Intergenerational learning through creative methods: The Romanian perspective

Apprendimento intergenerazionale attraverso l'uso di metodi creativi. La prospettiva rumena

Raluca Icleanu
Romanian Society for Lifelong Learning
raluca@srep.ro

ABSTRACT
The ALICE project was implemented in Romania by the Romanian Society for Lifelong Learning which selected trainers from different parts of the country to participate at the intial online training for trainers. The aim of the adult trainings later organized by SREP was to instil a greater interest in reading and storytelling and provide older adults with an educational alternative for how they can spend their leisure time with their children/grandchildren.
In our organization's daily work in the educational projects we implement, we meet young people who express themselves very difficult and have serious problems in correctly speaking and writing. In the same time, rupture between generations is also very high, many young people do not communicate with parents, and parents spend less time with their children. Also new technologies make the gap between generations even bigger. The idea of learning from each other through new technologies emerged also from the implementation of projects by our organization which addressed both parental education, and family learning, projects that have a real interest among adults and children.

Il progetto ALICE è stato attuato in Romania dalla Società Rumena per l'Apprendimento Permanente (SREP), che ha selezionato formatori da diverse parti del paese per partecipare alla formazione iniziale online proposta dal progetto ai formatori. A partire da questa formazione, l'obiettivo dei corsi di formazione per adulti organizzati più Avanti da SREP è stato quello di infondere interesse per la lettura e la narrazione e fornire un'opportunità formative per gli adulti più anziani su modi per trascorrere il tempo libero con figli e nipoti.
Nel lavoro quotidiano della nostra organizzazione incontriamo giovani che indicano la propria difficoltà e mancanza di competenze per l'espressione orale e scritta. Nel contempo, la rottura dei legami tra generazioni è molto elevato, con molti giovani che non arrivano a comunicare con i genitori, e genitori che trascorrono sempre meno tempo con i propri bambini. In questo contest, le nuove tecnologie sembrano rendere il divario tra generazioni ancor più grande. L'idea di imparare gli uni dagli altri attraverso le nuove tecnologie è emersa anche a seguito dell'esecuzione di diversi progetti formativi da parte della nostra organizzazione sia per l'istruzione dei genitori, la famiglia e l'apprendimento degli adulti, di genuino interesse per adulti e bambini.

KEYWORDS
Adult learning, creative languages, intergenerational learning, storytelling.
Formazione degli adulti, linguaggi creativi, apprendimento intergenerazionale, narrazione.

Formazione & Insegnamento XII – 2 – 2014
ISSN 1973-4778 print – 2279-7505 on line
doi: 107346/-fei-XII-02-14_16 © Pensa MultiMedia

Introduction

In recent years, children read far too little. The computer, the TV, the Internet and tablets occupy the children's time devoted to reading. This issue stands out among teenagers, where 2 out of 5 have trouble understanding the text they read.

In this context their language and vocabulary have much to suffer. Many young people are not able to express themselves properly.

Always stories told by parents and especially grandparents occupy a special place in the children's hearts. Interest for books, for information, also reading skills grow since early years of life when children are fascinated by the images from the story books, and more by the way adults talk to them about various characters, good and bad, which fight, in the end good defeating evil.

You always try to guide children through stories to discern good from evil, learn to be fair and to protect fundamental values: truth, justice, honesty, fairness, etc.

In recent years the value system suffered greatly in the Romanian society. If in the stories good and evil are clearly distinguished, in today's society a young man finds it difficult to discern what is good and evil, being subjected to an excessive media exposure, most often giving confusing and contradictory information. The young man must adjust to his environment and have the strength to keep his individuality and personality in his own entourage.

1. Piloting of the first adults learning programme (ALPP)

Every year fewer children are interested in reading and that's why their vocabulary is increasingly poor, and their ability to understand texts and stories are poorer.

At the same time children are more attracted to new technologies since early childhood coming in contact with smart phones, computers, video games, etc.

In our organization's daily work in the educational projects we implement, we meet young people who express themselves very difficult and have serious problems in correctly speaking and writing. In the same time, rupture between generations is also very high, many young people do not communicate with parents, and parents spend less time with their children.

Also new technologies make the gap between generations even bigger. The idea of learning from each other through new technologies emerged also from the implementation of projects by our organization which addressed both parental education, and family learning, projects that have a real interest among adults and children.

In this sense, the ALPP completes the already developed activities in other projects.

The ALPP meets school and family needs to help students and young people to develop an interest in reading and writing skills.

ALPP ran in a parent extracurricular activity designed to help them become a better teacher and learning companion for children, but also to give them the chance to learn new things with their child.

The ALPP aim was to instil a greater interest in reading and storytelling and provide older adults with an educational alternative for how they spend their leisure time.

The importance of this aim for the people engaged was to provide better communication and cooperation in the family, between generations, to provide the necessary support to adults to help children in their efforts to evolve.

The creative language adopted was Digital Storytelling and Intergenerational Storytelling.

The people engaged in the activities proposed by the ALPP expected to gain skills/knowledge on storytelling and creative writing. The impact is an intergenerational relationship, to be able to teach adults how to interact better with children and how to lead them to develop language and passion for books.



Fig.1 – A session of the ALPP

In our organization's daily work in the educational projects we implement, we meet young people who express themselves very difficult and have serious problems in correctly speaking and writing. In the same time, rupture between generations is also very high, many young people do not communicate with parents, and parents spend less time with their children.

Also new technologies make the gap between generations even bigger. The idea of learning from each other through new technologies emerged also from the implementation of projects by our organization which addressed both parental education, and family learning, projects that have a real interest among adults and children.

In this sense, the Intergenerational Storytelling Project completes the already developed activities in other projects.

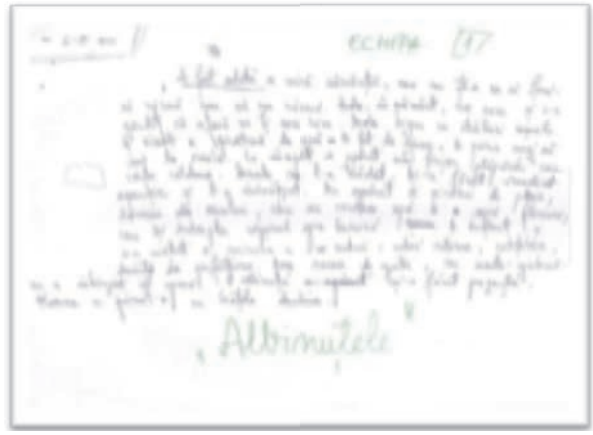


Fig. 2 – Adults' Reflections

This strategy is very useful in the context of the intergenerational education, which combines with the digital story being well received by both parties, children and adults can each cooperate with experience and competence, both benefiting.

To motivate adults to attend classes, meetings were conducted with them in the school, when the importance of these courses and their effect on the good upbringing of their children will be explained, as a result they can communicate better and more effectively with their children.

To be more effective we developed an appropriate program for the adults' needs so they have the opportunity to fully participate, depending on their work program.

Also children were engaged in collateral activities, allowing the adults to attend.

The proposed activities were meant to support adults in gaining skills and knowledge in digital storytelling and creative writing. The use of digital technologies is new to the adults and it is considered very important in order to communicate better with their children/ grandchildren known as more attracted to new technologies since early childhood.

The activities developed during the ALPP focused on presenting the alternative of digital stories to written ones by showing the strong impact that images, music, voices have on children rather than just reading from a paper. Participants were asked to create their own stories by writing or drawing. Participants learned through the activities to create their own digital stories using storyboards and audio mixing programs.



Fig. 3 – Children drawing as part of the activities

The skills that participants gained during the ALPP had a strong impact on their children building a stronger relationship and sharing their knowledge.

Parents would make the stories more appealing to their children using ICT tools that children handle very well and appreciate. In the same time, during the creation of their own digital stories, parents are supported by their children in their understanding of different ICT tools.

The ALPP was very much engaging for both the participants and the trainer. The participants enjoyed very much all the warm up exercises, all the stories presented, working in teams, discussing among each other the importance of digital storytelling and the right choice of stories for their children/ grandchildren.

The ALPP turned out to be a group meeting with parents/ grandparents sharing their experiences about children and what methods are appropriate for them to be closer to their needs. That is why digital storytelling was considered to be one idea as children are very much into new technologies and involving parents and children altogether in the creation of a story using the new technology will bring them much closer.

2. Piloting of the second adults learning programme (ALPP)

Reading and writing are basic skills for everyone. Young children are taught since school to express and narrate. Kindergarten is the first environment in which children are asked to communicate and tell to which group he belongs.

The fascination which stories have upon children must be kept also later on, so that they become literature consumers not only of the movies, adaptations of books.

Unfortunately, fewer and fewer grandparents tell stories to their grandchildren, as it would have been done in past generations when the most beautiful stories were told by grandparents.



Fig. 4 – Intergenerational activities

Children's of today are increasingly attracted to new technologies. Lack of reading makes them have a poor vocabulary, not allowing them to fluently express themselves.

A book is difficult to read, given the poor grammar, while new technologies are intuitive and do not require too much knowledge.

Also the lack of genuine value systems increases the confusion of the new generations, which can be decreased by adults with creative languages and metaphors from books and stories for children.

The importance of this aim for the people engaged will be to provide better communication and cooperation in the family, between generations, to provide the necessary support to adults to help children in their efforts to evolve.

Goals: The people engaged in the activities proposed by the ALPP can expect to gain skills/knowledge on narration, connect textual reality with their own reality and to become more analytical, open minded.

The impact could be an intergenerational relationship, to be able to teach adults how to interact better with children and how to promote educational and moral values as well as ideological issues, through children's literature. Reading and writing are basic skills for everyone. Young children are taught since school to express and narrate. Kindergarten is the first environment in which children are asked to communicate and tell to which group he belongs.The fascination which stories have upon children must be kept also later on, so that they become literature consumers not only of the movies, adaptations of books. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer grandparents tell stories to their grandchildren, as it would have been done in past generations when the most beautiful stories were told by grandparents.

Children of today are increasingly attracted to new technologies. Lack of reading makes them have a poor vocabulary, not allowing them to fluently express themselves.A book is difficult to read, given the poor grammar, while new technologies are intuitive and do not require too much knowledge. Also the lack of genuine value systems increases the confusion of the new generations, which can be decreased by adults with creative languages and metaphors from books and stories for children.

The creative language adopted was **Children's Literature and metaphors to enact intergenerational dialogue.** This strategy is very useful in the context of the intergenerational learning; given the known desire of children to sharpen the stories told by adults, as well as adults need to have at hand means of educating and mentoring of children.

To be more effective we developed an appropriate program for the adults' needs so they have the opportunity to fully participate, depending on their work program. Also children were engaged in some of the activities, allowing the adults to attend.

An online network was developed in which parents, teachers, grandparents discussed about their findings and shared their good stories, books etc.

The aim of this network was to increase the interest of parents, grandparents and teachers of using children's literature (both virtually created and non-virtually created – by means of books).

The network should be a space of further communication for the target group involved and for others to share new tools for storytelling, sources of books. The network can be also a community, in which other institutions can offer their support, promote other workshops for the target group involved, enhance knowledge on children's literature etc.



Fig. 5 – Social Networks promoting the project

The ALICE community on Facebook called *Creative intergenerational activities* is full of people and institutions using creative languages and share their opinions and work (with more than 100 members).

In these sessions, children were present and together with their parents enjoyed the organized activities. They were present to share their opinion on the chosen stories, the parts of the stories they liked and the parts they disliked; they give feedback on the style of narration and how interest is raised when telling a story.



Fig. 6 – Digital Storytelling and intergenerational Learning

The second ALPP organized by SREP raised awareness on the need to use children's literature as a tool to help children make a difference between good and bad and an activity to bring adults together with their children in a pleasant way.

Participants enjoyed all the activities especially the part in which they had to re-tell the stories they have already known by heart and considered to be well known by the children.

Conclusions

There is a growing need for bringing closer children with their parents and grandparents through different intergenerational activities meant to shape children's personalities and also to acquire abilities necessary for a better and pro active communication within a family. These programmes that were developed during the project are just examples of intergenerational activities, more and more can be created and used for the same purpose.

References

Cullivan, B. E. (in collaboration with Karrer, M. K &Pillar, A. M.). (1981). Literature and Child. Harcourt Brace: Jovanovich.

Falconer, R. (2009). The Crossover Novel: Contemporary Children's Fiction and Its Adult Readership. New York & London: Routledge.

Gilien, J. & Hall, N. (2003). The Emergence of Early Childhood Literacy. In N. Hall, J. Larson & J. Marsh, (Eds), Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy (5-12). California: Sage.

Lambert, J. (2010). *Digital Storytelling Cookbook*. Berkeley, CA: Center for Digital Storytelling.

Seed (2010). *Learning through Digital Storytelling – the Handbook*. Lugano: Switzerland.