there may be also other, specific methods involved in a project, since not only the situations each project deals with are different, but also the participants involved in the project.

### **The Slovenian Third Age University – A Breakthrough in Slovenian Adult Education**

The Slovenian Third Age University is said to have been the very first attempt at the democratisation of adult education in Slovenia (Krajnc, Ličen 2002). Several reasons prompted its founding. Its origins date back to the creation of the first program, in 1984, in the Centre for Foreign Languages, Ljubljana. This was a French language study course for the retired, led by the mentor Dušana Findeisen.

In the mid 1980`s, aspirations towards the democratisation of Slovenian society and education became increasingly pronounced, coinciding with the emerging "political spring" of nations in socialist countries. The repressive policy of the regime's rightist faction, whose pressure from 1976 onward concentrated in particular on the educational system, the import of foreign literature and the persecution of intellectuals, had left the retired population largely unaffected. This ultimately allowed more room for action and, ultimately, for the creation of the Third Age University.

The democratisation of education in Slovenia can therefore be said to have actually started with study circles at the Third Age University. They brought the idea of edutainment (education with joy) onto the Slovenian social and cultural scene and encouraged individual educational and cultural pursuits. Adults other than pensioners, as well as children in the school system, thus had an opportunity to see an individual-centered education program in practice – a program that begins with a focus on each individual student and

is then adjusted to him or her. This was in sharp contrast to the state-set programmes of instruction and educational coercion prevailing in their immediate environment.

One of the reasons for the foundation of the Third Age University was the growing awareness among the public of the need for lifelong education. As there had previously been no education intended for people in later life, the implementation of the concept of education for the elderly considerably changed people's views of it.

Another pertinent reason was the need to prevent social exclusion and the marginalisation of pensioners, and to give them an opportunity to continue their active and socially participative life after their retirement.

A rather formal reason for the foundation of the Third Age University was the burgeoning number of pensioners and a sharp reduction (to the age of 45) of the early retirement age.

### **The Need for Intergenerational Work and Learning in the Post-modern Society**

Modern industrial society is being slowly replaced by a post-modern information society. Or, to put it differently: in a labour society in which work was industrialized, tasks were well determined, fragmented, and precisely divided among its members, where formally acquired knowledge was meant for one profession and for life, the position of both young and older generations was also well defined. Thus, it differed considerably from the position these generations have in today's "fluid" information and knowledge-based society, a society which is characterised by numerous changes having technological, cultural, economic and social implications.

In an industrial society, one spent their so-called "first age" going to school and preparing for relatively well-defined and predictable professional work. During one's so-called "second age" one was mostly employed, and in the "third age", one was forced to withdraw from organised work. Within post modern society, however, all generations are faced with the changing working and psychological conditions, and consequently with the need for life-long development in order to maintain and/or increase their employability. This holds true for younger, middle-aged, and older generations alike. Younger and middle-aged generations spend their time balancing employment and formal /informal education, and moving from one working environment to another, while the elderly must constantly upgrade their competencies in order to return to or remain in the labour market.

Moreover, social frictions are intensifying. Middle-aged people are striving to not yield their positions to younger or to older generations. What is more, they are willing to step out of the intergenerational contract with the elderly and the younger generations, with the goal of reducing the social burden they have to endure at present. As a result, the po-

sition of *all* generations in the post-modern society needs in-depth rethinking. Namely, it seems that it is no longer possible to take measures changing the position of just, for example, the elderly or just the younger generations. Measures must be taken and policies must be shaped while bearing in mind new necessities concerning the cooperation and co-existence of all generations.

Consequently, in a knowledge-based society, younger and older generations are in need of educational, learning and work (not necessarily jobs) opportunities which enable them to continue to gain knowledge and acquire new skills and competencies. This is done in order to not become redundant, or not to become less valuable older workers.

But who is, nowadays, considered to be an older worker? This is not necessarily an older person, but it is surely one who does not have working strategies adapted to the needs of the modern work. It is one who stops being employable because he or she has not devoted sufficient effort to his or her employability. Considering the fact that the retirement age will continue to increase, and also that paying for different social protection schemes does not necessarily mean that the elderly will stay in the labour market (on the contrary, they might end their working life actually out of work due to illness or a disability) taking care of one's employability and integration in the society is extremely important. Intergenerational programmes seem to be the programmes of choice when it comes to the integration of different generations into society.

### **The Significant Mission of Intergenerational Projects**

Intergenerational projects based on reciprocal learning and the joint work of young, middle-aged and older generations can contribute towards maintaining and increasing the employability of all generations. First, owing to the non-hierarchised work opportunities they get within such projects, they offer younger generations quicker access to the labour market. Next, they enable middle-aged generations to experiment with their work more effectively than they can in their professional working environment. For the elderly, working and learning in intergenerational projects offers them possibilities not only to evaluate their past experience and knowledge, but also to upgrade their skills. Moreover, all generations involved in intergenerational projects have significant opportunities to learn from each other. This is, however, on the condition that those who plan such projects are knowledgeable and able to "organise" opportunities for them to do so. A successful intergenerational project must be carefully planned and conducted, taking into account various aspects and goals, not the least of which is the need for exchange among generations.

The Slovenian Third Age University is a good example of a national intergenerational organisation. Founded 26 years ago, it started as a voluntary intergenerational project involving older retired professionals, active professionals and experts in different fields, and young university students of educational sciences. It focused mainly on cultural education. The initial idea was essentially to enable older adults to strengthen their social

identity through awareness of their cultural role in society and to make it possible for them to pass their knowledge, experience and culture onto younger generations. However, it was quickly learned that younger generations also had their own knowledge, experience and culture to share. Thus, from the very beginning, knowledge, experience and culture was a two-way exchange between both older and younger generations.

Hand in hand they started building the Third Age University, a communitarian project based on both confidence and symbolism. Cohen (1985) reports that 'community' is a cultural phenomenon, and community has boundaries that are symbolically defined. In the case of the Third Age University these boundaries were defined by generations quite often far apart, involving individuals from 21 to 95 years of age.

In this common activity involving different generations, past knowledge and skills were revived and new knowledge and skills were gained by all the participants. The young students of adult education started study circles together with elderly people, who were retired professionals. They all became involved in common learning and organisational activities. They also became involved in common activities for the benefit of the local community. They learned painting and each year they set up an exhibition. They learned translating and they translated interesting texts to improve the life of the elderly. Together they translated books dealing with psychological problems (for instance, hyperactive children) for the benefit of all generations. They studied art history and they took on the work of cultural mediators in museums. They learned research methodology and they conducted research work for the national museums. They learned about the media and they produced their own magazine, a series of radio programmes broadcast on the national radio, a series of television programmes.... They learned art history and local history and they got involved in cultural tourism. They set up drama groups producing their own scripts and started performing for the local community. These activities were for the benefit, of course, of everybody in the community. They learned transactional analysis and about the needs of grandchildren and they set up a new organisation called "Adoptive grandparents". They learned about new technologies and they started producing web pages for different civil organisations. At this university, which has developed into a true social and educational movement, elderly retired professionals continue to impart their knowledge and experience to their peers and younger people, thereby maintaining and upgrading their professional knowledge and skills.

So far, there have been numerous activities conducted by the young, middle-aged and older generations as a result of both their joint theoretical and practical learning, aimed at a tangible result (a survey, a book, an exhibition, a radio or a TV programme, a new temporary or a permanent activity, a service etc....) Many members of the Slovenian Third Age University, regardless of their age, turned the knowledge, skills and competencies they had acquired there into a professional first or second career. Many others who became involved for voluntary work have set up new civil organisations or have joined existing ones in the local community (help lines, etc).

## Conclusion

The Slovenian Third Age University started in Ljubljana with six elderly (over 55) students and a 32 year-old mentor. It was not an easy undertaking in former Yugoslavia where civil society did not have "le droit de cite". Nowadays, there are 42 universities in 41 towns striving to provide a better position for all generations in society, providing educational, training and working opportunities for both younger and older generations. The Slovenian Third Age University has grown out of an intergenerational project.

## Summary

Dušana Findeisen begins by theorising the concept of project, focusing on the difference between a project and a permanent activity resulting from same. She examines the assumptions on which the project methodology is based. Further, the author emphasises the importance of a project being ever-changing, fluid and flexible in an insecure post-modern society. Using the example of the Slovenian Third Age University, she then demonstrates how an educational, intergenerational project may turn into a valuable permanent activity.

**Key words:** project, intergenerational project, project methodology, intangible cultural heritage, voluntary cultural mediators, older adults, the Slovenian Third Age University

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Sabina Jelenc Krašovec and Sonja Kump

## **The Concept of Intergenerational Education and Learning**

In our aging 21<sup>st</sup> century society certain new social facts have focused attention on intergenerational harmony and the need for cooperation between generations. We assume that with demographic changes – aging inhabitants and consequently a longer life span – the role of the elderly within their social environment will become increasingly important, and this will lead to intergenerational links and relations also gaining in importance. The issue of intergenerational solidarity is not new, as it has always been present in one way or another. Various authors (i.e. Bengtson 2001; Martin-Matthews 2006, and others) have noticed that intergenerational links are becoming increasingly diverse, which is a consequence of numerous factors linked to social changes as well as changes in the family structure.

The importance of strengthening intergenerational ties and reducing age segregation can be found in various international documents (United Nations 2002, 2007; European Committee 2005). The necessity for this awareness is illustrated by the current demographic trends which are changing the relations between generations, and consequently influencing various fields of social, cultural and political life. The starting point for these international documents lies in a society for all ages, a society in which the importance of strengthening intergenerational solidarity through initiatives aimed at promoting “mutual, productive exchange between generations, focusing on older persons as a societal resource” is emphasised (United Nations 2007, pg. 2).

Due to changes in the age structure of society, new research on the life paths of individuals (within the social context) has appeared. This research takes into account changes on the social as well as individual level (Elder et al. 2003). The share of the oldest age group is growing quickly, and the older population is extremely inhomogeneous (we have at least two generations within the group aged 65 years or more), which indirectly influences the study of problems. It is necessary to discover the links between the earlier phases in life and the later life periods, links between childhood and adulthood, links that outline the individual's life journey. In contemporary society, alongside ethnicity, race, gender, family, job, religion and health, age is becoming an increasingly important cultural identity system. Childhood, adolescence and old age can all be considered periods that border on adulthood, with adulthood being denoted as a period of full participation and activity. Compared to adulthood, adolescence and old age are deviational periods, seen as special transitional periods, and this additionally increases the traditionally devised (linked to age periods) organisation of life, work and learning (Hill et al. 1995, pg. 280). Active adults ‘evaluate’ the young and old, and decide whether those individuals are ‘experienced



enough' for certain activities, or whether they are still capable of being actively included in society. It is this divide between age and cultural identity that is the starting point for thoughts regarding the necessity of intergenerational cooperation and solidarity. Such partnerships should reduce incidences of exclusion and discrimination and fulfill the principles of an active old age.

All of this demands a more in-depth analysis of the possibilities and needs for establishing broader family and non-family bonds between the generations, for these will ensure and fulfill the family functions that are missing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Intergenerational Cooperation, Intergenerational Transfers and Generational Contract**

A lot of people consider intergenerational transfers and cooperation to consist simply of intergenerational help, even though the term indicates a variety of activities and results. Intergenerational cooperation can be represented by various types of support, including emotional and social; it also comprises intergenerational solidarity and the generational contract (Albertini et al., 2007, pg. 319) as the most important --as well as the most disputable-- dimension of the contemporary welfare system. If this is how we understand intergenerational cooperation, we have to take into account the transfer of goods and resources between adult generations and also within the family. It is through this type of welfare preservation in an aging society that the balance between financial stability and the principles of social justice is being preserved. In relation to this, the intergenerational provision of help within the family has been an important topic during the last decade. With that being said, we often fail to mention reciprocal help based on 'intergenerational caregiving', which is mainly referred to as taking care of the elderly (care provided by the younger generation), which has a pejorative sound to it and is reminiscent of taking care of a child (Martin-Matthews 2006, pg. 1)<sup>1</sup>.

In the processes of intergenerational cooperation, the public dimension is of extreme importance. This is especially true in terms of the influence it has on planning social policy for the purpose of strengthening the processes of social integration, and consequently reducing social inequality. There are vast differences between European countries regarding to what extent the family and/or the state take care of vulnerable individuals, and this is also linked to various welfare systems. There are also big differences between states having different views of the family regime (strong or weak role of the family) especially with regard to social cohesion, social control and other social indicators that are directly or indirectly linked to the family (Reher 1998, pg. 216).

We are interested in how changes in intergenerational ties will influence intergenerational cooperation, if it is possible to influence the strengthening of intergenerational ties

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to this the data from the latest research (Albertini et al., 2007, pg. 320:) indicates that most exchanges between generations take place in the other direction, i.e. from the elderly to the younger (adult children and grandchildren).

within the family and community through education, and also what sort of education would encourage intergenerational ties within the family.

## **Changing Multigenerational Ties**

Alongside the sociological debates on changes in the family (which are adding to the importance of multigenerational ties) many sociologists are also turning to the work of the pioneer of American family sociology, Ernest Burgess, a representative of the Chicago sociological school, who studied American families over time<sup>2</sup>. In his studies of the increasing complexity of family life he emphasised the importance of the macro social context of the family through time (social organisation in the context of social evolution) as well as their micro social dynamics. Burgess's conclusions represented a starting point for contemporary studies on the importance of intergenerational ties. A few starting points (Bengtson 2001, pg. 1; Martin-Matthews 2006, pg. 2; Popenoe 1993) were:

- Family changes through time – from the expanded to the nuclear family and its demise; changing its functions from socio-institutional to emotional-supportive functions;
- Family forms are on the increase – apart from the biological ties, other family relations are becoming increasingly important;
- Contemporary families often have more elderly members than members of the younger generations;
- The duration of family ties between the generations is currently significantly longer than in the past (generations live together for a period of up to fifty years, which is twice as long as in the past);
- In the future, multigenerational ties (ties between more than two generations) will be increasingly important for individuals as well as for the family and society; multigenerational ties will occasionally substitute the functions of the nuclear family.

In some countries (e.g. Canada) a large number of older people do not have children (Martin-Matthews 2006), which opens a new issue regarding intergenerational cooperation. In the linear line there are family relations between grandparents and grandchildren, and in the parallel line between aunts/uncles and nephews/nieces (Langer, Ribarich 2007, pg. 82). In these conditions the relations between more than two generations are becoming increasingly important for individuals and families, as well as for society as a whole, for the welfare of the individual and the support of multigenerational ties are more important than the ties within a nuclear family. Martin-Matthews (2006, pg. 7) termed the establishment of reciprocity between generations "the support bank". Not a lot of research on the reciprocal help within the family has been concluded and for the most part, research has been limited to individual states (which does not allow for comparisons). One of the researches was the 2004 longitudinal international research

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2 He studied the nuclear, two-generational, white, middle class family in USA.

SHARE (Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe)<sup>3</sup>, in which it was ascertained whether certain patterns of reciprocal help between generations exist in individual countries. Intergenerational family transfers are influenced by an array of factors such as the demographical structure of the family, educational and working status, relation and attitude between genders (or generations), public accessibility of intergenerational support, tax system, family policy, family values and traditions, etc<sup>4</sup>.

The above results were also confirmed by the Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG) that was performed in the USA from 1971 to 1997, which included 2033 members from three generational families (Bengtson 2001, pg. 8). On average the study discovered high (above average) levels of solidarity between grandparents and parents, parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, and the results were stable throughout the 26 years they were measured. They once again confirmed the conclusion concerning the 'intergenerational investment' that had been reached thirty years ago, which stated that the older generations invest much more into relations than then-younger generations and that this influenced their perception of intergenerational relations (Bengtson 2001, pg. 8-9; Gauthier 2002).

Encouraging intergenerational ties is of great importance for all of those who are tightly linked by family ties, as well as those who are lonely and wish to establish contact with the younger generations. As such, intergenerational education is important because it strengthens both family and community ties.

## **Characteristics and Importance of Intergenerational Education Programmes**

As a result of social changes both the young and the old increasingly often experience a

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3 SHARE is a longitudinal, multidisciplinary and international research carried out in Europe amongst individuals over 5 years of age (Albertini et al., 2007, pg. 321). The first round in 2004 included 10 countries (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland). In the research they tried to ascertain the shares of social aid between generations and social support (personal help, practical help and help with administrative tasks); they also tried to ascertain the help provided by looking after grandchildren; this was performed for a period of 12 months prior to the research.

4 Even though the data shows that public transfers are primarily intended for the elderly (social care), intergenerational help takes place the other way round, mainly from the elderly to their children. This was also confirmed by the data obtained in the SHARE research, which shows that the general pattern of help runs from the elderly to the younger, and this holds true for financial help as well as social support. The elderly financially support their children to a significantly greater extent than the children support them, however with age the quantity of financial help starts dropping slightly (Albertini et al. 2007, pg. 322; Attias-Donfut and Segalen 2002). On the other hand it has also been ascertained that an extremely low number of the elderly receive social support from their children.

feeling of social isolation. This might have resulted in the noticeable increase in intergenerational cooperation and education that we have seen over the last twenty years. This cooperation should improve the quality of life, strengthen the community and contribute to necessary changes in the social field. However, generation gaps are on the rise and this can lead to problems in reciprocal understanding and communication (Baily 2009, pg. 112).

Intergenerational education programmes could be described as 'social mechanisms that create meaning, constant exchange of sources and learning between the older and younger generations' (Kaplan 2002, pg. 306). Newman and Hatton-Yeo (2008) defined intergenerational learning programmes as planned activities that intentionally link various generations so that they exchange their experiences for mutual benefit. We are therefore dealing with an intergenerational operation, an entire array of ways in which the young and the old can cooperate and provide help to each other. The goal is to establish ties between the young and the elderly with the hope that one or both groups will benefit. This can take form in the young helping the elderly, the elderly helping the young, or reciprocal help/learning (Frye Burnham, Perlstein 2002). Intergenerational education is more than merely educational programmes; it is about evaluating the fulfilment of social policy and taking time to consider planning of the operation of the main institutions.

Intergenerational cooperation and educational programmes can emerge from various institutions and in various forms, e.g. in schools, community organisations, hospitals and elsewhere. From the 1970's onwards numerous intergenerational programmes have taken place in schools; if at first these were isolated examples, now these activities are being decided upon by entire districts or even entire towns, and they emphasise that intergenerational inclusion is an important teaching tool (Kaplan 2002, pg. 308).

If traditional teaching and learning in various forms of social life (family, school, clubs, and workplace) are mainly set so that the young learn from their elders, intergenerational teaching and learning is based on reciprocity and cooperation. Intergenerational cooperation and education can take place on various levels, resulting in strong ties between the generations. Kaplan (2002, pp. 314 - 316) sees intergenerational programmes as a continuum of intergenerational inclusion – from initiatives that do not demand a direct contact between the age groups to initiatives that encourage intense contacts and constant and long-lasting possibilities for confidentiality. Each of the levels has its own meaning and role within the intergenerational learning programmes; however, it is important that the activities that encourage different types of inclusion between the generations add to one another and intertwine.

### **The Effects of Intergenerational Educational Programmes**

Intergenerational educational programmes have an influence on the programme participants as well as the broader environment (i.e. local community). MacCallum et al (2006) analysed the effects of 120 intergenerational programmes and the results clearly showed

the various benefits and advantages of intergenerational exchange for individuals as well as the community. If we analyse the effects that education has on individuals we are interested in the possible effects that it has on both the young as well as the elderly.

By cooperating in intergenerational programmes, youths gain knowledge and skills (including social skills), begin forming opinions regarding aging and the elderly, begin growing emotionally, etc. They start taking into account the value of personal experience, they learn about team work, and understand the past as a way of life that lasts and repeats itself<sup>5</sup> (Kaplan 2002, pp. 317-318). The results from certain research (Strom and Strom 1995, pg. 329) show that the young who have contact with elderly 'mentors' in schools achieve better grades than the young who lack such contacts; such programmes reduce dropout rates and improve discipline, regardless of whether these programmes operate within the school, or if they take place in the community and are oriented towards community development. As a result of these programs, young people's sense of self worth and self respect is on the increase, while feelings of loneliness and isolation are on the decline. Feelings of social responsibility and optimism are also on the rise and the children have a better understanding of the value of life-long learning. Goff (2004) has ascertained that the younger participants of intergenerational learning have developed the capability for empathy, creativity, initiative and openness, and they are also more inclined to participate in alternative free time activities aimed at confronting issues such as drug abuse, violence and anti-social behaviour. This research shows that it is extremely important in which way these activities are organised and to what degree the young are included in them<sup>6</sup> (Rossberg-Gempton, von Dickinson and Poole 1999, pg. 323).

Likewise, the elderly are also positively influenced by intergenerational educational and co-operational programmes, and the influences add up. Their influence on the health and the level of activity of the elderly is important, as is the influence on their views of the younger generation; the programmes also lead to self-reflection and consequentially improve life circumstances. In their research, Fried et al. (2000) ascertained that the symptoms of depression were significantly reduced amongst the elder participants of intergenerational programmes; in addition, they also spent less time watching television and increased their mobility as well as their capability to solve problems. It is interesting however, that the research did not note any changes in feelings of happiness. The elderly participants in the programme also reported that their feeling of self worth had increased,

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5 Children can learn a lot of other things from the elderly, for instance manual skills, artistic creation, horticulture, traditional games, cultural history, etc.

6 The more they act as merely observers, the lesser the chance of a positive effect on the development of their social skills, or, to put it differently: the more passive the young are and the less actively they cooperate with the elderly in joint activities (e.g. that children merely sing to the elderly in a retirement home), the greater chance there is that they will not change their opinions of the elderly or that their previously formed notions that the elderly are dependent and helpless will only become stronger.

and that they no longer felt lonely. Furthermore, they reported that they had re-entered the community, improved their memory and cognitive skills, made friends with younger individuals, passed on tradition and culture, experienced an increase in their motivation, developed a variety of new social skills and had started using new technologies. Apart from this, the elderly also felt respected and recognised for their contributions to the community, both past and present.

Intergenerational educational programmes support the concept of active aging, which assumes an active role of the elderly in their everyday life. Most of the elderly also understand the concept of active old age and successful aging as establishing good relations with others, and taking care of them as well as getting along with them. The young bring abundant energy, enthusiasm and support into the lives of the elderly. Studies of the influence such social changes have on intergenerational relations and roles showed the importance of communication between the young and the old. The analysis of the research that was performed by Zeldin et al. (2000) has shown that the elderly change their attitude and opinion of the young only as a result of long term intergenerational programmes which have a clear goal of reciprocal operation. This finding is similar to the conclusions reached concerning the effects felt by young people.

The goal of numerous intergenerational programmes was not primarily oriented towards the needs of the young or the needs of the elderly people, but rather towards increasing the quality of community life. Numerous intergenerational programmes emerged in order to preserve local history, create folk art and culture, encourage a clean environment (e.g. recycling, refuse collection, and similar) or to encourage community learning (Kaplan 2002, pg. 313). Some intergenerational programmes were even set up explicitly to influence the surrounding community. The purpose of such programmes was and is to jointly solve problems and strive for changes in the community. The effects can be seen in various aspects of community life and are shown, for instance, in the members of the community taking responsibility, reducing stereotypes, reviving contacts between neighbours and relatives, encouraging social cohesion and establishing a more inclusive society, reducing the pressures on parents, forming social networks and strengthening community ties, forming, maintaining and revitalising the public infrastructure within the community, developing voluntary work, encouraging social work, improving the range of services, etc. Participants learn that generations are connected, and that the youth and the elderly have to join forces in taking care of the quality of life in their community<sup>7</sup>.

The influence the intergenerational educational programmes have on the development of the local community cannot always be seen. For instance, when pupils visit the

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, the example from Florida shows the cooperation of a number of generations within in the programme 'The young and old against crime'; the participants prepare legislative proposals against violence, present them to the state legislators and try to obtain support for them (Kaplan 2002, pg. 313).

homes of the elderly this has an important 'hidden' effect; it is because of this that a larger number of the elderly are able to live alone and remain a part of their community. This will, in turn, support the activities that take place within the community, for independent elderly people have greater 'social capital' and this can prove to be important for the other members of the community.

Regardless of the numerous positive examples of intergenerational education and cooperation, the influence of the programmes has to be considered critically and with great attention. Great expectations exist that the intergenerational programmes will have outstanding positive effects on the lives of children, youth and adults. However, researchers have been ascertaining that there are numerous obstacles to be faced in the systematic development of intergenerational programmes, e.g. traditional age segregation of the participants in the study groups, lack of cooperation between the financial resources on the local and national levels, insufficient inclusion of programmes into the existing job system, an insufficient system of ascertaining and exchanging experience and good practice (Kaplan 2002, pg. 327), to state just a few.

## **Conclusion**

Even though the vision of a society that includes all age groups has been adopted by numerous countries, not a lot is known about how these individual countries are prepared to implement this on a local level. A move in the direction of a society for all ages is possible only through policies and practices that will strengthen an individual's life-long learning opportunities as well as the development of families, neighbourhoods, communities and institutions. Over the last 20 years numerous countries have witnessed a great increase in the number of intergenerational programmes; however, experts warn that intergenerational programmes alone cannot change the norms, opinions, institutions and practices that need to be changed in order to come closer to a true "society for all ages". Nancy Henkin (2007, pg. 148) states that in order to achieve such a goal, the communities should be dedicated to taking care of all age groups and to encouraging the values of reciprocal dependency and reciprocity. Thus, the welfare of all generations within the community can be built only with the coordinated endeavours of all sectors: social, economic and cultural. Today the main problem is the fragmented treatment of special interests and individual target groups, instead of a rounded treatment of all inhabitants of a certain community, regardless of their age group.

In an attempt to ensure that the concept of a society for all ages would become feasible on a factual, local level, the Centre for Intergenerational Learning at Temple University developed a model for the construction of a society which intentionally encourages the welfare of children, youth, adults and the elderly and speeds the reciprocal dependency and operation of various age groups (2002). The concept of the community for all ages represents an intentional network of social relations, formal and informal activities and services, all of which would support the welfare of people in all of their life phases (Communities for All Ages 2002). The formation of such communities is based on the conviction that the aging of the population opens opportunities for a number of people who

operate and think differently, but with the joint goal of improved welfare of the community and its human and natural resources. Because the model of the community for all ages assumes that changes will be made in the thought process as well as in the operation of individuals and organisations in neighbourhoods and communities, the starting point for successful implementation lies in community education and intergenerational learning.

With an increase in the number of intergenerational programmes we could expect that the support for intergenerational programmes would also increase; however, we must be aware that providing help to the elderly with adapting to their new roles is not a priority in schools, government services or private organisations. The number of the elderly who in one way or another (as volunteers or otherwise) cooperate in the upbringing and education of children/grandchildren is on the increase, but not enough attention is being paid to the fact that they would be significantly more successful in these roles if they had been previously trained and educated for them. They would be much more successful if they had a better understanding of contemporary childhood, parenthood, school and their role in these processes. At this moment in time there are still very few programmes that educate grandparents. There is also not enough understanding of the connection between the influences and effects of grandparent/elderly cooperation in various school and community activities and the quality of intergenerational solidarity and cooperation in the family.

In Slovenia we will also have to research the needs and possibilities for intergenerational education in various organisations within the community. There is often a gap between the promises and the practice, between desires and possibilities. A lot needs to be done before we can truly introduce the possibility of intergenerational education in Slovenia – we will have to influence public opinion regarding the necessity of intergenerational programmes, i.e. educate the public, influence changes in school policies, ensure support for teachers in the development process of intergenerational programmes, establish mechanisms for including the elderly (volunteers) into school work, and much more.

## **Summary**

The concepts of intergenerational education and learning are changing due to demographic, social and economic changes. Alongside the traditional exchange of knowledge and experience within families, it is now spreading into community learning and the broader social environment. Intergenerational education and learning programmes are defined as planned activities that intentionally link various generations with the goal of exchanging experiences and achieving mutual benefits. Their goal is to connect people by means of mindful, mutually beneficial activities that encourage understanding and respect between generations, as well as contribute to more cohesive communities.

**Key words:** intergenerational education, learning programs, cohesive communities, intergenerational transfers, generational contract.



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Nives Ličen

# Rethinking Education in Later Life

## Introduction

In our rapidly changing society, education in later life enables older people to take decisions, to make choices, and to better their living situation. With education in later life being an independent and quickly developing field of study, it is in need of substantial research and public support, and also in need of developmental projects. Moreover, in today's aging society, older people's education should become part and parcel of the educational system.

The rethinking of education in later life has considerably intensified due to a combination of the increased number of older people in western societies, new findings about learning opportunities and the desire to achieve mental balance. In the future, the percentage of people over 65 years of age in the European Union will continue to increase. Thus, Giannakouris (2008) argues that by the year 2060 people over 65 years of age will represent up to one third of the population, which is – mostly in gerontagogical and educational studies – interpreted as an achievement of our civilisation. Education in later life is not a new study field, nor is it a new practice, but the increasing number of older people makes us assume that it will increasingly grow in importance. In spite of this fact, it continues to be theoretically undernourished.

## The Two Metaphors on Lifelong Learning and the Education of Older People

Education in later life may be approached as a part of lifelong learning and education, both of them being described by two metaphors: market of learning and learning networks.

Market of learning means that there is provision for education, consisting mostly of vocational education with programs attractive for the market, demonstrating that neo-liberalism has penetrated education. Considering education in terms of its commercial value leads to the marginalisation of potential participants, and programs which are not particularly valued on the market. If education is left to be regulated by the market, it can not be expected that older people can achieve equal rights and have equal opportunities within the educational system. Namely, the neoliberal approach to education and learning has developed the kind of discourse which allows the State to put aside its responsibility to its citizens. The State (groups of people making decisions on behalf of the State) passes its entire responsibility for education onto individuals (and the market), thus withdrawing its support for quality educational programs for all groups of citizens. The pro-market social paradigm does not devote attention to groups at the edge of society, nor does it devote its attention to older people. Education for groups of (younger)

adults, adapted to the needs of those who can afford it, seems to be perpetuating the internal mechanisms of the stratification processes that are already in place. Statistical data for Slovenia ([www.stat.si](http://www.stat.si)) clearly demonstrates that the participation of adults in education decreases with age and increases with the level of education achieved.

Education of older people should by no means remain within this pattern. If it were to remain there, it would predominantly develop towards vocational education, or education for a second career. If education in later life were solely meant for older people to remain in the labour market and/or to return to it – as envisaged in the active aging policy supported by the European Community – it would remain within the mercantile relationships, and would mean accumulating knowledge for the production and activities within the established institutions. Old age, however, is not just about maintaining a career or building a new one. On the contrary, it is meant for discovering new areas of life, new content of life, and as it is also meant for preparing for the end of life.

Learning network is another metaphor based on dialogue, the importance of community and cooperative learning. The first metaphor emphasises work and learning for work, while the second stresses learning for being as it is analysed by Faure (1972) and Certeau (1980). In order for learning to be effective and associated with everyday life issues (not only with the issues of capital and profit), it should be lifelong and in should take place in one's natural environment. It should also be oriented towards gaining knowledge about self, space and time. Older people should continue to develop their relational and communicative skills, and their knowledge about their community. Learning – in this context – is defined as a process and activity for maintaining and encouraging opportunities for creating choices and making decisions.

Being aware of the danger of binary simplification, we do not recommend the use of only one approach. Education of older people is connected with the two metaphors: learning being both a product and a process. In programs, either one or the other dominates.

Organised education of older people started in the 1960's in American universities; however, it was not strongly encouraged. Education which is not compulsory lacks financing and the support of the State or private sponsors. Educational policies focus on the activities required by the market, neglecting the types of education which encourage personal well being, personal growth, artistic creativity, etc. However, psychoneuroimmunology emphasises the importance of well being for maintaining health, and thus health is the argument that is very often used to stress the importance of education of older people. Namely, education helps older people to remain healthy, thus lowering health insurance expenses. This is a reasonable argument for capital-oriented thinkers.

Education in later life substantially differs from adult education. It is not primarily a training activity for vocational aims, but mainly encourages creativity, personal growth and social integration. Education of older people shows its fragility in the competitive envi-

ronment but at the same time also its strength. Principles applied in older people's education can appear at any time during one's life, since personal growth, creativity and the ability to enter into and maintain a dialogue are important at all stages of life. Moreover, principles of education as put forward by programs for older people have also been adopted in establishing and running other adult educational programs.

## **Stereotypes about Older People and Older Learners – A Barrier to Education**

The education of older people is associated with several stereotypes, among them that older people's education is somehow inferior to the rest of adult education. Most of the time it is considered a leisure time activity, with leisure time being one thing that older people supposedly have in abundance. In the industrial era, leisure time was only considered valuably spent if it had been spent preparing for work, and much less if it had been spent for living. Since the education of older adults is seldom connected with work, it is therefore considered to be less valuable and therefore older students to be worse and less efficient students than adults. But older people have proven to be exceptionally motivated students, learning in their own way and out of their own motives, with quite often the motive and the reward for their learning being the learning process itself.

Hasty generalisations about older students lead to erroneous judgements of such learners. As a result, older people participate less in education. Thus, positive or negative prejudices develop, affecting not only individual older people but also spreading out into the whole group of older adults. In various sources of professional literature older people are often considered a rather homogenous group. Chen, Kim, Moon, Merriam (2008) analysed articles on older students during the period from 1980 to 2008. Analysis of 93 articles in five journals of adult education from different continents demonstrates this feature of older students, when viewed as a group, exhibiting few differences. Groups of older people are depicted as if there were no differences regarding gender, race, age, social class, or social status. People in later life are presented as a group capable and motivated for learning, as if they had few cognitive and physical barriers. Such perception may hinder the shaping of educational policy. There may be the development of new approaches designed to meet different needs, but at the same time these policies may overlook those older adults who are not inclined to be active, or are not as able as the program designers would expect them to be.

Old age is erroneously considered to be the same for all. There are mostly two sub stages. The first one is related to entering into old age and adaptation (early old age) and the second one to the declining forces (late old age). Or, the first one is the period between work, retirement and old age, and indicates the modern dynamics of either inclusion into the labour market or exclusion from it during the period which used to be called "the third age". These two periods correspond to different chronological ages, and most of the time to different social statuses, thereby inducing the need for different types of education. In practice, the development of programs and the forms meant for early old age advance

quickly, while late old age is still burdened with many stereotypes and is not considered an appropriate age for education. However, experience shows that even eighty-year olds are learning computer sciences, foreign languages, and conducting learning projects. Moreover, hospice personnel have discovered that people in their institutional care learn until they die (Andershed 2006). In English the wording "getting old" has been replaced with the more active "growing old" (Randal, McKim 2004) to emphasise activity and creativity, and minimise the focus on losses.

Critical social theory calls for accepting stereotypes about old age. An ideology has been created presenting these stereotypes as true and natural. Instead of resisting, protesting and fighting against the erroneous but predominate social beliefs, older people learn to accept them as truths, thus becoming guilty of tyranny against themselves. Paolo Freire depicted the oppressed plant workers from the "mute-culture" and it can be argued that older people also belong to this same culture and behave in a similar way, making way for the creation of educational apartheid, with education being accessible solely to select groups of older people. What used to be true for the education of poorer adults is now true also for older people: forms of education do not address all groups and strata. Each of us, including people in later life, should have access to education. Old age should not be thought of only as a period in which people are only in need of help, i.e. medical help, but as one of the periods of life when people also need help, and therefore the idea of education in later life encouraging and empowering older people is initiated. Addressing not only different older individuals, but also different groups of older people is a challenge to be faced by gerontology.

## **Continuity and Discontinuity of Education of Adults and Older Adults**

There are a fair number of research studies on older people in the field of demography, medicine and sociology. Fewer are reflections on older people and the relationship between education and aging in educational studies. The majority of these studies make reference to the empirical data collected by various governmental bodies and governmental organizations. However, local communities, churches, associations and families in which older people pursue their education, seem to be left out. Next comparison will follow the categories as they have been shaped under the influence of adult education.

## **The Objectives of Education in Later Life**

In the educational system learners are presumed to use their knowledge in different practices. Not to use knowledge in a way today's western society deems it useful, efficient, profitable and appropriate equals indecency -- a waste of time and money. Older people often ask themselves why they should develop personal potential competences in old age. Herein the discontinuity with education of adults is displayed. Not only is the purpose of education in later life different, but also the perceptions of feelings aroused in connection with adult education and education in later life differ.

The education of adults makes us optimistic, while the education of the old often creates discomfort. The education of older people deals with questions concerning the purpose of life, learning to be. 'Learning to be' is valuable in later life and it is even more valuable in the case of older people facing the end of life, reflecting about the sense of living and dying.

The education of adults mainly focuses on education for production and consumption. Older people (can) divert their focus from such studies to instead question themselves about their existence. They wonder what it means to live and what it means to die. These are "non-working", significant questions, not often addressed in Western culture. At times these questions can be considered immoral, and these themes are not integrated in the education of older people. Moreover, we should ask ourselves if life without paid work, in the eyes of our western civilisation, is meaningless, and if the answer is yes, we should go on asking ourselves if this is the reason why we focus on the education of older people for work and not on education for life. We wonder whether prolonging old age is considered a failure because of our modern perception of the importance of work, while we are well aware that older people can not work in the same way as when they were young. Non-productive age is looked upon as a failure due to our not knowing what else can be of importance in this period.

### **Educational Activities and Educational Providers**

Learning environment and didactic approach are shaping educational activities in later life and adult education. Comparison between the two demonstrates the discontinuity between education in later life and the education of adults, and indicates the need to form gerontagogy didactics. Even when comparing the content of education programs, differences can be found in the existing programs. It can be assumed that a much greater diversity in the content and design of the educational programs might better meet the needs of all groups. Kump and Jelenc Krašovec (2005) argue that the education of the older people within the formats that have been developed so far focus on more educated and better-off groups of inhabitants in an urban environment. This does not come as a surprise. The education of older adults seems to have started at the American Universities (1962). In 1972 the first Third Age University was established in Toulouse, France. In many countries the education of older adults has been considered a privilege and therefore less related to the needs of the less educated.

At the University of New Hampshire in the United States of America, the Elder Hostel Movement started in 1975. Five colleges prepared programs for students over the age of fifty five (55+). By 1980 the elder hostels had spread throughout the United States of America and Canada. Since 1983, China has been organizing education for older people. By 1996 there were already 8,000 universities and schools worldwide educating older people.



In Slovenia, the education of older adults has been in place and spreading since 1984, when the idea of education for older people was introduced. The first Third Age University was established in 1986 within the Andragogic Society of Slovenia, following a two-year experimental and research period. As in other countries, it was also launched as a voluntary undertaking by university teachers and adult educators themselves involved in somehow "privileged education", like French language, culture and civilisation (Krajnc, Mijoč, Findeisen 1992). The Slovenian Third Age University has developed both theory and practice on the basis of continuing research accompanying the development and transformation of education of older adults, and also comprising the social changes in Slovenia and former Yugoslavia (Findeisen 1999, 2002). Ten years later the Anton Trstenjak Institute in Ljubljana started intergenerational groups, uniting older people belonging to different age groups and led by associations for intergenerational co-operation. These groups are now found throughout Slovenia (Ramovš 2003).

New providers of educational programs for older people have also developed. In addition to third age universities, education takes place in schools, churches, associations, local communities, community schools, institutions for education of adults, libraries, as well as in day centres, old people's homes, associations of pensioners, hospices, etc. Kump, and Jelenc Krašovec (2009) show in their research that most education providers are to be found in urban areas.

Nevertheless, the number of older people participating in educational programs for adults remains relatively low. A large gap exists between the educational programs designed for adults and the actual needs of the elders. Programs for adults are less attractive to older people. Some studies attribute this to the discontinuity of adult education provision and to the lower self image of older people, but mostly to their different interests (Peroto 1990 in Dale 2001). Older people, unlike people in early and middle adulthood, are not interested in formal evaluation of their learning (qualification, certification). They value education based on how much it contributes to their personal growth, their well being, their understanding of themselves and the society, and according to the nature and effectiveness of the social networks they create as a result of their participation in education. There are several barriers to the participation of older people in education, and often adult education programs are not adapted to older people regarding schedules, price and premises. The price has to be affordable for older people, and therefore educational organizations carry out a substantial amount of work as volunteers. Another barrier to formal educational programs is more physical in nature; education often takes place in lecture rooms which may be located on the upper floors of a building, but older people need an environment which allows access even to those who might be limited in their movement. Geographical distance between the older people's homes and the educational facilities is also important.

Information and communication technology offers numerous opportunities for e-learning, e-communication, e-commerce etc. Therefore, it should be accessible to everyone.

In Australia in 1999, a University of the Third Age (U3A) with on-line courses was established; this became known as U3A Without Walls. It is designed for those who either due to their own illness or because they perform the role of caregivers, can not attend the U3A.

Educational activities have different didactic formats. Education often takes place in small groups enabling personal rapport and socializing. In small groups, older people can share impressions and establish new social networks. In Slovenia, a variety of study circles and reading groups for older people have emerged. An increased emergence of individual face-to-face learning and education, community education for older people, counselling and guidance, out-reach education, as well as e-learning are all expected. Moreover, so-called mental "wellness centres" are developing, encouraging older people to stimulate their mental activity through innovative forms of education.

### **Types of Education for Older People**

In his 17th century publication *Pompaedia*, Comenius defined education throughout life. He described several schools that lasted from birth till death. The last two schools are the school of age and the school of death. Three hundred years before the emergence of organised education for older people, Comenius wrote that man learned in old age. He said that old age was a peak of life, a period when everyone had to see to it that all he or she had done in life had not been in vain. People need various incentives. According to Comenius, the school of age comprises three classes (Comenius 1993, pg. 289). Objectives and selective methods are clearly defined for each of them. The first class is the class of those who have already entered into the period of old age and are now investigating what their tasks are and what they can do. The second class is the class of people who have entered the period of mature age, and have to finalise their work. The so-called "exhausted ones" who are expecting the end of life belong to the third class. People in the third class are contemplating death, which is also important for education. They can die, of course, in all other periods of life, but it is only this last one that will ultimately end in death; there is no other outcome. Comenius says that it is not difficult to die; death just happens. To die well – this is the art of arts (ibid. pg. 291). Western society does not refer to preparation for death as part of education. Death and dying are still considered a taboo topic, and we therefore do not talk about death.

The three classes defined by Comenius may be used to classify types of education of older people. At the crossroads between the education of adults and the education of older people, there is the education of older workers. They are trained for work and need different formats of education from those of younger workers. Even after retirement they can be educated to perform work. We can address this work as a prolongation of their last professional activities or as new professional work they take on, the so-called second career. Older people should remain active as long as possible. This does not necessarily mean full-time employment, but being active in different ways and for different periods of time. Training for work with older people includes training for full-time work or for

part-time work (in later stages of the career), education for voluntary and other forms of work.

Pre-retirement programs that encourage education for developing creativity play a special role. The main purpose of pre-retirement education is to prepare for the transition to retirement itself. The change which occurs with retirement is one of life's major changes. Pre-retirement education should start five years prior to retirement, namely by changing one's work (Klercq 1998). From the employer's point of view, retirement is a method of maintaining the vitality of the work force, replacing older workers who may no longer be able to cope sufficiently. With the transition into the post modern age, retirement will also change. Labour intensive jobs are performed by machinery. As such, mental health and knowledge transfer are becoming increasingly important.

Another type of educational program for older people is education after retirement. This is the period during which people organise their time differently. Social networks that the person had previously enjoyed at work no longer exist, and therefore one needs to establish new social networks. The education of older people can be intended for training and developing professional competencies, but it is not a regular employment relationship; perhaps it is voluntary work. It is intended for building relationships, bonding, for being active in social groups, associations, churches, or political parties.

Education at an advanced age is the third type of education in later life. Education in this period is characterised by numerous stereotypes depicting this period predominantly as a period of dependency, without observing the needs and possibilities of older people, but instead merely focusing on their limitations.

The above stated types of programs are intended for older people. Apart from those, there is an increasing number of programs in the field of gerontagogy intended for older people's relatives and dealing with the environment in which they live. Gerontagogy also encompasses programs qualifying people to work with older people. The American libraries, for example, started training for librarians to work with older people, especially for lending books at their homes. Some twenty years ago the central library in Stockholm launched a program for older people reading at home and meeting once a month in the library. The Slovenian Third Age University passed this kind of program over to Slovenian libraries.

## **Educational Needs of Older People**

Motives for enrolling in educational programs indicate the discontinuity between adulthood and old age. In young adulthood the need for increasing one's ability to conquer one's surroundings and gain instrumental knowledge are obvious. It is different with older people. Beside material security, they develop the need for:

- interpersonal relationships, maintaining and developing social networks;

- passing on knowledge and experience;
- achieving a sense of life;
- maintaining good health, independence and enjoyment of life;
- care and help (in very old age).

Taking these life needs into consideration, educational needs will be formed with emphasis on dialogic and autoreflexive knowledge. Research conducted on learning in other cultures also shows that older learners differ from adult learners. Merriam (2002) conducted research concerning the informal education of older people in Malaysia. She discovered that they learn in situations, experimentally, informally, and in relation to religion and philosophy. We do not have much information regarding informal learning in Slovenia. However, in 1986 the first generation of the participants at the Slovenian Third Age University in Ljubljana were asked about their motives for participation in educational programs (non-formal education). Answers regarding the reasons were as follows: desire for knowledge (71%), desire to try something new (21%), desire to meet other people (19%), desire to fill free time (15%), desire to start a new activity (2%).

Personal growth is important (Clenell 1990 in Dale 2001). In European investigations conducted roughly during the same period, older people expressed the following reasons for enrolling in educational programs: wanting to preserve their mental strength and encourage their mental processes, the desire to discover new interests, and the desire to pursue newly discovered interests.

When Australian students were asked about the benefits of their education, they answered: non-stressful learning, personal development, entertainment, pleasure, and encouragement (33%); new knowledge (26%); social connections, associating, and meeting people (22%); broadening horizons and maintaining mental activity (11%); making new friends (6.5%) (ibid).

Gerontagogy is being faced with the challenge that only those who are already motivated and better educated enroll in educational programs. Others should be motivated as well, and the programs should be adapted to take into account their needs. When we talk about education, the different capabilities of older people, as well as the possibility of their development in various environments, should be considered. Social roles, social integration and social gender identity should be taken into account. Further, it is necessary to develop conditions that encourage learning, since education contributes largely to healthy life-style, maintaining mental health, encouraging a positive attitude towards health, greater self-respect, and greater satisfaction with life (Dale 2001). Schaie and Willis (2002) and Cohen (2007) find that older people, if intellectually active, do not lose their intellectual capabilities until their late 80's. They experience a minor decline in memory, but verbal knowledge and verbal abilities continue to grow until their late 70's (Hooyman, Kiyak 2008).

Older people can learn, and they are capable of change. Every older person can adapt to his or her environment with the help of new knowledge, can change his or her environment with that knowledge, and can remain a relevant and useful member of society.

### **Educational Aims in Later Life Differ from the Educational Aims of Adults**

Aims of educational programs are connected with different levels of knowledge, and the shaping of identity. Various authors set the hierarchy of aims differently, combining the aims in the field of knowledge with other aims.

Findeisen (2002, pg. 27) divides the aims of the education of older people in the following three clusters:

- A. education that encourages older people's personal growth;
- B. education developing understanding of changes in society and the change of social roles, encouraging social inclusion and maintaining bonds with the society;
- C. education developing specific abilities for volunteering, self-employment, work in services, etc.

The educational aims for older people are not merely to acquire knowledge but also to socialize. Therefore, the education of older people also forms also new ways of connecting people.

The line between work and leisure, between personal growth and professional career used to be clearly defined. Today, however, there are no such divisions; work and non-work activities take place at the same time, and periods of education, work and free time are being combined. Therefore, new post-retirement models of work as well as new types of vocational education for older people are emerging. In Slovenia, for example, older adults are being educated for work in museums for new voluntary roles as cultural mediators (Furlan, Bračun Sova 2009). The students of the Third Age University and the museum staff are being educated jointly by the Slovenian Third Age University and respective museums. Additionally, a project is being run by the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana educating pensioners to take on the role of mentors for the unemployed (Rapuš 2008).

One of the aims of education in old age is to encourage the development of one's relationship to life as a whole, and to increase the possibility of each individual to control his or her own life. Such empowerment and the resulting feeling of competence serve as a motivation for learning.

### **Conclusion**

There is a discontinuity between the education of adults and the education of older people. Aims, context and the form of information in the education of older people are dif

ferent from that of education of adults. Differences are visible in terms of motivation, content and aims, methods, forms and providers.

The purpose of life-long education and learning in old age is the overall well-being of people, their contribution to relationships, culture and society, through transmitting intangible cultural heritage, paid work and volunteering. The concept of life-long learning places older people in the position of the ones who are learning and progressing. When re-thinking educational programs, as well as learning in everyday life situations, the entire group of aging people needs to be observed. Groups that are aging now were born after the Second World War and were better educated during their youth than their parents had been. Because their level of education is higher, older people will likely enroll in educational programs in greater numbers, and therefore even more new models of education can be expected.

A system of education for older people should be formed, consisting of three strata programs: pre-retirement education, education in early old-age and education in late old-age. Program providers will be different and they will be inter-connected; they will encourage development of the system, transmission of professional knowledge, and education of experts and research. This field is faced with several challenges: who will educate within the field of gerontology, what knowledge should they possess, how will gerontology develop, how to find proper educational forms for different groups of older people, how to organise education in their local environment, how to prepare programs in a virtual environment, how to win government support for education of older people, how to inform the public about the necessity of the programs for older people, etc. Formal networks of education for older adults need to be formed which are connected to other educational networks. Older people who are learning in an innovative manner with younger people (in intergenerational programs) give this process of education special importance.

Older people in the educational system have been neglected. The educational system and what it offers focuses on those forms and periods that have already been established. This is education of children and the young as well as education of adults, with education for the latter mainly in the segment of professional education and qualifications for professional work. Education in old age is a relatively new phenomenon and not much research exists, but practice shows the influence that the education of older people can have on the welfare of an individual and the entire society. Therefore, we can expect more research and financial attention devoted to this phenomenon.

Both competition and greed have moved the concept of adult education far away from any connection with feelings of self-worth, how one perceives him or herself, and how one manages his surroundings. Perhaps the education of older people will lead the entire system to re-think its aims. Older people are part of society and contribute to it, while at the same time they are undeniably exiting it. This does not mean that their life has no

meaning anymore. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The education of older people is essential for civilisation. It can loosen the strong connection between education (of adults) and profit, as well as educational systems and a panoptic society.

*Translated from Slovene by Vojka Melinc.*

## **Summary**

The similarities and differences between adult education and the education of the elderly are analyzed by using comparative methods. Author found many differences between two fields. The concept of lifelong learning and education in adulthood are dominated by education for the workplace. The discussion notes that civilization needs the education of older people because it can help to avoid or minimize the impact of a neo-liberal invasion in the educational system.

**Key words:** education of the elderly, lifelong learning, andragogy, gerontagogy

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Dagmar Kokavcova and Lena Theodoulides

# **Learning and Knowledge Sharing the Core Processes in Knowledge Management**

## **Introduction**

The topic of knowledge management ("KM") education and training has become of greater relevance as new technologies have changed the way organizations view and use knowledge. Information can now be collected, analyzed and distributed in ways not previously possible. On the other hand, it is not just technology that is driving the excitement around knowledge management. Most research in knowledge management focuses on "hard" methodologies for developing data and the information processing capacity of information technologies. "Soft" methodologies for developing human and social capabilities, including personal knowledge, have been largely overlooked.

Several models of action learning and action research help us to access, communicate and manage personal knowledge, and to develop people's innovative and creative capabilities. Moreover, they help us to emancipate people from the shackles of positivism, thereby helping them move into a non-positivist paradigm of research, development and self-learning. The practical implementation of knowledge management focuses on knowledge sharing activities by using several tools which result in learning action for all participants.

## **Knowledge Management and Learning Process**

Alfred Marshall, a forefather of neo-classical economics, was one of the earliest authors to explain the importance of knowledge within economic processes, saying, "Capital consists in great part of knowledge and organization... knowledge is our most powerful engine of production." (Marshall 1965). Based on Nonaka and Takeuchi, neo-classical economists were concerned only with the utilization of existing knowledge, not with the creation of new knowledge (Nonaka, Takeuchi 1995). Changes in computer technology during the mid 1980's were the keys to this shift; as computers grew exponentially in speed and availability, and their cost began to fall, their uses changed. Organizations were, for the first time, able to quickly capture, codify and disseminate huge amounts of information across the globe (Tapscott 1996).

Knowledge management has become a major trend since the mid-1990's. Different professional communities, among them information systems/information technology (IS/IT) and more business management-oriented people, have created strong conceptual ties with the idea of managing knowledge. The management of knowledge goes far beyond the storage and manipulation of data, or even of information. It is the attempt to

recognize what is essentially a human asset. The generally accepted view sees data as simple facts that become information as data is combined into meaningful structures. These subsequently become knowledge, as meaningful information is put into a specific context and can then be used to make predictions. According to this view, data is a prerequisite for information, and information is a prerequisite for knowledge (I. Tuomi 1999).

Despite several years of professional and academic interest, for most people the concept of knowledge management still remains somewhat wooly and ill-defined (D. Neef 1999). This leads to the question: is it possible to manage knowledge? Human knowledge is action-oriented and is best transferred via traditional methods, e.g. in social interaction with other people, because humans have a huge capacity to absorb signals unconsciously in face-to-face communication (K. Sveiby 1996). The author of one of the first knowledge management books in Europe also stated that it was impossible to manage knowledge itself; it was only possible for managers to control and influence the environment (Sveiby 2000). Knowledge management has now arrived at a new stage of its life cycle. After the disillusionment that followed the initial technological euphoria, knowledge management is now on the way to a better understanding of its success factors (Weber, et al. 2007).

## **Knowledge Creation and Knowledge Sharing**

Despite the widely recognized importance of knowledge as a vital source of competitive advantage, there is little understanding of how organizations actually create and manage knowledge.

One of the first models describing and explaining knowledge sharing was developed by Boisot in 1987, defining knowledge within an organization as either codified or un-codified, and as diffused or undiffused. The term "codified" in this case refers to knowledge that can be readily prepared for transmission purposes, such as financial data. In this model, codified undiffused knowledge is referred to as propriety knowledge and is deliberately transmitted to just a small group of people, usually on a "need to know" basis. The second term, "un-codified", refers to knowledge that cannot easily be prepared for transmission purposes; this includes knowledge such as personal experiences. The model suggests that un-codified and undiffused knowledge is referred to as personal knowledge (e.g. experiences, attitudes, perceptions, views, and ideas). The third aspect of the model covers public knowledge and common sense knowledge. Public knowledge is codified and diffused through libraries, journals, books, newspapers, etc. Common sense knowledge, which is relatively diffused and un-codified, can gradually develop through the process of socialization and externalization (Boisot 1987).

Nonaka & Takeuchi's knowledge management model (1995) presumes that knowledge consists of tacit and explicit elements. In this aspect, tacit knowledge is defined as non-verbalized, intuitive and unarticulated, whilst explicit knowledge is articulated and can be specified in writing, drawings, computer programming, etc. This model posits the

idea that, by means of socialization, tacit knowledge in one can be transferred into tacit knowledge in others. Furthermore, tacit knowledge can be transformed into explicit knowledge by formalizing a body of knowledge or through externalization process. Nonaka, Toyama and Konno (2000) started from the point of view that an organization is an entity that creates knowledge continuously. They propose a model of knowledge creation consisting of three elements: (1) the SECI process, knowledge creation through the conversion of tacit and explicit knowledge; (2) "Ba", the shared context for knowledge creation; and (3) knowledge assets, the input, outputs and moderators of the knowledge-creating process. The knowledge creation process is a spiral that grows out of these three elements; it creates a spiraling effect of knowledge accumulation and growth which promotes organization, innovation and learning (Nonaka 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).

Lodhi (2005) offers a further concept of knowledge conversion; his Culture Based Knowledge Sharing model (CBKS) provides a framework for analyzing the dynamics of knowledge flow in an organization. Key elements of this concept are communication, individual attitude as well as group attitude, and organization policies. They interact dynamically with each other to influence the knowledge creation and sharing processes. CBKS emphasizes the existence of "true knowledge" – individual knowledge of employees – and knowledge assets represented by databases, books, and information within organization. The conversion of knowledge is realized by converting these knowledge assets into "true knowledge". To realize this process effectively and successfully, the organization has to create a supporting space, or – to use Nonaka's term – "Ba".

To summarize these theoretical models of knowledge conversion and the knowledge sharing process, we can describe some main features and characteristics (Kokavcova, Mala, 2009):

- The most valuable knowledge is in the minds of a select number of employees in an organization. To identify these employees, to take care of them, to develop their special competencies, and to educate them: this is the main role of Talent Management,
- Knowledge is impossible to manage; to support knowledge sharing and knowledge conversion, managers have to create an environment characterized by loyalty, trust, creativity, open-mindedness, honesty and openness. Covey (2006) demonstrated that trust is necessary for the credibility – and, therefore, the empowerment – of any organization, economy or human relationship. People who work in an atmosphere of trust can collaborate productively, so things get done faster and at a lower cost. Without trust, however, business slows down and costs rise.
- Knowledge sharing is a particularly psychological issue. The knowledge owners have to be ready, willing and able to perhaps not just exchange, but also to change their own "intellectual property", which may very often be based on long-term practical experience. Information and communication technologies provide the instruments with which one can transform knowledge from tacit to explicit, as well as enabling

the creation of databases, storage, and libraries accessible through common “share points”;

- Knowledge sharing and learning are the main prerequisites of new ideas and innovations. There is a very close relationship between knowledge sharing and learning. Davenport (2009) advocated for merging knowledge management with some other function — most likely the human resources, organizational learning, and talent management constellation.

Assuming it is possible to define, the process of knowledge creation and knowledge sharing is both the main presumption and frame of learning. It can be understood as a continuous process through which, by acquiring a new context, a new view of the world and new knowledge, one can overcome the individual boundaries and constraints imposed by information and past learning. (I. Nonaka, G. von Krogh, Voelpel 2006).

## **Learning Process**

Through distinguishing between knowledge and skills, learning is becoming one of major activities of human resources. Senge (1990) was the first to introduce the metaphor “learning organization”. Such an organization is typical for increased capacity to learn, adapt and change through people who are learning. Senge (2007) defines a learning organization as an organization where people develop their ability to achieve the required results, where there are new supportive and expansive ways of thinking, where the door is open to collective aspirations and where people are continually learning how to live together.

Another concept views a learning organization as an organizational system that permanently ensures continued learning for all its members so that they can change and improve themselves. Such an organizational system contains the following elements of systematic programmed learning and development: systematic problem-solving; experimentation, training, and transfer of knowledge from the external environment; previous experience and learning from failures; mutual relations within the organization, customers and suppliers; individual learning from one another; and learning based on contacts with educational institutions and universities. We analyze some learning models where knowledge creation and knowledge sharing encourage and develop learning among the people involved.

## **Holistic Learning Model**

Knowledge management is a broad discipline that includes learning and development, information technologies and human resources management. A useful means by which we can understand the operational mechanism of this model is as a complex view of the process of learning, capturing and exploiting knowledge. Even though individual phases of the model bring results, permanent application of all phases brings synergy and long

lasting results of the learning process in action. The process of learning, capturing knowledge and its subsequent exploitation is called the holistic model -- learning before, during and after the event.

### **Learning before action**

Before a person starts to work on a new task, he should obtain the knowledge required for completing the task. One method by which he can obtain such knowledge is by looking for information or people with the necessary experience on the intranet or internet. He thereby creates a system of available knowledge. He obtains the views of people who have encountered a similar problem; he evaluates the model from the past, tries to identify where the bottlenecks are and how to avoid mistakes.

### **Learning during action**

On-going learning, reflection on the achieved results and knowledge use during the action itself, will not only facilitate adaptation to new conditions but also aid in the identification of and ability to correct any deviations from the course or desired goal. It is valuable to evaluate each particular activity, from its beginning to end, each identifiable purpose and certain parameters of the performance and to learn from these. In its natural state, the process of continual learning is simple, so that one remains focused on the task itself. It is enough to ask four simple questions: What do/did we want achieve? What has been achieved? Why did differences appear? How can we learn from these?

Continuous learning in a team environment enhances integrity, trust and motivation; the team also gets an idea of how well it is doing overall. At the same time, team learning helps to relieve the pressure of a potentially unclear final result,

### **Learning after action**

The process of learning after the action can significantly help in realizing other projects. The team assesses the areas in which it has succeeded as well as failed. The acquired tacit knowledge will be exploited in the future.

### **Capturing the knowledge**

For each phase of the holistic model it is useful to create an effective way of capturing and further transferring implicit knowledge so that it will be available for use by co-workers. Capturing knowledge requires a certain context and gathering of specific experiences, which are extracted in such a way as to provide a complex picture. Knowledge is captured simply but effectively by focusing on the main points and the evolution of events. We can compare it to the back cover of a book where a whole course of action is summarized in just a few paragraphs. If the recipient considers the described solutions relevant, he can find a detailed documentation on the activity or may contact its participants. Knowledge is captured with regard to those who will exploit it in future. It must have a clear message in order to attract the recipients' interest and be useful for them; otherwise, the effort has no effect. It is necessary to preserve the captured knowledge in

a clear structure. Its systematic clustering and continuous renewal enables the creation of a solid base of knowledge.

In learning, it is important that the acquired knowledge is integrated into organizational processes, and has a permanent, positive effect. It is a never-ending cycle of identification through reflection, analysis and capture, as well as the creation of a knowledge base, its incorporation into organizational processes and further application in similar activities.

## **Action Learning**

Action learning is one of the “action science” or “action oriented research methods” which is used when we are confronted with complex, non-routine problems for which no standard solutions exist.

Action learning can be used when an organization is faced with real-life problems for which no clear-cut solutions exist. It can be described as a social process of managers and workers getting together to review and interpret their experiences in order to understand the processes that have led them to learn and solve a problem (De Loo, 2002). A model of values and actions for personal knowledge management was presented by Zuber – Skerritt (1996) and is based on the theories and methodologies of adult learning, collaborative action learning and action research. The model consists of seven commonly shared values and principles of an Action Learning and Action Research (ALAR) culture, captured in the acronym ACTIONS. The matching actions are captured in another acronym – REFLECT. The resulting model, from which seven kinds of personal knowledge are generated, can be used for knowledge-sharing training and learning programs. We have used it in the project known as Tandems Go!.

## **Integration of Knowledge Sharing in Learning Processes**

The practical implementation of the above mentioned models was researched and questioned in a number of our projects. The empirical observation of the knowledge sharing in the e-learning processes became a core focus during the international project Tandems Go!. Over the last year we have conducted ongoing interviews with the main emphasis being on the use and importance of knowledge sharing in managerial professions. The main findings are presented below.

## **Project Tandems Go! – Twinning the Elderly and Young People as a Possibility for e-Learning**

The existence of knowledge sharing processes is the main prerequisite of further growth and development in every type of company, organization and society. The following example will present the best practices of real application of this process together with its impact and results. The personal knowledge model in theory which was used in the project Tandems Go!, is described as ALAR. Increasing human potential and knowledge

through the knowledge sharing process is the main objective of an international project financed by the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Commission. The participants are from eight European countries and primarily represent lifelong learning institutions and universities. This cross-generational project involves elderly people from all sectors of society and young students, and is aimed at creating a collaborative e-learning environment where all the learners can acquire and improve their PC literacy as well as seek innovations and best practices by means of e-learning and digital communication. The learners attend workshops pertaining to a concrete topic concerning professional and shared life experiences; they exchange and share knowledge about the theme as well as obtain specialized PC skills such as internet browsing and searching, e-mail correspondence, photo handling etc. Pre-evaluation results document the fact that the knowledge sharing and experience sharing processes are very effective and popular. In a practical way, the project follows the theoretical frame of a particular ALAR (Action Learning and Action Research) model.

*Table 1. Action Learning and Action Research Model*

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>A</b> dvancement of knowledge and learning	Experience and reflection on the experience in a cycle
<b>C</b> ollaboration	Team spirit, accept everyone is unique and equal, view differences positively, synergy of results
<b>T</b> rust, respect and honesty	Preconditions for truth/truths
<b>I</b> magination, intuition and vision for excellence	Enrich the pursuit of ideas, possibilities and to lead to high level of performance
<b>O</b> penness	To external criticism and self-criticism, multiple possibilities
<b>N</b> on-positivist beliefs	Knowledge is from various sources, must be practical and integrate both explicit and tacit knowledge, including subjective insights, intuitions and hunches
<b>S</b> uccess	Shared success, accountability, recognition, reward

ACTIONS can actually be translated into actions that we carry out ourselves. Our strategies can be summarized in another meaningful acronym, REFLECT, as shown below:



Acronym	Description
Reflection on /in action and Advancement	Learning and improvement in work place: management and leadership, organizational learning and change
Effective use of processes and methods	Collaboration and teamwork, workshops, presentations
Feedback from "critical friends"	Trust, honesty and frequent feedback from critical friends, respect for others and their differences
Leadership development and Imagination	Imagination, intuition and vision are excellent leadership qualities, multiple intelligences IQ and EQ
Exploration of new opportunities	New ways of seeing, questioning, learning, appreciating and valuing
Coaching	Knowledge must improve practice, question insight(s)
Team results	Learning and development outcomes for individuals, teams and organizations

Source: modified by author based on O. Zuber-Skerritt (1996).

## Implementation of the Knowledge Sharing in Learning Process

The theoretical aspects of knowledge management are very well known among its practitioners, managers and entrepreneurs. Their experiences with the implementation of the knowledge management process were related to knowledge education and training. Professionals sometimes lack the ability to implement knowledge sharing in their everyday working life in order to learn from each other and to enrich their experience. The already described SECI model by Nonaka was converted into a knowledge spiral that creates a learning environment within the community.



Source: Modified by author based on Nonaka, 1995

Socialisation as a process of knowledge conversion was selected as the introduction and the very first step on which to focus our effort for further dialogue and learning. Practitioners have suggested more social activities connected with knowledge sharing and learning exchange, such as external workshops outside the company and creation of heterogeneous learning teams consisting of experts from different fields. The most frequent way of learning and knowledge sharing among professionals became known as the approach "learning by doing"; we described it as the action learning model, wherein new ideas are created. Learning was defined as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences.

Action learning can be used when an organization is faced with real-life problems for which no clear-cut solutions exist. Professionals have described it as a social process of getting together to review and interpret their experiences in order to understand the processes that have led them to solve specific problems, to learn from each other and exchange experiences. Due to the rapid development of information and communication technology, an e-learning environment might help to develop knowledge sharing and to support learning. The creation and the development of the holistic measurements mentioned occurred as another initiative during the interviews. The current quantitative measurements fail to take into account personal skills and abilities, which are the fundamental base for creativity and common learning.

## **Conclusion**

Both professionals and academics agree that an organization's knowledge is one of its most valuable assets. Theories related to knowledge management, and particularly knowledge sharing, are continually developing in order to provide organizations with practical tools detailing how to use it in their practical work. The socio-technical aspects of knowledge management focus on the personal aspects of knowledge creation as well as knowledge use as an essential part of the learning process.

This paper has examined some of the key aspects of knowledge management that explain the importance of the so-called human factor in knowledge creation, exchange and sharing for the purpose of learning. This paper has taken a step in that direction by examining the current thinking of professionals and academics regarding influential knowledge management topics and their relation to learning. After the discussion of recent experiences and findings in the areas which contribute to practical implementation of e-learning, the paper suggested areas for further study in order to help businesses to use knowledge management in their learning processes in the future.

## **Summary**

This full paper emphasizes some fundamental concepts of knowledge creation and knowledge sharing as being prerequisites for the learning processes in any organization.

Within the entire theory as it relates to knowledge management, two approaches have been developed over the last decade. The first approach is based on the role of technology (mostly ICT) in the process of explicit knowledge creation through a number of database systems, and sociotechnical perspectives. The sociotechnical perspective, as opposed to a purely technological view of knowledge management, provides the settings or conditions in which individual knowledge is recognized, may be exploited further and may be shared with others throughout the learning process. There are many written theories related to knowledge management, but limited practical tools that help with the learning process. The emphasis of this paper is to show the practical experiences of knowledge sharing in the learning processes. The predominant implementation of knowledge management is questioned using empirical evidence from recent projects as well as interviews conducted by the authors, who examine importance of knowledge sharing in learning activities.

The research findings are presented together with some suggestions for responding to questions regarding how to use knowledge sharing in the learning process.

**Key words:** knowledge management, knowledge sharing models, learning process, e-learning

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Marko Radovan

# Creating Effective Environments for Adult Learners: Age Differences

## Introduction

Many books examine adults' various characteristics and how those characteristics influence how they learn. Teachers should consider these characteristics when developing instructional programmes. Since Knowles (1970) introduced the concept of a learning climate, adult educators have been aware of how learning environment affects learning. In this paper we describe what it means to create a powerful learning environment, examine some empirical data from recent research, and present some guidelines for structuring facilitative learning environments.

## Defining the Learning Environment

Malcolm Knowles (1970) made note of the "friendly and informal climate" in many adult learning situations, the flexibility of the educational process, the use of experience, and the participants' (including the teachers!) enthusiasm and commitment as all being part of the learning environment. These factors affect both learning and motivation. There are almost as many definitions of the learning environment as authors. This term arises both with different names (e.g., learning environment, learning context, classroom context, learning climate, etc.) and in different areas (school, classroom, specific problem, etc.). Most studies have investigated variables that focus on different elements of a classroom, for example, beliefs, goals, values, perceptions, behaviour, classroom management, relationships, physical spatial organisation, and socio-emotional climate. In short, everything that helps to explain what is happening in a classroom. Furthermore, the definition also depends upon from which angle the researcher studied the learning environment, e.g., psychological, educational, sociological, or anthropological. Researchers have used the concept of learning environment in several ways: to describe learning tasks' characteristics (Maehr & Midgley 1991), a class's context (Perry & VandeKamp 2000), peer groups (Ryan, AM 2001), a school's context (Hofman, Hofman & Guldemond 2001), a learning environment's physical characteristics (Hiemstra & Sisco 1990), to mark the virtual learning environments of computer programs or the internet (Weller 2007), and to refer to a classroom's psychosocial environment (Fraser 2002; Moos 2002). Fraser identifies the learning environment as a "common perception of students and teachers in an environment where learning takes place" (Fraser 2002). Hiemstra (1991) gave a very broad definition of learning environments in adult settings, which describes a learning environment's elements in relation to psychological, social, and cultural conditions:

*“A learning environment is all of the physical surroundings, psychological or emotional conditions, and social or cultural influences affecting the growth and development of an adult engaged in an educational enterprise.” (Hiemstra, 1991, p. 8)*

In this text we diverge from Moos’s (2002) socio-psychological aspect of the learning environment and limit ourselves to the psychosocial learning environment, which includes students’ perceptions of the course, the programme’s organisation, and the relationships among the students and between the students and lecturers.

## **Moos’s Understanding of the Psychosocial Environment**

Rudolph Moos (2002) developed a so-called socioecological approach, which seeks to explain the interconnectedness between the psychosocial environment and individual behaviour. Moos (1974) defined psychosocial environment with three dimensions, indicating the majority of situations in which we find ourselves in everyday life (e.g., at home, at work, and in school):

1. relationship dimension,
2. personal growth dimension,
3. dimension of the system’s characteristics.

The relationship dimension indicates the interpersonal relations’ quality and power in a given context. This area includes the level of personal involvement and cohesion as well as the mutual aid and cooperation between individuals in a social environment. The personal growth dimension includes approaches in which the environment promotes personal development and career advancement. Autonomy, goal setting, and requirements reflect this dimension. It is determined, for example, by the students’ orientation to the functions of their rivalry with research or independent work in their environment. Systemic dimension includes rules, clear expectations, control mechanisms, and the system’s responsiveness. It is expressed through, for example, differentiated instruction, clear rules, organisation of classes, or by accepting differences.

## **Some Empirical Findings**

To illustrate our statements, we briefly examined some results of research regarding the learning environment. These findings are part of a large research study of adults in formal education done in 2007 (Radovan, Mohorčič Špolar, & Ivančič 2008). This research included 1295 adult students; 50.2% were females, 58.2% were between 26 and 40 years old, and 64.3% had a four-year secondary education.

To observe the participants’ views on their learning environment, we used a shortened version of the Adult Classroom Environment Scale (ACES), which Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) originally developed and several other studies (e.g., Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Lin et al., 2007; O’Fathaigh 1997) confirmed.

The scale consists of seven dimensions of the learning environment:

- **Affiliation:** the level of social communication and cooperation among students.
- **Teacher Support:** the level of support, assistance, incentives, and friendly relationship the teacher provides.
- **Task Orientation:** the degree to which students and teachers focus on tasks and results.
- **Personal Goal Attainment:** the teacher's flexibility level when teaching so that the methods are in the students interests.
- **Organisation and Clarity:** the degree to which learning has clear objectives and activities are well-organised.
- **Student Influence:** the degree to which learning focuses on students and allows them to influence the learning process.
- **Involvement:** the students' attention and activity level in the classroom.

The scale's original version consists of 49 items; we shortened the scale so that our questionnaire used 15 items. Two or three arguments represent each dimension. Below we present some descriptive and comparative results we obtained with this scale.

*Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of the Learning Environment Scale*

	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
The study programme provides opportunities for making new friends.	4.07	.70
The teacher makes every effort to help students succeed.	3.76	.86
The teacher respects students as individuals.	3.73	.83
The study programme has a clear sense of direction.	3.71	.71
Participants in the training discuss real-life examples based on their personal experience.	3.70	.80
Students often ask the teacher questions.	3.68	.78
The study programme is well organized.	3.62	.84
Getting work done is very important in the study programme.	3.62	.81
Most students in the study programme achieve their personal learning goals.	3.60	.73
Most students enjoy the study programme.	3.55	.85
The students in the study programme enjoy working together.	3.51	.78
The teacher insists that you do things his or her way.	3.43	.88
Activities not related to study programme objectives are kept to a minimum.	3.17	.92
Students feel free to question study programme requirements.	3.11	.86



	M	SD
Students can select assignments that are of personal interest to them.	2.98	.96

Source: LLL2010 Research, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2007.

Table 1 shows the participants' average estimates on a five-point scale. We can see that their highest estimated claims are that the programme offers opportunities to gain new friendships among the participants and that the teachers support the participants. The participants gave minimum importance to items that described their influence over education.

In the following analysis we combine these items according to the aforementioned authors' theoretical assumptions (Darkewald & Valentine 1986; Moos 2002). We formed seven dimensions of the learning environment. The results show that the highest value achieved is the dimension of the relationship between students and the teacher's support. The slightly lower median value followed the view that education is well-organized and has clear goals. Somewhat lower, but still above average, the participants assessed the individual aspects of the educational process (the potential to achieve personal goals and focus on teaching tasks), including a focus on students (for details see Radovan et al. 2008).

Our data also suggests that a learning environment's variables are the most powerful for predicting students' satisfaction with the learning process. Several regression analyses show the great predictive power of learners' satisfaction. The strongest one explains 29.5% of the variance at a significance level of  $p < 0.001$ . We found that the learning environment's five dimensions correlate positively with satisfaction with the learning process:

- Affiliation between the students ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Active involvement of students ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Level of teacher support ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Clear and well-organised activities ( $p < 0.001$ )
- Personal goal attainment ( $p < 0.05$ )

## Age Differences

As we know, educators should give more attention to older participants than to younger ones because the former have specific learning needs and expectations. Our research results show that age causes some major differences in learning perceptions (Radovan et al., 2008). As we can see in Table 2, age influences students' perceptions of all of the learning environment's dimensions, with the exception of active involvement and focus on goals. This analysis found that older participants (over 41 years old) rated almost all items higher than younger people did.

Table 2. Age Differences in Perception of Learning Environment (ANOVA)

	20 or less	21– 30	31– 40	41 or more	F	p
Affiliation	3.69	3.74	3.87	3.84	4.501	.004
Involvement	3.56	3.59	3.64	3.65	.789	.500
Student Influence	3.34	3.40	3.46	3.40	1.516	.209
Teacher Support	3.61	3.64	3.86	3.87	9.621	.000
Task Orientation	3.22	3.37	3.42	3.50	2.951	.032
Organisation and Clarity	3.44	3.62	3.75	3.69	5.292	.001
Personal Goal Attainment	3.07	3.23	3.33	3.40	5.342	.001

Source: LLL2010 Research, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, 2007.

The differences are most significant in the evaluation of teachers' support. The students' estimates of this dimension increase linearly with age ( $F = 9.62, p < .001$ ). Somewhat lower, but still high, are the differences in their perception of their ability to achieve personal goals and the quality of the organisation's education. First was the highest estimate, by respondents older than 41 years ( $F = 5.34, p < 0.001$ ); second were those 31–40 years old ( $F = 5.29, p < 0.001$ ). The differences are statistically significant in the students' perception of group membership ( $F = 4.50, p < 0.005$ ) and thinking that the programme focuses on the task ( $F = 2.95, p < 0.05$ ).

## Conclusions

It is obvious that younger and older students' perceptions of the learning environment differ significantly. In our study, the learners' age caused consistent and significant differences between younger and older students, which appear in five of the seven dimensions. We could ask ourselves what caused this difference. On one hand we can assume that a person's expectations or needs often influence his perceptions, but sometimes it is the other way around. Of course, from these analyses alone we cannot assume the direction of influence, but the findings nevertheless give us a clear message about the specific weight that adults give to and expect from education that they are participating in. So how can we create powerful learning environments that will stimulate older adult learners? If we follow the theory of self-determination, then learning environments must support the following three factors in order to develop students' intrinsic motivation: competence, autonomy, and social relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students' willingness to learn develops spontaneously in learning environments that take into account these needs. Teachers' roles in organising and carrying out instruction is to hold these needs in high regard and respect them.

## Summary

Societies' social and economic transformations have forced more and more adults in Slovenia (and other European countries) to enroll in formal educational programmes to gain qualifications, or for retraining. Numerous reports demonstrate the shifting trends in the age of students in post-secondary and, especially, tertiary education. This study's sample includes 1296 secondary and post-secondary adults from age 18–55 who are participating in a formal adult educational programme. Data were collected as a part of the "Lifelong Learning 2010 – Toward a lifelong learning society in Europe: The contribution of the educational system" project. Older students receive a lot of attention from researchers and teachers in adult educational institutions, and although numerous studies have investigated the differences in motivation between traditional and non-traditional students, research on how age differences impact students' perceptions of their learning environment is limited. For this paper we investigated the nature of those perceptions and their association with age. We try to clearly explain adult participants' perceptions of their learning environment, which raises possible implications for both their motivation to learn, and current teaching and learning practices.

**Key words:** learning environment, motivation to learn, learning satisfaction, formal adult education

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Monika Govekar-Okoliš

## **Characteristics of Mentors in Intergenerational Education**

### **The Influence of the Strategy for Lifelong Learning and Education on Mentors in Intergenerational Education**

One result of the requirement imposed by the European Union on its members to implement a strategy for lifelong learning and education is that Slovenia has adopted the lifelong principle. This has created a need for integration of all the parts of the educational system –throughout one’s life in terms of duration, and in all areas of life with regard to its scope. Through this concept of lifelong learning, both the education of children and young people and adult education, which also includes older adults, should be two complementary parts of a whole, i.e. the educational system. However, it is necessary to take into account specific aspects of the education of children and young people and of adult education. The concept of lifelong learning thus encompasses different types of education and different types of training in all stages of life. One of these types is certainly intergenerational education.

Intergenerational education is a need that has arisen in the present time as a response to the altered conditions and requirements of the modern world, which demands constant learning and education with regard to young people, adults, and older adults. This applies also to those who take on the role of mentors in intergenerational groups. The new duties of mentors relate not only to a higher quality of constant professional development and personal professional growth, but also to the expansion of their professional work from formal to informal education, or to combined education that involves children, young people, adults and older adults. This presents mentors with new responsibilities. With regard to this, mentors need to be familiar with the differences and special characteristics of education involving young people and adults, and take them into account in the process of mentoring intergenerational groups. Moreover, mentors in intergenerational groups must possess specific knowledge in mentorship. It would be beneficial if future mentors in intergenerational education could be trained for this kind of work, as the need for intergenerational education is growing. With this in mind, new professional guidelines for mentors are appearing, directing them towards training in mentoring intergenerational groups and for intergenerational education. Mentors should be aware of their role, their duties, their mentorship and their own lifelong professional development for effective mentoring of individuals through all the periods of their lives.

## **The Importance of Mentors and Their Roles and Duties**

### **The Importance of Mentors**

The basis of the importance of mentors can be found in numerous definitions of the word. Among these definitions, two generally stand out: a mentor is a guide, a teacher, an educator (wise, well meaning), an advisor to a young person; a mentor is a person, who with advice and explanations, guides and leads a young, inexperienced person. Thus we can see that a mentor is in fact a leader and an adviser.

Kejžar (1986) says that a mentor is a person, who with his or her extensive life experience and professional and personal maturity, leads and guides a young person. Daloz (1986) similarly stresses the importance of the mentor as leader. A mentor is a guide, leading someone on the path to a set goal. Zupan-Kušče (1989) sees a mentor as one who encourages a person to constantly improve his or her knowledge, and who encourages curiosity in a person, whilst also creating good, positive relations. All the authors are united by their emphasis on the importance of a mentor as a guide, a motivator and a person who has sufficient experience.

Jarvis (1995) also says that a mentor is a person who responds to the needs of a learner and acts as his or her assistant and guide. He says that mentors must have the necessary knowledge and experience themselves as well as know the abilities of individuals in order to be able to lead them.

Shea (in Parsloe and Wray, 2000) says that through their work, mentors help others in reaching their potential. Gibb (2006) calls a mentor "an executor", who has a personal interest in helping to lead and develop a less experienced person.

These definitions show that a mentor must possess certain personal characteristics and abilities in order to be able to help an individual in his or her professional and personal development. In view of these interpretations of what a mentor is, we can go on to analyse the mentor's role.

### **The Role of the Mentor**

The role of the mentor is described by a number of authors who list and define different roles. Opalk (2003, p.14) sees a mentor as a role model, a motivator and an adviser. She talks about a number of roles in relation to mentors:

- encouraging an individual's professional development,
- creating learning opportunities in communication, critical thought, responsibility, flexibility and team work,
- teaching specific skills,
- creating challenges and assigning responsibilities,
- giving constructive feedback both in relation to an individual's strong and weak points,

- helping to understand the culture of an institution,
- answering questions and being available for discussion,
- encouraging and supporting,
- disseminating information,
- helping an individual in setting up a network of business contacts.

Krajnc (1984, p. 47), on the other hand, says that in the shaping of the role of a mentor two types of mentors are important:

1. mentors who guide and lead systematically along a pre-set path and through planned learning sessions towards knowledge,
2. mentors who do not guide and act in a more relaxed and open way, trying to include in the learning process that which they discover in their student as they go along.

In both types the role of the mentor is the leading one. Which of these two types is better? The answer to this question is difficult, as each mentor type has good points. If we combine the two types, we get just the right combination.

This means that the best mentors are those who have a pre-set path and a teaching plan, but who are at the same time willing to adapt to the newly found needs of an individual on an ongoing basis and, when necessary, change a particular method of work, the timetable or other aspects of the plan.

### **The Role of the Mentor as Leader**

Different authors see the mentor as leader in different ways. Let us single out a few definitions.

Nastran-Ule (1994) says the most important role of the mentor is that of a leader. This role is the one that affects the activities of a particular person, group or institution, making it easier to achieve set goals. Those belonging to these social units (mostly) follow the suggestions, directions or orders of the leader. The role and duties of a leader usually depend on the group being led.

Glasser (1994) also emphasises the role of the mentor as a leader. A mentor-leader cannot force individuals to do their work well. Thus an important duty of a mentor-leader is to lead individuals in such a way that they see a connection between what they are actually doing and what they believe is good work.

We can talk about three types of duties associated with mentors in the role of a leader: psychological, social and professional (Nastran-Ule, 1994, pp. 237-238):

#### *1. Psychological duties of a leader-mentor*

These are related to the demands and needs individuals express to their leader, and thus satisfy them via the leader. This means that the leader can act as psychological support, an identification "figure", and/or a group symbol which gives individuals a feeling of safety, confidence and confirmation. A leader-mentor is the bearer of the main responsibility



for how the whole group functions and feels. On the other hand, a leader-mentor can also be a scapegoat as he or she provides psychological support and acts as the bearer of responsibility who, in the case of the group's failure, takes on the role of the guilty party. Individuals transfer to the leader their guilt in relation to the failure, thus reducing their own feelings of guilt.

### *2. Social duties of a leader-mentor*

These are connected to the organisation of the functioning of a group of individuals and to the climate in the group. The leader-mentor organises and coordinates the division of work among the individuals within the group. He or she also acts as an arbiter in any conflict situations that arise in the group. In addition, the leader-mentor represents the group outwardly, i.e. acts as the group's representative. The leader-mentor is also in charge of dividing the roles and positions among the individuals in the group. And, above all, he or she is the information provider and holds the important role of opinion-maker within the group.

### *3. Professional duties of a leader-mentor*

The professional duties of a leader are the ones that usually spring to mind when we talk about leading:

- a leader coordinates activities,
- a leader plans activities,
- a leader is an expert (ibid).

Cartwright and Zander (in Nastran-Ule, 1994, p. 239) say that the mentor's leadership consists of the activities carried out by the members of the group which contribute towards the identification of the group's goals and which:

- guide the group towards the goals,
- improve interaction among the group members,
- establish cohesion within the group and provide the source of the group's strength.

Secord and Backman (in Nastran-Ule, 1994) claim that the personal characteristics of a leader are not as important as whether these characteristics enable him or her to contribute within specific circumstances towards the realisation of the group's goals. It is important that those being led see the leader as the leader and accept and support him or her.

### **The Role of the Mentor as Adviser**

The role of mentor as adviser is one of the most important. In connection with this, it is important to know what advising actually means. "Advising is an organised form of assistance to an individual in his or her progress, personal growth and development" (Kristančič, 1995, p. 10). If a mentor wishes to understand an individual's needs during the advisory process, he or she must first recognise his or her own motivation and needs. Kristančič and Ostrman (1998, p. 19) offer three areas that jointly influence the establishment of a good advisory relationship:

1. The types and methods of communication used by the mentor-adviser.  
This includes verbal communication, non-verbal communication and contact.
2. The mentor-adviser's emotions.  
A mentor must know what it means to be shy or trusting. He or she must know how to accept others, express and balance emotions and must have the ability to feel.  
The mentor-adviser's thoughts.  
The mentor knows how to use inner speech and must be capable of making realistic decisions. In addition, he or she must understand his or her own thoughts and emotional reactions.

### **The mentor's duties**

There are descriptions of the mentor's duties and the special features of these in both Slovenian and foreign literature.

Brocher (1972) notes that it is the mentor's duty to be constantly ready to learn and supplement his or her knowledge. He stresses the importance of constant learning, which we now call lifelong learning. If a mentor wishes to be an expert, he or she must follow all the new developments and constantly improve his or her professional knowledge.

Furlan (1972) describes the mentor's duties slightly differently. He says that it is the mentor's duty to make an individual free from the need of constant affirmation by the mentor. The individual must learn to stand alone and offer self-directed feedback. This is done in the form of inner speech. And that which is positive in this self-addressed talk serves as self-affirmation for that individual.

Zupan-Kušče (1989) defines a mentor's duty as equipping individuals for the search for new information and helping them to develop the ability to independently and in a targeted manner search for answers to the questions that arise in their work.

From the different definitions of mentors' duties we can conclude that it is their role to influence the individual's personal capacity for creativity and to be on the lookout for factors that hinder the individual's successful learning and work. A mentor must also monitor the individual's motivation, his or her emotional experiences and the success of their work. Another duty is to take care of his or her own professional development.

### **Characteristics of an Effective Mentor**

Individuals need as effective a mentor as possible, one that knows how to lead, has clear objectives and helps an individual identify what he or she wishes to achieve. An individual must, for example, learn about the institution and the members of the group in which he or she finds him or herself during the mentoring process.

Krajnc (1984, pp. 46–53) believes that the effectiveness of a mentor becomes obvious when the mentor reaches the highest point in mentorship assisted education, when the

mentor and an individual face each other in a dyadic relationship, i.e. a cooperation between two people.

Brajša (1983, pp. 107–121) puts effective, clear communication at the top of the list of the characteristics of an effective mentor. The mentor's communication must be coherent, which means that a mentor expresses verbally and through behaviour exactly what he or she actually thinks and feels. In this way he or she gains an individual's trust. In addition to clear communication, a mentor must recognise differences in thinking and acting and give an individual freedom in order for the individual to be able to develop in a different way to the one the mentor would select. In spite of a certain psychological proximity, the mentor should respect and maintain a "distance" in a relationship with an individual. A mentor must also be capable of communicating as an individual's equal – "both you and I" – and must not put the other person in a subordinate position while they are working together. This means that a mentor must recognise the capacity of the other person to be responsible and to successfully complete the learning process.

Opalk (2003, p. 15) emphasises the importance of the mentor as a person who reflects on his or her own role, expectations, prejudices and limitations. A mentor can be truly effective when he or she puts aside his or her own ambitions, hopes and fears and instead considers those of the mentored person, as only then is the mentor ready to develop a truly effective mentoring relationship.

Clutterbuck (1994, pp. 44–52) links the effectiveness of the mentor with a positive atmosphere – the mentor is the one who is able to create such an atmosphere and encourage the individual to trust the mentor. A mentor must also know how to communicate, i.e. be able to actively listen and pose open questions. In this way, the mentor creates a successful learning climate, knows how to forge genuine human relationships, uses empathy and knows how to view things as objectively as possible.

Thus communication skills are very important in a mentor. The mentor should be as democratic, decisive, creative and confident as possible. This creates greater trust in the mentored person. It is also important that the mentor is a "thinking practitioner". This can be achieved when a mentor learns from his or her own experiences and includes them in his work and when he or she knows how to connect theoretical knowledge to practical work. A mentor must be responsible for his or her own professional training, his or her own lifelong learning and education.

### **The Characteristics of a Poor, Ineffective Mentor**

If one wishes to be an effective mentor, one must also recognise the characteristics of a bad, ineffective mentor. The label of a bad or ineffective mentor tells us that the relationship between the mentor and the individual is not successful. In this case we can say that the mentor and the individual did not hit it off, as there is no real connection between them and the mentorship process is ineffective. In such a relationship there are also con-

flicts that have not been satisfactorily resolved. The communication is of the wrong type.

Various problems can arise between a mentor and a trainee. The most obvious, according to Opalk (2003, p. 17), include the mentor failing to give enough attention to the trainee, failing to see the trainee's limitations and expecting too much. A mentor can also be too protective and supervise an individual too much, not taking into account and not understanding an individual's abilities and interests. A mentor can also be incapable of giving negative feedback in a creative way or failing to provide enough structure in the mentorship.

Rečnik (2004, pp. 53–54) draws attention to the possible inappropriate forms of verbal communication between the mentor and the individual, mentioning “threat and warning” expressed by the mentor. What is referred to here are orders which are followed by a consequence if they are not obeyed. The individual feels frightened and develops a hostile relationship to and a dislike of the mentor. “Preaching and moralising” by the mentor is also inappropriate as communication of this kind is based on authority, obligations and duties. The individual defends him or herself by feeling offended, as he or she feels weak and also guilty for not having gained the mentor's trust. Criticism by the mentor creates feelings of inferiority in the individual. Criticism (short-term or long-term) does not have a positive effect. An individual who is criticised fails to progress and develops a negative self-image. Diagnosing is another inappropriate form of verbal communication. This means unprofessional diagnosing, i.e. drawing conclusions and communicating to an individual the reasons for particular behaviour, thus telling him or her that the mentor knows the reasons for the way the individual is behaving. The individual perceives this message as a threat. The message of diagnosing is that the mentor knows everything and can see an individual's inner thoughts and motives (*ibid.*).

## **Conclusion thoughts**

Mentorship in intergenerational education of young people, adults and older adults signifies only one of the roles of an expert who leads, guides, advises, provides training, etc. Within an intergenerational group he or she appears simultaneously as the individual's mentor, helping the individual with personal growth, learning and training, whilst at the same time contributing towards the development, creativity and the work of a group as a whole.

Being a mentor in intergenerational education means that the mentor, irrespective of the various roles and duties associated with the role that we have mentioned above, also possesses the fundamental pedagogical and andragogical knowledge. Mentors must be familiar with and implement the particulars of learning, training and working that are specific to children, young people and adults. He or she must take into account the specifics of the preparation of the training programme in line with the needs of the intergenerational group. Through mentoring work in an intergenerational group, the mentor must create a suitable link between professional, theoretical and practical knowledge.

This is why the mentor must have suitable professional training for conducting intergenerational education, and experience in working with and educating young people and adults, as well as having abilities required for effective mentoring and leading individuals of different ages within a group. This means that in addition to being familiar with the roles and duties of the mentor, he or she must also be familiar with the characteristics of an effective and ineffective mentor in order to be able to conduct intergenerational education successfully.

## Summary

This contribution deals with the influence of the strategy for lifelong learning and education on the role and importance of mentors in intergenerational education. The article includes a general definition of the importance of the mentor and of his or her role and duties, and a description of the characteristics of both effective and ineffective mentors. These definitions help provide guidelines as to how mentors can effectively carry out their work in intergenerational education.

**Key words:** mentor, intergenerational education, the importance of the mentor, the role of mentor, effective mentor, ineffective mentor

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Dušana Findeisen

## **Is there a difference?**

# **An Interview with a Mentor Working with Groups of Older Adults**

Mentoring older adults does not resemble teaching, or at least it shouldn't! Moreover, mentoring older adults is not about knowledge transmission, but something far from it! It is about the adults' and their mentor's personal growth, and it is about enabling older adults to remain full and contributing members of society. It is also about empowering them, making them understand the world around them and their position in this world. Finally, mentoring older students makes us aware of older people as real people -- as older individuals and not as people to be dealt with and approached on the basis of the characteristics of their social group.

Following is an interview by Dušana Findeisen with the painter **Miran Erič** on the group **Turtle**, a painting study circle at the Slovenian Third Age University, and the dilemmas posed by teaching younger adults and mentoring older students.

In his education as well as in his life, the painter Miran Erič has pursued a course that can hardly be described as leading straight to his goals. Winding as if in a quest, blessed with some happy coincidences, his path seems to have provided him with plenty of precious insights and opportunities for social learning, and learning in general. He spent several years studying at the Teachers' College before he enrolled at the Academy of Plastic Arts. There he met a colleague who shared his love of diving, which led him to his specialist studies, and subsequently to a Master's Degree in the conservation of wet wood. Although focused on painting, the course was interdisciplinary and included archeological perspectives. This brought him later to the Department of Archeology of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana.

**D.F.: You have pursued a very individual course in education, as well as in life. There has been a great deal of search and exploration along the way. Could you perhaps tell us what your work, say, at the Faculty of Archaeology, your present employer, involves? What do you find most exciting in your work?**

I think I have come to love working with individual students as a result of my past experience which has provided me with insights into people, their behaviour, their minds and emotions. I like to encourage them, to discover together with them the direction that is right for them. I love to work with each of them individually. I do not think I like methods of teaching in which the teacher is separated from the students, with the teacher on one side being the knowledgeable authority and the students on the other side, in experi-



enced and supposedly ignorant. Why ignorant? Just because they do not have my years of experience? I like learning from my students and I like seeing them learn from me.

**D.F.: You have come forward to talk to us unsolicited, since you feel that in the twenty years of working with a study circle at Third Age University, one of the very first groups established, you have gained plenty of experience, which after deep reflection you have transformed into generalisations. You would like to pass this onto others. Has there been anything else that has induced you to make this step?**

Actually, yes. I have been led by the wish to counter the persistently negative view of artists and painters of mature age. The group Turtle (Želva), with whom I have spent an entire twenty years, has become a group of good painters. The most important thing, however, is that over these twenty years their painting intelligence has greatly improved. They use it when painting and to appreciate works of other painters, sculptors and architects.

The aesthetic criteria they have adopted impact their way of thinking; they affect them as individuals and they affect their social environment. I believe this is quite important and it makes me wonder why official critics, art historians, editors and others show no interest at all in the work of retired people, as if they did not exist any longer. I would resent seeing myself, or my children when old, treated in this manner. This is why I am doing all I can to fight such prejudice. Right now the Turtle members are exhibiting at KUD Prešeren (Cultural and Arts Centre) - another in the series of exhibitions that have enriched the cultural programme of this institution.

**D.F.: How and when did you come to see that older people form a segment of society that is very much alive and highly motivated - provided they are supported in their rejection of aggressive social stereotypes that push them into passivity and dependence?**

I remember the beginnings of the Third Age University. We were working in an old people's home. Every now and then a curious resident popped in for a moment. The difference between them and my students was striking. My students were mentally alert, sparkling with curiosity-- you could feel they wanted to create something good, to learn, to grow. At that time I first realized that if we want old people to remain an active part of society, to be creative and to experience personal growth, they have to be put in the middle of life. They should meet in the centre of the town, in the places where they are spatially connected with other people and their activities, so that there is a flow between them. In the past, people of different ages used to live and work together. Only with the industrial age was a strong division established between people of different ages. But we need each other. Each of us is a source of learning for others, older people in particular. It is not true that only today's experience counts, as we are led to believe. Older people have a view of the world around them as well as the future. We should listen to what they

have to say in the same way we listen to what our own generation says - it will make it easier to take the right decisions.

**D.F.: You said that old people should be put in the middle of life. How did you manage to do this for your group?**

Well, we first got connected with a primary school by means of a common curriculum. I remember us having the same motives as the children. They hosted us for a very long time. Then I realised that I was an active member of KUD France Prešeren (Local Cultural and Arts Centre), so the Turtle moved its activities there. This brought about a change in the programme policy of the organization, turning it into a real "community centre". It opened up to receive everybody – and so the project named "From 1 to 99" got started. In the belief that local development should be based on people of all ages and social groups, and that besides the official culture, there should also exist the culture generated by the members of the community themselves, my students were invited to participate in the annual programme activities of the Centre. They gladly accepted the challenge. We have been cooperating with this organization ever since. Our contribution is one exhibition per year.

**D.F.: You have been working with one single group for a very long time. When you started, did you foresee that it was going to last so long?**

No, not at all. Well, I had in mind the familiar scheme, a course of education lasting a given number of years. Eight years, four years, another four years and so on. I had not foreseen that people would be coming to me to gain knowledge; neither did I know how important it would become for us to meet socially – on a particular day. Tuesday was the day they had chosen. On Tuesday they come in with their portfolios, loaded with brushes, paints, etc. It is their day. Little by little it has become my day too. Timetables should be fixed; they cannot be changed. Why not? Because for older people learning, and in our case painting in a group, constitutes their way of life; it is a fixed element of their day-to-day routine. When I understood that, I started asking myself what the role of the teacher or mentor was in such a group -- no doubt broader than what I had first imagined. I see myself now as a leader, an advisor, a bridge between them and ...the works of art, events in the town, etc. Occasionally I find myself dealing with a pathological case, the consequence of the severe psycho-social deprivation in this social group. The teacher is more of an animator, a person connecting, motivating and guiding people, deciding together with them on the goals and content of the work to be done, a person who knows their lives. Interestingly, however, he is also accepted by the group as one of its members. In this way the group also tends to solve his dilemmas and enters his life.... In short, mutual relationships arise, shared learning and experiences, a joint professional career and, partly, a joint course of life.

**D.F.: Is this how you felt from the very beginning?**

By no means! When I started I was permeated with the ideas I had received during my own education and the experience of teaching in primary school. I believed that curriculum was of the highest importance. In the first week we would learn this, in the second week that, after a year.... The objective was always to reach a certain level, and in the end everybody would become a graduated artist. Well, nearly everybody.

I would rush frantically forward and every now and then look back to see if my students were following. Then I sensed something was very wrong and so we started talking about how they were doing, how they were feeling and what they were wishing. That was the first breakthrough on my path. I realized that the learners were what mattered the most in the learning process. Everything should take second place to them. The starting point is each single individual. We must not make our students do what they do not feel like doing. There may be things they will never really master, no matter how much effort they would put forth.

One of my students is unable to master perspective. She simply cannot do it. She has a sight deficiency, a consequence of a severe flu: with one eye she sees one object, with the other another, but from a different angle. So what? This is her idiosyncrasy. She might be said to have the vision of a Kandinsky - cubic. Some painters would wish to look and see things this way - from various angles. My task is to help her bring this out, to stress it.

However, not all peculiarities are so obvious. Many are hidden and it is the task of the mentor to discover and consider them in order to help each individual grow. You can develop only what you have got, not what you have not. Obviously, not everything that is there is positive. Learning, however, emerges also from what may seem to be negative. Of course, this does not mean that our students should be doing only what they are already capable of and what pleases them. Techniques need to be learnt, but, for God's sake, let us allow them their individual expression. Let us not make them copies of ourselves. We do not want them to be good copyists, but good painters!

#### **D.F.: How much should a mentor get involved in his students' work?**

Well, in this regard I have also gained a new understanding. At the beginning we did everything nicely in the proper order. This went on for a couple of years, actually. We spent quite some time on still life, too much time.... At the beginning my students expected me to do a lot of things for them, to arrange their compositions, to choose motives for them. Slowly I realized that they would profit more if they did everything by themselves. They resented it for quite some time. I remember deliberately leaving them alone. They grumbled that I was just walking around and would only occasionally cast an eye on what they were doing and comment on their work. But slowly they learned to trust themselves, their own perception and their own judgement. They also found support in their classmates and their comments. My professional view became just a view. And they slowly stopped grumbling.

**D.F.: You mentioned that painting means a way of living for your students? How did you manage to achieve this?**

After a few years I started feeling that we had stalled. We had got used to one another. Every Tuesday their portfolios were brought to class and then taken home again, with the pictures made during my class. And in the meantime? Nothing happened between two sessions. I realized in horror that my students would never become painters unless they lived with painting, unless their whole life was pervaded by painting, thinking about colours, motives, forms. Yes, it was nice talking with them about painting; it helped me to maintain my "painting form" now that my professional life had taken another turn, away from art, which I regretted. Still, I was aware that we had stopped making progress. I said to myself: well, they no longer need me as a mentor; I am at the end of my resources. What shall I do? Walk away and leave them? Then I got the idea. They will have to work at home and bring pictures to the class to have them analyzed and commented on. They grumbled a bit, as if their father was abandoning them. Two members quit, but the rest stayed. It took a while before they all began to bring pictures and have them analyzed. They realized that not doing it would exclude them from the group. And so they slowly began to work. And not only to work, to paint, but also to live as painters. And that was my goal. I believe that once the students become ready to work independently, when they find their own expression, the mentor will learn a great deal too.

**D.F.: Listening to you makes one feel that in your eyes the group has a special power.**

Certainly, everything happens within the group. But the group is not something static; it is not a series of individuals. It is a living organism, with changing moods. It will set itself a goal and pursue it. Everything will go well as long as there is a challenge. In the time immediately before the goal is attained, everybody feels tense, as if facing a major decision. The mentor must then be able to release the tension. If some members of the group become competitive, their mild aggressiveness needs to be channelled into common achievement, and negative energy turned into positive. The peak is public presentation with reviews and feedback. Then there is satisfaction following the achievement, resolution that it will be even better next time. Then a decline in interest, repose.... Each week has its own inner dynamics, each month, each season. Like the life of an individual, the life of the group has its ups and downs. It is important that the mentor should sense the inner pulsing and rhythm and not counter that. Still, it is essential that he is able to set worthwhile goals and to offer support.

**D.F.: Is there anything you wish for your group?**

I would like them to be given the attention they deserve by professionals, art critics, politicians and others. I find it unfair in comparison with many who are noticed and acknowledged although they have much less to show. I would like to see some research focus on this group in order to present and record their achievements and to make a generaliza-

tion of all the valuable insights gained... Anyway, we will continue to paint. We are about to produce an almanac and a catalogue, which will reaffirm our identity to the public. And the feedback, who does not need that as much as we need our daily bread?

*Translated from Slovene by Majda Ažman Bizovičar*

Jolana Gubalová

# Information and Communication Technologies in Education of the Elderly

## Lifelong Learning and Lifelong Guidance in Slovakia

The statistical survey from 2009 showed that only about 5% of citizens of the Slovak Republic between 25 – 64 years of age participated in lifelong learning. The natural social and economic development of the recent time in Slovakia generated a whole societal need of lifelong learning. Lifelong guidance strategy (LLL and LLG Strategy) was the tool for forming a knowledge society, the formation of which is undoubtedly a priority of the government, declared in the Program declaration of the Government of the Slovak Republic, in accordance with the program goal: *„The Government of the Slovak Republic considers the forming of the knowledge society to be its priority because only such society constitutes a precondition of democratic development, science and technological progress, economic growth and social security, employment and growth.“* (Program Declaration of the Government of the Slovak Republic, August 2006)

## Description of the Education Systems

### Formal education

The formal system of education shows a high level of restriction and a relatively low ability to constructively utilise complementary functions of non-formal systems of education in order to shorten the time necessary for obtaining a new qualification or an extension of the original one. It issues, with a few exemptions (e.g. fire protection technician, tourist guide), officially recognised qualification certificates.

The most significant deficit of the formal system of education is its low capability to respond flexibly to newly created professions, and to the implementation of new technologies and innovations in practical life through the creation of new learning and study programs. The length of the creation and implementation process for new learning and study programs is often too long, and does not correspond to the needs and demands of employers and the market.

### Non-formal education

The non-formal system of education is extraordinary for its ability to instantly respond to new education needs, and for its innovation and implementation of new technologies through creation of “tailor made” education programs.

Its deficit is that it does not provide formally recognised certificates on partial or full qualification, and also that it does not have a state-controlled management quality system,

which would provide a high level of non-formal education equal to the quality of formal education.

### **Informal learning**

At present the least utilised subsystem of education is one which is based on man's natural abilities to learn. This could then potentially lead to obtaining formal recognition of one's abilities, by providing all conditions necessary for the practical mastery of a profession (learning by doing).

### **Lifelong guidance**

The services of lifelong guidance in the Slovak Republic are provided primarily under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The current system of guidance insufficiently covers certain groups of citizens: the employed population, craftsmen and self-employed persons, unemployed out of evidence, the population in the post-productive age, and marginal groups.

### **Quality of Lifelong Learning**

The system of quality management of non-formal education is directly anchored in the legal regulations referring to formal education on all levels.

In the future Quality management in the non-formal system of education will be guaranteed through the national authority, established by and under the supervision of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic. Following the prepared legislative draft of the future lifelong learning act, the national authority shall fulfill the tasks authorised to certify educational institutions to accredit programs of non-formal education in a modular form, with assigned credits to particular modules; to certify lecturers and managers of non-formal education as well as the counsellors, and in this way guarantee state control over the quality of lifelong learning and lifelong guidance.

### **Information and Communications Technology in Lifelong Learning**

In this period educators have high hopes for information and communications technology (ICT). ICT has been seen as a potentially powerful tool for improving the educational process and increasing access to learning by the disadvantaged. Can it live up to these hopes? Does it have particular relevance to the needs of adults with inadequate educational qualifications or low literacy skills?

In my opinion, increasing motivation is a key factor in encouraging less confident learners to re-engage in structured learning. But ICT is not a panacea. It is not an alternative to teachers. Teaching new literacies requires more sophisticated technical expertise and support than has ever been the case in adult literacy education. Educators require strong operational skills and access to high-quality, reliable equipment and technical support.

## **Project GRUNDTVIG: TANDEMS GO! “Twinning the elderly and young people as a possibility of e-learning”**

This project responds to the needs of elderly citizens in Europe and offers them the possibility to gain knowledge in the field of information and communication technologies. Besides professional trainers, training is also provided by young students who, in pairs with the seniors, communicate through the use of modern information technologies. This project will run from 1 August 2008 to 31 July 2010. The co-ordinator of the project is Starowstwo Powiatowe Mikolow in Poland, and the following seven partner organisations are taking part in it:

1. E-SENIORS organization Paris, France,
2. VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTER N.E.L.E- PREFECTURE OF THESPROTIA IGOUMENITSA, Greece,
3. MEHMET HASAN SERT ILKOGRETIM OKULU – OKUL AILE BIRLIGI Konya, Turkey,
4. Câmara Municipal de Grândola, Portugal,
5. Health and Safety Unit - Education Division Floriana, Malta
6. LJUDSKA UNIVERZA AJDOVŠČINA, Slovenia,
7. Matej Bel University of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.

The project team from Matej Bel University is made up of teachers of the Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations, and the Third-Age University (Senior University). The partners conduct their activities at their home institutions and then exchange their experience, knowledge and teaching materials.

Within the project the Third-Age University has so far realized a series of three workshops with the following focus:

- A. searching for information on the internet – working with the internet search engines/browsers,
- B. working with e-mail,
- C. discussion forums on the internet, blogs and social networks (i.e. Facebook).

The target group was the senior students of the Third Age University and regular students of the two above mentioned faculties, who paired with the seniors. The junior students gradually introduced their older colleagues to the work with the internet, taught them various ways of searching for information and methods of communication. The sessions were conducted in a very friendly working environment.

At the end of the program, all seniors filled in electronic questionnaires published in the university LMS Moodle system to evaluate some aspects of the workshops.





*Figure 1: Workshop in the computer room*



*Figure 2: Working in tandem*

**Here are some of the questions and answers:**

1. Are you satisfied with the number of workshops (3)?

Yes	No	I can't say
86%	7%	7%

2. Which factors were most motivating for you for the participation in the workshops?

Curiosity	I need it for my work	I need it for private purposes	Trainer/teacher	Friends	Other factors
14%	7%	29%	22%	14%	14%

3. The most useful knowledge I gained:

Searching for information on the internet	Work with e-mail	Communication through chatting	Blogs	Personal presentation on Facebook or Picassa
43%	29%	7%	7%	14%

4. Did you like the co-operation with your junior partner??

Yes	No	I can't say
100%	0%	0%

5. Will you stay in contact with your partner??

Yes	No	I can't say
93%	0	7%

The results of questionnaires and interviews confirm that most of the participants responded positively to this method of education and gained a lot of new knowledge and IT skills.

As an experienced teacher, I must say that I personally was surprised by the result. In the beginning I was a bit sceptic about this kind of education and could not imagine all possible aspects of it. My fears were not realized; the age gap between seniors and juniors was bridged successfully and the communication and exchange of information went smoothly. At present we are running our third series of the educational workshops in which the experience and knowledge from previous workshops is being used.

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Nives Ličen

## Case Study: Intergenerational Learning in Primary School

At the Centre for Adult Education of Ajdovščina, a network linking a primary school, a people's university and a university was established in the context of the Grundtvig project "Tandems go!" This network provided a framework for an intergenerational learning project which aimed to encourage older people to learn by working in tandem with primary school students. Together they learned computer skills, which were then used to record stories reflecting local culture and history. The stories were found in the local oral history. These stories had never before been recorded in writing, but had only been passed down orally.

First, the domestic and foreign practices of intergenerational learning were analysed and cultural environment was systematically observed. For this purpose, several conversations were held with primary school teachers and some children of Alexandrian women (*Slov. Aleksandrinke*, i.e. women who worked in Egypt). The aim was to find topics that would be of interest to the younger as well as the older participants. Next, a programme was prepared focusing on the stories of women who had migrated to Egypt during the economic crisis in the previous century, namely Alexandrian women.

Such a choice of topic allowed for the project to address not only intergenerational but also intercultural issues. Interculturality, which is becoming a principle in the global society, has long been part of this environment, not only due to the fact that the geographical environment has been included in various states (Austrian, Italian, Yugoslav) and language communities throughout history, but also to people's going abroad and returning. The stories revolving around multiculturalism are on the "ship of memories", and we wanted to find them. The migrants' stories were chosen as studies show that intergenerational learning in small local environments requires a topic that brings people together and points towards the possibilities for development. In our case, the topic might contribute to the development of rural and cultural tourism. It is the latter which implies the preservation of one's foundations for the purpose of "staged authenticity" in the context of tourism.

The following chapters present a part of the action research carried out in the context of the project, which involved groups of pupils and elders.

### Intergenerational Learning

Throughout history, intergenerational learning has taken place in various environments

such as at work, in the family, at events, rituals, etc. Older people passed their knowledge on to the young. Nowadays, intergenerational learning is not only about passing on knowledge and insights gained. The rapid growth of novelties also encourages joint learning, as new problems call for a joint approach and joint learning.

The project was based on the findings of intergenerational education (Hatton-Yeo, Ohsako 2008, 2002). The term “intergenerational education programmes” refers to organized educational activities bringing together different generations, usually with a least a gap of two generations between them. Such activities enrich all participants, increase mutual understanding (familiarity) and help build a more close-knit, cohesive community. If bonding is to occur spontaneously, networks take much more time to form (if they form at all), so professional associations and policies encourage intergenerational interactions. Intergenerational learning requires institutional support and encouragement. There are numerous opportunities for this; programmes can be organised by educational institutions (centres for adult education, universities, schools), political organisations, trade unions, societies and charity groups (Caritas, intergenerational camps), parks, tourist organisations (intergenerational tourism), etc.

Intergenerational education programmes are built upon models of informal education, which are gaining ground (Hager, Halliday 2009). Also considered are the principles of interactive planning and learning in everyday life, as presented by the models of experiential and narrative learning. Emphasis is placed on innovative and participatory learning.

Modern intergenerational education programmes were first developed at the end of 1970's in the USA and have since evolved into a multitude of various programmes. With regard to knowledge acquisition, the programmes are divided into the following types:

- A. elders guiding/mentoring youth,
- B. youth mentoring elders,
- C. youth and elders collaborating, learning together,
- D. youth and elders socialising.

Our project used the third approach; the old and the young were learning together.

### **Project work and research**

The research was particularly focused on intergenerational education provided in local communities and dealing with local culture. We were interested in local knowledge which, as a result of our inability to evaluate and reflect on it, is fading away in the face of modern trends. Thus, the social theories of learning were used as an analytical tool, based on the *Communities of Practice* model developed by Lave and Wenger (2009, 1991).

The Communities of Practice model views learning as a social process. To enter a culture's practice is to establish relationships not only with the current but also with the former

pillars of common practice, especially with those whose achievements and experience affect contemporary culture. When becoming immersed in their local culture, children get in touch not only with the living but also with myths. In the local cultures of the Vipava Valley and Goriška, the stories of Alexandrian women are a treasury of tales and possibilities for narrative learning.

In line with the action research method, various intergenerational learning models were first studied, after which the platform was prepared. Several instances of intergenerational learning were analysed. We studied examples of intergenerational learning in an orchestra as well as in an intergenerational Caritas summer camp, which were projects carried out by the Third Age University of Slovenia (Ianus), a Maribor Adult Education Centre's project (*Seniors in Action*). We also studied a project on computer education for grandparents, which had been carried out by the People's University of Koper. Moreover, we analysed several websites presenting intergenerational projects (intergenerational tourism, intergenerational programmes in a natural park). The *Intergenerational Country Project* is an intergenerational tourism project, wherein participants visit domestic as well as foreign places (e.g. Japan, in a project carried out by Penn State University and *Projektbüro Dialog der Generationen*). Most programmes prove intergenerational learning to be a form/strategy that allows various topics to be explored and various methods to be implemented.

Practice shows that the content is very important. The topic must engage all group members, so we chose one from local history that would be of interest to all groups.

### **Method: Participatory Action Research**

Action research is a process of systematic reflection, enquiry and activities carried out by individuals in the field of their professional practice (Norton 2009) in order to improve it. Action research combines the acts of changing and researching; it is an activity "disciplined" with research. Literature largely describes action research as a problem solving activity. Our research, however, focuses on innovation rather than problem solving. A reflective practitioner examines his/her practice and forms new models not only to solve the problems he/she encounters but also to creatively develop the practice. By means of action research, practical knowledge is acquired. Validity is ensured by applying triangulation to the method and time of data collection, as well as by interpreting the results through several theoretical concepts.

Action research planning was followed by establishing the basic questions; namely, we asked ourselves what was going on, what to change and how to change it.

#### **What is going on?**

The process: We observe demographic changes, identify the need to improve attitudes toward older people as well as the problem of e-literacy with older people, and search for possibilities to connect both the activity and role of the school within the local com-

munity. Upon critical reflection, the data collection methods are determined. Qualitative methods, interview and observation are decided upon.

### **What to change?**

The process: We want to implement a project that will combine the cultural tradition and community experience related to the migrations to Egypt with modern e-technology and storytelling. We wish to bring together groups of elders and pupils.

### **How to change?**

We will establish a project network (primary school, centre for adult education, university) and prepare an intergenerational education project. By participating in the Grundtvig project, we will also learn from other people's experiences in order to develop the programme of non-formal intergenerational learning.

### **What happens after the change?**

After the first year and completion of the e-literacy course, i.e. in spring 2009, satisfaction and the desire for continuation of the project were observed. The activities were planned to continue in school year 2009/2010. We participated in panels, thus gaining useful information in discussions with other experts.

These phases were followed by further observation, evaluation, and analysis of the data obtained through evaluation. The change that had been introduced was reconsidered with regard to the objective of education programmes and features of the local culture, which affected the choice of topic for intergenerational learning. In the first year (2008/2009) the intergenerational learning project focused on improving e-literacy among elders, while in the second year (2009/2010) it concentrated on using the acquired knowledge to record stories on the migrations or memories of the migrants. Seeking the knowledge hidden in personal, family stories, we also organised a visit from a daughter of an Alexandrian woman to the Tandem club.

In the process of memory gathering, we wished to encourage reflection on the experience of other cultures, life in other places and contact with other languages, as well as meditation on how established values and knowledge affect the present. In the local environment, Alexandrian women were important "change bringers". Many life stories revolved around Egypt and, as research (e.g. Škrlić 2009) suggests, their influence still resounds.

### **Action research findings**

Nine tandems were included in the group. The meetings were held in the computer classroom of the Dornberk primary school. The staff included three primary school teachers, a people's university education coordinator and a university researcher.

After the first year, during which computer education was provided to the elders paired

with pupils, results were gathered and evaluated. Then, activities were planned for the following year. The plans for the follow-up project 2009/2010 included the following objectives:

- to foster appreciation for local history,
- to introduce youth to the local culture through stories,
- to present personal histories through life stories.

Learning about Alexandrian women in the context of local history is aimed at encouraging reflection on similar issues in the modern world such as interculturality, migration, discrimination, intolerance and exclusion.

The set goals are to be attained by means of: collecting stories about migrations, recording stories in e-form, inviting a daughter and a granddaughter of Alexandrian women for a visit and conversation with the group.

After the second year (2010), data was collected in various ways. The following methods were used:

- teacher's observation,
- focused discussion with the Slovenian team staff,
- informal evaluation with the participants (discussion after meetings).

The findings were summarised with regard to individual participant groups:

#### A. Students/children:

- at the end, they expressed satisfaction, and even enthusiasm, for group work with elders;
- at the beginning of the project, many had had doubts; individual animation was required;
- after the first year, all participants wanted to and did continue to participate in the project;
- after the second year, they expressed satisfaction and willingness to participate in similar projects;
- the participating students are more patient, tolerant with slow learners, and understanding and cooperative during classes,
- changed their communication with teachers (improved attitude and communication; it seems as if assuming a different role made them realise the complexity of education, and as a result the relationship between the participating teachers and students improved);
- the students showed high motivation for work, which is illustrated by the students' asking if they could still work on an occasion when the meeting was to be cancelled due to a teacher's absence.



It can be concluded that intergenerational programmes go beyond their pure content, as the participants learn relationships as well.

**B. Students/elders:**

- expressed satisfaction with the acquired knowledge and enthusiasm for learning,
- experienced the idea that new technologies open doors to information (enthusiasm about the internet),
- wish to progress faster,
- expressed intention to continue using the computer,
- expressed intention to participate in similar projects in the future.

**C. With regard to the environment:**

The children's parents were happy to see their children working in intergenerational pairs. An intergenerational program proves to be a good way to include children into the community, enrich the education plan and improve the students' work ethics.

The project received local media coverage (television and newspaper), thus promoting the school within the community.

**D.** The group of project staff (primary school teachers, people's university education coordinators, a university researcher), which had first been formed as a project team, evolved into a community of practice. A learning network was formed, which was a learning environment for innovative learning and cooperation in other professional challenges.

Intergenerational programmes affect the "socialisation" (mutual acceptance and motivation) of the young and the old working in tandem; apart from acquiring knowledge and gaining new insights, senior citizens are encouraged to learn in other fields as well.

## **Conclusion**

Educational institutions willing to seek new ways of learning and education play a key part in the development of innovative practices. One such field is intergenerational learning. Schools at all levels of education have a great influence on intergenerational cooperation and learning. The concluding thoughts bring forward some findings which may lead to new action research.

The rapid development of e-technology has opened up new learning opportunities for all population groups. As opportunities alone cannot ensure that various population groups will actually take part in education projects, qualified animators are required to inform, motivate and introduce various groups of people to e-learning, particularly those expected to encounter many obstacles.

The project's findings raise questions for further research, testifying to the theoretical and methodological development, namely:

- How can life stories help us to understand incidental learning, which occurs in inter-generational and intercultural relations?
- How can we further develop intergenerational learning didactics?

Even among groups differing from one another in terms of their members belonging to different generations with different values, there are enough activities to bring them together. There is always a certain level of mutual familiarity or unfamiliarity. Education can contribute greatly to raising the level of mutual familiarity and cooperation.

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