

Intergenerational Learning – Lifelong Learning

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Received: January 16, 2018; received in revised form: February 28, 2018;
accepted: March 13, 2018

Abstract:

Introduction: Nowadays, providing the access to learning appears as an emphasized priority for every stage of life, due to the demographic changes, even near the place of residence or with the utilization of the possibilities of the new informational and communicational technologies, which bring new possibilities also in the dimension of learning between generations.

Purpose: Intergenerational learning can also be defined as a mutual learning relationship and interaction between the young and the old. The starting point of the study is that the younger and older age groups can learn from each other in their free time, in a non-formal learning environment in the framework of study circles. This paper drafts some practical directives for planning and organizing intergenerational study circles in a non-formal learning environment.

Methods: We intend to make a synthesis based on former research and literature – learning between generations, spending free time, learning at an old age, study circles – and following this, a methodological guide is going to be made for planning and organizing intergenerational study circles.

Conclusions: Study circles can be seen as intergenerational learning possibilities – young and old people with different preliminary knowledge can make a profit from the experiences gained during joint work, and from the topics examined from different points of views. The younger and older generations can work together in a non-formal learning environment and there is an opportunity for common learning and knowledge sharing as well.

Key words: intergenerational learning, learning from each other, free time, non-formal learning, community culture.

1 Introduction

Nowadays, the issues of permanent learning (Lifelong Learning – LLL), and learning that is spread in every area of life (Life Wide Learning – LWL) are more and more frequently dealt with. The expression lifelong learning, places the process of learning in the time dimension, while life wide learning vigorously emphasizes the feature of different learning areas complementing each other. Learning can take place in learners' free time, in the framework of the activity done in a community, can be connected to

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work, and its result can be used in the world of work, in everyday life, or it can be even connected to hobbies (European Commission, 2012; Németh, 2015).

In the past years, many initiatives have started to support learning. The particular recommendations (Commission of the European Communities, 2000; UNESCO, 2017) emphasize, for example, the utilization of learning supporting possibilities hiding in new technologies, providing access to learning, the importance of learning from each other and between generations, the need for preparation for lifelong learning, as well as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning results (Miklósi & Oszlanczi, 2010). Among others, the GRALE 3 (Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, UNESCO, 2017) report identifies three key areas of adult education: getting the basic skills, basic competencies; the area of professional training and the support of active citizenship, which includes, among others, free learning and community learning as well. The pursuit for active citizenship at the same time encourages the preparation for lifelong learning and its practical realization. The above-mentioned report also deals with the effects of adult education on health, lifestyle, labour market, as well as social, civil and community life, organized with the purpose of self-realization, professional interest, finding a workplace or creating better working possibilities, but the individual can also be motivated by belonging to a community. Currently, there is a decrease in the participation in formal training. Among the members of the adult population, mainly the non-formal learning environment comes into the fore (Forray & Juhász, 2008).

2 Learning and motivation

Adult learning and learning at an old age have their specific characteristics – e.g, the cognitive achievement capacity – and are also influenced by the education and health condition of the individual itself. And vice versa, research on learning at an old age has proved that suitable activities in this field can have a beneficial effect on health and life satisfaction (Kolland, 2008; 2011). Research results (see Swindell, 2009) draw up three guidelines to reach an active/successful old age:

- keeping the risk of illnesses low;
- maintaining mental/intellectual and biological/physiological health;
- preserving vitality and positive activity.

Research results show that women tend to participate in learning at an old age more often with the aim of spending their free time actively and in a more useful way (Forray & Juhász, 2008). Learning at an old age can have various sources of motivation (Jászberényi & Bajusz, 2013; Goriup, Čagran, & Krošl, 2015):

- Communication need – Different learning scenes mean also communication scenes – they promote the establishment of new relationships, new groups, maintaining and evoking older relationships, etc.
- Spending free time in a useful way – When people become retired, the amount of free time they have increases significantly. In older adults, the need for spending these hours in a more useful way comes up – they take part in lectures in clubs, meet their friends or attend courses, learn languages, do hobbies or go on trips. Often, retirement also gives opportunities to deal with things that were planned for a long time, but their realization failed due to a lack of time even to learn new things. Many people retire in a way that they do not need retirement, they want to continue an active life and learning new things can be an integral part of it.

- Healthcare reasons – Deterioration of health is an inherent part of old age. As time goes by, there are more and more situations when people learn for the sake of protecting their health, e.g. when changing dietary eating habits, individuals have to learn new cooking techniques, recipes or change their lifestyle according in several aspects.
- Technical development – A fast development of technical tools, information technologies and the Internet generated the elderly adults' need for getting familiar with these tools and for learning how to use them (Napora, 2016).

In the process of learning between generations, those jointly done activities become decisive which are based on the different experiences of various age groups and generations. Learning is based on the exchange of experiences itself, thus, the knowledge and skills characteristic for a certain generation can be utilized (Ludescher & Waxenegger, 2008). According to Kolland (2008), although we speak about a heterogeneous group, it still cannot be called intergenerational learning, as one-way knowledge sharing cannot be seen as such either. The three basic principles of intergenerational learning, as defined by Kolland (2008), are learning together (communicative learning), interdisciplinary learning, and learning from each other (dialogic learning). Two dimensions of interdisciplinary learning can be observed – the chronological and the connecting dimension. The first one is related to passing cultural and social norms, while the second one is related to understanding those living in different social situations. In connection to the social capital, many studies have been made. The technical literature usually refers to the works of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putman, as a starting point. In his social capital theory, Putman (2000) emphasizes, among others, the role of informal small groups based on regular and real interactions – the role of reading circles, supporting groups, study circles, and the significance of relationships based on cooperation.

There are many examples of good practice for intergenerational learning in the circles of free time activities – older adults mentor the young ones, while the youth teach the older people how to use new technical devices; they work together on, for example, environmental protection projects; or they act together in a play, etc. Many times, the emphasis is not on the learning activity, but on the time spent together and the social activity for the sake of a common aim (Forray & Juhász, 2008; Jászberényi & Bajusz, 2013; Tengely, 2010).

An opportunity for intergenerational learning is also offered by study circles. It is a learning possibility where the members of a group of different-aged people define together what and how to learn with the help of a facilitator. Both the young and old students coming with different knowledge and experience benefit from the experiences gained during the group work by presenting the particular topics from different points of view (Ludescher & Waxenegger, 2008). Intergenerational learning is based on dialogue-based learning. The communication between the generations and the experience and knowledge exchange surplus generated from the learning process are parts of the learning experience (Kolland, 2008). We see study circles as a form of regular learning- and participant-centred education in small groups, which is built on the division of labour and cooperation of the participants, ranging from topic selection and activity planning to the evaluation of the achieved results.

One of the initiatives of the ADD LIFE Project Toolkit (ADD LIFE European Tool Kit) (Waxenegger et al., 2008) was specifically directed at the development of intergenerational education programmes. The international project was seeking the answer for the question how universities can elaborate, experiment new and innovative learning possibilities for the realization of intergenerational learning inside and outside the university walls.

3 Tips and advice for planning and organizing intergenerational study circles – a methodological guide

In the rest of the study, considering the experience of the ADD Life Tool Kit (Waxenegger et al., 2008), too, we have formulated some practical directives for planning and organizing intergenerational study circles in a non-formal learning environment:

- *Facilitator* – The leader of the study circle is competent in the organization of the study circle but is not necessarily an expert in the given topic, s/he rather facilitates – supports the creation of a dialogue among the participants, promotes participants' self-confidence, creates a calm atmosphere, encourages cooperation and avoids rivalry (Kindström, 2010; Larsson & Nordvall, 2010). We should aspire for a clear shaping of the way of participation and the creation of the relationship between the topic and the personal lives, and the actual situation of the participants. We should incite a dialogue, a dissolved exchange of views and opinions, as well as provide an opportunity for commenting on for each participant, both during the learning process and in the process of evaluation (Kolland, 2008; Ludescher & Waxenegger, 2008). The method of the study circle can help promote the participants' self-confidence, too. We should support challenging but realistic goals. It should also be taken into account that the use of language should be "generation sensitive", adjusted to the expectations and needs of the particular participants. Cultural differences can obstruct intergenerational learning. The students should examine their own cultural backgrounds with a critical eye and should respect other approaching forms as well. Different cultural codes can cause misunderstandings and, in a given case, they can lead to problematic communication situations (Kolland, 2008). We should aspire for maintaining the attention and interest of the members of the study circles, provide the possibility for each participant to join the online work. During the learning process, we should give supporting feedback, continuous strengthening (which can also come from other members of the community) (Mogyorósi, 2017).
- *Preliminary knowledge* – The work in the study circle builds on the preliminary knowledge and experiences of the participants (knowledge construction). It is important that the expectations of the participants are clear to everyone. For example, the following questions should be answered: "What is the most important thing you want to learn about the topic?"; "What do you wish/would you like from the other participants in order to achieve your goal?" (Kindström, 2010). We should encourage sharing experiences, the participants' involvement, activate their preliminary knowledge, etc. For successful learning, the motivation for learning, the interpretation system, as well as the activation of the participants' existing knowledge related to the topic are indispensable.

- *Planning and organizing learning* – Learning has to be planned and organized. The participants of the study circle decide about the learning plan and methods together. The plans can be formed on the go flexibly; they should be adjustable to the needs of the participants. The participants plan the work in the study circle and discuss the goals together. They approve and set them, so an active involvement of participants is indispensable. The participants can also change and modify their preliminary plans in a flexible way during the study circle work, since they consider the learning plan as the tool of learning. The members of the study circle are responsible for the functioning of the group and how they achieve their learning goals. They need to define the optimal number of participants. An insufficient number of members or too many of them may decrease the efficiency of the study circle. If the group has less than five members, it is difficult to maintain general conversation. Experience says that if a group is too big, the cooperation and common responsibility are less effective inside it. Namely, the work in the study circles is based on the active participation and cooperation of its members. The ideal number of the members of a study group is from 8 to 10, so that every member of the group is in a communicational relationship with the others and has the possibility of exchanging experiences and opinions. Both in relation to the intergenerational learning and the study circles, it is true that learning is not efficient with very large groups (Kindström, 2010; Larsson & Nordvall, 2010). Intergenerational learning is realized if the proportion of those representing different generations in groups is in balance, each participant of the group feels him/herself important, and the topic can be interesting for various age groups. Furthermore, the work in the online study circles can be efficient if there is the possibility of both synchronous and asynchronous communication.
- *Methods* – With the use of participant-centred methods, for example, generating discussions, making mind maps etc., we can incite cooperation. Cooperation with peer students can help to maintain the motivation for learning as well. Moreover, it can play a significant role in solving learning problems, increasing the efficiency of learning, and developing critical thinking. In the case of certain participant-centred methods (e.g. the method of discussion), it is recommended to call the attention of the participants to the fact that there is no single truth, and many parallel theories may exist. It can encourage critical thinking and point at the vision-weakening features of stereotypes. These methods emphasize that there are individual differences among people, so, generalization is never exact (Kolland, 2008). This is why it is important to make sure that every point of view comes to light, just like various opinions and approaches.
- *Evaluation* – During the learning process, it is necessary to receive supporting and continuous feedback from the other members of the community. When finishing a learning activity, feedback should be provided, there should be the possibility to show, discuss, and evaluate the results, etc. The study circle work usually ends with some kind of a product and does not aim at measuring knowledge. The way and philosophy of the evaluation should adjust to the age specificities of the study circle participants. We should provide the participants with an opportunity to show their results in a form that points out their strengths, not their weaknesses. There should be the possibility of self-evaluation as well. We should provide a positive, close, and if necessary, constructive feedback (Virág, 2017).

In the following table (Table 1), we summarize the general principles of planning study circles on the basis of the above-mentioned directives.

Table 1

General points of view on planning study circles based on Kindström (2010) and Larsson and Nordvall (2010)

Who?	The leader of a study circle does not fill the traditional directing role, s/he is there not as an expert or instructor, rather as a supporter, facilitator of the participants. S/he supports forming dialogues among the participants. S/he strengthens the self-confidence of the participants, creates a calm atmosphere and avoids rivalry.
For whom?	It is a free learning, educating possibility: for those interested in things in life, eager to learn, eager to learn at an old age, eager to learn Hungarian, living geographically far, for those having a limited room for manoeuvre etc. The participants can differ from each other as for gender, age, school qualification, marital status, workplace; they can have different preliminary knowledge and working experience.
What?	Study circles mainly build on a personal interest in an exact topic; present-oriented or past-oriented interests. Choosing a topic can be connected to general knowledge, professional knowledge, or a hobby, etc.
Why?	Interest in a topic, diverse spending of free time etc. Its use in the world of work, in everyday life etc. Community aim: belonging to somewhere, creating cultural and social capital.
From what?	Typically, it has no cost commitment. In the case of intergenerational initiatives, the promotion of Internet use can be necessary, especially for older people in this case, e.g. a tender source
Where?	If personal attendance is necessary, in the place of residence or in an easily reachable place In an online learning environment, reaching the content is irrespective of place, for example in the framework of community sites.
When?	In the case of study circles which are built on personal presence, a meeting is to be organized once, maximum twice a week. A typical study circle meets about 10 times for a 2-3-hour session. In an online learning environment, however, time and space can be formed in a flexible way, due to the devices and applications making synchronous and asynchronous communication possible. On request, providing the possibility of synchronous communication (simultaneous presence in the online space).
How?	With participant-centred methods (e.g. the project method, research-based learning, problem-based learning)
With what?	Printed materials, Web 2.0. Computer/mobile info communicational devices, Internet connection, Internet applications, etc.

4 Conclusion

Intergenerational learning can promote the creation of relationships between generations, can widen, enrich social networks, can have a positive influence on the quality of life, can support the exchange of cultural experience, can preserve traditions and values etc. (Kolland, 2008; Coleman, 1994; Putman, 2000). An advantage of intergenerational learning is that the preliminary knowledge and life experience of the adult and older generation and the life philosophy of the younger generation appear simultaneously. When discussing a topic, the representatives of different age groups can enlighten the given topic in many ways. Moreover, participation in study circle work can direct the participants towards new areas: they can be curious about further fields of interest of other participants of various age. Meanwhile, we can experience that the relationships between generations are loosening. In the case of meeting places, it is also true that there are fewer and fewer possibilities for intergenerational meetings (Ludescher & Strempfl, 2008). For example, in the life of a small town, taking into account the access to different age groups (local website, online group of the local community, local newspaper, cable television and community radio stations etc.), the means of the local public can efficiently support the call for learning within the communities and generations in particular towns, communities, even in an online environment. We agree that there exist some kinds of fear that the use of the Internet may exclude older people from a part of the communication. Therefore, it is important that the promotion of Internet use, especially for older people, is a part of the plan of the intergenerational programme (Vavřín & Halvorson, 2008).

Acknowledgements

This paper was supported by EFOP–3.6.1–16–2016–00001 “Complex Development of Research Capacities and Services at Eszterházy Károly University”.

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