Let's Cook Together: Empowering intergenerational communication through cooking

Cuciniamo insieme: rafforzare la comunicazione intergenerazionale attraverso la cucina

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ABSTRACT
Storytelling is a very common educational practice that is used in every level of education. It has a positive impact in children's learning and creativity. Often the educational use of storytelling is based on national storytelling traditions such as Shadow Theater which is very popular in many countries including Greece. In this research we present eShadow, a storytelling tool inspired by the Greek traditional shadow theater and how it has been used in a number of Adult Learning Pilot Programmes (ALPPs) implemented within the context of the ALICE project in Greece.
In these ALPPs, intra-family communication scenarios were investigated as well as scenarios related to enabling children develop their own digital stories using eShadow. Furthermore, eShadow was used in a live interactive performance event combining Music and Digital Shadow Theatre. The evidence gathered during the implementation of these ALPPs confirms that such kind of approaches can indeed enhance intergenerational bonding and create an engaging learning space for children to develop important key skills. Our findings illustrate that eShadow is very easy to use, attracts the interest of both children and teachers and has a positive impact on the development of children's creativity.

Lo storytelling è una pratica molto comune in ambito formative ed educativo, utilizzata ad ogni livello di istruzione. Ha un impatto positivo sull'apprendimento e la creatività dei bambini. Spesso l'uso didattico dello storytelling si basa su espressioni narrative ben conosciute a livello nazionale, qual è il caso del teatro delle ombre, molto popolare in molti paesi tra cui la Grecia. In questa ricerca presentiamo i risultati dell'implementazione di uno strumento digitale, "eShadow", ispirato al tradizionale teatro delle ombre greco, nel contesto di un certo numero di attività pilota per la formazione degli adulti (Adult Learning Pilot Programmes, ALPPS) attuate nel contesto del progetto ALICE, in Grecia.
In questi ALPPS, gli scenari di comunicazione intra-familiari sono stati studiati così come scenari che consentono ai bambini di sviluppare le proprie abilità per il lavoro con lo strumento digitale eShadow. Inoltre, eShadow è stato utilizzato in evento interattivo che univa presentazioni di Musica e Teatro con la presenza di teatro delle ombre "digitale". Le prove raccolte nel corso di questi ALPPS conferma l'ipotesi degli autori che questo tipo di approcci può infatti migliorare i legami intergenerazionali e consente di sviluppare importanti competenze chiave sia negli adulti che nei bambini. I nostri risultati mostrano che eShadow è molto facile da usare, attira l'interesse di bambini e insegnanti e ha un positivo impatto sullo sviluppo della creatività dei bambini.

KEYWORDS
Intergenerational communication, intergenerational learning, life long learning, creative languages, cooking together.
Comunicazione intergenerazionale, l'apprendimento intergenerazionale, l'apprendimento permanente, linguaggi creativi, cucinare insieme.

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Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing body of literature focusing on the communication between elderly and younger generations to create a healthy society (for overviews, see Harwood 2007; Nussbaum & Coupland 2004; Williams & Nussbaum 2001). In literature intergenerational communication and intergenerational activities have been defined in a number of different ways. The term "intergenerational communication" applies to interactions involving individuals who are from different age cohorts or age groups. Families provide ready examples of individuals whose communication would be classified as intergenerational: parent and child, grandparent and grandchild, aunt and niece, to name a few. These interactions stand in contrast to intergenerational communication or communication between individuals from the same generation or age cohort, such as siblings. Intergenerational communication occurs outside the family context as well. Any interaction between a child and an adult, a young person and one, who is middle-aged or older, or a middle-aged person and an older person fits the definition of intergenerational communication (Williams & Nussbaum 2012). Recently, a considerable attention has also been given to the critical role of culture in understanding intergenerational beliefs about intergenerational communication (Giles et al. 2007; Giles 2004; Pecchioni et al. 2004).

The year 2012 was the European year for Active Aging and Solidarity between generations and among its aims was to remove barriers between generations and encourage intergenerational learning. Moreover, in line with the goals of the EU 2020 Strategy, it seems necessary to promote a social model that combines citizenship education and intergenerational learning;

> *Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities, which promotes greater understanding and respect between generations and may contribute to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational learning is a process, through which individuals acquire skills and knowledge, but also attitudes and values, from all available resources and from all influences in their won 'life worlds'*. (EAGLE Consortium, 2008)

Kaplan (1998) who is concerned with intergenerational transmission defines intergenerational initiatives as activities, events and programs that increase cooperation, interaction or exchange between elder people and younger ones. More and more opportunities need to be created for intergenerational learning and practices in order to understand the importance of the interaction between older and younger generations (Williams & Nussbaum 2012). Thus, for the purpose of this study the following definition of intergenerational learning is used:

> *Intergenerational learning offers a means for skills, values, and knowledge to be passed between generations, as well as an opportunity to foster mutual understanding and support wider objectives of community cohesion*. (Learning for Active Ageing & Intergenerational Learning, 2012)

Intergenerational learning can take place in formal and informal settings such as workplace, educational settings and settings outside the formal classroom. However, to ensure intergenerational learning the setting and language that nourishes the dialogue between generations must go beyond the language tra-

ditionally adopted in an educational setting. Using creative languages might be a powerful tool for facilitating this dialogue. It gives the opportunity of "being together" in non-traditional ways, sharing creative activities with feelings of enjoyment, exploring, trying out and self-expression (Margiotta 2012; Raffaghelli 2012).

This paper presents the stages and results of an Adult Learning Pilot Project (ALLP), which was organized as part of the A.L.I.C.E (The Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences) Grundtvig project and put into practice at St Luke's Community Centre in London, UK.

In broader terms, the ALLP aimed to:

- contribute to Intergenerational Learning (IL) which is an important part of lifelong learning in which generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge that enrich all parties;
- bring together people from different generations in a purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations;
- to develop intergenerational awareness in order to build up an understanding and respect between generations, which leads to the development of competences and inclusion;
- build on positive resources that both the younger and older generations have to offer each other and those around them;
- promote greater learning and understanding and respect for all participants in the exchanges of the program and contribute to balance the gap (if any) between generations;
- create a caring environment in which generations are at an equal level and encouraged to contribute to communication and learning.

The impact on participants engaged in the several activities proposed by the ALPP was to:

- get to know each other in a non-formal but caring learning environment that aggregates the different ages of life where teenagers and elderly can meet and exchange knowledge and take care of each other;
- contribute to intergenerational learning and dialogue;
- create a space for speaking and sharing;
- support reflexive parenting by valuing the resources of the family unit;
- provide opportunities to reflect upon their choices through critical reflection on their own experiences and backgrounds;
- foster conversation;
- raise awareness that leads to understanding and respect between generations.

1. Background to the study

We focused on two main questions:

1. How does creative languages (food, cooking together and story telling in our case) influence intergenerational learning?
2. How can we raise awareness of adults in their role as educators, particularly in parenting?

Firstly, we needed to find a setting where everybody from the community could easily find access to this place. Secondly, it had to be a non-formal setting where younger and elderly people could come together, share and learn from each other. Keeping this in mind we made a small-scale research regarding what was available and after discovering St Luke's Community Centre we decided this community centre was the right place.

St Luke's Trust is an old and well-established charity that owns a large community centre that provides services and facilities to the communities of south Islington, City of London and surrounding areas, making this often deprived inner-city part of London a better place to live, work, learn and play. This building provides a space for local people to gather and socialise, and is a place that enables them and other organisations to deliver services and activities to the local community. The aim of this community centre is to improve the conditions of life for the people living in the area of benefit. It not only helps break down barriers within the neighbourhood but also contributes towards the area being welcoming, safe, healthy, alive with activity, and neighbourly. Accordingly, this community centre provides and hosts over 65 weekly activities ranging from after- school clubs to social care for the elderly, from community gardening projects to corporate volunteering for City employees. It is a place loved by thousands of local people who visit it regularly (http://www.slpt.org.uk).

However, even though this community centre is providing a wide range of activities and services for adults, children and young people, these activities are usually designed for one certain group of participants and have little room for intergenerational learning. The community centre also confirmed this and was very enthusiastic in supporting and hosting our ALLP. We put a banner in the community centre and distributed flyers in the neighbourhood (see Appendix I). The community centre also advertised our project online through their Facebook page and with the help of the community centre staff the event was immediately booked out. Approximately 36 participants (20 younger, 16 elderly) participated in our ALLP project. Due to health and safety reasons we were not allowed to accept more participants in the kitchen.

As the next step, we designed an ALLP that used COOKING and FOOD, and STORYTELLING as creative languages to empower intergenerational communication using the professional KITCHEN in the community centre for the first 2 sessions; the hall and the kitchen for the lunch session and finally a seminar room for the follow up 2 sessions for personal storytelling and reflection. We believed that FOOD and COOKING together is a very basic activity that can serve as a positive non-formal environment for parents, children and elderly people and bring together people from different cultures especially in a multicultural community like London.

During the cooking sessions a professional chef introduced a meal and younger and elderly participants had to collaborate and produce the same dish. Meanwhile, they had to communicate, share responsibilities and cooperate to achieve a task (MEAL) while respecting each other's decisions, sharing responsibilities and trusting each other. The trainer, chef and food anthropologist were walking around and encouraging the participants to cooperate.

During the lunchtime, everybody shared the food and ate together. The younger participants conducted a mini survey, asking questions to the adults.

After lunch, participants together with the children, teenagers went upstairs and watched a video extract. Afterwards, they talked about the importance of sit-

ting and eating together as family and sharing a personal story of their childhood. Everybody shared their experiences and feelings about being together at the dinner table and discussing the daily experiences.

In the second half, the younger participants started a drawing activity while parents started a discussion.

2. The sessions

2.1. *Overall outline of the sessions*

Session 1-2: In the lovely kitchen of the Cookery school at the Community Centre
- Introduction to the ALLP: Let's cook together
- General ntroduction and the aim of the day
- The importance of food and communication
- Hands on: cooking

Session 3: In the kitchen and hall of the Community Centre
- Lunch time

Session 3-4: In the seminar room of the Community Centre
- Input of intergenerational communication and its importance
- Importance of cooking together and eating together
- Personal stories shared during/after lunch and dinner times
- The importance of sitting together and sharing
- Raising awareness in the importance of parenting (see Appendix II for pictures of the sessions)

Number of Participants for each session:

Session 1-2: Cooking
16 Adult – 20 Children

Session 3: Eating together (lunch)
22 Adult – 20 Children (staff from the community centre joined the group)

Session 4-5: Storytelling
Adult – 10 children (some had to leave after lunch)

2.2. *Session description*

Session 1-2: (Duration**:** 2 hours)
Trainer activity:
- Opens the session with a general introduction and aim of the day.
- A food anthropologist explains the importance of food and cooking together.
- The professional chef and 2 assistants give the demo cooking and help the participants in groups with the cooking.

Learner activity:
- Participate actively, follow the steps, cook, discuss and reflect.

Steps:
Warm-up: The trainer gives a general introduction and asks questions to involve the participants and elicitate their answers. 1. How much time do you spend with

your children/ son/ daughter/ father/ mother…. At home? 2. Who is cooking at home? 3. Do you help each other? Why/ why not? 4. Why is it important?
– The professional chef describes the dish of the day and shows the stages of how to cook.
– Participants follow the stages and try to produce the same dish. During this process they have to collaborate, help and speak to each other.

Session 3: In the hall of the Community Centre (Duration:1 hour)
Lunch time
Trainer activity:
– Sets the task for the lunchtime.

Learner activity:
Enjoying the lunch, which was prepared as a result of cooperation, while discussing the questions given by the trainer. The younger participants are responsible for conducting the mini questionnaire (Reflections Sheets, see Appendix III) and are taking notes.

Steps:
Everybody takes the food that was cooked together to the hall and set the table. The trainer gives a small card (reflection sheet) with the following questions:
1. What did you like most about cooking together?
2. What have you learnt today from each other?
3. Are you planning to cook together in future?

Meanwhile everybody is enjoying the lunch and chatting informally.

Session 4-5: In the seminar room of the Community Centre (Duration: 2 hours)
– Input of intergenerational communication and its importance
– Importance of cooking together and eating together
– Personal stories
  The importance of sitting together and sharing
– Personal reflection on parenting

Trainer activity:
The trainer clarifies the aims of the session and asks the participants to watch a video extract. (see Appendix IV)

Learner activity:
Watch and reflect on the video extract. Participate and share their personal stories. Reflect on parenting. Children are separately drawing a picture.

Steps:
– The trainer asks the participants (adult and children) to watch a video extract in which SAV tells her personal story about food, her childhood, how they spend time together at the dinner table etc.
– The trainer wants the participants to listen to the story and reflect by thinking about their experience and sharing their feelings regarding food and cooking.

Both parents and children reflect about their personal feelings. In the second half of the session, the children together with an assistant went to the far corner of the conference room and did a drawing activity regarding a message they want to give to their parents. Meanwhile parents sat together in the other end of the seminar room and discussed the following topics

– parents as educators
– awareness and reflections regarding own experiences as parents
– importance of intergenerational communication
– the impact of parenting on their children

At each stage we aimed to use different type of evaluation tools to enrich the evaluation process such as;

Session 1-2 COOKING: Audio/video recording
Pictures
Feedback of the chef and food anthropologist
Trainer's log

Session 3 EATING TOGETHER: Audio/video recording
Pictures
Reflections sheets
Trainer's log

Session 4-5 STORYTELLING Audio/video recording
Pictures
Questionnaire (see Appendix V)
Drawing and Presentation
Trainer's log

2.3. *General information about the evaluation process*

The video recordings clearly showed the engagement of the participants. Both the chef and the food anthropologist gave feedback on the process and reactions of the participants. It was especially a positive decision to use reflection sheets and give the task to the children as some participants did not want to be filmed or their pictures taken; thus, in this way the children were able to ask questions and get feedback from their parents/adults.

In session 4-5, at some point it did not feel right to film as a participant got very emotional and started to cry when she remembered her childhood and family. Therefore, we decided to stop filming and focused on the individual's need. In session 5, adults were discussing parental issues while children were drawing pictures regarding messages they would like to give to their parents. Later the children presented their pictures one by one. At the end of session 5, we handed out a general questionnaire regarding participants' experiences and suggestions for future applications.

Throughout the process, a trainer's log was kept.

2.3.1. The Key Competences

The European framework for key competences for lifelong learning, released at the end of 2006, identifies and defines the key abilities and knowledge that everyone needs in order to achieve employment, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship in today's rapidly-changing world. Here are the key competences achieved with this study.

KC2- Communication in foreign languages:
For some participants English was not their first language; in fact we had two participants who could not speak English at all. Some children were better in using the shared language (ENGLISH) and helped their parents to express themselves. It was a nice experience to develop skills such as motivation and intercultural understanding through teamwork.

KC5- Learning To Learn:
The adults have discovered the interest of the creative language (FOOD AND COKING) and are willing to implement ideas in the own life, understanding how to deal with a new language and how to create rich and caring environments with it. The participants also critically reflected on their own experiences sharing with other members of the community.

KC6- Social and civic competences:
Through the practice of critical thinking, parents became aware of the differences between experiences and showed empathy and solidarity through the cooking experience.

KC7- Sense of initiatives and entrepreneurship:
The decision and willingness to participate in cooking stimulated concrete actions in parents and children. There was a great teamwork where they had to translate thoughts into actions immediately. Everybody was on a equal basis to learn and further their ability to anticipate possible events in future.

KC8- Cultural awareness and expression:
The adults have discovered the interest of cultural differences in childhood with regard to food and cooking and would like to create/collaborate in the creation of experiences enhancing the potential to learn about languages/cultural differences, traditions, daily routines.

2.3.2. Reflection sheets

Here are some comments of the participants:

1. What did you like most about cooking together?
- I made new friends
- It was fun.
- Spending time together and cooking with the whole family especially on Father's Day.
- Mum liked meeting new people and learning new food.
- I liked cooking together because it means we could work as a team.
- We understood and learnt more than I knew.
- It's the first time that I do something like that with my mum. We had to work together. Great J
- I am impressed with everybody's cooperation.
- More communication and learning new food. You get to share ideas and you learn more skills.
- Nice people, good teamwork, sharing idea, Mum liked me seeing cooking.
- My mum liked using the rolling pin.

2. What have you learnt today from each other?
- My mum learnt to do team work.
- How to make humus.
- We had to read and understand the recipe together. When we did not understand we asked other people. Great help.
- We communicate very well; people around us are very polite and more skillful than us so we learn more from them.
- Both elderly people and children can actually do something together.
- I think my mother has realized that I'm not too bad in cooking, maybe next time she trusts me.
- How to cook with the finest ingredients.
- Cooking food from different cultures.
- That we can do anything together.
- That my daughters are good cooks.
- How to make flat bread.
- Young or old you can cook.

3. Are you planning to cook together in future?
- I am not sure. I would love to.
- YES, especially with daddies.
- Why not!
- Definitely, because you can learn more things.
- Yes, definitely. Cooking is my life.
- YESSSS.
- Yes, we would love to come in future and learn more ideas and more skills. We would like to work with Hülya and Nafsika.
- We are planning to cook together once a week.
- Don't know if my mother let me. I would love to.

2.3.3. Questionnaire

11 adults stated their views in the questionnaire and here are some of the results;
- 7 participants found it very enjoyable, 4 enjoyable
- All of them would like to attend similar activities.
- 9 participants indicated that they have not previously attended any projects with their children

What did you find most interesting, useful, challenging, new… of today's event?
- Learning new things
- Everything, spending quality time with my son
- Sharing, meeting new people from other countries
- Meet other parents and share similar problems
- Mix of cultures
- My daughter, not wanting to join first but later happily participating
- Sharing tasks, learning new skills with new people
- Being patient, trusting each other
- The video, we are all the same
- Listening to other parents and their feelings
- Useful, fun.

Conclusions

Intergenerational communication develops a better understanding between generations, reducing discrimination and increasing social inclusion. Food and cooking together can be used as an effective tool for creative languages that promote intergenerational communication. Cooking together can serve as an 'ice breaker' to build dialogues while creating rapport and furthering the communication. Food combines people and strengthens social bonds; it touches everything important to people; thus, it is an effective tool for intergenerational communication and learning. Moreover, intergenerational learning activities can provide an opportunity to develop a better understanding and reduce generalizations of 'the other' especially in a multicultural society like London. Food and cooking together enabled the participants in this study to go back to their families of origin and value their personal stories but at the same time listen and appreciate other real life stories. Food and cooking together created an environment where there was mutual respect, understanding and a greater sense of empathy towards each other and the will to interact and form social relationships. Participants felt bonded through the first three sessions (preparing the food and eating together) and thus found it easier to share personal experiences regarding parenting in session 4-5.

Our project created an informal but structured setting for an intergenerational learning where older and younger participants were motivated to share knowledge, skills and collaborated together for a shared outcome. Through basic routines like eating and cooking participants were on equal levels and everybody contributed to the intergenerational communication and learning with positive resources that both the younger and older generations had to offer each other. During the 5-hour project older and younger generations not only collaborated and worked as a team but also had a chance to work and discuss within their age groups. In the first three sessions as mentioned earlier all the participants bonded and formed a certain rapport with each other. In the last two sessions participants were able to reflect upon a personal story (Savi's story) sharing afterwards their own personal stories. This provided a basis for reflecting on their own experiences and backgrounds and their choices through critical reflection. Adults are not just caregivers but also educators whose actions have consequences for their children's future life and life long learning in general. Raising awareness and helping adults to reflect upon their own parenting experiences was very crucial and we believe we achieved this through personal stories regarding family life, food, cooking together, daily routines and the importance of spending effective time together.

Overall, we believe that this project was a great success and could contribute to intergenerational communication. Participants indicated that they really enjoyed spending time with not only their own children but also seeing other elderly and young people cooperating together. They further said that they would love to join other programs with younger people

Some parents indicated that there is a need to come together with other parents and children to share experiences and learn from each other. Despite the limitations of this study, we believe using food and cooking together as a creative language can contribute to intergenerational communication and learning.

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Appendix I


The Mosaic
EACEA
Education and Culture DG
Lifelong Learning Programme
Project Number: 518106-LLP-1-2011-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP
ALiCE
Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experiences
Let's cook together
Let's spend a day cooking, enjoying food and storytelling together!
Sunday 16 June 2013 - from 11.00 until 16.00
St Luke's Community Centre - 90 Central Street - London EC1V 8AJ
Parents, grandparents and all those adults interested in experiencing intergenerational learning through 'cooking, eating and storytelling' are invited to the workshop.
They can come with their kids.
To enroll please book directly from St Luke's reception or call 020 7549 8181.
Workshop facilitator: Dr. Emine Çakir
Free entrance
Lunch is offered by the workshop organizers
Partnership
Italy | Italy | Greece | Romania | srep | Switzerland | seed | United Kingdom | The Mosaic
ALiCE Project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
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Appendix II



Session 1-2



Session 3



Session 4-5

Appendix III





Reflection Sheets ☺

1. What did you like most about cooking together?
2. What have you learnt today from each other?
3. Are you planning to cook together in future?

Appendix IV

*

*

Have you attend other events with your child/relative before?

( ) Yes ( ) No

If YES, please specify

Cuciniamo insieme: rafforzare la comunicazione intergenerazionale attraverso la cucina

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the implementation and results of an Adult Learning Pilot Project (ALPP), which was organized as part of the A.L.I.C.E (The Adults Learning for Intergenerational Creative Experience) Grundtvig project and put into practice at St Luke's Community Centre in London, UK. It especially tries to justify which settings and language best promote the communication between generations and whether *COOKING* together and personal storytelling can be used as creative languages to empower intergenerational communication and learning. Findings suggest that even though food and cooking together are fundamental parts of daily routines, they can create a positive, non-formal setting for parents, children and elderly people and bring people from different cultures together. Cooking together can serve as an 'ice breaker' to build dialogues while creating rapport and furthering the communication. Food and cooking together enabled the participants in this study not only to go back to their families of origin and value and tell their personal stories but also to listen and appreciate other real life stories.

Questo articolo presenta l'attuazione e i risultati di un'attività pilota di formazione degli adulti (Adult Learning Pilot Programme, ALPP) organizzata nell'ambito del progetto ALICE (progetto Grundtvig) e portato avanti al Centro Comunitario Saint Luke di Londra, Regno Unito. Il lavoro cerca di analizzare quali settings e quali linguaggi possono promuovere migliori forme di comunicazione tra generazioni. Specificamente, ha tentato di valutare se il linguaggio creativo della cucina congiunta può avere significativi risultati per l'apprendimento e la comunicazione intergenerazionale. I risultati suggeriscono che anche se il cibo e la cucina sono parti della routine giornaliera, sono elementi che possono diventare positivi ambienti informali per genitori, bambini e persone anziane, e non solo: possono anche far congiungere persone da diverse culture. Cucinare insieme può servire pertanto per rompere il ghiaccio e promuovere dialogo e ulteriore comunicazione tra generazioni. In quest'esperienza, il cibo e l'attività di cucinare ha reso possibile tornare