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Affiliation: Slovenian Third Age University

Reporters: Alenka Gabriela Čeh, Dušana Findeisen and Karina Sirk

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Mentors and Mentoring in Older Adult Education

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Authors: Alenka Gabriela Čeh, Dušana Findeisen and Karina Sirk

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Introduction

Two decades ago, a prominent critical theorist in older adult education David Batters by (1987, p. 4), argued that 'there has always been a reluctance among adult educators to examine the principles and practices of teaching and learning as they might apply to older people. Unfortunately, this view still holds true. Notwithstanding the recent increase in the number and focus of publications in educational gerontology (e.g. Glendenning, 2000; Jarvis, 2001), remarkably little has been published on 'geragogy' – as the strategies employed in teaching older adults are referred to. However, this statement does not apply to Slovenian Third Age University and its repeated discussion about mentors and mentoring, older students as well as formats of older adult education and more generally older students and their attitude towards older adult education. Thus, in 1992 was published »How we were building Slovenian Third Age University« (Krajnc et al, 1992) with articles based on the empirical findings like ' Why small study groups in older adult education«. (Findeisen, 1992) discussing from the point of view of mentors group dynamics in small study groups developing from a group of single diverse and unconnected members into a primary social groups . At this university were later published several studies and articles on mentors and mentoring (www.utzo.si)¹ This empirical study *Mentors and Mentoring in Older Adult Education* is based to a larger extent on the study by Alenka Čeh (2016) discussing characteristics of study circles at Third Age University in Ljubljana.

! . Definition of the research problem

Our research problem is connected with the functioning of study circles of older adults and more precisely with the role of study circle mentors active at Slovenian Third Age

University. We are interested in this problem as it has been under researched and is now in focus of the P3AE European project.

Educational practices referring to older adults have been more intensely researched in a number of studies over the last two decades ever since the times when policy makers got aware that European countries were ageing countries and our societies were ageing societies.

Older adult education is not only about the topical education, the transmission and creation of knowledge, it is also about relationships and about unsettling older people's complacency about their social condition and their powerlessness to transform society (Battersby & Glendenning, 1990).

This research is about mentors and their role leading older adults towards achieving a number of aims of their own aims and those of their study group, study circles.

Our research is based on other research studies on mentoring older students and their findings (Bračun Sova at all 2015.; Findeisen 2005b, Findeisen 2012 2012) arguing the mentoring depends largely on the older students' individual as well as community and social needs.

1.2. Research question

The research question "How do mentors feel about their role" has been subdivided into sub questions:

1. How do mentors learn to qualify themselves for mentoring a study circle?
2. How do mentors evaluate the process of learning connected with their
3. mentoring work in in the study circle?
4. How do mentors prepare the programme for their study circle and how do they proceed implementing it?
5. How do mentors recognize individual characteristics of the participants in the study circle and the characteristics of their learning group?
6. How do mentors assess relationships in the study circle?

7. How do they see the role of a study circle mentor?
8. How do mentors assess the activities of the participants in the study circle?

3. Methodology

The research is a qualitative research based on the phenomenological approach (Van Manen 2009) since we were interested in subjective feelings and mentor's subjective assessment. It was conducted at Slovenian Third Age University and included six mentors of their 113 mentors. Our research has been carried out on the basis of sequential analysis i.e. the sequence of occasional overviews of the whole and repeated interpretation. interviewees were selected on the basis of the electronic data existing collected at Slovenian Third Age University. We used them for fixing and appointments with the mentors.

3.1. Description of the research instrument-interview

The interview comprises twenty-one questions formulated on the basis of the theory of the functioning of study circles. The questions are divided in six chapters. (1) general questions about the mentors characteristics, (2) questions on mentoring, (3) mentor's qualifications, (4) planning of work in study circles, (5) recognising individual characteristics and their impact on the study group and (6) the work plan.

3.2. Collecting empirical data

Interviews were conducted with four study circle mentors between November 2016 and February 2017. Four of them were conducted by phone. Two face-to-face interviews with mentors we know in person.

The interviews were conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. All interviewees gave us permission to record the interviews. All interviewees were asked the same questions to which they gave spontaneous answers.

3.3. Selection of the research units

In this research took part five women and one man, aged between 27 and 69. The average age of the interviewees was 46 years. Four interviewees were employed. Two of them were retired. Mentors were not selected at random. We selected those who seemed more analytical and knowledgeable about the phenomenon.

The interviewees are mentors of different study circles: painting, art history, computing and language study group. (Italian, French and English)

Table 1: Basic data about interviewees

SYMBOL	AGE	GENDER	EMPLOYMENT STATUS	STUDY CIRCLES	DURATION OF THEIR MENTORING
M1	27	Female	Employed/study circle mentoring as additional activity	In charge of 4 study circles of computing	1 year
M2	43	Female	Employed/studycircle mentoring as additional activity	In charge of 1 study circle of painting	5 years
M3	65	Female	Retired/ study circle mentoring as additional activity	In charge of 4 study circles of French and English	11 years

M4	36	Female	Employed/study circle mentoring as additional activity	In charge of 6 study circles of Italian	7 years
M5	34	Male	Employed as a mentor at Slovenian U3A in Ljubljana	In charge of 10 study circles of computing	5 years
M6	69	Female	Employed/study circle mentoring as additional activity	In charge of 1 study circles of computing	13 years

3.4. Analysis of the collected material

Following the interviews we transcribed the recordings. We went through the recordings and transcripts several times, read them and arranged them, corrected the transcribing mistakes. We removed the unnecessary repeating. (Mesec, 1998, p.87). The transcriptions were made the written language but our wish was to keep them as close as possible to the original wording. The data were processed by using the process of coding following the underlining of the most relevant parts of the interview. (Mesec, 1998, p. 103). We arranged the text, defined the coding units, used open coding. We selected relevant notions. formulated the categories and theory.

During this process we often went back to be more sure of the findings. We left out sayings that were not in relation with the research questions.

Coding units were built out of the research questions. Coding units covering the same notion were selected and separated from the rest of the text.

4. Results and interpretation

4.1. Mentor's qualification for mentoring

Answering the research question No 1: How do mentors learn to qualify themselves for mentoring a study circle?

Types of knowledge

All interviewees are at least university graduates. one of the interviewees is a master of science. Four out of six interviewees are educated in the field of pedagogy/andragogy. What they have in common is that they take care of their qualification in the first place by educating themselves on their own. They educate themselves informally, thus meeting their interests and needs.(Jelenc, 2007)

Mentors argue that prior formal education is less important. More important are mentors' competencies concerning lecturing, facilitating, moderating students' learning in a study group.

M1. " Actually I am a graduated andragogue myself, which means that I have no formal education in informatics and computing. But you know computing is a skill. What is really important is that you are able to explain and not to be a computer man or woman".

The interviewee has gained the computing knowledge on her own and by attending courses. But she values the knowledge of andragogy very high, needed for the transmission of knowledge and skills on the group of learners.

Additionally mentors believe that a mentor has to feel his or her students, has to like them and take into account their experience.

M5. " You start lecturing by using what you dispose of and what you know. Later, I think, it is different. If you listen to your students and yourself and are attentive as a lecturer, you grow personally and your lectures are respected. You then get ever more

positive feedbacks. So you can see that you are going in the right direction. As a mentor, you know how to be a motivator"

In both testimonials is mentioned the mentor's ability to accompany the participants, to have didactical skills (transmission of knowledge) and to motivate learners to study.

Mentors should be empathic, co-operating, inovative, should faciliate co-operation, dialogue and intensify the thirst for knowledge.

The ways of acquring knowledge

Mentors mostly educate themselves on their own in the field of mentoring. Moreover, they take part in various adult education wokrshops, read andragogic literature and take part in liberal education offered by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education and educational seminars for mentors conducted at the Third Age University.

M3. "Moatly by reading. I study bits of evrything. And I also attend seminars at Third Age University. I also read andragogical literature, You have to, you know. You can't do without it."

M2. "I took part in the introductory course for study circle mentors at SIAE"

M2: Then I took part in other educational events at SIAE,

M1. " When I was selected for the mentoring role, I took part in the training and education for mentros at U3A. It lasted one day. We were introduced to the role of mentor in study circles, group dynamics and social interactions in groups, the role of animator. The characteristics of older adult learning, though I had already quite a lot of knowledge gained in my university studies of andragogy."

Ways of acquiring knowledge

Mentors mostly qualify for mentoring study circles by learning autonomously, by consulting their colleagues, by taking part in a variety of adult education workshops, reading andragogic literature and taking part in introductory trainings offered by Slovenian Institute for adult education (SIAE). They also take part in education for mentors that is conducted within Slovenian third age University.

M3: "Mostly by reading a lot. I study different texts and then at the university there are different lectures and seminars. I read androgogic literature as well. You know, you have to. And I am interested in this topic as well."

M2: "I took the introductory qualifying course for mentors at the Slovenian Adult Education Institute."

M2: "Later, I participated in a number of educational events, offered by the Slovenian Institute of Adult Education."

M1: "When I was selected and admitted to be a mentoress, I took a part in the training for mentors at Slovenian 3rd Age University. It was a one day training, where the role of mentors in study groups was presented. We were told things about relationships and social interactions within groups. We also discussed the role of animators and the characteristics of older adult education... Though I had learnt a lot about this topic already when I was studying andragogy at the University there were many things that were new to me.

M5: "... Yes, and I often took part in the educational and training events for mentors."

It has been found that mentors are aware of the fact that older adult education is in constant change and is constantly upgraded, therefore learning and education are necessary in order to be a good mentor and to meet the needs of the participants in education, their need to know. That is why mentors continue studying through the study year, educating themselves, as to remain in touch with the field of older adult education, and to be able to pass new knowledge and new findings on their students. Mentors keep educating themselves in different ways:

- E-courses,
- Reading literature (monographs, handbooks, professional journals,

newspapers...)

- Talking to professionals from the study field,
- Courses, workshops, seminars.

M6: "I read a lot of books and I am not ashamed at all to turn to my colleagues at the Faculty of Philosophy. They are always ready to help me.

M4: "I also think that if you don't "push yourself" and learn new words... Because in our study groups we keep using the same words and structures and it is not that easy to upgrade your knowledge of language and it seems to me that if I did not force myself to study on my own I could easily get behind and, if I don't upgrade knowledge on my own. By reading literature, surfing on the net. There I found new ideas.

M1: "...During the last year I attended several trainings – Safety on Internet, and then I enrolled in e-education for three months and at the end there was the final face-to-face workshop."

M2: "As concerns the topic of my study circle I keep upgrading my knowledge by learning on my own, reading literature, surfing on the net, where I find new ideas. As concerns the educational topics, I educate myself by reading literature and from time to time I also enrol in a workshop."

M4: "I have a tendency to combine this with the courses conducted at MINT. There we had a course on different didactic approaches."

M5: "I mostly surf on Internet and I study tutorials on YouTube. From time to time I pay myself an e-course lynda.com. There are several lectures. Currently, I'm learning Windows 10. To cut a long story short. I mostly learn on Internet. In short, computing is such a field that once you learn something, there are new topics to amaze you and the changes may be very small and somebody who is familiar with computing can easily understand them."

We have found out that peer learning is quite important, but also learning from friends and relatives.

M4: "One of my friends who translates for the president of Slovenia Mr Pahor and the writer Rebula helps me a lot. I often turn to her and she has helped me a lot as concerns grammar. She is Italian and she studied Slovene, so she is very good at Italian language. That is why I often consult her.

Collegial peer learning is getting ever more important in the professional circles and companies. It is stimulated in different ways (for instance with communities of practice or internet communities or peer counselling. (Billett, 2012). At Third Age University this method of learning at workplace has always been utilised. The interviews lead us to conclusion that collegial peer learning is a process of learning at workplace par excellence (workplace learning).

The time of studying

It has been found that all mentors study to meet the needs of mentoring during the whole year. They also study while on holidays when lectures do not take place. Mentors keep learning and educating themselves during hoildays, preparing the new study year.

The interviewed Slovenian Third Age University mentors identified three groups of factors, exerting an impact on their qualification for mentoring. These factors were grouped into three subcategories, as it is shown in the tables below: The types of knowledge needed, the ways of educating oneself and the duration of learning. It can be concluded , on the basis of the interview , that mentors' readiness to learn and their engagement (they educate themselves during the study year and also during the holidays) is important. Mentors underline that "feeling people" is important, which means that they have competencies for efficient communication, dialogue, and empathetic cooperation as well as professional transmission of knowledge and meeting the students' needs.. These findings correspond to the research studies on important competences for mentoring (Bogataj, 2013; Nahmad Willimas and Taylor, 2015). Mentors argue that social competences and didactic competences are the most important ones. M4 says that professional knowledge (linguistic knowledge) is necessary.

The interviewees keep educating themselves, they keep learning mostly autonomously by reading, surfing the Internet, taking part in courses and by means of collegial peer learning.

Compiled Table 1-

Category: Mentors' qualification		
Subcategories	Notion	Notes
The types of knowledge they need	University degree Pedagogic and andragogic education Competencies for dealing with people	They assess as important the possibility to be sensitive to people and their needs
The ways of acquiring knowledge: the ways of educating oneself	Autonomous learning Reading Courses (At Slovenian Adult Education Institute Courses for mentors at Third Age University, Internet courses, tutorials, peer learning	The number of answers may be different since the interviewees responded to an open question
Duration of education/learning	Through the whole year During holidays	They keep educating themselves and they like it (they don't denigrate education)

4.2. Feelings about one's own learning and education

Response to the research question No 2: How do mentors evaluate the process of learning connected with their mentoring work in the study circle?

In the past category were included answers to the questions about where mentors educate themselves, where they acquire knowledge to be used in their mentoring work, while in this question we are interested in how they assess their own learning in the study circles..

The following mentors' statements are interesting: They learned a lot from the participants in the study group, from their stories and experience. These statements illustrate the definition of human capital which Healy and Côté (2001, p 18) define mostly as "knowledge, skills, competences and individual characteristics, bettering personal, social and economic living". In the interview mentors said that their older students' personal stories were an important source for their learning.

Following are the quotes about the wisdom of older people (life stories), professional knowledge, the development of patience, didactic skills (lecturing skills).

M2: "So I was told a number of personal stories and from all personal stories you can learn something... You grow personally, you learn from people... From their stories, their lives. There are students who are very intelligent, and, shall we say, wise. From older people you can get a lot of wisdom."

M1: "When they open up to you, when it happens... Then you can learn a lot from the participants in the study group. When the study group opens up, when they start sharing their life histories, then you can learn each time a lot."

M2: "I was wanting to say that a lot of new knowledge is added each time. Some comes from my own studies, some comes from the participants."

M3: "I learn a lot from their experience."

M5: "What you get in return is a kind of personal wisdom... In the long run I would say because our students are people with experience, who have endured a lot in their life."

M6: "This seems to be very interesting, because our students have different professional background, this is how each of them contributes a lot to the group."

It is interesting that mentors argue that while working with older students they have learned to be patient.

M1: "...You broaden your horizons and you start being very patient and tolerant. This is particularly so in computing classes. I think I have become much more patient. Though, at time, I feel like I would like beheading them (laughter), but you come to be more patient and finally you start understanding how they view computing.

M4: "... You need to be enormously patient."

M5: "When working with older learners your personal growth gets stuck when you have to be patient. Immensely patient."

We think that the need of patience is less due to the fact that the learners are older than it is due to the nature of the work itself. Mentors devote their attention to each of the learners individually. The situations encountered are different from the situations of formal learning of young people, where teachers lectures but do not follow the needs of their learners (the pace, breaking up of learning units, etc.)

By mentoring study circles at Third Age University mentors have enhanced the way of lecturing. Continuing education offer a lot of possibilities to the mentor to become more self confident as a lecturer.

M1: "You keep learning how you should explain certain things. How to explain certain things in a different way."

M1: "I have become a better lecturer mentoring older students."

M6: "... I have managed public appearing."

We have found out that education and learning are key factors impacting mentoring study circles. We have also found out that mentors know that without continuing education and permanent education, they cannot be mentors, since learning is a constituent part of life and a must for mentors.

M1: "You have to find ever new ways how to explain things."

M1: "I mentored computing groups at the beginners' level, intermediate level and advanced level. I also mentored a digital photography study group... I found my students rather demanding and I had to put a lot of effort into my own education and learning about photography.

The following year and you have to learn new tricks and things you haven't learned yet."

M2: "Each time I have to prepare for my lectures and I am happy to add some new knowledge I get in the meantime. I have a thirst for knowledge and when I start exploring a topic or an issue then I study and at times I also go deeper into what I already know."

M2: "Above all, you learn a lot about people. You learn about the psychological and social aspect of them, but each study circle "adds new pearls to your necklace".

M5: "Basically, my life is lecturing and learning. That's my life."

M6: "I have learned that in old age it is important to be active and to be cultivated."

Mentoring study groups at Third Age University has brought to one of the interviewees knowledge he can use in his professional field, also beyond the Third Age University. It is about transmitting knowledge and skills acquired at workplace, which can be transposed from the workplace A to the workplace B. When researching mentors' learning at workplace, similarities with other professions can be found, professions and jobs that develop reflective practice (Cvetek, 2016).

M2: "I have learned, and this is very useful, how the group dynamics goes."

M2: "There are certain techniques you learn as for example, ice breakers or some games, that can be used at our workplace. Such things are always welcome, if you work with groups."

The mentors we interviewed argue that they have experienced personal growth due to mentoring older adults. They think that they have increased their understanding of diversity, that they are more patient, persistent, self confident. They are more able to cope with diversity and accept it.

M3: "Mentoring has an impact on professional and personal growth. It has a positive impact. I think it is positive to have more understanding for different people, especially because older people are different from children, which I am used to teach."

M4: "I have learned to be persistent. My students come in different states and have different health conditions... One of my students is an oncological patient with metastases all over his body, but he comes each Tuesdays directly from the hospital,

to be with us. Even if he stays only one hour. He is really losing his strength. He can't do anything anymore, he doesn't hear, he doesn't see, but he keeps coming. Such people instill the will and courage in you. Then I say to myself if I feel slightly uncomfortable that if *they* come to my lectures, then I have to be there for them. They give you the strength to live, I think in general."

M4: "I have got a lot of experience. If I compare how I was years ago with what I have become I know, I have come a long way."

M4: "You experience personal growth, patience and persistence."

M5: "Well, I think, if you teach people with your heart, not only brain, than it is impossible that you do not develop as a person."

M5: "It is impossible not to grow since they tell you what they think."

M6: "I have learned from my group to cope with diversity. To cope with diversity on one hand, on the other hand I appreciate all the knowledge I can get from my students."

Mentors underline the importance of personal growth, connected with their personal engagement, while mentoring their study groups. They feel that in relation with older people, listening to their life histories and experience they experience personal growth. They think that they have gained a lot of positive qualities, like patience and persistence. Patience has often been mentioned. Mentors want to give older learners the best education and that is why mentors keep educating themselves and bettering their lecturing skills. For some of the mentors the knowledge acquired is useful in situations outside their mentoring at Slovenian Third Age University.

Education of older people does not bring new knowledge only to the participants in study circles, but also to their mentors. Basically, the study circles enable knowledge, experience, life histories and relationships to be joined and to guarantee interpersonal growth. This is why study circles are very much different from courses; in study circles the relationships are not formal, the contents of learning are not totally defined, mentors and students are close, mentors keep upgrading their knowledge.

Compiled Table for the second research question:

Category: Feelings about one's own learning and education		
Subcategories	Notions	Notes
Learning from the students	The students' experience Wisdom of older people (stories) Knowledge from their profession and jobs The increase of patience	Mentors appreciate the knowledge they have got from their older students and from their experience
Lecturing skills	Improving the way of lecturing (didactical skills)	Mentors feel the need to improve their way of lecturing
Permanent learning	The need of permanent education	Older people are always eager to get new knowledge. This is how they "force" their mentors to keep learning and educating themselves.
Knowledge for the professional field and jobs to be used outside Third age university	Knowledge of the group dynamics, skills for working with the learning group	Knowledge acquired while teaching and facilitating study circles, can be transposed to the mentor's professional field. outside Third Age University
Personal growth	More understanding Persistence Coping with diversity	Mentors feel that due to mentoring older people have grown personally

Planning and organizing mentoring work

Response to the research question No3: How do mentors prepare the programme for their study circle and how do they proceed implementing it?

How do mentors assess the activities of the participants in the study circle

Urh in drugi (2012) argue that study circles are not the same as courses. In study circles mentors do not dominate the other members of the study circle. They do not completely define the aims, the scope and the quantity of the work to be done. Our interviewees are aware of this.

M3: "It's not the same as in courses where the learning population is different and where the aim of the course is not completely the same. In older adult education, mentoring is more about validating one's knowledge."

M3: "Some students, when they enrol in our study circles think that learning will be like in courses for adults, but it is impossible to work in the same way, because there are no exams in the end. Urh et al. (Ibidem) argue that besides their mentoring role, mentors are also organisers, motivators and animators united all in one person. Moreover, mentors should identify the needs in the social environment and should respond to them preparing a programme in accordance with the analysed needs. This means that any study circle is in relation with the local environment.

At the Third Age University mentors prepare a curriculum for the whole study year in October, when students enrol.

M1: "It is up to me to prepare the curriculum for the whole year.."

M2: "I have prepared my curriculum for the whole study year."

M4: "I have prepared my curriculum for the whole study year, but it's only a draft, because I never know what my group will require."

M5: "The programme is prepared for the year to come, but modifications are possible at any moment."

M6: "The programme is known for the year to come."

Besides the preparation of the draft program for the whole study year mentors prepare also the detailed programme for each single educational encounter. Of utmost importance are the introductory sessions, when the programme has to be introduced and the study group is met for the first time and the participants in the group also meet each other or the first time. We have found out that mentors are aware of the importance of the first impression,

the presentation of the programme and the initiating good relationships and relaxed atmosphere in the group. Relaxed and friendly atmosphere can be established on condition the wishes of all members of the study group are taken into account and empathy takes place. To this end mentors try to make educational encounters interesting dynamic. Only those older students, who are satisfied, remain in the study group, others quit most of the times.

The following quotes describe the mentor's preparation for single educational encounters:

M2: "Before the beginning of the first encounter, I prepared a lot of material and I also thought a lot about how I would introduce the participants to each other.

M3: "Before I start, I think how to start, how to make the encounter dynamic. I do not start lecturing right away."

M4: "For each single group I have to prepare myself each day. No matter how many times I have already done it. If I do not prepare I have this awful feeling that I am unprepared."

M6: "For each hour of lecture I need at least 1 to 2 hours, sometimes a whole a week to get together all the material I need. I have all the material in PowerPoint and if I don't have pictures, I have to take my camera, and I go and take pictures myself."

M6: "This autumn whis native village, tomorrow, with my husband. Fabijani was born there and I have already asked that the church be opened."

In principle the contents, the study modules are known in advance and planned in advance for the whole study year. But this does not mean that mentors do not comply with the wishes and possibilities of their students. By and large they follow the prepared programme, but when necessary, they can change it.

M1: "In general the program is planned, but when you lecture you modify it."

M2: "I have followed my curriculum and my plans and we have added bits here and there. But when the learners get enthusiastic about learning, they can't be stopped."

M5: "If I see that the majority of my learners are not interested in a topic, I skip it."

M5: "I could say that I stick up to 80% of the program, because I have to lecture, what I have promised. But one part of the program is flexible and the learners can choose what they want to study."

On the basis of the analysis of the interviews it has been found that programming the contents and planning the implementation of the program is the most distinctive feature of mentoring study groups in older adult education in comparison with formal education.

It has to be emphasised that mentors take into account the wishes and expectations of all learners and even their own wishes and expectations. Mentors are flexible in choosing the topics of the educational encounters.

M2: "I have prepared a draft program, which was ample with several options and at the introductory meeting with my study group we went through the proposal we talked about it and decided what was most interesting and less interesting for the whole group."

Mentor like their students to express their wishes.

M5: "I am very happy when I see that when I finish lecturing their interests gets larger and quite often they have very good ideas about what they would like to study the next year."

The prevailing learning methods in study groups in the Slovenian Third Age University are discussion and social debate. Mentor argues that they use: working with individuals, pair work and group work. The study group members study different texts, go together to exhibitions, in language groups handbooks and grammar books are being used. In computing training and in painting groups practical work is in the focus.

M2: "We went to an exhibition."

M3: "I use course books, of course. They are important for teaching languages, and we work on grammar. They do exercises, they have assignments, which we check and explain what is OK and what is not ok."

M4: "We go to exhibitions, we attend performances. Each year we go to the French institute. They go to libraries."

M4: "We drill a lot. We work in pairs and translate. By the end of the first year we have read our first book."

M4: "I keep going around with open eyes and I use what is interesting in every encounter. We also like music, so we listen to the songs and I give them lyrics so that they can learn new words. And then we sing."

M5: "Our encounters are very practical. There's not a lot of theory. Mostly practical work. And it pass by so quickly."

Mentors care for eclectic didactic methods and they take into account the evaluation which they consider as an important tool in older adult education as to find out what the participants like, what they do not like, what they have learned and how they have learned. Quite often they discuss the encounters together with their students when they go for a cup of coffee after the encounter. They discuss about the educational encounter when they go for a cup of coffee with their students.

M2: "I often evaluate the topic and the delivery as well as the satisfaction of students after single educational encounters and without hesitation I ask them to evaluate the educational session anonymously by writing on a piece of paper what they think about our common work."

M3: "I ask them and then they keep silent for a moment and then they start talking. Quite often, when we go out for a cup of coffee I ask them to check their satisfaction. In the lecture room they feel somehow uncomfortable. They don't like to talk about such matters."

M5: "I feel comfortable, if they say immediately if they are satisfied with the contents of the session."

M6: " I start the first evaluation in the middle of April. We discuss what we will do till the end of the study year and what won't be possible to do.

As we have seen, planning and programming study circles is very important. The program is what attracts older students. Mentors are aware that an attractive study program is essential, but even if students enrol in a study circle it does not mean that they will remain there. Their decision to stay or to go away depends on how they feel in the group, on the possibilities the learners have to participate, the methods used, the possibility to co-shape the program, the possibility to meet one's own needs and to attain one's personal aims. Some groups do not start functioning and as time goes by they fall apart."

Compiled Table for the third research question

Category: Planning and organisation of work		
Subcategories	Notions	Notes
Program is set in advance	Program is drafted for the whole study year	Though the program is known in advance, mentors adapt to the wishes of the participants
Preparation of the encounter	Preparation of each single encounter A lot of time is devoted to the preparation of encounters	What is most important is the first encounter of the group
Taking into account wishes and expectations of the group of learners	The program is broadened, new topics are added Topics that are not of interest to the participants are skipped If they are interesting to the participants, they are deepened	Though mentors take account of the participants' wishes they stick to the drafted program
Diverse methods of work	Discussion, individual work, work in pairs, group work, going to exhibitions, work with texts, the use of written texts, practical work	Mentors care for diversity of the education, going on in study circles

Evaluation	Continuous and final evaluation	Mentors are familiar with evaluation and use it
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4.4. Identifying single participants and groups' characteristics

Response to the research question No 4: How do mentors recognize individual characteristics of the participants in the study circle and the characteristics of their learning group?

We are going to examine the ways in which mentors identify characteristics of individual learners and those of the learning group and how these impact work in a study circle.

Five out of six responding mentors are mentoring more than one group. Therefore we were interested in how they adapt their educational program to the group. Why? Mentors can easily "lecture" the program to several groups without taking into account the characteristics of single groups. But in these groups there are individual learners with quite diverse life histories and knowledge as well as skills that impact the processes within the study circle. Some groups can be quicker than the others. Some are more curious than the others and some are more active, while others are slow, some are eager to appear in public, or to conduct seminars, while others stick more to the drafted programs.

The mentors who participated in this study, adapt their program to the group. It takes quite a lot of time for them to get familiar with their study group and adapt the contents of the educational program to their needs and expectations. However, if mentors have worked in a given group for a long time, if they know the group quite well, they have a tendency to adapt the programme to the group, while they are preparing it. That is before the study year starts. They do not adapt the contents to single groups, but they adapt other learning activities, like exercises, films, listening to music, attending exhibitions, going to museums, going for a trip, paying visits to relevant institutions.

M1: "When you see that they have difficulties with certain contents than you spend longer time dealing with the same content or, on the on contrary, you skip it if you find that it is too easy for your students."

M1: "When you start working, you can assess right at the beginning, who has more difficulties, and who is better at computing, who needs more help and then you take into account all these characteristics of the group and you adapt the program. You slow down the pace to see for example, if the pictures in Word are a bigger problem. If this is so, you introduce a lot of exercises, basic exercises, you don't complicate. On the contrary, if you work with a group that is good and advancing quickly, than you add, for instance Google Chrome shop or other setting, just because you see that they like it and would like to broaden their horizons."

M1: "Yes, of course. You can skip certain things. You don't deal with everything that was written down in your plan. At the beginning the programme is mostly too dense. Then you adapt to the group, either you don't deal with everything or you add certain some other information or learning units."

M5: "Some groups are focused on contents, they are serious, hard working, while others are more relaxed and communicative."

M5: "Each group out of my ten groups I teach has its own character, to which I adapt. I keep adapting to the atmosphere of the group."

It has been found that mentors adapt their training or educational program and that they are aware of how important it is to get familiar with the learning group as a whole and with individual learners. Mentors argue that it is of utmost importance to know well the individual learners, to be able to set them limits and to adapt them to the prevailing group dynamics. These processes in group dynamics are known and are taken account of in group learning (Sweet, Michaelson, 2012). We agree with the mentoress (2) who argues that mentors should know well each single learner in the group as to have somebody to talk to at times and to know who needs to be stimulated or calmed down. It can therefore be concluded that mentors in study circles are far from simple transmitting of knowledge. Their job is about counselling and guiding, navigating between different life histories, experiences, learners' characters, learners' personal features and abilities. We were surprised by one of the mentors (2) saying that as a mentor you have to gain respect of the most powerful one's in the group as to be able cooperate with them. "If this is not the case, you can lose the whole group" . Mentor has to gain confidence of those learners who

possess social power in the group (Comp. Casula 2015). In relation to this, mentors navigate among the learners in the group and unite different life histories into one entity.

M2: "As a mentor, you have to observe the group dynamics. First you have to get to know the characteristics of the group, which is growing from a group of individuals into a group as a community."

M2: "I think that at the beginning the whole process is the most interesting. You spend a lot of time deciphering the group dynamics and you observe how power is distributed. Some people can have a lot of knowledge, but they are withdrawn, some people are loud and they can even be too loud for the group, they would never stop talking."

M2: "Yes, it means that you have to be very observant, and you have to feel the atmosphere of the group. You have to look at each single student to see, where to find an interlocutor. The one you can address and connect to, the one who dominates, to calm him or her down and you have to see, where the introverted or the withdrawn o will need support."

M2: "You have to respect those who are the most powerful in the group. They must like you. You must get their attention, and they must respect you, then you can work with them. If you quarrel with them, you won't be able to work with the group anymore."

M5: "Groups are as important as individuals. It is important for individuals and groups to experience a certain type of group chemistry."

Mentors are aware of the group dynamics and they know perfectly well that groups are not just an addition of individuals' characteristics. What is important here is also the situation and the environment (Forsyth, 2006, p. 24).

Compiled Table addressing the fourth research question

Category: Identifying individual group characteristics		
Subcategories	Notiond	Notes
Adapting the program	Program Activities	Mentors adapt to each group
Group dynamics	Groups are different They need to know each individual learner	They think it is important to know each single learner

4.6. Interpersonal relationships in study circles

Response to the research question No5: How do mentors recognize individual characteristics of the participants in the study circle and the characteristics of their learning group?

Relationships in study circles are on the whole equal. They are very relaxed and friendly. There is no hierarchy and they are a positive environment for adult learners to develop cooperative learning.

M2: "Good relationships are very good. They don't stop at the end of the learning session or at the end of the group learning."

M3: "The relationships are friendly."

M4: "In each group there are people who are ok."

M4: "They are very attached to each other."

M5: "They are mostly ok. The relationships are very good. Students become friends."

M5: "...Especially in those groups who have been working together for a long time, the relationships are friendly. From time to time a romance is sparked."

Not only the students have good relationships with their peers, but they are on good terms with the mentor as well. Between the sessions they socialize, they go together for a cup of coffee, dinner, for a trip, or they spend holidays together.

M1: "Alright, I am on good terms with all of them... I could qualify our relationships as warm. From time to time we go for a cup of coffee, they write to me during their holidays and so on."

M2: "Each group has its own dynamics, but me as a mentor, I have with each single student a special relationship."

M4: "We are on very good terms. We trust each other and quite often we laugh together."

M4: "Maybe my attachment to them is too intensive and I really regret if someone decides to stop coming to the group sessions."

M5: "The relationships are friendly, I would say. They have adopted me, sometimes I feel like a man, desired by all women (laughter). At times I have a feeling to be mentored by my students. Well to a certain extent."

M6: "Positive relationships between the mentor and the group are a precondition for good functioning of the group."

Good relationships are important for quality education, argue mentors. Relaxed atmosphere make working together easier and joyful. Members of study circles where relationships are good have a tendency to be more patient and their learnability is higher.

M1: "If students are on good terms and are friends, the atmosphere is relaxed and students are ready to adapt to individual pace of their colleagues."

M2: "Good cooperation is for me a source of learning."

M3: "It is important that we are joyful. If a member of a study group gets a grandchild, we talk about this event. We notice when somebody is absent."

M5: "Good relationships help students to be more patient. Relationships are friendly. There are no hurt feelings if somebody gets behind the others."

M5: "As a mentor, you feel rewarded when your students laugh and react."

M6: "That's true. If we feel ok, we also get good learning results."

Study circles attract quite diverse people with their own life histories. Some integrate better in the group. There is a problem when certain students display such behaviour that the group equilibrium gets shattered. It is difficult to deal with such persons and they have bad impact on the group dynamics. Such groups can be a burden for the students themselves and the mentor. Therefore the group does not work well.

M1: "In one of my groups there was a man, a very dominating male, and the others did not dare to oppose him. In some way he dictated the nature of the relationships in the group. If he made the proposal, the group would adopt it, even if they were not in agreement with him. And consequently, this group did not function as a group and each of the members was functioning as a single person and it was very difficult for me to work with this group."

M2: "If the atmosphere is not good, I discuss the issue with individual students. This is my way of resolving the situation."

M4: "There was a woman in my group, who had some difficulties and she was quite irritated and had intense reactions to whatever was said."

M6: "People in groups are different and mentors have to ask them to be patient."

M6: "I do not adapt to people who spoil the atmosphere. Over the years I have met only two persons who were offensive. I can't imagine working in such a group. Teaching older learners is my hobby and I would not stay if students were unpleasant."

M6: "But in my group everybody is so joyful, so that those who are traumatised have to go away and find another group that suits them."

Single students can impact the whole dynamics of the group. One of the mentors described the following interesting situation:

M4: "In one of my groups were professional linguists and we worked a lot and achieved a lot. They wouldn't joke. They were interested only in learning and this gives the mentor a strange feeling. They were eager to discuss over and over again each grammar item. And then some students quit because of their health condition and new students came who were more relaxed. Now the group is completely different. We laugh a lot."

Groups that function well, socialise outside the learning sessions. Mentors report that students socialize with one, two or three other student, or sometimes the whole group. They go together for a cup of coffee, they go out to dine together, pay visits to each other. This social networking consolidates the groups.

M1: "In all groups, except one, I had very good relationships. They became friends, they helped each other, they wrote to each other, they sent pictures from holidays, etc."

M3: "My Tuesday group meets every Tuesday in the coffee shop Maximarket. Also during the holidays. From time to time I give them a call. If I pass by, I talk to them. From time to time we have a common dinner, even with those, who do not attend the study circle anymore."

M4: "Of course, you have to adapt and be flexible. For example, this group who have been together for six years now, it is important for them to socialize. Sometimes we spend half an hour celebrating a birthday or a new grandchild. This is very important for them.

M4: "Three day excursions consolidate the ties between us. Some groups organise the trips on their own. They meet during the holidays as well."

M4: "They are all well connected and they often go for a cup of coffee together before the session and after the session as well."

We have seen that in groups where relationships are good, socializing is a kind of prolongation of the study sessions, even if the study sessions themselves can be devoted to socializing though very rarely. Mentors argue that their students enrol in study circles to get new knowledge, socializing comes second.

M5: "They attend study circles to know and socializing is only a natural result of learning and not vice versa. If they find out that in a group they will not get the knowledge they want, they will move to another group."

Good relationships have positive impact on the participants and the mentor. Participating in a study group is joyful and relaxing for most of the group members. Friendly relationships are born in such groups. If there are people who spoil the atmosphere in the group by their rude or strange behaviour, the group harmony gets destroyed. If the atmosphere is not good, it may happen that the group falls apart.

Compiled Table addressing the fifth research question

Category: Interpersonal relationship in study circles		
Subcategories	Notions	Notes
Interpersonal relationships in the group	Good relationships Friendly relationships, Socializing outside the study sessions	Groups, where relationships are good stay longer at Slovenian Third Age University.
Relationships between the group and the mentor	Good relationships Socializing outside the study sessions	Participants "adopt" the mentor

5. 7. Feelings about mentoring

Response to the research question No 6: How do mentors assess relationships in the study circle?

For mentors, mentoring is a way of living and at the same time mentoring gives rise to professional and personal development.

M5: "I could say that for me mentoring is a way of living."

M1: "Mentoring is for me a possibility, where I can develop personally and professionally."

M6: "Mentoring means being active, but it also means passing the knowledge of art history on others, because I love art history. This is very pleasant."

Mentors learn from older mentors a lot. Mentoring is not only about transmitting knowledge. It is about accepting people as they are. Mentors think that they can learn a lot from their students and they have a very positive attitude towards the mentoring role."

M1: "You are always surrounded by people older than yourself. You learn a lot about them. You learn about their profession, about what they do. About their life histories and this broadens your horizon."

M1: "You can learn a lot. Not only in the field of computing and informatics, but also generally. If they travel a lot, they can tell you a lot about different cultures. This is the kind of conversation I have with them."

M2: "What I like most about mentoring is that I can cooperate with people, who have diverse educational background and are not of the same age."

M3: "I was amazed, how much they can give you, how much they can tell you about their life experience. It is so different from elementary school. You get their attention and they respect you."

Mentors emphasise that when they relate to their students, they get the feeling that they grow personally. Mentoring is for them helping people. What is most important is, that they feel accepted and their relationship with the students are good."

M3: "Mentoring supports my own development."

M5: "I like the feeling after each session that I have given my students something. That I have helped them."

M5: "It is important for me as a lecturer, that they accept me, that they are comfortable being with me, that the atmosphere is relaxed and in the end, each of us is rewarded."

M6: "I don't work for money I get. I work to study and to feel ok with my students and I like travelling with them."

The interviewees describe mentoring as a pleasant activity. They enjoy teaching and being in contact with different people. Their motivation lies in the mentoring process itself. Working becomes a part of their identity (Nicolini, 2012).

Mentoring means a lot to them. It is due to the fact that they are in close contact with the students. All members, the mentors included, are equal and knowledge is created through a discussion, counselling and mentoring.

M1: "I really like mentoring. I like being in contact with other people, getting to know them. I enjoy being in their company. I enjoy teaching (laughter)."

M3: "Mentoring means a lot to me."

M3: "Mentoring them is my pleasure and I miss them during the holidays."

M3: "I like teaching (laughter very much.. I really enjoy mentoring older students. I am glad and happy that I work with them. Working with some other students, pupils would be difficult. I couldn't stand it."

The respondents think that the role of mentors unites and motivates the participants in the study group and they like the role they play in supporting their student development.

M2: "What I like most is that I contribute to their development, that I know how to animate them and make them enthusiastic. This is what I like most."

M2: "Mentors are not there to teach but they have to unite and motivate the students."

M2: "What I really like is that due to my encouragement they go beyond their limits, I used to have a student who at the beginning said that he would never be able to paint,

that he doesn't have a clue, that he can't even take a brush in his hand and in the end he became an amateur painter."

M2: "Yes, this is very good, because you help people overcome their fears."

Mentors report that their primary role is to pass on knowledge. Their primary role is teaching and facilitating learning. They know that their students are not there to socialise but to get knowledge."

M4: "Maybe I am too serious about everything. My students even made a reproach to me but I think that they must get knowledge for what they pay."

M5: "I know the social stereotype that older students come here to socialize. This is far from reality. They come to get knowledge in the first place.."

Mentors in the study circle have a positive feeling about mentoring. For this is a way of living. It is not only about transmitting knowledge, it is also about receiving knowledge. They like being accepted. They teach a lot their students, but they also teach them. Mentors consider themselves as motivators.

Compiled Table addressing the sixth research question

Category: Feelings about mentoring		
Subcategories	Notions	Notes
A way of life	Learning from participants Professional and personal development The feeling of being accepted Pleasure	They have a very positive attitude towards mentoring
Motivating and connecting the participants	Helping other people Moderating the group Making students enthusiastic	They have a feeling that they can support personal growth of the students

5.8. Cooperation of the participants

Response to the research question No7. How do mentors see the role of a study circle mentor?

Learning in study circles is cooperative. Cooperative learning is learning in groups in which the way of work is such that positive connections among the members of the groups are established. By means of direct interaction while learning both students and mentors try to attain common goals. The students in the group are active and the mentors like their students to ask questions. This is how the burden of teaching is partly taken off the shoulders of the mentor.

M2: "In my English group, which is upper upper intermediate, they had a proposal to spend each session half an hour talking about their personal lives. So students talk about their health conditions, different difficulties and then we discuss the issue. So we spend up to half an hour on this activity and then we go on with the topic of the session."

M4: "From time to time they bring in the group films with Italian subtitles. It is up to them which films they choose."

M2: "If your group is motivated and if the members of the group want to cooperate, and work together and if they have suggestions, that it is wonderful."

M2: "If you like people, if they are willing to cooperate and to take on responsibilities, then the burden is taken off your shoulders. Then you are practically in the same position as your students."

The students distribute their tasks among themselves. In doing so they are helped by the mentor, each of them has a role in the group. In this way the roles are equally distributed and each of the students feels included and the mentor feels more free.

M2: "What I was wanting to say is that we distribute the tasks among us. Everybody does something."

M2: "We make sure that everybody has his or her own function."

M6: "In the meantime they have a presentation, if we agree to it."

M6: "Then we have some filed work and my students function as guides using the knowledge they have gained in the group. This is a speciality of my work. Students are active, they are guides. They choose their topic, not me."

We have seen that mentors are happy that their students are active. It has been found that the students, in general, are hard working and they regularly participate in the work of the group.

M4: "You give them an assignment and the next week you get 10 pages back."

M6: "I must say that some of them, when they came, were not able to make presentations. But when seven years ago we had a public appearance at the Third Age Festival, they were so enthusiastic that the next year they invited their friends and relatives and the room was crowded."

M6: "A student of mine said to me in confidence: "I'm so grateful that my wife attends your study group. Her memory is declining and if she hadn't joined your group she would have lost her intellectual forces. Now she comes to you, she listens, writes down, has public appearances. It is all very useful for the whole family. She was about to start drinking. Because it is very difficult for people when they have no meaningful activity."

M6: "And then I include those who are willing to appear in public. Those who do not want to perform, are later attracted to this activity by their peers. This is how they get activated and they say if somebody has worked for forty years it means that he or she is able to work."

M3: "We split our tasks. Some of my students want to talk, others are withdrawn so I have to adapt myself a lot."

Students cooperate in different ways. They ask questions about different topics. If there is something they don't like, they like organising trips, the activity has a unifying impact of the group members and if mentors take into account their wishes, the students get more motivated to be more actively engaged in learning."

M1: "They participate asking questions."

M5: "If you work with older students, they have a lot of interests. They readily ask questions. They come to the sessions out of their own will and at the end of the sessions they still have a lot of questions."

M4: "There are some members in the group who take on organisation of the field trips. At the end of the study year, students present their knowledge and their findings in form of exhibitions, lectures, excursions, literature circles, bulletins, brochures, performances, etc. Their knowledge is not only theoretical, but also practical and it supports local development.

When study circles were introduced the authors of the concept decided that there would be cognitive and action aims to be achieved.

Going out into the local community is very important for the study circle. Local community used the knowledge older people have. Older people get knowledge from society, communities.. Therefore it is necessary that knowledge is also brought back to the local environment and local community.

M6: "This year we will be taking part in the European cultural heritage."

M1: "In one of my groups we published a group on the itineraries through Ljubljana. In one of the projects where I acted as a mentoress, we shot short films. In the Slovenian cinemateque we had a first night screening of these films and then we went to the festivals in Leeds and Frankfurt. The knowledge does not stay within the group in this way, it has to be passed on.

Compiling Table addressing the seventh research question

Category: Students' cooperation		
Subcategories	Notions	Notes
Suggestions coming from the students	Group activities, They distribute tasks among themselves, They express the wish that the programme be changed, Organisation of field trips and excursions	Mentors react to the students' suggestions and proposals cause mentors' joy

Mentors have a positive attitude towards the activities of the group. They like their students to have suggestions, to be interested in the topic, to ask questions and to be ready to broaden horizons. Through the contributions of the students the ties within the group get consolidated. For a successful relationship between mentors and mentorees it is important that the mentor is able to organise work, to accompany the students, to evaluate their progress and to direct the students. Mentoring is not only about the transmission of knowledge but it is also about having an impact on personal development of the participants. It changes their attitudes and beliefs as well as it enlarges their social network and consolidates interpersonal relationships. Mentors are responsible for personal development of each student, which has a positive influence on the development of the study group and it also impacts their reaching the aims they set themselves. Mentors are leaders, leading the study groups but they are not the only ones who can set aims and choose the contents. On the contrary. This is the task of the whole group.

Conclusion

It has been found that mentors take care to upgrade their mentoring competencies, and prepare for each single session. They make sure that their educational encounters with students are dynamic, diverse, they meet group members during the sessions and outside

the sessions. They go together to exhibitions, film performances, they visit different institutions, they travel together. The programme is adapted to the participants, their needs and aspirations.

Students are hardworking and want to know what stimulates mentors to do the same and more. Mentors know that getting knowledge is their students' primary goal.

Learning in study circles is a two way and multidirectional process.

Relationships in study circles are different from those in formal adult education.

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ANNEX 1

Re Dear mentor/mentoress

We know that your are involved in adult education, and you are, or you might be involved in older adult education in the future as well. Therefore, we would kindly ask you to answer the following questions that will help us better understand the characteristics of your job. Do not worry, we will take care that your privacy will be strictly respected.

Thank you for your readiness to co operate with us.

Location:

Hour when the interview started:

Hour when the interview ended:

Characteristics of the interviewee:

Gender:

Age:

Employed/unemployed:

In which study programme are you acting as a mentor/mentoree?

Attitude towards old age and older people

What do older people mean for you personally?

What do you think about your own age?

What should older people do in our society?

Mentoring

What is your role in your study group/groups? Will you describe, it please

What is mentoring in your eyes?

What do you like most?

How do you feel about the mentoring process (you as a mentor/mentoree)

How do you and your students learn from each other? What have you as mentor/mentoree learned from the study group members?

How has mentoring impacted your professional and personal development?

Professional qualification

How did you qualify for mentoring your study group/groups?

Now that you are a mentor/mentoree, how are you upgrading your knowledge?

In what way do you follow the development of the discipline or the study fields you are lecturing about?

Planning and organisation of work

How do you go about planning activities for your study group?

In what way do the participants contribute to the study group? (organising study tours, bringing texts, information, recordings to the groups etc.)

How do you feel about your students' contribution to the study contents in the group?

How do you reach an agreement with your group about the study programme?

Identifying individual characteristics

How do you identify groups characteristics and how do you integrate them in the work process?

How does the work plan change according to the identified characteristics of the group members/group?

Carrying for the good atmosphere in the group

How do you assess interpersonal relationships in the study group?

What kind of relationships are there among you?

How do the relationships in the study group impact the work process? Thank the interviewee for his/her answers.