

OLDER ADULTS AS A SPECIAL LEARNER AUDIENCE

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Abstract

From the very beginning The Third Age University of Slovenia has been an independent organization, similar to societies registered outside regular universities. The approach that the Third Age University developed is based on the cooperation between mentors and students. This approach has become traditional and still characterizes our education of older adults. Different generations live in different social networks and circumstances. Studying represents a way of life for older people and the quality of older adult education depends on the quality of mentors and mentoring. Mentoring is an intimate relationship between the mentor and the learner. A characteristic of mentoring at the Slovenian third age universities is a rich intergenerational cooperation. Mentoring has thus become a common approach in education and represents a substantial part of independent individual learning.

Keywords: adult education, older adults, education of older adults, The Third Age University of Slovenia, mentor, mentoring, intergenerational learning, individual learning, open access to education

Introduction

When in 1984/85 we started with the education of older adults, there was no recognized theory or research for this specific segment of adult education. Our starting point was the elaborate adult education theory, andragogy, andragogy studies at the University of Ljubljana and the established practice in some areas of adult learning. At that time most of the activities in adult education were oriented either towards occupational, job-oriented education and training or the political education of adults, which was of no use in the education of older people, deriving from different, primarily cultural, needs and interests and of older people and their self-realisation. Not conforming with the contemporary educational policy of this country, the Third Age University's basic concept was humanistic, learner-oriented, adjusted to the requirements of the third age. Since after retirement older people become very much socially excluded, our work was not subjected to socio-political pressures, the repression felt in the "main-stream" education; we enjoyed a relatively great amount of freedom in creating and introducing into practice new study programmes for older adults in Slovenia. We started our work with great enthusiasm, but without financial resources. Our major input was voluntary work and people's own power and initiative. When a problem appeared, not only the leaders, but also our students, the elderly, looked for solutions, investing their human and social capital in their education. The approach that the Third Age University thus developed is cooperation of mentors and students. It has become traditional and today still characterizes our education of older adults.

From the very beginning we had connections with some French third-age universities, which were - together with Prof. Vellas - our model and ideal. The Slovenian third-age universities were similarly independent organizations, registered as societies outside regular universities. We were aware that our common task is to explore, discover and specify the new phenomena in adult education – education of older adults. We did not only learn from external models, but after 29 years of our own research, observations of the emerging practice and analyses we have made, we believe, a significant contribution to the international development of the theory and practice of the older adult education. This happened mainly through our participation in international organizations in the European Union and in different EU projects. Our influence extends to East-European countries, where older adults education is in many places in its initial stage.

A generation as a special learner audience

Different generations live in different social networks and circumstances. Their respective social positions, the perception of their life situation leave a social and psychological imprint on each generation, which affects the educational processes in a significant way. A study conducted by the Slovenian Third Age University in 2001 revealed that mentors distinguish between three different learner audiences: young learners in formal education, adults re-entering education (young and middle age adults) and older learners. The study comprised mentors with experience in education of all three generations.

Pupils of primary and secondary school feel that education has been imposed on them and that others (adults) make all decisions regarding their education. Compulsion to study gives rise to school aversion and leads to a defence subculture, so the young look for shortcuts and easier ways to study success. Since the lack of interest and aversion to learning seem to be prevailing in this situation, the teachers tend to feel alienated, perceiving their work as a tiresome burden.

Adult learners are seen in a different light by their mentors. They tend to be pushed into education by a concrete need for specific knowledge. Their learning motivation is external, though accompanied by a general thirst for knowledge. The burden of work, family and public obligations interfere with their education, acting at the same time as obstacles and stimulants. Adults do not often have the possibility to satisfy their personal learning motives. Our research showed them to be highly motivated, but limited in the possibilities to pursue continuing education. Haste, overlapping obligations and numerous social pressures in the professionally active period of life prevent them from a full commitment to learning and education. Adult educators feel they have to adapt to such circumstances and the actual possibilities of the adults in their study groups. They try to find ways to help surmount the obstacles these people meet in accessing knowledge. How successful they can be, will depend, in spite of their high motivation, on external factors, which are beyond the educators' control. The education of individual participants interacts in a complex way with other social roles they have. The mentors stated that they felt greatly rewarded in the cases when their adult students managed - in spite of all the obstacles - to obtain the knowledge they needed.

When talking about older learners the interviewed mentors stressed they were a very special audience. Studying is a way of life for older people. They will engage in learning activities also independently, without a mentor. In their case education is intermixed with other functions in their lives. They live to learn what they want to learn. Learning with a mentor is only part of their knowledge-searching activities. The encouragement goes in both directions, from the mentor to the student and vice versa. It is important that a feeling of closeness develops between the mentor and the group as well as between individual members of the group. A group of older learners becomes their primary community. The strong wish to learn is fuelled by primary motivation: inner impulses, suppressed wishes, the need for self-realisation, dormant talents. The mentors, almost without exception, stated that they saw the education of the elderly as an award, something they did for their »soul«, something that helped them carry on in other situations, a satisfaction of their need to be in a personal relationship. (Krajnc, 2001)

Older people are not prepared to educate themselves under any circumstances

Older people are not prepared to educate themselves under all circumstances. Their decision to pursue education is personal, voluntary, so they expect quality interpersonal relationships. The expectations they have are even higher because they tend to lack social contacts and have difficulty satisfying their primary psycho-social needs, defined by A. Maslow as the need for security, social belonging and love, the need for (self)respect, curiosity, the need to explore the un-

known and the need for self-realisation. Their involvement in study groups can bring them also some emotional satisfaction, since study groups function as relatively permanent social units with developed interpersonal relations.

The study circles at the Slovene Third-Age University tend to become primary groups, in which friendship and trust prevail in close interpersonal relations between the members. The possibility of open communication reduces the apprehensions and tensions in students, so that they dare to expose their lack of knowledge by raising “odd, senseless” questions. This contributes to efficiency of learning. Curiosity - the primary motivation for learning - makes knowledge the uppermost goal for participants; however, another very important expectation in study groups of older learners is satisfaction of their basic social needs: safety, social belonging, self-esteem, love and self-actualisation; this is what a social group also has to offer. This does not diminish their motivation for education, on the contrary, it raises its quality and efficiency. Since the socio-emotional needs do not appear to be equally strong in the learning groups with young and middle-aged adults, some critics express doubts in connection with older adult education. (A. Maslow, 1970)

After retirement an individual's social life tends to shrink significantly, that is why older people use their social engagements to satisfy their basic social needs, but this is possible only if meaningful interpersonal relations can be established.

Our research shows that study groups, once formed, tend to remain stable for many years. In addition to learning, they give the participants the privilege of belonging to a primary social group. The dropout rate in this type of education is not high, it is lower than in formal education. For organizers it is very important to keep the same study group over several consecutive study years by upgrading study programmes and setting new educational and activity goals.

Whereas for students in regular schools the absence of a teacher is often felt as a relief, the older adult students are very sensitive and critical about their mentors' absences, since study circle attendance constitutes an important element in the structure of their lives. Interruptions can be tolerated only exceptionally and for a good reason. The continuity of the educational process is an important factor in older adult education. Some study groups even organize weekly meetings with or without their mentor in the time of summer vacations. The students nurture social ties in their own specific ways to gain socio-emotional rewards. Informal meetings of study groups contribute to students' knowledge in different ways. The mentor will be observing this process of informal learning and will later include the “results” in formal meetings during the study year through lectures and other methods. For older adult students education becomes a way of living - the integration of informal and formal education is an ongoing process. (Krajnc, 2006)

The analyses reveal a specific phenomenon in older adult education, how learning efficiency and social well-being of older adult students depends on how they fit into their study group. In the initial stage, when entering a particular study group, they explore how they can fit into it. Basi-

cally, the evaluation process starts already with the first impressions of the other members of the newly established group: can they accept the other members and be accepted by them? If they feel this cannot be the case, they will immediately change the group. The “changing group” process lasts at least 2 months (October, November) after the beginning of each study year. Some students might change several groups. This obviously presents extra work for organizers, but they need to see it as an important stage in the educational process. The councillors and the professional team of the Third-Age University help students to find the group into which they fit well, which is a guarantee for efficient learning and quality of interpersonal relations in the study group.

The quality of older adult education starts with the quality of mentors and mentoring

Mentoring is an intimate relationship between the mentor and the learner. Many different types of mentorship can evolve; one could say that there are as many mentoring styles as there are mentoring pairs. In older adult education, mentors in small study groups - study circles - are still prevailing. The relationship between the mentor and individual members may differ; however, through time the group will become a special entity with its own rules and a firm network of interpersonal relations - a social community. In Slovenia there are several study programmes for mentor training in older adult education and year-long EU projects, conducted in cooperation with several Ministries. Introductory courses are followed by specialist courses to improve mentors' competences. Together with some NGO's (e.g. The Association of Retired Pedagogical Councillors) mentor training teams are being trained for education of older adults at the local level. It is anticipated that by spreading this type of training throughout the country the mentorship quality will be further enhanced. Special electronic learning letters “Knowledge and the Mentor” are edited in order to make professional mentor training penetrate all 45 Third Age Universities in Slovenia. Introductory training, initiating mentors into the education of older adults and the third age, is compulsory, other types are optional. Typically, the training courses are attended primarily by the best mentors, those who love their work and already possess a great deal of knowledge about it.

Characteristic of mentoring at the Slovenian third age universities is a rich intergenerational cooperation, the mentors being young graduates, Ph.D. candidates, middle-aged persons with jobs in other organizations or in regular schools, and older, retired professionals. They all can be mentors if their professional expertise and personal characteristics are satisfactory. The initial training for mentors in older adult education is obligatory. With all of them the study circle will eventually congeal into a firm social community. At the one end there are the young, still jobless graduates or Ph. D. students, gaining their first teaching experience, at the other the oldest mentor, a 95-year-old teacher. The groups have similar features. The students and the mentors accept one another as people, regardless of age, their relationship is based on trust and openness. There are, however, also cases when the participants' needs or their personalities differ so much that they part and the group disintegrates.

Mentoring has become a common approach in education, it covers a substantial part of independent individual learning. When we feel we wish to learn something new, we first ask ourselves who could help us do it. In most cases the mentor is not the person's only source of knowledge; the learner will use other resources and combine them in different ways. For mentorship to be successful, suitable conditions need to be provided:

- The mentor and the learner should have personalities that match well and there should be affinity between them.
- They need to develop mutual trust and engage in open communication.
- The mentor must believe in the learner's success in learning and, unconditionally, in his abilities.
- The mentor must get to know the learner, understand him and empathise with him to be able to »draw« out of him his undiscovered abilities and to release his unexpressed personal potentialities.

The mentor/learner relationship is delicate. There should be a balance between freedom of expression and advancement in cognition on the part of the learner on the one hand and the correctives and limits set by the mentor on the other. The Chinese have a saying: »The greatest fortune in life is to find for oneself the right teacher «. This is the guarantee that the learner will develop and advance.

Pair learning, learning side-by-side with a mentor, is the most individualized, rational and effective way of transmission of knowledge. Mentoring is a dynamic social relationship, in which each participant has his respective tasks, leading to the same goal: the learner's knowledge. The mentor and the learner have to adapt to each other. In the initial »get-to-know-each-other« phase, they will assess how successful their cooperation will be. The mentor's assessment of the learner is very important for success in learning. He can set more or less demanding goals and invest more or less effort in their common work. Since the mentor represents the authority, his assessment directly reflects on the learner's learning motivation, raising or lowering study criteria. The mentor's belief in the learner's success is a major incentive for learning,

The mentor can shorten the path to the goal and make up for some of the learner's shortcomings. Lately, group education (classroom, course, seminar, lecture) seems to have been losing in importance whereas independent education has been gaining ground. A learner - regardless of age, be it 15, 30 or 70 - often cannot reach his goal all by himself: he is not able to accomplish all the necessary tasks, such as the choice of resources, setting the evaluation criteria or spotting errors and mistakes. He needs a mentor at his side to steer with him to the goal.

The mentor links and coordinates various resources of knowledge and helps the learner to discover new resources. He follows closely his progress to decide what he already commands and what

tasks he should proceed with. With the mentor's help the learner moves in a safe environment. For instance, a middle-aged woman starts learning to skate on the frozen Lake Bled, admiring the agile movements and turns of her coach. She does not ask herself which part of the lake is safe to skate on, how thick the ice is, what are the most suitable skating accessories for a beginner or what are the names of particular skating figures. This is what her coach, her mentor, will take care of. All she wishes is to learn a bit of what he has shown her by the end of the day. The mentor bears part of the learning risk, the rest remains with the learner. Learning with a mentor makes the learner feel safe, reducing his doubts and uncertainties. Observing and following his progress, the mentor knows when and how to encourage him.

There are formal and informal mentors. A formal mentor is assigned to a person according to some regulations. For instance, a senior, more experienced professional in a company becomes the mentor to a newly hired young worker; a veteran teacher to a new school teacher; a master craftsman to an apprentice, a senior student to a freshman. Since the mentor is appointed externally, on the basis of a regulation rather than personal characteristics or mutual affinity, the interpersonal relationships in tend to remain rather superficial in formal mentorships. They are reduced to informing, giving instructions, preparation of written communications, supervision and control. Some mentoring pairs, however, establish a more personal relationship, one that has more depth, is based on trust, human closeness, role modelling and intensive learning. In such cases the formal mentorship quality matches that of informal mentorship. In principle, the formal mentor is assigned on the basis of his position in the organization, his expertise and experience and rarely becomes the role model, the mentor / mentee contacts are formal and not very personal, which usually prevents a friendship- based relationship developing. In formal mentorship the focus is on the transmission of knowledge whereas the informal mentoring also contains the possibility for personal growth. (Krajnc, 1979, pp. 213-221)

Since mentorship has been widely acknowledged as an effective form of adult education at home and in Europe, formal mentoring systems have been established in different fields, e.g.:

- in Europe tandem learning has been introduced in job sharing partnerships of a younger and older professional (transfer of experience to the young, entering the labour market)
- the Third Age University of Ljubljana provides training of senior students to become mentors (tutors) for younger students in order to increase study effectiveness and reduce drop-out rates.
- The entire third-age university network (in Slovenia there are 45 third-age universities, connected into a network) is based on the mentorship system, with mentors working in individual study circles with 12 - 15 students). The concept focuses on joint discovering of knowledge, not teaching.
- Mentors help trainees in work organizations to acclimate and become effective workers.
- Mentors to secondary school and university students on practice in various institutions are responsible for their systematic introduction into work practices.

Mentors for individual students' products: undergraduate theses, Master's and Ph. D. theses. The "Bologna Reform" envisages two student mentors: one to help during the preparation phase and in the selection of the thesis topic, the second in the research phase and the preparation of the Ph.D. degree.

Formally appointed mentors are becoming a common phenomenon both at home and abroad since pair learning has some advantages over group education. Formally appointed mentors are used in formal education, in the field of employment, in professional jobs in institutions and companies. A segment of formal education is thus being replaced by mentoring in order to gain effectiveness. In older adult education mentors lead study groups. Within the educational model of the Slovenian Third Age University each group of learners (study circle) has, apart from a mentor, also an »animator«, who acts as the mentor's aid, representing the link between the mentor and the group. The animators may be changed whereas the mentor usually remains with the group over several years. The participants tend to form strong attachments to their mentor and keep attending study circles only if their mentor remains with them. Emotional bonds and trust are created also between individual members of the group, which contributes to successful learning. (Klemenčič, 2010)

People usually choose their informal mentor on the basis of personal affinity, his knowledge and skills, and their ability to trust him. The informal mentor can be anybody: a neighbour, a family friend, a co-worker, a relative. He is chosen from among the learner's acquaintances. It can also be a new contact, somebody they have met on a journey, in a project, at common work, at an exhibition, etc. The informal mentor may soon become the role model for the learner. In the atmosphere of mutual trust and openness, without negative feelings or second thoughts, the learner

makes quick progress, and this has a visibly positive impact on his learning motivation. The mentor believes in the learner's abilities and positive learning results. Looking back at one's personal learning history, one will be surprised to realise how many people have actually mentored him in his life. An in-depth mentoring relationship requires good matching of the mentor/learner personalities, or else they will soon part and the mentoring activity will expire.

Mentorship is an on-going relationship. From the initial learning cooperation it can grow into a true friendship, which can subsist also after the learner has ceased needing a mentor. During the first phase, the mentor/learner relationship is symbiotic. The learner identifies with the mentor, imitates and follows him. The mentor's and learner's products are similar, nearly identical, until the time the learner has sufficiently progressed. In the initial phase he cannot but imitate the mentor, as he is yet unable to find his own way. For instance, he paints like his mentor, using the same colours, compositions and motives. Only later, in the second phase, can he reach his individual expression. He may discover, for instance, that he prefers different colours, chooses different motives than his mentor and gradually creates his own identity in painting. The mentor should not mind these changes, but see them as a positive result of his mentoring activity, a learning success he and his mentee can be proud of. The mentor and the learner have become equal partners, mutual respect makes it possible for them to acknowledge their equal status.

Once the learner has embarked on his individual path in discovering knowledge and accumulating new insights, his need for a mentor will slowly diminish. If the mentoring experience has been positive, a relationship of friendship will be preserved. If the mentor, however, does not do his job properly, the project can fail already in the initial phase. This may happen if the mentor resents the fact that the learner is imitating and copying him, and sees this as a violent intrusion into his intimate world, which may arouse in him negative feelings towards the learner. A verbal exchange may resolve the situation: the mentor and mentee can resume their cooperation or else part. Informal mentoring allows making such decisions whereas the formal mentorship is fixed and has to be carried on- if only on the paper.

Let me describe a mentoring case from the study of design. The student was eagerly imitating his mentor, not yet capable of developing his individual expression or identity. This greatly upset his mentor, who perceived it as a theft of his skills and expertise. Conflicts occurred between the two again and again, so that a third person had to mediate. The student felt helpless and betrayed, he had trusted his mentor and did not understand what he was doing wrong. Had the mentor had a bit more patience to allow the mentee to pass through the imitation phase and develop his own style, the relationship could have prospered. Unfortunately, in this case it ended sadly before this could happen.

With the research study carried out at the Department of the Pedagogy and Andragogy of the Faculty of Philosophy, at the University of Ljubljana between 2001 and 2003, we endeavoured to establish what qualities were the most appreciated in the mentor. A questionnaire with open-ended questions was completed by individuals, aged 30 - 40, with university degrees in different

fields, who were doing a course to obtain secondary- school teacher qualifications. The findings showed that the mentor's knowledge, expertise and skills were not considered to be more important than his ability to empathise with the learner and lend him an ear, his tolerance, kindness and readiness to acknowledge achievements. The interviewees would not wish to work with a not sufficiently knowledgeable mentor, but possessing expertise alone does not suffice. Some groups even put appropriate personality traits in the first place, above professional knowledge and skills. The responses revealed the complexity of the mentor/learner relationship.

The study also showed that people are very careful when choosing a mentor - if they are in the position to make their own selection. This may be the reason they sometimes choose him from among family members - mother, father, spouse. In this case the relationship of closeness and trust already exists and does not need to be created anew. When they need some special knowledge, they will first look among friends. The third round brings casual acquaintances, their fourth choice would be, as shown by the data from the questionnaire, experts the individuals have not met yet. They would approach them by phone, by letter, e-mail, or arrange an appointment. Mentoring can develop within the relationship between two acquaintances; how much time they will be willing to devote to it can be agreed later, once they have discovered that their cooperation is a viable way of learning. (Krajnc, 2006)

Education as a reaction to financial and economic crises and the crisis of value: Each One Teach One

In 2009 we started in the third-age universities network a new social educational movement of volunteer education in pairs - education as a gift, which could free us of financial considerations in the time of financial, but also value system crises. In its concept the educational movement of learning in pairs integrates intragenerational and intergenerational education.

People need knowledge to survive as badly as the air to breathe. Regardless of what generation they belong to, they cannot give up education once the financial resources and public support are no longer available. They have to discover new paths to knowledge. The consumer society and misuse of capital pollutes our environment with masses of products. We all are exposed to and tired of aggressive, terrorising advertising - the psychological pollution of our environment. The new educational movement addresses, among other, the pressing social need to raise the value of knowledge in our societies. Do the official national and EU policies recognize this need?

Open access to education and knowledge for all people is the imperative of the information society. Knowledge has become a public good, no longer a privilege of the elite; education, therefore, can no longer depend on one's financial circumstances. The older adults have accumulated a great deal of different knowledge and experience. Among the people surrounding us there is always someone who possesses the knowledge of what we would like to learn. Knowledge is the greatest gift that can be given to anybody. Can the exchange of knowledge bring new benefits? The mentor's and learner's roles are exchangeable. I am somebody's mentor today and tomorrow

I will be his/her mentee. The dynamics of lifelong education brings new mechanisms into the process of education. Informal mentors possess the inclination and interest to work with people and to pass on their knowledge to others. The concept of Each One Teach One rests on these premises.

The educational requirements of the information society are immense, and cannot be met solely through institutional education by means of hired professionals. Lifelong education is diversified and individualized both in the methods employed and in content. The framework of formal group education - schooling, is too narrow to cover all learning needs; therefore, alternative ways to knowledge and self-realization have to be found.

In 2009, a new educational concept was devised at the Slovenian Third Age University, beginning a new movement: "Each One Teach One". Once we have realized that we possess certain knowledge, we can pass it on to somebody else. Let us donate our knowledge to those who need it. We all have too many things and would prefer spiritual goods. »Let me give you some of my knowledge«, should replace giving material presents, which will eventually end up in a useless gifts store (there is already one of this kind in Ljubljana). The Each One Teach One movement is spreading within the third-age university network, comprising 45 organizations in 43 places.

In 2010, the company S&T Slovenia joined the University as a sponsor. They initiated the movement in their branches and are also supporting pair learning of computer skills for older adults. The company now provides training of informal mentors and takes care of the identification of the movement. They have donated several computers to the most active Universities in the network to enable mentors-volunteers to teach individuals computer skills, prepared information leaflets, organized meetings for promotion of the movement and equipped a small IT classroom at the seat of the Slovenian Third-Age University in Ljubljana. Here several voluntary mentoring pairs can learn computer skills at the same time.

At the core of the concept of the "Each One Teach One" movement are Erik Fromm's theories, especially the ideas he elaborated in his work »To Be or to Have«. Knowledge can be a gift if we are more interested in being than in having. The wealth people possess lies in what they are, not what they have. Of course, looking around we see how remote this kind of thinking is from most people, who have been manipulated into becoming mere consumers through the power of capital. (Fromm, 2004)

Our theoretical premises also derive, in part, from Robin Kidd's »Education for Being, Becoming and Belonging«. People need education and knowledge in order to survive, so it should circulate among people. Through education a person becomes somebody that has previously not existed, he is able to develop his potentials in the process of self-realization. Through education people learn to choose who in their society they wish to belong to, they acquire personal values and attitudes. A significant part of our knowledge is gained through social learning, cooperation with other people and interpersonal relationships. Not everything can be learnt from books or by

means of modern technology. Learning through personal contacts helps people acquire values and form attitudes. (Kidd, 1976)

In developing the Each One Teach One concept we also relied on our own experiences of how we learned to use the computer. Most of us did it with the help of a friend or acquaintance. First this friend demonstrated the new computer program, explained it and showed us how to use it, then we tried to use it in their presence. Not everything went smoothly right away. The “mentor” explained what had gone wrong and why we were stuck. In the days to follow we started doing it on our own. The fact that our friend was available on the phone was of great help. When we got lost, he or she would advise us how to proceed, explain what caused the problem, why the programme wasn't working and how to eliminate the error. Gradually we gained experience and mastered the process and , after a while, almost forgot when and how we learnt it, and also who taught us how to do it. The practice of computer skills acquisition within the Each One Teach One movement is developing in a similar way.

By passing on some of our knowledge, we will not lose any. Quite the contrary, by doing it, we may learn something new and refresh the knowledge we have. Spiritual goods do not obey the laws of material goods. So why do we hesitate? Because spiritual gifts are not appreciated yet. The choice of things we give as presents is changing. In the past it was industrially manufactured articles, now it is hand-made and home-made things. The idea of knowledge as a gift may prosper in the future, when the interest in material things and consumerism begins to decline. Presently, the widely spread consumer mentality, pushing people into shopping through immoral manipulations –to protect capital- represents a serious obstacle. The Each One Teach One movement is, among other things, a revolt against consumerism. It is opening educational opportunities for people who do not have financial resources. In the time of crisis we have to provide access to free education, find non-payable ways to knowledge. The Each One Teach One movement is one of them. It does not require money - knowledge can circulates among people as a gift

Our first assumption was that pair learning is facilitated if the mentor and the learner have been previously acquainted. (This is not really necessary, mentoring is now done on a much broader scale.) The first step was made by the mentors in the Third- Age University's study circles. We started promoting pair learning. Knowing how to use e-mail is almost indispensable in today's communication, so in the group I am mentoring I enquired which of my students knew how to use it and then suggested that they choose someone from their (or some other) group and help them learn it. After some lively discussions the first computer learning pairs emerged, and the idea slowly began to spread also outside the University. The content in pair learning also diversified. Still, our first concern is still computer- skill learning in pairs, with one retired person guiding another retired person who would like to become computer functional. The learning pairs either meet at the seat of the organization or in the home of the learner, since working on one's own computer makes it easier and progress is faster. The movement thus introduced into

Slovenia, almost unknowingly, the concept of »patronage», about which we had been previously informed in the Netherlands.

At the beginning, the Each One Teach One idea seemed strange to our students; they were reserved about it, apprehensive and cautious.

- I'm not a computer person, you need somebody who is. I don't know enough.
- I can't imagine being a mentor just like that.
- You need somebody who is more competent than me.
- I don't know anything about pair learning.

The initial reservations and lack of self-confidence were surmounted when S&T Slovenia organized a meeting of all mentors /volunteers in the company. The potential mentors were invited. During the morning session there were expert presentations, then the mentors presented their first mentoring experiences. I was impressed to hear their subtle descriptions of the mentoring relationship, the advantages it offers, how they adapt to different learning styles, etc. These observations, available also on the internet, attain the standards of professional andragogical literature. In the ceremony that followed the mentors received some gifts (T-shirts and accessories printed with »mentor« and the slogan "Each One Teach One"). It was a kind of initiation ritual, the volunteers were publicly acknowledged as pair learning mentors. The discussions over lunch were lively, and any second thoughts about mentorship disappeared.

In the first phase, we had more learner candidates than mentors willing to teach. Today, our mentors work with several students, doing it either simultaneously or consecutively. Learning in pairs is becoming a recognized way of acquiring computer skills. It is quite common among younger people, who do not have time to attend organized courses. The Third Age University has merely recognized this approach publicly and given it a name so that it can be promoted and can spread in an organized way. We anticipate that the movement will gradually evolve into intergenerational pair learning and that it will diversify from computer skills into other, new contents.

Learning computer skills was our first choice because we did not want the movement to be too diverse and dispersed at the start and also because computer literacy is essential in our high-tech age. Being computer illiterate means being excluded from the society. The needs for this type of knowledge are very high. The data of the Bureau of Statistics and a study by the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, which is now being completed (with the researcher Papič), show that the older generations are those most discriminated against when it comes to computer literacy. Only 9% of the people aged above 61 use the computer. The state administration is introducing electronic administration. For whom? Who will have access to it? Older people will be even more marginalized unless they become computer functional. The computer skill needs of older people cannot

be satisfied with professional IT instructors. What is needed is mentors- volunteers, informal mentors.

In lifelong learning the roles of the mentor and the learner are interchangeable and temporary. Each one teach one. Today I am learning, I am a student of the mentor I have chosen; tomorrow I may become a mentor and help somebody learn something within my field of knowledge.

Growing influence of older adult education

Older adult education has experienced noticeable development and progress in European countries. The growth is evident also in its social importance. The aging society is a beneficial social development and not a developmental mistake, presenting a threat for the other two generations. But it can be beneficial only if the society devises a new social status, a new role and a new image for the third age. This cannot evolve by itself, it needs a systematic and conscious endeavour with clearly set goals. Are today the social processes and policies not victims of a wild pathology of the capital? What is needed to create a new reality for the third age, is a democratisation of the society and raising of the value of man. Are the national and international policies ready to boost the value of man and knowledge? If not, the society will lose the benefits of the development and will descend into regression and social pathology.

The humanisation the life of the third generation has the same effect on the lives of the second and the first generations. We live in the same society and the social roles of all three generations are interdependent and supplementary. The changes in social status and role of one, affect the others. The life of old people has changed in many ways. Older adult education has become a logical, accepted part of lifelong education. In a person's last three or four decades of life survival depends on education as much as it did at a younger age.

The attitude towards education changes through various periods of life. The eagerness to learn, which is characteristic of small, preschool children, returns with the old age. In the intermediary periods secondary (external) motives for education tend to prevail. The older adults' "learning with joy" and "education as a way of life" – their complete dedication to acquiring new knowledge - have an important influence on other generations. This helps us to discern, in theory and practice, the real characteristics of life-long education for all. The subculture of older adult education differs fundamentally from school education: the position of the learner is reversed: we can talk about the learner- oriented education.

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