»TANDEMS GO!- twinning the elderly and young people as a possibility of e- Learning«

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Demographical changes, especially aging of population in Europe, are opening new problems and questions about how could elderly people become active part in our society and how could they integrate their activity with younger people. The other challenge is increasing use of e technologies. The international Grundtvig project (2008 – 2010) Tandems go! – twinning the elderly and young people as a possibility of e-learning based on both issues.

Intergenerational learning and education is becoming an increasingly interesting but still relatively unexplored phenomenon. Project Tandems go! aimed to develop innovative practices of intergenerational learning in eight countries: Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Malta, Greece, France, and Portugal. The 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. Moreover we aimed to create a collaborative e-learning environment where all the learners (elderly and young) can acquire digital skills, and to seek innovations and best practices by the means of e-learning and digital communication. The project aimed to motivate the whole community to adopt a caring approach to its elderly residents, improving the overall quality of their life and to narrow the intergenerational gaps and differences. Young people were »paired« with adults under trainer's supervision. That kind of cooperation enabled them to gain new skills (internet, chat, e mail…). Interaction between adults and young people focused on different topics which enriched knowledge of the history and social changes in the community.

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. Theoretical papers are gathered in the first part of the brochure 'TANDEMS GO! Twinning the Elderly and Young People as a Possibility of e-Learning', which is one of the outcomes of the project. They comprise works aiming to answer some research questions: What are the characteristics of intergenerational projects and what is their importance? How intergenerational solidarity is 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 mentor's role in education in later life and intergenerational groups?

We have discussed the project with colleagues at professional meetings in Poland (2008), Malta (2009), Slovakia (2009) and Slovenia (2010) observing that intergenerational learning is changing as a result of intergenerational transfers and changing multigenerational ties. Particularly interesting are the didactic challenges in preparing intergenerational programmes. All partners in project team have developed different programmes for intergenerational learning.

Experiences and Case Studies

The partners' experiences are gathered in the second part of the brochure 'TANDEMS GO! Twinning the Elderly and Young People as a Possibility of e-Learning': Experiences and Case Studies.

In Poland young people from County High School have been paired with older adults under trainer's supervision. All this was the way or method to enable them to gain new skills (Internet, E-mail, blog, chat, games). Interaction between adults and youth was focused on topics (i.e. places, schools, historical diets, former jobs, etc.). Adults have been gaining IT skills, confidence and self-esteem, while the youngsters enriched their knowledge of history and social changes in their community. Thanks to modern e-tools and concern of both age groups, series of thematic blogs came into life (some of them have been translated into English). They developed a concept for education of elderly people.

In Turkey Parents' Association organized computer class with volunteer students and their parents. Course was named "Basic usage of Computers and Internet". By means of this course both the students and the elderly developed confidence in their work and were both proud of themselves. Some of the skills gained by the end of this course were searching for information in the internet, sending and receiving emails/letters, playing games, chatting. The overheard topics of conversations among the pairs were places they have been to, school life, clothes and uniforms, food, sports and games. In conclusion, the project activities resulted in the satisfactions of both parties.

In Malta project was carried out between the St. Clare College, Girls' Secondary School and the Mellieha home for the Elderly. They organised transport so that the girls from the Pembroke school could travel to the home in Mellieha in order to carry out this

Project. Success of these meetings has spread to other homes on the island and it has been requested to carry out more similar projects.

In Portugal the project consisted on creating a close partnership between students of the secondary School António Inácio da Cruz – ESAIC; and students from the University of the Third Age of Grândola - USG. Considering the nature and needs of each partner, they defined specific objectives: 1. Create and promote the empowerment of the elderly students on dynamizing the blog of the USG, 2.Create and promote the empowerment of the elderly students on continuing update the facebook page of the USG, 3. Organize cultural and recreational activities between the two institution participants in order to bring them close together and promote the proximity and better understanding between them.

In Greece they organized different courses for different target groups with crucial voluntary contribution from retired scientists.

In France the project was prepared jointly by the Cultural Center Daviel (where E-Seniors provides computer trainings), the Youth Information Point (PIJ), a group of students from University of Paris X, and the team of E-SENIORS. It based on intergenerational tournaments, where students demonstrated some interactive games to the team of E-seniors.

Slovak group organized ICT courses for elderly people at the Faculty of economics. The target group was the senior students of the Third Age University and regular students of the faculty, 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.

Slovene team developed new methods for intergenerational learning between students (from primary school and university) and elderly people. In the context of the Grundtvig project ″Tandems go!″ there was at the Center for Adult Education of Ajdovščina established a network linking a primary school, center for adult education and university. 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.

Conclusion

Experiences of all project partners show that intergenerational learning and education could become a real bridge between generations. 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.

References

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