Intergenerational Learning and Education - Always a Challenge

Lucia PETRESCU, „*Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi*

Bogdan Costel IRIMIA, *EuroEd Foundation*

Anca COLIBABA, „*Gr. T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, EuroEd Foundation*

Abstract: *In the XXI century the transfer of experience from one generation to another has become a great challenge. The link between the generations can be useful for more than mere socialisation. This connection established through intergenerational learning and education can equip beneficiaries with new skills and abilities. The great thing about this is that it benefits all people involved.*
*The challenge has been taken by two projects: **ENIL**[1] and **I am not scared**[2].
In the contents of this article we will present these two projects and the manner in which each answers the challenge.*

Key words: *intergenerational learning, bullying*

In this article we will present two different approaches towards intergenerational learning. The approaches are developed by two European Projects, funded by the European Commission, that encourage intergenerational learning in two different ways. The **ENIL** project promotes interregional learning by supporting practitioners in the field and the **I am not scared** project will handle the bullying phenomenon by placing pupils, their parents and teachers at the centre of the research.

ENIL

The European Network in Intergenerational Learning responds to the need identified among practitioners to offer a platform and incentives for fostering new ideas and new developments in intergenerational learning across Europe, and to provide the infrastructure for on-going exchange of expertise, good practice, news,

---

[1] ref. no. 510890-LLP-1-2010-1-FR-GRUNDTVIGGNW
[2] ref. no. 511645-LLP-1-2010-1-IT-KA1-KA1SCR

research and developments in the field. It will facilitate discussion and shared understanding of concepts/terminology around Intergenerational Learning Policy and Practice, while identifying new priorities and raising the profile of Intergenerational Learning across Europe by consolidating informal networks, contributing to the debate on the role of seniors in today's society, influencing policy makers, disseminating and mainstreaming intergenerational learning developments. The Network will encourage through adequate measures both the horizontal transfer of innovation among practitioners (through Peer Learning Activities and providing opportunities to meet and exchange good practice) and a two-way vertical dialogue between policy makers and the grass-root level (through dissemination of policy decisions, through research into existing practice that will feed further policy recommendations, and through the singling out of impact of good practice at various levels). In concrete terms, the Network will organize two thematic conferences and an advocacy conference, will fund Peer-Learning Activities among organizations at grass-root level throughout Europe, will publish two thematic reports and an advocacy document, will issue an Intergenerational Learning Magazine in eZine format and in print.

The main aim of the Network is to promote Intergenerational Learning (IGL) by bringing together and supporting sustainable, effective practice in the field and by facilitating the exchange of ideas and expertise beyond individual projects, and by creating a mechanism for practitioners to influence policy and practice. Although some attempts to do this have existed, including a formerly funded network in IGL and several development projects, these have not led to sustainable practice. As a result, this Network will fulfil three parallel aims, and therefore three functions:

RESEARCH FUNCTION: Provide an overview of IGL through comparative analyses and develop a shared terminology at a European level

DISSEMINATION FUNCTION: Disseminate innovation and good practice in IGL at European level and provide a platform for information on key issues, policy and research In IGL

ADVOCACY FUNCTION: Promote the mainstreaming of IGL at policy level and the implementation of identified innovative good practice throughout European educational systems.

The main idea of the network goes back to the principles of popular enlightenment and to the road-opening work of Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, in the sense that learning should be done through direct interaction between people,

not from the books, and aim mainly towards personal maturity and self-knowledge. Intergenerational learning settings provide spaces for interaction between generations and a transfer of personal knowledge, wisdom or new skills from one generation to another. The network will aim to promote a form of learning that values the education of minds in general over training people for specific jobs or careers in particular, and it ensures people, young adult or the elderly, do not simply become experts in one narrow professional field and remain illiterate in other areas of human life. It will not be particularly concerned with transferring learning methodologies that help the person – the whole person – become a full member of society, develop critical thinking skills, and give a broad knowledge base from which to interpret the world around. Intergenerational learning focuses as a rule on on-formal ways of developing the learner's ability to analyse and synthesise knowledge and situations, empowers the younger generations to make good decisions based on the power of examples of the elderly; and encourages the elderly to remain integrated and active in society by transferring their knowledge to younger generations and by learning how to cope with the realities of the changing society (e.g. new technologies, new skills, new fashion or other social realities). Ultimately, any work conducted by a network in intergenerational learning will focus on helping a person become a lifelong learner.

It is expected that, as a result of network activities, practitioners throughout Europe will be able to adopt and/or improve intergenerational learning activities, and that policy makers will have sufficient information to back up further support for and mainstreaming of intergenerational learning activities into national and transnational policy and curricula.

How to meet the challenges of a millenium where sometimes aggressiveness is rewarded as a success story is one issue that is further taken as one topic of discussion in this project and extended in a separate approach in the project whose description and outline follows.

I am not scared

The bullying phenomenon is a main challenge that all educational systems have to deal with.
I am not scared intends to identify the best strategies to prevent and combat the bullying phenomenon and provides Secondary school and Vocational Education teachers, Directors Pupils, Parents and key policy makers in the field of education with a better understanding of the dynamics that can lead to the emerging

and consolidating of the bullying phenomenon and of the most effective strategies and behaviours to tackle it.

The main objective of the **I am not scared** project is to promote and adopt a Bottom-Up approach to the understanding of the bullying phenomenon. The project will place pupils, both Victims and Bullies, their parents and Teachers at the centre of the research so that they themselves will be the protagonists of acquiring and understanding the information, through their commitment to a common research-action activity in order to analyse exemplary case studies from their different point of view.

Another objective of the project is to promote a knowledge sharing and transfer of knowledge and experiences among institutions and schools representing 9 European countries with different level of awareness and effectiveness on the theme of bullying prevention and tackling, in order to transfer the best solutions and experiences from the most advanced countries (i.e. UK, Germany and Spain) to countries that still lack organic strategies to tackle the problem (i.e. Italy, Belgium and Greece) and that are still developing a complete understanding of the issue (i.e. Bulgaria, Lithuania and Romania).

The project has a direct **impact** on the following short terms target groups that will all be directly involved in the analysis of bullying episodes from their different point of views.

1. 450 Students of Secondary and Vocational education schools

Students Victims of bullyism, bully students and other students will benefit from a more aware approach to the causes, the negative effects and what behaviours they can adopt to prevent the bullying episodes.

2. 180 Teachers of Secondary and Vocational education schools

Teachers will benefit from the reflection on how they could improve their capacity to understand the dynamics that backup and cause bullying episodes and what they can do effectively address the situation.

Teachers will also benefit from the knowledge sharing experience, with which they will from their colleagues according to a peer to peer approach.

3. 450 Parents of students who played a role in bullying episodes

The Parents will benefit from the opportunity to reflect on the behaviours that can signal problems related to bullying episodes, to gain information on who to refer to be informed and to get advices and to learn what to do to prevent and address the problem.

4. 90 Supporting Experts (e.g. Psychologists), 90 School Directors and 90 Key Policy Makers

They will benefit from a more in depth and practical oriented approach to the understanding of the group and personal dynamics that are behind the bullying episodes, of what role they can play to address the issue.

The *I am not scared* project contributes to Acquisition of key competences in preschools and in obligatory education as it develops a strategy to address bullying at school providing all actors playing a role in the School and Vocational Education system: students, their parents, teachers, school directors, professional experts and policy makers with key competences to identify, prevent and tackle this phenomenon that deeply affect the right of students to achieve an adequate level of education.

The project also contributes to the success and effectiveness of lifelong learning policies as it tackles the bullying phenomenon that highly affects the rights of pupils to receive education. Being victim of bullyism can be a cause of school abandon which can lead to social exclusion and passivity of individuals. The project provides solutions how to tackle this by the development of a high quality strategy, to be used by all actors of the school systems to better understand and tackle bullying and remove those related obstacles that threat students chances to be active and aware citizens.

Although a really wide bibliography addressing the bullying phenomenon is available, most of the documents are developed by experts in the field (Researchers, Psychologists etc.), while less is available if we consider a Bottom Up approach, focusing as a starting point on the direct experiences of teachers, pupils and parents and making these subjects protagonists of the narration, analysis and peer to peer sharing of knowledge of what is happening and only then comparing this experience with the perception of the experts in order to provide a frame linking the "scientific" approach to the experiential one.

The project therefore is innovative as it promotes an understanding of the bullying phenomenon, based on the direct gathering of the perception, opinion and feelings of those who have been protagonists of the events. This gives them the opportunity to reflect and explain what they think were the causes and motivation of the bullying, what help was needed and from whom to ameliorate the situation, what functioned and what did not in the behaviours of all the actors in order to reduce the impact of what was happening etc.

Instead of conclusions

Intergenerational learning and education is more important now than it was ever before. Once awareness has been raised, it is up to us to take action. The two projects presented in this article are relevant cases which involve final beneficiaries in a structured environment, activating them and offering them the opportunity to provide their input. Through this type of activities we achieve: intergenerational learning, transfer of innovation, skill development and probably the most important aspect of all we bridge the gap between generations thus creating a better inter-communication channel.

References:

1. www.enilnet.eu

2. http://www.eagle-project.eu/

3. http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/area/intergenerational-learning

4. http://www.irea.ro/ro/index.php

5. http://projects.pixel-online.org/iamnotscared/index.php