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Characteristics of Intergenerational Education Findings from eight case studies

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Abstract : Intergenerational education has developed as a social practice enabling the education and formation of social networks among individuals, associations and institutions as manifested by the results of international action research on intergenerational education in duration of two years.

Intergenerational education was introduced in various environments in eight countries, which present eight parallel case studies. Empirical data was collected through qualitative methods. The programmes were analysed with an emphasis on links between educational institutions and their local environment.

Conclusions of the research: The study establishes efficiency of intergenerational education as a strategy of education and forging links between the younger and older generation and as a method of developing both pedagogy of dialogue and pedagogy of care.

Keywords: intergenerational education, community, case study, school, elderly

INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational activities and solidarity are discussed in various documents, adopted by the United Nations Organization (United Nations, 2007, 2002), while 2012 has been proclaimed the European year of intergenerational cooperation. The subjects of our research, intergenerational learning and education, also form part of this paradigm.

Over the past fifty years, social changes have reduced the potential for spontaneous intergenerational communication. The reasons for this are varied. When adapting to ever-changing life conditions, the family changes and thus loses its basic role of facilitator of intergenerational transfer. Old age is no longer inseparable with the authority of knowledge. People interact predominantly in the same age groups and education is carried out in homogenous age groups. However, living in a fluid world, without solid structures of meanings and relations, increases the importance of joint knowledge creation.

Intergenerational education is interpreted through varied theoretic concepts and principles, for example through the principle of society for all ages and by including the elderly in society (Sanches, 2007; Kobylarek, 2010), through the principles of a just society and the concept of relational goods (cf. Nussbaum, 2010, Gecchele, 2010), and finally through community education (Jelenc Krašovec, Kump, 2009, Bressler et al., 2005). Development of intergenerational programmes also supports the “theoretical trend” in the philosophy of education, which is evident in the

shift from pedagogy of behaviour to pedagogy of relation, to stressing ethics of care and the concept of communicative pedagogy.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the context of this study, intergenerational programmes are defined as planned activities connecting different generations with the purpose of exchanging information, knowledge, experience, feelings and stories – namely, developing a common practice in a way that both generations benefit and that enhances mutual understanding. Reciprocal influences, mutual awareness and respect together with empowerment in the social environment are important.

Modern programmes of intergenerational education began to emerge in the USA in the 1970s. First they pursued goals of connecting the elderly and the young, while in the 1990s other goals developed as well, predominantly building communities through intergenerational education and not only connecting the two outermost population groups. Yet even today, the aim of most programmes is to connect the elderly with the young; most often they are prepared by organizations in the area of elderly education or social work with the elderly. There is less development in the field of primary schools and youth associations, although the research results show positive effects for both groups included in intergenerational programmes.

It is exactly for this reason that our research initially turned to observing connections between an educational institution (school) and groups of the elderly. In the action research, both were included in non-formal education.

Intergenerational programmes are often perceived as projects in which the young help the elderly and in this way build their responsibility towards the community. Modern authors disagree with such a view (cf. Loewen, 1996; Sanches, 2009), as intergenerational education is a model that increases the learning potentials of both target generations. Our research tackled the question of whether this mutual benefit can be confirmed. Our concept of the research derived from findings of MacCallum et al. (2006) who analysed intergenerational programmes in Australia, Cumming-Potvin (2010) and the conclusions presented by Newman and Hatton-Yeo (2008), Boström (2003).

Research of intergenerational learning and creation of intergenerational education models has increased due to several factors, including those referring to the economy, social policy, knowledge management and cooperation in the educational system. Research of intergenerational learning in companies shows that in intergenerational groups, either more conflicts occur, since generations use different languages (Convertino, Farook, Rosson, Carroll & Meyer, 2007), or there is intensive adaptation of one group to the other, which consequently diminishes the potential for intergenerational learning. Expert knowledge is needed to prepare an environment where in situ intergenerational communication and learning can flourish. This challenges not only the economy but also social policy. An ageing population demands different approaches if an inclusive society is

to be established. Since groups of people who are no longer part of the active working population are more at risk of social marginalization, various activities to connect generations into a community have to be developed. Namely, the actual and potential abilities of the elderly population tend to be underestimated. Moreover, the elderly themselves most often nurture wrong beliefs about old age. A great majority of the elderly (above 65 years) acquire new knowledge as successfully as the younger generation provided they have enough opportunities, time and motivation. Contrary to this fact, a study in the Slovene environment showed that 45.7% of adults think that the majority of those above 65 years cannot adapt to changes (Zupančič, Colnerič & Horvat, 2010), which shows a lack of awareness of the elderly's learning potentials.

Intergenerational groups are an environment where, due to various ages and experiences of their members, different symbolic networks appear, promoting cognitive conflict and reflexion on everyday practice. Hanks and Icenogle (2001) suggest that intergenerational dialogue is linked to variety, meaning that conflicts – but also cooperation – may develop between generations. As a result, children should meet with intergenerational experiences early in primary school. In view of all the above, it would be wise to promote systematically intergenerational connections already in the current educational system, which is precisely what we attempted to introduce in our action research.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION RESEARCH

Various models of intergenerational learning have been studied with the action research method. In recent years, there have been many incentives for intergenerational learning in very advanced age groups, and the positive effects of programmes have become evident, for example in homes for the elderly (Krout et al., 2010; Hegeman et al., 2010) and in intergenerational networks in the local environment (Kladnik et al., 1998; Ramovš, 2009). More and more programmes have emerged in the working environment, as described in the Cross-Ages project.

Initial research question

We were interested in how intergenerational learning works in the local environment with regards to the young included in an educational institution, and the elderly included in the local environment. More detailed research questions referred primarily to the functioning of groups in educational programmes.

Due to limitations of the participating groups, our questions were also restricted. We were interested in the following:

(a) agents and relations; (b) motivation for inclusion; (c) methods and efficiency of education; (d) goals; (e) contents; (f) planning and organization.

The conceptual framework for the research was prepared by the researchers who were part of the action group (Ličen, Gubalová, 2010). Our methodological apparatus was based on the action research strategy, use of ethnographic approaches and taking into account characteristics of the case study as the research type. When preparing and carrying out the research we considered findings of andragogic studies on field observations of learning (Merriam, 2002), on qualitative research (Flick, 2009) and on action research (Norton, 2009). The epistemologic principle in qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon from the participants' perspective, so we focused on participation during all phases of our research.

More detailed articulation of the research question was based on social theories of learning and in situ learning as well as narrative learning. We were interested in intergenerational learning that takes place in local communities and is linked to local culture. Together with e-literacy, which was the goal of pair work, we aimed to evaluate and consider the importance of local knowledge, which tends to disappear with global trends. Stories of the elderly were thus the object of collection in intergenerational groups.

Research units and time limits of the study

Our study was idiographic. Individual cases in eight countries, namely Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, France, Greece, Portugal, Malta, and Turkey were considered research cases. During the 2008 - 2010 period, groups

introduced various forms of intergenerational education in their environments. All shared the same method (the young and the elderly learning in pairs) and goal (the elderly should start using the computer for various purposes: e-mail, blogs, Internet surfing, entertainment and exchange of stories).

Research strategy

The main methodological strategy of our project was action research that included eight parallel case studies. The methodological apparatus was formed using qualitative approaches mainly for the following reasons:

- The participating groups were relatively small (from 6 to 12 pairs).
- During the process of collecting empirical data (which continued for two years) groups changed (some joined, some left, some programmes were repeated).
- Participants of different ages were included in the young (from primary school children, aged 10-12 years, to students) and in the elderly groups (from just retired sixty-year-olds to those reaching the age of 95 in homes for the elderly).

Where the participants were children (under 16), we took special care to ensure ethical conduct of the research. All participant data was protected, parents were informed of all procedures and they confirmed activities at

meetings with teachers. Some parents were included in the project as mentors for the children.

The study was set up as a process of systematic observation and reflection on the practice that was introduced. To achieve the highest validity of scientifically substantiated research, we followed the principle of triangulation when collecting and interpreting data. Data was collected in various manners and interpreted through cooperation of experts from different fields of expertise.

Each individual study in a particular country was treated as an independent case study. Each case study was understood as research of a limited system and positioned in the context of a particular country. The whole context of the project, which was the same for all involved, is presented by the ageing of population, the need for intergenerational cooperation and the need of e-literacy of the elderly brought about by development of e-technology.

Various educational and other organizations participated in the research. In various countries, agents from diverse organizations were included: 3 primary schools, 2 secondary schools, 2 universities, 1 home for the elderly, 1 institute for adult education, 1 society, 2 universities for the elderly in establishment, and 1 university for the elderly working within a university. Since we considered each group of a particular country as a unit, we first analysed each individual case and then compared them among themselves at four meetings of expert teams using the focus group method. After the first and the second year we prepared records on observations of

practices which we supplemented in discussion with colleagues at work meetings.

Methods of data collection

The following data collecting methods were used:

Short interview, observing and recording events, surveys, and focus groups (including coordinators of expert groups and representatives of individual units).

Data was collected extensively and recorded in various forms (anecdotic records/diary of special events, interview protocols, questionnaires, minutes of focus group meetings).

Interviews were carried out with adult participants (students, the elderly, mentors). Interviews were performed by individual mentors after the end of the first year and after the end of the second year. When education was carried out only in one study year, the interview was carried out at the end of the programme. Conversational research interviews, i.e. short interviews with open-ended questions, were used. The interviews lasted from 20 to 30 minutes and answers were promptly recorded.

Another method used by teachers was the method of anecdotic records (diary of special events). The methods of teacher's observation and records were used to monitor pupils or students. All records are anonymous and comply with research ethics where children were involved.

Focused discussion (focus groups) was used with colleagues from other countries, taking place at four expert meetings. During these visits we participated in educational meetings of intergenerational groups in the relevant country and thus we could observe work in groups.

Two principles, namely participatory attitude and reflective approach, were applied in our research.

Data processing

All records were first arranged in groups including case studies from participating countries. After that, data was collected and processed according to common research questions. In this process, joint meetings and analyses in the focus group were important, as they contributed considerably to understanding and interpreting the recorded data.

When arranging data, we separately monitored the information that observers found about the achievements of children and the young and about the achievements of the elderly.

Children's achievements have been summarized according to mentors' observations (notes) and interviews with teachers.

Achievements of the elderly have been summarized according to interviews with the elderly and according to mentors' observations (notes).

Characteristics of planning and pursuing our goals were summarized according to discussions with mentors.

INTRODUCTION OF CHANGE

After analysing examples of good practice in other environments (the following projects were studied for the purpose of the research: Ianus, Seniors in Action, Intergenerational Country, EAGLE, Tacitus, Age Management), some more important factors were revealed and consequently included in the programmes when they were introduced.

The following factors were established as significant:

Environment where the programme takes place, which influences the frequency of individuals meeting each other (i.e. in a working environment employees are in mutual contacts on daily basis, while people in local environments are not). Different cultural environments cultivate different stereotypes on the elderly, which the elderly adopt and thus conditions for “a self-fulfilling prophecy” exist. In all environments we thus planned animation of participants, since we more or less expected stereotypes to be present.

The role of the educational organization is particularly important in the initial phases of projects as well as in maintaining their operation. Institutions both introduced the projects and coordinated voluntary work. Mentors who cooperated with volunteers were in charge of this aspect of work in all institutions participating in the project.

Dialogic learning and efficiency of the intergenerational approach

Emphasis was on cooperation as a two way exchange instead of one way training and the benefits for all involved. This is not only a matter of solidarity of one group towards the other, but a matter of knowledge transfer. According to social theory, learning takes place in relations and is defined through relations, it is realized in communication and happens with social participation. Therefore attention was paid to facilitating reciprocal relations.

Personal relationships

Intergenerational programmes provide face-to-face relations between the young and the elderly. Such occasions are relatively rare in modern society, therefore we also planned encouragement for mutual communication.

Joint activities

Positive effects cannot develop if the young and the elderly only socialize (in such case even a dislike and negative results may develop). In all groups, we therefore set action goals, i.e. these groups would prepare or make, for example a blog, a collection of stories, a manual for stories, a public presentation of products/an exhibition, a public computer game tournament.

To pursue educational needs

Programmes need to fulfil the needs of target groups and the environment; it was necessary to carry out an analysis of the people who were included in the group, so in the beginning, through non-formal discussions, they were asked about their wishes.

Support of the local community

Since the support of the local community is important, we obtained the support of local societies (pensioners' societies, societies of rural women, local authorities/mayors, the local media).

On the basis of the above elements, we designed a model to absorb recommendations from other projects and take experiences from various areas into account. We analytically followed activities, taking into account research questions, through the following constituent parts:

- Agents (those active in the model),
- Educational programme (multidimensional goals, contents related to local knowledge, methods of ensuring reciprocity),
- Circumstances in which they operate.

The test programmes started at various periods, some as early as in autumn 2008, some in spring 2009. The strategy applied was similar, i.e. intergenerational learning in pairs. Each couple worked with one computer, and a teacher (mentor) was present at workshops.

FINDINGS

The results confirm the findings of other studies (Sanches, 2007; MacCallum et al., 2006; Boström, 2003; Osborne and Bullock, 2000). To sum up, we can report that the elderly enjoy activities and social contacts. It also seems that the young learned a lot about others and about themselves. They reported benefits of the intergenerational programmes. The vast majority of both groups expressed willingness to continue such programmes. The findings are presented in view of research questions on agents and relations, motivation, methods and efficiency, goals and contents, planning and organization.

Agents and relations between agents in a group

Various groups of differing age structures were included in the programme. The youngest pupils were 10 while the oldest students were 21. Pupils and secondary school students received no monetary rewards, while university

students received minimal compensation for coming to meetings. In view of gender, women prevailed on the younger as well as on the older side.

We were interested in whether the educational programme influences intergenerational connections and whether closer connections would appear. Judging from what was told, potential friendships developed. These findings confirm the findings of other studies, for example MacCallum et al. (2006).

We were further interested in whether their contacts would continue after the programme was over, namely whether they expressed any intention to stay in touch.

A survey was applied to the Slovak group during their education about their intentions to stay in touch after the end of the programme. Their answers were affirmative. 93% of women participants wrote of their intention to stay in touch even after concluding their education. 90% of respondents answered that they would continue such education. Such data already shows that during the education course, almost all participants had a clear intention to keep in contact and continue the programme. In other groups, mentors asked about participants' intentions to stay in touch. These surveys were applied after the end of education. Affirmative answers, i.e. that they intend to keep in contact also after the education finishes, were less frequent. Approximately one half (48%) of the young (attendants of primary and secondary schools) gave affirmative answers, and 60% of the elderly. It can be concluded that enthusiasm and feelings of connectedness are greater during the programme than at its end. There was also a difference in the groups, since the Slovak group consisted of

female students and elderly ladies who attended the programme at the university for the elderly. In Slovakia, such universities are considered part of the regular university system. Completed secondary school is a condition for enrolment and the same applies to regular, younger students. Participants of this group had more similarities in the conditions of their study than the other groups.

In their interviews, the elderly testified that their opinion of the young had changed (approximately one half of respondents, 49%) and similar results were also found among the young. 40% of young respondents admitted that their views of the elderly had changed. This confirms similar findings of other projects, for example CrossAges. Joint education changes the views each group has of the other and opens potential opportunities for cooperation.

Motivation

We asked ourselves whether introductory animation was necessary and whether participants showed willingness to be included in similar programmes.

The young:

At the beginning of the project, the young expressed many doubts. Individual animation for participation had to be carried out among school

pupils. At programme conclusion, they expressed satisfaction with their work, and the majority expressed their enthusiasm about working in a group with elderly members. After the first year of the programme, all participants expressed a willingness to continue and did indeed continue to be involved in the project. After the second year they said they would continue to participate in similar projects.

The elderly:

Initial animation of individuals was necessary. Animation was individual, sometimes through a telephone conversation, sometimes with personal contact in the local environment or in programmes for the elderly at universities for the elderly. The elderly doubted in their capabilities. They were embarrassed, expressed many reservations about their participation, but at the same time showed a thirst for knowledge. Dominant beliefs still confirm stereotypes that the elderly are less successful in learning. This was particularly pointed out by mentors from Turkey, where women had many reservations.

The elderly showed increased interest at the end of programmes, as they were curious about information-communication technology (they asked more questions) and also stated that they would like to continue with similar education (all members of groups from Slovenia, Poland, and Malta). All the elderly confirmed that they would continue to use the computer, they described how pleasant and useful this knowledge is, and most participants said they would continue being involved in similar

projects. In their interviews they expressed a high level of satisfaction and high motivation for further work.

Methods and efficiency of education

The results of our work confirm suitability of the method. At the beginning of programmes we doubted, at least in some cases, whether such education would be fruitful or whether it would not go beyond socializing, without the elderly learning how to use the computer.

The results were satisfactory as the elderly learnt how to use the Internet, e-mail, they started to participate in blogs and even made their own (Portugal and Poland). They all learnt to use e-mail.

Greater self-confidence was evident in both children and in the elderly, as was observed in their expressions and in their statements for the media (local television, local newspapers), in their communication with visitors in the group and in communication with teachers (summarized from teachers' observations).

They expressed satisfaction with the method, as it enabled reversibility of roles, which further influenced learning, relations and mutual support, since both sides contributed and gained from the experience.

Achievements/knowledge of the elderly (summarized from their interview statements), according to which the efficiency of the method can be judged.

Moreover, various environments show different points of emphasis. In final interviews, they most often mentioned:

- New knowledge, skill development (they learnt to use the computer) and satisfaction with new knowledge and enthusiasm over the Internet.
- Meeting the young (changing views of the young).
- Meeting variety and novelty (new vocabulary, relation to an authority/teacher, relation to information and communication technology).
- They expressed increased motivation for learning.
- They expressed a wish for faster progress in learning.

The efficiency of the work method can also be judged from the achievements of children (summarized from teachers' observations, interviews with mentors).

They developed initiative (manifested for example in cases when a meeting was to be cancelled because the mentor was absent, but pupils themselves took care of a replacement and organized the intergenerational meeting).

They developed tolerance, a better attitude to school work, their behaviour at school changed (in pupils included in the project, teachers noticed their improved communication with teachers, they were more disciplined in writing their homework, they were more tolerant in conflicts).

They showed pro-social behaviour towards the elderly (this was especially evident in homes for the elderly).

Increased responsibility and dedication became evident (this was particularly pronounced in groups that included secondary school students).

All the young demonstrated dedication to work, but since male and female undergraduate students in the French and Slovak group received minimal compensation, their dedication cannot be completely equated with that of pupils and secondary school students who received no reward.

The strategy of intergenerational education seems to be effective also through perception of time spent at school. Pupils did not experience the additional time spent at school (when they were in the intergenerational group) as something obligatory, but as something worth striving for. Such findings were reported by groups from Slovenia, Turkey and Malta (where pupils from primary school were included).

Major goals of educational programmes

Goals were the same in each country, namely to offer the elderly opportunities to use new technologies and to enhance their social networks. According to reports of the groups, the goals were achieved. Most of them acquired computer skills and formed opportunities to build new social networks. Conclusions about the achievement of goals can also be deducted from statements summarized from interviews with the elderly on how they experienced education. The elderly reported on the development of a more active role. This was particularly pronounced in groups working with elderly members included in universities for the

elderly (Portugal, Poland) and was not evident in the narratives of the Slovene group. The reasons for this may be varied: the elderly either pay no attention to their activities in society or they think that it goes without saying. In order to obtain such data we would have to observe more in detail and in depth their everyday life or prepare more specific questionnaires.

Together with the wellbeing and satisfaction they refer to as a consequence of being included in educational programmes, they also mention an escape from loneliness. When children come to a home for the elderly, the elderly feel as they are being more included in life (Malta). They also mentioned re-evaluation of their experiences as they were telling their stories. This was specifically pointed out by members of the Polish group who collected stories of their own experiences during the Second World War. They developed a process of narrative learning. They also emphasized increased self-respect and feelings of being accepted in the community (particularly when presenting their works at an exhibition in school).

The goals achieved can also be judged through statements of the young (female undergraduate and secondary school students) and teachers' observations (for groups of children). The young feel that it was an important life experience for them and they gradually realized that the elderly are a part of the community. According to teachers' statements, intergenerational learning can be a form of free time activity or optional school activity for children and the young and also for groups with special needs. Intergenerational learning promotes development of beliefs that they are capable of acting in the community.

Contents

Contents are closely connected with education goals and what is mentioned above on experiencing education applies also to the contents of the programmes. In all programmes, education included getting to know e-mail, Internet search, narrating and recording stories (oral history). The contents differed according to action goals. Where focus was on collecting stories on experiences during the Second World War (Poland), the contents were connected to history topics as well. The Slovene group was in a similar situation, as they collected stories about migrations, and thus conversations about migrations made part of the contents. When planning and selecting the contents it is necessary to ensure that they are linked as closely as possible to the needs of participants, while contents that strengthen stereotypes and erroneous beliefs about the elderly should be avoided.

Planning and organization

When creating programmes of intergenerational education, we followed models of non-formal education. Participants were included in planning according to principles of interactive planning. They also took into account experiences and the need for extended repetition and consolidation. In research projects, needs of the elderly had priority. Teachers, sociologists, economists and engineers were among organizers of the education. In all groups they followed the needs of participants and encouraged those

working in pairs to come to an agreement about the content and phases of learning. In this way, attention shifted from “using” the received programmes to creativity in learning. In groups, participative learning could be noticed. However, this does not mean no planning was necessary. On the contrary - programmes need an adequate level of quality planning if they are to be flexible and adaptable. In achieving action goals and in encouraging active ageing it is beneficial if several organizations (school, society, company) are included. Networking among them should be encouraged, as this facilitates implementation of the programme and ensures its stronger placement in relation to the environment. It also became evident that cooperation with local authorities (the mayor's office, municipality administration) is important.

Achievements important for the institution and affecting the organization of intergenerational programmes

The parents of children included in the project were satisfied to see their children work in the community (according to reports of teachers and some parents working as mentors). Intergenerational programmes are a good way of including children in the community. After this programme, the elderly began to participate in other programmes for the elderly. All these interweaving events connect different groups and institutions (for example a school and a pensioner's society, a school and a society of rural women, a school and an institute for adult education). Projects were covered in the local media (television and newspaper), which contributed to the school's good reputation.

Financing is also part of organization. Although the project was mostly carried out as voluntary work, it was necessary to provide financial means for the voluntary work to function (premises had to be provided, etc.) Despite the fact that all participants in the eight countries wanted to continue with similar projects, work grounded to a halt wherever there was insufficient effort invested in the management of voluntary work and the provision of finances. Work continued wherever universities for the elderly were established or where such universities had already been operative and prepared new programmes. However, intergenerational programmes in schools were discontinued, despite the fact that we found many positive effects for the young. This demonstrates that intergenerational educational programmes were more adapted to the elderly participants and less to the young, and that other forms of intergenerational education that will attract greater interest of schools will have to be found.

CONCLUSIONS

First we should mention the findings referring to the methodology and present limitations of the study. The latter refers mainly to the manner of collecting data, most of which was narrative, which report participants' experiences. Relatively small groups were included and they changed during the programme, therefore the use of mentors' qualitative narratives,

students' narratives and observation techniques (anecdotal records, field records) was justified. As a consequence we can only judge the cases included and our findings cannot be generalized.

The next limitation lies in the fact that we did not know the older participants before they were included in the educational programmes. We presuppose that they were people who were ready to get involved in new experiences. Therefore our findings cannot be generalized to all groups of the elderly.

In our observations, we focused on the process. We followed (monitored) the practice, the way the process progressed. For further evaluation, special instruments to monitor and evaluate learning at personal and organizational levels would have to be prepared. Evaluation remains at the descriptive level.

Results of the action research and its connection with findings of other studies

Summarizing the findings from all participating groups, we noticed that different cultural environments had a different impact on the initial animation necessary for inclusion into intergenerational groups and to begin learning how to use information communicational technology, as well as on the choice of contents, while the dynamics of the learning process were similar.

We can confirm findings of some studies (Covertino et al., 2007; Boström, 2003) that show that the elderly and the young get closer to each other and that joint learning represents a positive interaction for them. Also in our

research, joint intergenerational learning revealed itself as the type of intergenerational contact that positively influenced the groups of both the young and the elderly. It also had positive influence on the inclusion of an institution (school) in the environment.

Positive influence is felt in social connections and in promotion of social cohesion. Participants stated that they were satisfied with joint activities and they would continue to cooperate. Emotional ties, especially affinity and friendship, are extremely important. Although this was evident in all groups, it was most explicitly described in the Maltese group, where pupils visited a home for the elderly and in pairs with the elderly looked for topics on the Internet of interest to the elderly.

The young who experience “care for the other” also feel joy and satisfaction. The concepts of “culture of care” and “pedagogy of care” refer to children and young who not only receive care from adults, but also take care of somebody else themselves. Our research confirms findings of other studies (for example Loewen, 1996; Sanches, 2009) that both groups benefit from intergenerational programme and that intergenerational programmes are microstructures, through which realizations about the lives of others and of “the others” are formed, which is important for maintaining social cohesion.

As confirmed by our cases, connections between generations can be a part of school activities (of institutional education) either in primary school, in secondary school or at university. Realizing that intergenerational programmes present efficient strategies for generations to approach each other (not only to create knowledge and skills), new methods need to be

developed to suit the needs of various groups. Successful intergenerational learning and cooperation requires connections between institutions and local environment and connections between various local institutions. Connections between different sectors, such as health care, culture, schools, social work, economy are also necessary. We can confirm the findings of Granville (2002) and Sanches (2009) that efficient intergenerational programmes need to be harmonized with the needs of a community and that partner cooperation of all participants is essential.

The traditional education model is represented by linear progress in time (children, the young, adults, the elderly), comparable to linearity and succession of life phases, as well as by segmentation of parts, each of which functions independently. Intergenerational education may connect different segments of the educational system and contribute to the holistic nature of education.

It seems that schools and other educational institutions have a marked role as mediators in connecting generations. Particularly universities and other higher education institutions have an important role in connecting younger and older experts in their professional fields, connecting education and working in various age groups. Primary schools, which are present in local environments, have a visible role in connecting the local community, the young and the elderly.

Suggestions for further development and research

Our study opened many theoretic and methodological questions, namely how to study intergenerational education in different environments and how to study intergenerational learning in everyday life. The latter pertains more to anthropological studies and is not included in studies in the field of educational sciences.

Well organized intergenerational programmes give very good results, as shown by studies in the USA, Europe, Australia, so it would be wise to consider institutionalizing intergenerational programmes. This implies encouraging intergenerational connecting in various ways: from financial to staff- and space-related incentives. This type of education is to be stimulated through grants, education of teachers, introduction and maintenance of volunteers' networks. All projects we observed established possibilities for development of intergenerational learning, which was carried on for two years. After two years they were discontinued where they lacked administrative and financial support, which is a condition also for voluntary work.

The following recommendation refers to professionalization of intergenerational education. We require study programmes to train educators at the level of specialist expertise. Universities which develop studies of educational sciences should also organize modular programmes to train experts who would lead intergenerational education.

As opportunities themselves do not ensure that various groups of population will get involved in education, we also need competent

animators to inform and motivate, and provide initial training for various groups of people, especially those with many obstacles to education. Considering the host of stereotypes, many obstacles can be expected with the elderly. Through connections among educational institutions, animation in the local environment, non-formal education and new educational methods, innovative learning practices are encouraged in all generations. In the long term, we should connect the educational system with the system of voluntary organizations for the purpose of intergenerational education and in this way also encourage the ethos of cooperation.

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