

**INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING CIRCLES – AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL
FOR MUTUAL EDUCATION OF YOUNG AND SENIORS**

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Abstract

The paper views an alternative educational model, Intergenerational Learning Circles (ILC), through which young, in particular college/university students, and seniors, in particular retirees, can learn together and from each other in age-diverse teams by sharing of experience, knowledge and skills. The structure of the intergenerational learning circles model is given as a two-way process. In addition, the content of the intergenerational learning environment, where ILC function, is described in details focusing on the key, additional and intercultural skills offered, as well as the learning and assessment methodology selected and adapted to the specific needs of the learners. An emphasis is also placed on the expected impact of the ILC model on the potential beneficiaries.

Key words: *intergenerational learning, alternative educational model, intergenerational learning circles, intergenerational dialogue, age-diverse teams.*

1. INTRODUCTION

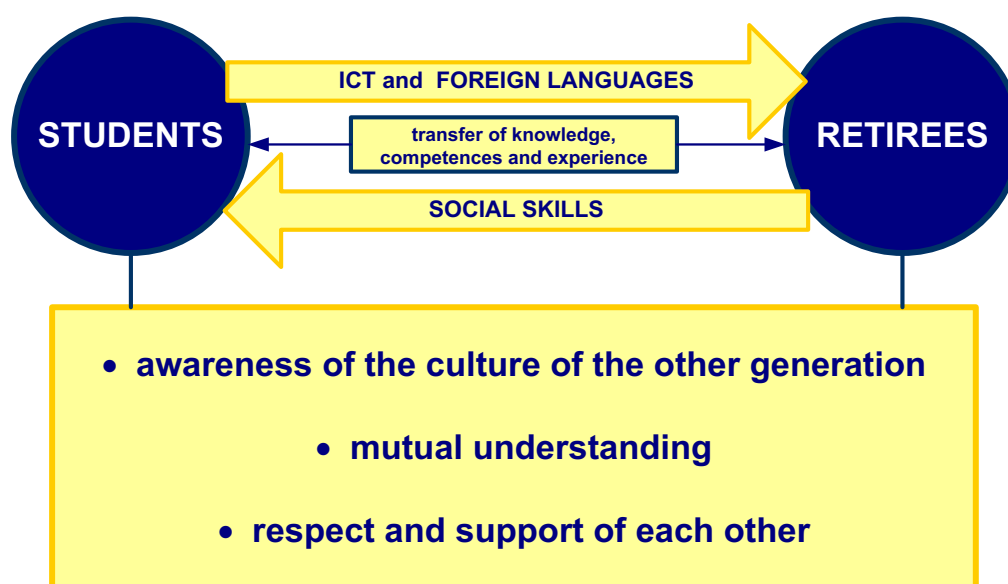
Intergenerationality is an interaction between members of different generations. Within the learning process the concept of intergenerationality has been defined in a number of ways. In April 1999, the UNESCO Institute of Education organized a meeting in Dortmund with the aim of attempting to reach a common view of the concept of Intergenerational learning. However, since the participants were from a range of different cultural and socio-political background, it was a broad definition that was agreed upon; the intention being that the concept should accommodate a variety of perspectives and facilitate collaboration. The definition agreed upon is as follows: “*Intergenerational programmes are vehicles for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations*”.

Within the present paper intergenerational learning refers to the transfer of experience, knowledge and skills between two generations for mutual benefits. It is implemented within the European Project “Students-Retirees Intergenerational Learning Circles”, Lifelong Learning Programme, GRUNDTVIG sub-programme, in the form of learning circles where two generations, in particular college/university students and retirees, work and learn together in age-diverse teams. This alternative educational model is an attempt to bridge the gap (lack of understanding, tolerance and respect, existence of negative stereotypes, etc.) between the two generations, which impedes their full-value interaction - as regards retirees this results in their social exclusion, underestimation of their creative potential and experience, lack of access to new technologies; as regards students – lower level of application of skills in real life situations, lower level of communication skills, unexplored patterns of behaviour and attitudes gained throughout lifetime.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING CIRCLES MODEL

As it was already mentioned, the intergenerational learning circles involved the active involvement of both college/university students and retirees organized in age-diverse teams. It is a two-way transfer of knowledge, competence and experience, where each participant plays two roles – the one of the teacher and the one of the learner. Students teach retirees in basic computer and English language skills whereas retirees teach students in social skills (fig. 1). This teaching-learning process takes place in a structured environment where curricula and support from professional teachers are available, face-to-face and on-line hours are fixed, etc. In the course of learning both target groups are supposed to better understand their cultures, to tolerate differences and respect each other.

Figure 1 – Structure of the Intergenerational Learning Circles



However, in addition to structured learning, more relaxed and unstructured learning is provided for the intergenerational learning circles – grouped in age-diverse pairs and teams, students and retirees work out joint products such as team and partner-country portfolios. This contributes to their intercultural awareness and respect of diversity no matter of its nature. Furthermore, the target groups practice different physical activities and adapted sport games, as well as get some knowledge of healthy nutrition. In this way they are given an opportunity to improve their physical fitness and nutritional habits so that they can stay active later in life.

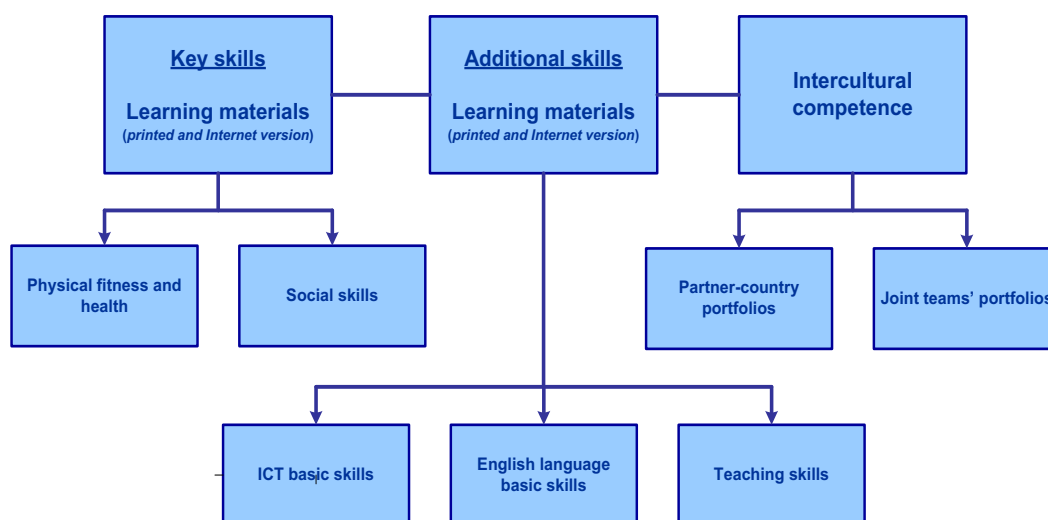
3. INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The intergenerational learning circles function in a specifically tailored learning environment aiming at using the creative potential of both target groups as valuable human resources who can contribute to the social, economic and cultural development.

The environment combines several learning areas in a systematic way: *social and intercultural competence, cultural awareness, sport, health issues, ICT, and English language*. The six learning areas are interrelated so as to form a coherent learning system and each area has its specific role taking

into consideration the immediate needs of the students and adults today and the demands of the European knowledge-based economy. The social competence and cultural awareness of different socio-economic groups is the core of the learning system. Sport, health issues and intercultural competence are the supportive elements through which team work, cooperation, self-esteem, respect and tolerance of diversity, etc, could be enhanced and consolidated. ICT and English language are used as work instruments rather than as separate learning targets so as to successfully implement the learning within the intergenerational learning environment (fig. 2).

Figure 2 – Intergenerational Learning Environment



3.1. Key Skills

The key skills include *Physical Activities and Health Issues* and *Social Skills*. The two learning materials are available in both printed and Internet-based version.

3.1.1. Physical Activities and Health Issues

The printed version covers the following topics:

- Medical check-up and physical tests;
- Different types of exercises;
- Walking and jogging;
- Hiking;
- Relay and adapted sport games;
- Factors influencing people's nutrition habits;
- Physiological changes referred to diet and nutrition;
- Nutrition and health for elder people;
- Nutritional requirements; macro- and micro-nutrients;
- Diet: digestive and absorption processes;

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- Nutritional pyramid; what to eat, what amount;
- Functional, transgenic and ecologic food;
- Food handling;
- Nutritional assessment;
- Guidelines for elaborating rich, varied and healthy diets.

The Internet-based version includes:

- Exercises to be practiced at home, outside and in the gym (guidelines + video clips);
- Articles and assignments related to healthy nutrition.

3.1.2. Social Skills

The printed version covers the following topics:

- Self-awareness;
- Self-motivation and motivation of others;
- Communicative techniques;
- “Body language”;
- Team work. Leadership;
- Difficult situations and problem solving;
- Conflict management.

The Internet-based version includes:

- Self-assessment tests;
- Recommendations for improvement.

3.2. Additional Skills

The additional skill falls into 3 groups: *ICT Skills*, *English Language Skills* and *Teaching Competence*.

3.2.1. Basic ICT Skills for Adults

The printed version covers the following topics:

- Hardware aspects of computer configurations;
- Software aspects of computer configurations. MS WINDOWS XP;
- The file system. Operation with folders, files and images;
- Text processing programme. MS WORD 2003. Basic functions in relation to operation with DOC files;
- Document formatting;
- Operation with tables;
- Internet. Operation with Internet;
- E-mail. Registration. Reading, sending and deleting messages;
- Information search on the Internet.

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The Internet-based version includes:

- Assignments in relation to the above topics.

3.2.1. *Basic English for Adults*

The printed version covers the following topics:

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- English alphabet. Transcription.
- Get to know each other. *Vocabulary*: expressions of introduction, countries, nationalities. *Grammar*: personal and possessive pronouns.
- My family. *Vocabulary*: family relationships, jobs. *Grammar*: personal and possessive pronouns, articles, prepositions (in, with).
- My home. *Vocabulary*: household items, pieces of furniture, rooms, personal belongings. *Grammar*: There is/are; have got; general questions; prepositions: under, behind, in front of, next to; pronouns: "IT"; plural forms of nouns.
- A friendly chat. *Vocabulary*: basic conversational expressions and phrases, words related to everyday talk. *Grammar*: general questions; negative form of "be".
- Let's go shopping. *Vocabulary*: clothing items, sizes, colours, foods and drinks, phone numbers. *Grammar*: numbers, would like, how much.

The Internet-based version includes:

- Additional exercises and grammar folders.

3.2.1. *Methodological Guide*

It is available as a printed version only and is divided into two sections:

- How to teach seniors (retirees);
- How to teach young (students).

Each section consists of:

- Factors influencing the selection of teaching methods and techniques;
- Teacher's role;
- Teaching methods and techniques;
- Teaching tips.

3.3. *Intercultural Competence*

The intercultural competence is built by joint development of team portfolios and partner-country portfolios as well as by working in multicultural teams.

3.3.1. *Team portfolio*

It consists of the following:

- A video film presenting the team members on the background of places of interest;
- A photo gallery of each team member grouped into the following sections: my family, my friends, my study/working environment;

- CVs.

3.3.2. Partner-country portfolio

It is divided into 3 main sections:

- A brief summary of the respective country (geographical and historical information, typical national characteristics, national customs and traditions visualized by photos, the opinions of representatives of other cultures);
- A photo gallery comprising 4 sections: places of interest (natural landmarks, historical sights, religious monuments, picturesque places); national dishes (short description + photos); national costumes;
- A multilingual interactive glossary in BG, EN, GR, ES, FI, PL.

4. LEARNING METHODOLOGY

The learning process within the intergenerational learning circles is built around the blended-learning method so that students and retirees can on one hand self-determine their learning environment and self-manage their learning time; use ICT in practice for learning and teaching purposes and, on the other hand, socialize during face-to-face sessions, practice sport together in order to improve their intergenerational team work, health and activity as a whole. Internet-based training is supported by tutors so that trainees can receive the help needed.

Students will teach *Basic ICT Skills for Adults* and *Basic English for Adults*. Retirees will teach *Social Skills*. In addition, some teachers will be mediators so as to provide the professional teaching support required. *Physical Activities and Health Issues* will be taught by professional teachers/trainers.

Each module has its own number of face-to-face and Internet-based self-study sessions, corresponding to the specific nature of the subject taught, as follows:

Figure 3 – Distribution of face-to-face and Internet-based sessions

Module	Face-to-face sessions	Internet-based self-study sessions
1. Social Skills	16	13
2. Physical Activities and Health Issues	28	24.5
3. Basic ICT Skills for Adults	30	35
4. Basic English for Adults	30	35

The following learning techniques are used corresponding to the specific nature of the module and the trainees' needs:

- team work;
- pair work;

- peer support;
- individual work;
- role games;
- simulations;
- discussions.

5. ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The assessment methods take into consideration the specific nature of each module. They could be adapted to the teaching and learning practices to each specific country so that cultural differences can be considered.

5.1 .Social Skills

There is an overall assessment of the knowledge and skills of trainees, including assessment of the social effectiveness achieved in the course of training and assessment during discussions. It is based on a comparative analysis of the results obtained from the entry and final tests, as well as on the results achieved during the sessions and the discussion at the end of training.

5.2. Physical Activities and Health Issues

The trainees will be assessed at the beginning and the end of the training in relation to their physical status and motor coordination. In addition, there will be current assessment within each face-to-face session. Pulse frequency, self-esteem and the quality and the quantity of each exercise set will also be monitored.

It is recommended, particularly for retirees, to do additional medical check-ups after the completion of a particular cycle of physical activities.

5.3. Basic ICT Skills for Adults

Trainees will be assessed by means of 3 practical assignments: operation with Windows XP file system; operation with MS Word 2003 document processing programme; operation with Internet-based applications.

5.4. Basic English for Adults

The assessment of the learners will be based on on-line tests and a final written test.

6. EXPECTED IMPACT

The intergenerational learning circles are expected to have the following impact:

As regards RETIREES, they will be able to:

- acquire basic ICT skills and practice them assisted by students in the course of elaboration of the materials;
- acquire basic English language skills needed for the European knowledge-based society;
- overcome the barriers related to operating with new technologies;
- be more open to the young and respectively to innovations;

- better understand the active life style of the young;
- promote their image as “active” and “valuable”.

As regards STUDENTS, they will be able to:

- improve their communication skills while cooperating and working with retirees;
- better understand retirees and appreciate their strengths;
- understand that they could learn from the latter and gain useful experience.

As regards both RETIREES and STUDENTS, they will be able to

- get used to physical activities;
- keep their health, physical fitness and overall tonicity;
- adopt more active life styles;
- get aware of their cultures so as to better understand and respect diversity and mutually use their creative potential for the benefit of the community;
- establish a very good and positive relationship between each other.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The intergenerational learning circles are an alternative model of how to promote intergenerational dialogue by sharing of knowledge, skills and experience among generations and by facilitating the process of cross-generational communication.

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