

## Why we need to foster Intergenerational learning?

Resume of the communication presented at the Conference "New Trends on Adult Education", held in the European Parliament, Brussels on 16 November 2010

**Teresa Almeida Pinto**

Learning within different generations (not only among the oldest and the youngest), it's one of the most ancient models of learning – especially valuable before the invention of writing, more than never needed in the current digital society.

Undoubtedly that education and training have a central role in the economic development of Europe. Undoubtedly that learning throughout lifespan should be a reality. However more than a decade of efforts "Making lifelong learning a reality" were not very successful, for mature and older adults. Figures from Eurostat, made available last October, shown that currently EU27 has 141 millions of inhabitants aged between 50 and 70 years old, but only 6,5 millions participates in education or training activities.

We should not expect different results if we don't experience different strategies. Adult education, which is all post-compulsory education, should not be a "quasi-compulsive", libresco option. Flexible, non-formal and informal learning can be more attractive and effective, to mature and older people; "older" school methods of teaching can be effective to some older adults, but because they are a very diverse group, more flexible methods should become a reality, to coop with all learning styles of older people. "Pure memorising is relatively difficult for older people; new contents can be learned if related to their own life and work experience."<sup>1</sup>

Although there's a lack of research about **how effective and less spending informal education can be**, there's no doubt on how popular this kind of education is, among mature and older adults.

Learning in adulthood is about changing: of competencies, social and personal behaviour, mentality and level of knowledge, among other aspects. Learning strategies to adults (and other age groups), should incorporate, and be delivered, in strong interconnection with current social and societal scenario; should also be incorporated in current policies and programmes.

The **Europe 2020 Strategy** - COM(2010) 2020<sup>2</sup>, exhort us to become more green and **more clever**. No doubt about the need to become more green, for the sake of the planet. However the need to become more solidary, it's equally urgent, for the sake of humankind. Considering speed ageing of populations, we will become a clever society if we really invest on create solid links between generations. **An intelligent society will be able to harness the potential of all people, regardless of age.**

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<sup>1</sup> Cedefop (2010). Working and ageing Emerging theories and empirical perspectives. [www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3053\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3053_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Europe 2020 Strategy: <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

**The inclusion of an intergenerational perspective into major EU Programmes and initiatives, will be a contribute to (at least partially) solve the problem of accessibility to learning; will provide a win-win situation to society as whole, and not only to the older ones. Intergenerational learning as transversal priority, will be a direct benefit to people of all ages: will contribute to shift the interest and commitment of older adults, with their own lifelong learning process and contribute to break the intergenerational heritage of low qualifications.**

*“The intergenerational impact of VET on child outcomes is also of importance. In the UK, study in VET courses post-16 has significant effects on children’s verbal ability and enables parents to produce a more educationally stimulating home environment. In Germany, all types of education of parents (including VET and apprenticeship) have a positive impact on their children’s wages. Jæger and Holm (2007) show that, in Denmark and other Scandinavian countries, the probability that children attain higher tertiary education is much higher when their mothers hold vocational qualifications. In addition, children are much more likely to complete apprenticeship if their fathers have an apprenticeship or a VET qualification.”<sup>3</sup>*

But how to mainstream intergenerational concept into all fields of life? The MATES’s Guide<sup>4</sup> provided an extensive number of recommendations about several areas, still not explored. Based on that work, the current model that I propose, includes either a bottom-up strategy and top-down strategy.

The top-down strategy would include the development of **intergenerational learning as an academic discipline**.

Although Intergenerational practice is very popular and successful, usually intergenerational learning is an outcome of these social activities, and not the main purpose for the practice. Professionals developing intergenerational activities, in most situations, develop skills and competencies outside formal learning system. Universities and other formal courses of training and education are focused in the care/relation to a generation alone (kindergarten educators, college and university teachers, gereontagogists, etc).

The recently approved *Report on the demographic challenge and solidarity between generations*<sup>5</sup> “considers that the perspective of shrinking populations by 2050 may implicate a (...) need for proactive policies to adapt spatial planning, housing, transport and all other kinds of infrastructures accordingly”, then it is even more understandable that, in an ageing society, **professionals need to learn how to deal with older people needs and expectations**: for a university teacher is it the same to communicate with a young student or with the an older one? For architects, city planners, designers, is it the same to plan for a young society or to an ageing one?

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<sup>3</sup> Cedefop (2009). Modernising vocational education and training. [www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3043beta\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3043beta_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Teresa Almeida Pinto (2009) Guide of Ideas for Planning and Implementing Intergenerational Projects. [www.matesproject.eu](http://www.matesproject.eu)

<sup>5</sup> Report on the demographic challenge and solidarity between generations (2010/2027(INI)) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A7-2010-0268+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

**Intergenerational learning as an academic discipline will provide basic skills to address the current and future reality.** Future professionals would learn at school, what's like re-built a society with more than ¼ of population aged 65 or more<sup>6</sup>.

This approach will contribute to a proactive change, not only to adapt transports, houses and public spaces, but also to foster active participation and citizenship of mature and older people.

Such approach goes in line with the WHO concept of age-friendly cities, which involve all sort of ages, and cities - either urban, rural or semi-urban areas.

This bottom-up strategy, (develop **tailored made projects at local level**), can be mainstreamed **in to all fields of society, from employment to culture, from education to health.**

The intergenerational perspective represent's a crucial add value to specific UE initiatives, such the **Agenda for new skills and jobs**: Intergenerational skills have the potential to create a **new professional profile** beside to **improve the quality of the services provided**, constitutes a contribute "to bridge the skills gap for the jobs of the future (...) new academic specializations need to be promoted"<sup>7</sup>; also contribute to **foster a new entrepreneurial culture**, namely trough the "recognition of initiatives to help young and old people who wish to create an intergenerational business together"<sup>8</sup> and improve "knowledge sharing in the workplace to enable different generations to develop new skills and understanding of the whole workforce"<sup>9</sup>.

Considering the **next generation of education and training programmes**, a cutting edge approach can be focused not on chronological age, but on the needs and expectations of the beneficiaries of this programme. The **"lifelong learning" programme should be based on a continuous life span, not on "age based" criteria.** A win-win situation can occur if instead of a "senior volunteer" programmes, as the opposite to the "youth on the move" initiative, we could focus on "promote **specific programmes for intergenerational volunteering and for mentoring**"<sup>10</sup> and alike programmes, **in the field of learning, employment and others.**

We need to re-address the future education and Training to allow mature and older adults to embrace a **lifelong learning trough flexible formulas**; Empower them with skills and an inner-motivation to keep learning, not just as a mean to stay on the labour market, but a path to stay active: to be productive member of society it's more than hold a paid job. Therefore, increase skills out of the so called "professional competencies", will equally help mature and older people to help themselves and to contribute society, trough a meaningful work.

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<sup>6</sup> "by 2050, 29 percent of Europe's citizen will be 65 and older" International Data Base:  
<http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/groups.php>

<sup>7</sup> An Agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment. COM(2010) 682/3.  
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6328&langId=en>

<sup>8</sup> Report on the demographic challenge and solidarity between generations, p.32

<sup>9</sup> MATES Guide, p.24

<sup>10</sup> European Parliament resolution of 22 April 2008 on the role of volunteering in contributing to economic and social cohesion (2007/2149(INI)) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P6-TA-2008-0131+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>