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The Intergenerational Educational Programs: A new Sphere of Lifelong Education

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Abstract. This work presents lifelong education as a key conceptual framework in adult education and intergenerational learning as an instrument that can be used to assist lifelong education reaching its goals. Intergenerational education was recognized as a new approach to lifelong education programs on International Roundtable "Developing Creative and Inclusive Strategies and Partnerships for Fostering a Lifelong Learning Culture, held from 27 to 29 November 2000 (UNESCO, 2001). In this roundtable the necessity for fostering intergenerational education was particularly recognized: "There are different environments where people learn in life. We generally do not learn from each other in an intergenerational context" (UNESCO, p. 39). This kind of education is recreated through the intergenerational programs that emphasize the pedagogical, has as the spinal cord of the teaching-learning process the diversity and intergenerational differences and is developed in specific contexts such as schools, communities, workplaces, etc. In this communication we intend to deep these and other questions about the intergenerational education and to present intergenerational educational programs as a new sphere of lifelong education.

Keywords: Adult Education, Lifelong Education; intergenerational education; intergenerational programs

Introduction

One of the first international attempts to influence educational policies in respects to the perusal of lifelong education is the Faure Report (UNESCO, 1972). UNESCO proposed the adoption of lifelong education as the main concept for educational policies in developed and developing countries. Twenty-four years later, the vision of the Faure report was re-articulated through the Delors Report (UNESCO, 1996). Although the Faure Report adopted the basic concept of "learning to be", the Delors Report presented four pillars of learning: to be, to know, to do, and to live together. Currently, lifelong education is still being questioned as an educational principle that needs to be contextualised within this era of globalisation, for the 21st century. Regardless of the complexity of this construct, there is no doubt that lifelong learning is a key concept within adult education.

Under the European Employment Strategy, the Lisbon European Council of March 2000 defined lifelong learning as all learning activities that establish a goal which, is undertaken on an ongoing basis, in order to improve knowledge, skills and, competencies. On the one hand, this vision makes it clear that lifelong learning, aside from being a component of education and training, should provide opportunities for the participation in continuous learning, regardless of the context. It is evident that, it should cover all types of teaching and learning: formal education, non-formal education, and informal education. On the other hand, it indicates that learning can take place in all dimensions of our lives and at any stage, i.e, the

acquisition of knowledge occurs in school, within the family, during leisure time, in community life, everyday professional life, and at all ages.

In this paper we present intergenerational education as a new tool that aids lifelong learning achieve its goals, and as a viable response to two specific objectives presented in the document of the European Communities Commission's "Memorandum on lifelong learning" published in October 2000 (CEC, 2000), which are: to develop effective teaching and learning methods for the continuation of lifelong and life-wide learning and to provide lifelong learning opportunities as close to learners in their own communities as possible.

In that same year, intergenerational education was recognised as a new approach to lifelong education programmes at the International Round Table "Developing Creative and Inclusive Strategies and Partnerships for Fostering a Lifelong Learning Culture", held from the 27th to the 29th of November 2000 (UNESCO, 2001). Explicitly, for the first time, the need to promote intergenerational education was confirmed: "There are different environments in which people learn in life. We generally do not learn from each other in an intergenerational context" (UNESCO, 2001:39). The UNESCO's Institute for Education created the programme "Promoting Inter-generational Learning Policies, Action Research and Networking", spurring the development of intergenerational education.

This type of education is not new, since older generations have always educated the younger and/or vice versa. However, due to the social, cultural, economic, historical, and, technological changes that have been taking place in today's world, these generations are becoming increasingly estranged from one other. Thus, missing the learning opportunity that is fundamental for the development of people and society. In response to this and other problems, intergenerational education takes on a new roll and is recreated throughout intergenerational programmes.

Both intergenerational education and intergenerational programme constructs are complex and there is still no consensus as to their definition, that is, it has not yet been decided what is the most correct and complete definition for it, and which term is the most appropriate to objectively adopt. In this paper we have chosen the definition of intergenerational programmes adopted by the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes, at the First International Conference held between the 2nd of April until the 4th, 2002 in England: "Intergenerational Programmes form a system, an approach and practice in which all generations, irrespective of age, race, location and socio-economic status bind themselves together in the process of generating, promoting and utilising ideas, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in an interactive way for the improvement of self and community" (Oduaran, quoted by Hattan-Yeo; 2002:19).

We define intergenerational education as "processes and procedures that are supported and legitimized emphasizing cooperation and interaction among two or more generations [...] seeking to share experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and, values in pursuit of their self-esteem and personal self-achievement. The goal is to change and be changed while learning with others" (Sáez, 2002:104).

1. The Relevance and Timeliness of Intergenerational Educational Programmes

To understand what intergenerational educational programmes are, we first need to look at some intergenerational programmes (which we will designate from now on as I.P.). These programs emerged in the late 1960s in the United States of America, in response to the geographical separation of young and senior members of families from neighbourhoods at risk. In the early 1980s they began to be employed to address social problems related to cultural, social, and economic needs in Canada. From the 1990s up until today, all over the

world and in Europe, these programs were used as tools for community development. (Newman and Sánchez, 2007)

In educational terms, IPs are situated within the scope of non-formal and informal education. Philip Coombs and Manzoor Ahmed define non-formal education as “any organized systematic, educational activity carried out outside the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (1974: 8). The main purpose of IPs is to open pathways to knowledge about the world, revolving around individuals and their social relationships. In these programmes there is an intentionality of action, by means of participating, learning, transmitting and exchanging knowledge, and the time. Dedication to careful planning is a major contributor to the success of the program.

It is essential for its development to start by understanding what its needs are, what it is in response to and, the possibilities/opportunities available to provide this answer, creating *a posteriori* objective. These may include, for example, care for the elderly and children, the strengthening of educational systems, the enrichment of retired people, the development of a sense of belonging, the improvement of relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, the preservation of cultural traditions, to minimise the isolation of older people, the promotion of awareness and concerns for the environment or, the improvement of community support systems.

Thus, IPs are developed according to the needs of specific groups and to meet certain necessities, such as people's participation being optional and based on their interests and motivations. The planning of activities should be developed in conjunction with the participants, taking into account their pathways. Its rules being defined in conjunction with the group, the great educator is the "other", the one with whom we interact, the role of the technician being one of guidance, support and monitoring. These interventions take place in various locations, such as schools, community organisations, hospitals, community services centres, etc.

These programs allow people to benefit from the opportunity to share and reaffirm their vital experience and, the meaning of their lives. Thus, they will in turn benefit from relationships of mutual support that allow them to provide and receive care at different times of their lives. In these programmes, people exchange information and discuss social and cultural values. Participants will develop skills that generate changes in themselves, in their organisations and in the communities in which they live.

Research has shown that Intergenerational Programmes benefit the people and the community involved. As evidence, we present some of the findings from the study carried out by Judy MacCallum and her team, who analyzed 120 Australian intergenerational programmes in 2006. The Benefits for the elderly included: opportunities for learning; the minimisation of isolation; renewed appreciation for personal experiences; reintegration into family and community life; enhancement of self-esteem and motivation; the sharing of experiences; recognition for their contribution to the community; learning more about younger people; the development of skills, including social skills and new technologies; the transmission of traditions, culture and language; etc.

Benefits for younger people include: the enhancement of their self worth, self-esteem and self-confidence; the access to adult support during times of difficulty; the refinement of their sense of social responsibility; a more positive perception of older people; to equip themselves with practical skills; the improvement of academic results; the improvement of reading skills; a lowered involvement with violence and drug; learning about history and origins and, about

other people's stories; support in building their own labour career; alternative leisure activities to tackle problems, particularly drugs, violence, and antisocial behaviour.

Finally, the benefits for the community include: the reconstruction of social networks; the development of a sense of community; the building of a more inclusive society; the breaking down of barriers and stereotypes; the building and strengthening of culture; offering models for civic behaviour; building, maintaining and revitalising community opportunities and public infrastructures. Included in this is the production of public art; care for the environment; volunteers to provide community services and to encourage people to work with other community groups to name a few.

In literature, it is more common to find studies based on the benefits received by younger generations than to find studies based on the benefits bestowed upon communities and the elderly. Due to the fact that the adult generation is the least studied and least implicated in the IPs. This is easily explained since IPs were initially aimed at generations on both ends of the vital cycle. The International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs (ICIP), in April 1999, considered involving multiple generations (including at least two non-adjacent generations without family ties) as a fundamental characteristic for these programs. Similarly, Hatton-Yeo e Osako (2000) state that these programs can involve multiple generations and should include a minimum of two non-contiguous generations from different families.

However, more and more authors highlight the importance of the middle generations' role as enablers and beneficiaries of the intergenerational practice. (Granville and Ellis, 1999, Newman & Sánchez 2007; Sánchez, et al 2008; Sánchez, Kaplan, Sáez, 2010). On the one hand, adults are normally the caretakers for the two generations (children and parents), they need support to perform their functions. On the other hand, adults have increasingly more periods of inactivity throughout their careers, in which they can benefit from opportunities to learn, to network with people from other generations and their own, to reintegrate within their family and community life and to feel needed, active, and participative. Thus, we begin to understand that using these practices with non-adjacent generations is to underutilise an IPs' potential.

Despite the predominance of the intergenerational programs' positive results in literature, some negative results also occur. An intergenerational program is more than just placing members of different generations to participate in the same activity. Although the co-presence of two different generations in the same space may be crucial for these programs, it is insufficient. According to Hayes, change, interaction and, behaviour of mutual assistance among children and the elderly requires time, careful planning and, professional implementation (2003). Along these same lines, Butts (2007) states that intergenerational interaction that is not designed or implemented properly can produce a negative appreciation for the other age group. These programs present risks and possible negative impacts that should be avoided and taken into account when organising an IP. Reviewing the literature, several authors (Granville and Ellis, 1999; Hatton-Yeo y Osako, 2000; Kuehne 2003, 2005; Bressler, Henkin and Adler, 2005; Newman and Sánchez 2007; Sánchez, et al 2008; Springate, Atkinson and Martin, 2008; Martin, Springate and Atkinson, 2010) assign a series of factors to an IPs' success that we have grouped and summarised as follows:

- a) On the one hand, the IPs should address the needs of the community and the local context and, on the other hand, the needs and interests of the participants.
- b) Everyone involved should give, take and benefit from an IP and these should impact their lives.

- c) In order for this to happen, they should have continuity in time; they should be well defined, planned and managed and, involve participants in the planning and design of the activities.
- d) They should be financially sustainable and work within a network for the support of different sectors.
- e) Professionals should have specialised training.
- f) Finally, they should be evaluated during the implementation of the program, from the beginning until the end, allowing for a constant readjustment of practice in order to be successful.

Thus far, two taxonomic criteria for IPs were identified, service and education, which are both commonly related to service and education, and are differentiated by their main objectives. Henceforth, the main objective for the service of an IP is to provide services to the generations, whereas the intergeneration educational programs' priority is to promote intergenerational educational exchange. The latter's focus on proper educational criteria and the teaching-learning process is based on diversity and intergenerational differences.

Therefore, intergenerational education allows us to put into practice the four pillars upon which lifelong education is based on (Delors, 1996):

- a) It teaches how to live together: I.E. it happens by contact with others, in a cooperative and participative environment among everyone involved, teaching about diversity, preserving traditions, collective identity, favoring solidarity and, avoiding violence and conflicts.
- b) It teaches how to know: I.E. provides the means by which to acquire knowledge and to understand the world, to develop professional and communicative skills through discovering with others. Through this process, information, news and, ideas are spread, feelings and customs are transmitted.
- c) It teaches how to do: I.E. develops individual skills, through active, collaborative, experimental learning, team work, voluntary work, confronting and solving conflicts and, empathic communication. It also inspires individual know-how that will influence the natural and social environment, hence improving it.
- d) It teaches how to be: I.E. aims for those in contact with others to get to know themselves better and become accomplished, develop their intelligence, responsibility, critical and, independent thinking, creativity, art, culture, etc.

The following are a few examples of Intergenerational Educational Programs, conducted in several countries:

1. The *“Elderly people now online program: School in the afternoon project”*, developed in Bulgaria.

In this program, children teach the elderly (grandparents) how to use *Skype*, after school. Children acquire knowledge and computer skills in school, which they then teach to the elderly. The elderly acquire skills and abilities on how to communicate via *Skype*, they build a positive attitude towards new technology and innovations and, continuously build upon their knowledge and skills. Children practice computer skills, experience teaching and, develop their communication skills.

2. The “*Prejudice Reduction Program/PRP*”, United States of America

This program aims at eliminating racial, ethnic and gender prejudice as well as the age difference in children. The elderly provide services to children in varied and multiple activities, such as: the preparation for an oral story between the elderly volunteers and students who address themes like the experience of growing up in the segregated south, the participation in civil rights movements, surviving the Holocaust, etc.; the creation of reading workshops, activities which stress prejudice and self-esteem, tell stories, read poetry out loud and, create puppet shows.

3. The “*Generate Cooking Project*” program, United States of America

A program in which young people and the elderly develop culinary skills together and learn how to prepare healthy dishes. In addition to these objectives, it seeks to break down the barriers between generations, to promote better understanding amongst generations and encourage older people to transmit their skills and experience to the younger.

4. The “*Two Generations*” program, United States of America.

This program was developed in response to antisocial behaviour, and involved a group of young and elderly people who discussed issues related to the town and stereotypes, and photographed problematic areas. From these meetings, activities to improve the environment arose, including the mowing of lawns, the cleaning of the river, the planting of trees and, the placing of tables and benches along the riverbank. At the end of the program, townsfolk continued to develop these activities on their own.

5. The “*United at Work*” program, Portugal.

This is an Intergenerational Entrepreneurship program promoted by the Social Innovation Bank of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa. Its main objective is to contribute to the joint integration of young people and seniors into active lives through entrepreneurship, using co-creation and interaction amongst the generations.

2. Conclusion

Much about this subject remains to be explained and explored; however, our main goal is to draw attention to the relevance and timeliness of Intergenerational Educational Programs and to demonstrate how these programs can be used, and how important they are to the promotion of lifelong learning and Adult Education.

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