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Come together, be together

ECIL, on-line course on intergenerational learning and how to use it

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To begin with, this is meant to be a workshop drawing upon your knowledge and experience, but we feel that we should first consider at least one of the basic concepts and topics of the ECIL programme. Actually, as you might guess, there are several, but there will not be any time today to discover them together.

This concept is the concept of *generation*. Not a *cohort* (all who are born in the same year, which is a statistical concept produced in 1962, a neutral concept), but *generation*, a complex concept with numerous connotations. There are differences between generations and within generations composed of men and women, educated and less educated members, of those who were born and raised in the country and those from towns. To sum up *cohort* is a neutral concept, an extreme simplification of the concept of generation, reduced to just one common characteristic *the year of birth*.

So first we'll be addressing the concept of generation, then we will present, briefly of course, the ECIL programme and finally we intend to do some workshop activities, so that you may get the taste of the programme.

About generations

The topic of new generations which cannot be classified has reappeared with the last so called "crisis" and the re-emergence of the generational issues is presently supported by two theses: first, the new generations are lost and sacrificed, unhappy,

and second, the thesis of a latent generational conflict that can explode at any moment». But, actually, how generations are born and shaped?

Different *generations* have been born into different societies, at different times. There are words and concepts qualifying the present society like risk, change, uncertainty, competitiveness, responsibility, selection, taking decisions. Risk, change, uncertainty are ever more faced by individuals alone, not whole communities. *Today's post modern society wants us to function as individuals*. The past industrial society, on the other hand, was offering more uniformity, more safety, more stability, but it was, on the other hand, putting more constraints on individuals and social structures,

To go on, *generations* are not a question of the age difference among them, but they are *a result of major social changes, of historic and political changes*. If there were no changes, there would be no generations. To put it differently. *Generation is not a temporal concept; on the contrary, it is a social or a historic concept*. Due to many changes and the turbulent history of the 20th century, generations got different names: *silent generations* from the period between the two wars, *rebellious generations* in the forties, *baby boom generations*, *socialist generations*, *Atari generations* and lately *boomerang generations*, etc. They were all born into different societies and were all shaped by them.

Now, concerning the attitude of the past present generations towards themselves and the others: In the past society the most frequently asked question was: "Am I allowed to do this and that"? And what is the most frequently asked question in contemporary society? "Am I able to do this and that?"

Generations born into these different societies unavoidably differ and in order to create and consolidate ties, bonds and connections between them, these differences are to be overcome or even better, should be used as *a resource*.

This is what *intergenerational practices and intergenerational learning* are all about. *Bringing generations together, making them co-operate on common issues while learning from each other and constructing new knowledge together for their common benefit and the benefit of the local community or working organisation.*

Now, around 1960 in western societies *family* became less hierarchical and let its members live in a more individualised way. This change, however, caused a lot of problems. With less support from their family, people started experiencing fear and doubts that they would ever attain their ideal Me, and therefore they started searching for *support outside their family*, in society, in the so called "inter-communities", groups of friends, societies, sport clubs etc. where they started creating different intergenerational ties, bonds and connections: ties of social solidarity and co-operation. Personal issues were also shared family issues, issues to be settled with the help of the family, turned into public issues supported by social movements. (For instance the social movement for the right to artificial miscarriage, the feminist movement for different relationships between women and men, etc.). In the past, there was a change from personal, private sphere to public sphere. Today the trend has been reversed. Young people, for instance, have a tendency to rely on their families and seem to be less interested in what is going on in society.

In addition, our societies have undergone many changes producing all sorts of inequalities (economic, urban, dwelling, cultural, educational, health inequalities, etc.) and this importantly supports the need for better intergenerational understanding, intergenerational ties, intergenerational learning the need for a more *cohesive society*.

There are many things we can value, but our societies seem to be dominated by a reduced number of values. This is not culture, these are not relationships, and this is not ethics or other values. These are *health, family, friends, and work*. Thus in many countries, especially Eastern European countries, the value of work come immediately after the value of health. In Germany, for instance, work comes third

after health and family, the same in the Netherlands and in Denmark. On the contrary, in societies where the prevailing value is work, there is, understandably, little room for social groups that do not work, do not have a job. *Consequently, younger and older people are being squeezed to the edge of society, and this is one more reason why intergenerational learning and practices are needed: to bring younger and older people together, to make them visible and better included in society.* A plurality of values would be needed. If this were the case older people, whose first value is not work but relationships, culture and having time, would remain included in society.

Additionally, *stereotypes about ages contribute towards dismantling cohesive society.* Organised intergenerational learning, learning about generations can better this situation by helping *generations to come together and be together*, by helping them to meet each other and to understand each other. Thus generational stereotypes may be alleviated.

Generation was first shaped into a concept in 1952, in the post war Germany. The first conceptualization was by Karl Mannheim in his work "The Problem of generations". Why in 1952, you can easily imagine. In the post war Germany there were generations that felt guilty for the war disasters (a major social interruption) even though during the war they were too young to be responsible of harm done. *Why today the issue of generations is re-emerging?* Why now? Because of many major social changes and inequalities produced by them. Because of the crisis- which is in fact a long transformation process that will last for decades- requires repositioning of all generations and social groups as well as a new *intergenerational social contract*.

Mannheim defined what is a generation- to distinguish *social generations* from the *kinship* (family, blood-related) *generations*. *Generation is thus* "a group of individuals of similar ages whose members have experienced a noteworthy historical event within a given period of time". (Mannheim, 1952). A mere chronological contemporaneity is not enough to produce a *common generational consciousness*. Mannheim in fact stressed that not every generation will develop an *original and*

distinctive consciousness. Whether a generation succeeds in developing a distinctive consciousness is significantly dependent on the pace of social change producing different events. (Second World War).

"In my times, in our times we were different" This is what we often hear from older generations. Of course we were better, more skilled, more polite...less educated. But these are subjective feelings. In the ECIL programme we suggest that *generations should be compared*, but in order to compare them, there should be some criteria. We propose that learners should discuss about their generation as it was when its members were aged twenty. What can be said about their *access to: education, health, accommodation, transport, work, income, and leisure time* in comparison to the generations of today's young people, those who *today* are twenty years old.

And finally, *do we really understand other generations, other than ours?* Or do we need to have more knowledge about generations for conducting intergenerational practices, for stimulating intergenerational learning and co-operation of generations in local community and at work, or simply for better living or avoiding the clash of gene-rations?

About the ECIL programme

Many of you are teachers, language teachers and as teachers you know that everything has to be put in a context in order to be understood and if possible remembered. So now we are going to relate the story about generations and society to the context of the ECIL programme of intergenerational learning.

We have all experienced intergenerational ties in families or elsewhere. Literally all of us. Without them, we would not have survived. *Generations are mostly well perceived and understood in families*, these being an intergenerational setting "par excellence". But the ECIL programme is meant exclusively for *two settings: local*

community and work environment, situations and relationships generations experience there.

Originally the ECIL course was a face to face course and the materials offered for consideration and suggestions of change by Beth Johnson Foundation to the partner organisations were, how shall we put it, intentionally rather basic, but interesting and inspiring, suggesting that the programme might be touching upon different areas of expertise and different reference study fields and disciplines: vocational training, community development, community education, youth work, community social work, socio-cultural animation, volunteering, adult education, project management, organisation of educational events, vocational training, social economy, educational sciences, sociology, psychology, gerontology etc. Since we are now in your country, Bulgaria, and since many of you are language teachers, let us tell you that this reminded us of Dr. Georgi Lozanov and his Treaty on suggestopedia ... A language teacher adopting suggestopedic methods should be expert in so many areas-too many-, that it seems quite impossible to be using suggestopedia. But then language teachers have a large choice and finally suggestopedic elements can be very useful in language teaching.

Thus, four partner organisations (UK, Spain, Sweden. Bulgaria, Slovenia)brought together their different expertise, transformed the programme, upgraded it in every respect and developed the national versions of the programme which are similar on one hand and quite dissimilar on the other hand, reflecting the cultural specific features.

In this workshop the structure of the on-line ECIL programme of intergenerational learning will be presented. Learning units 1, 2 and 3. Library, Introduction to ECIL.

The three learning units deal with

- (1) the issue of generations and intergenerational learning, European policies
- (2) intergenerational practices and

(3) evaluation

and are supported by an *extensive library* containing all sorts of documents:

books studies, articles, audio radio programmes, YouTube recordings, lecture.net lectures, pictures featuring relationship among generations. There are also reports from conferences or expert groups in which we were involved, our own scientific monographs etc. All these various documents in different languages are gathered there and we rather think these materials are important and interesting for a potential user. We do believe that the Bulgarian or Spanish or UK version of the programme contains such an exhaustive library as well and learners can even “travel” from one version to another, enriching their knowledge.

In the Slovenian version, however, we had some problems with overlapping documents covering several generations and issues at the same time. Nevertheless, we decided to support each unit by a separate file of documents, dealing with older people, younger people and intergenerational issues supporting the learning unit No 1. We added pictures to stimulate discussion among the learners, we added exercises, we transformed exercises, and we added theories, case studies ...

There is a file supporting the learning unit No 2 dealing with intergenerational practices. Here in the library we included examples of good practices, we have been gathering for a decade or so supporting a university subject Socio-cultural animation and education for local development offered within adult education studies in Ljubljana.

Quite useful is also the learning unit No 3 about evaluation which can be used all for many other purposes outside the ECIL programme. This unit is also accompanied by additional materials stored in the library.

In the Slovenian version the programme is titled *Come together, be together* because the ECIL programme is meant to bring generations together and to help them to

learn from each other, to construct new knowledge together within generational practices (intergenerational projects, intergenerational work, local community development projects etc.) or use their knowledge in co-operation with each other in order to create and maintain firm ties among them. Relationships matter. Intergenerational relationships matter!

Literature and references

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