



Green paper

ECIL – The development of a European Certificate in Intergenerational Learning

The aim of this project was to pilot a collection of intergenerational learning materials and training approaches initially developed in the UK with a number of partners across Europe. Through this process, both the materials and learning approaches have been tested for wider European relevance. As a consequence of the changing demography that is taking place in many countries, international actors such as UNESCO, UN, OECD and the EU have increasingly been highlighting intergenerational issues. The ECIL project is a response to these changes. Funded by the European Commission five partners have been working for two years to transfer tacit and practical knowledge and skills available within the project to a web based course that can be used not only in the participating countries but also in a broader context across Europe.

EU and reflections on demography and health

When people live longer they should also expect better health. This is made explicit in a report (EU 2009) where the connection between health and economic growth and education and labour market was reported. Participation can contribute to the health of individuals and welfare through better jobs. The EU prognosis expects the ratio of people aged 65 and more as a percentage of the population aged 15-64 is to increase from 25% in 2007 to 54% in 2060. This has an impact both for individuals and societies in the future.

The report also takes up the importance of considering the issue of “the compression of morbidity”, that is to say that as well as people living longer we must aspire for them to live less years in poor health. This is reflected in the EU target to increase healthy ageing by two years by 2020. To achieve such a change it is essential to promote active engagement and participation by people as they age across the life-course and highlights the importance of taking an intergenerational approach to promoting the well-being and quality of life of European citizens as an important contributor to achieving this ambitious target.

Among the reports, the third European Quality of Life Survey came up with a number of policy pointers regarding interesting examples of intergenerational learning. According to

Diener and Seligman, (2002) social interaction is considered by some academics to be the most important determinant of well-being and face-to-face contact is also important to life-satisfaction. Networks were important as well as trust. People that reported trust in other people had a strong determinant of life satisfaction. During 2012 the European year of Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity promoted active ageing and solidarity between generations that ended with a conference called "One step up" and the theme of intergenerational learning in education and in training settings. There it was revealed that older people saw an opportunity to teach, train and share skills with younger generations. Many extended this to the volunteering they undertook. It was also reported that older people (aged 61-92) tended to have a greater desire from midlife onwards to participate in intergenerational activities which give them a sense of purpose and greater personal satisfaction with their lives.

There is support for how educational or training programs can contribute to people staying healthy and independent as they age. This has been confirmed in a study called CiLL, an extension of the PIAAC study, when interviewing people born between 1932 and 1946. In CiLL around 24 % of the people are participating in volunteering work. There is a relation between basic skills and participating in volunteering work. People participating in voluntary work regularly perform 17 score points better in literacy and 22 score points in numeracy than people not participating in voluntary activity which is a significant difference. When other variables are considered the difference is still significant in literacy but decreased to 6 points.

The course that has been developed is therefore an important contribution to the intergenerational arena in Europe.

The aim for this EU-project was to transfer a course from the UK to a web course that could be used by all the participating countries. Four pilots were held to test the course in very different contexts and gave the project added value at the same time as there was a challenge in how to use the new knowledge in an effective and positive way and how to use this new knowledge in the process of the project.

Overall the added value to Europe of this course is broad – taking into consideration that the course will fit different contexts, rural urban, top-down, bottom-up, economic development, addressing unemployment and increased cooperation within the workplace. There were some important facts to consider based on the information above when evaluating and summing up the four pilot sessions.

The most important were the following:

The basic difference was the context. This was already evident in the country background reports but it was even clearer during the pilot evaluations. The political and cultural background sets the limits for what can be done and in what setting intergenerational practice can take place. The common setting seems to be intergenerational learning within the workplace as this can have added value for individuals, companies, communities and the countries as a whole.

The backgrounds of the participants were also important and were of course dependent on the context of each country. But there was an extra impact factor here that could be answered by the questions of who the participants were and what were their cultural background and their traditional setting. What did they bring into the practice?

Another important point was also how the different participants in the end interpreted the content of the course. Here the participants could learn from each other as partners in the project and also give a platform for understands for other potential users from other countries who would like to use the course.

In the end these facts explain parts of why each country setting is different. Understanding these facts and using them to extend knowledge of why intergenerational practice has to be adopted to the context where it will be used will be an advantage to all participants as they can understand each others different context.

Future

Intergenerational learning is now on the agenda in Europe. Regarding intergenerational learning there are some important factors that have to be taken into account. For example, all generations have their own historical background and in communities, regions and countries there are different cultures, values and traditions that have to be considered. It is also evident that intergenerational learning deals with learning between different generations, not only regarding the very young and elderly – but there is a lifelong learning perspective. This means from the cradle to the grave - learning during early years education, during working life and in the workspace, and during adult education that now is prolonged into later life. The intercultural context of intergenerational learning have an impact as well as this often takes place in a mixed setting where children sometimes adapt more to the new country than their parents. Moving from one country to another makes intergenerational learning important and sometimes complicated but still possible and a tool for making generations connect and understand each other.

The European Certificate of Intergenerational Learning is an important tool to help to develop people's knowledge and understanding of the potential and practice of intergenerational learning programmes and will provide a foundation for the continuing development of such approaches.