

Intergenerational learning for developing entrepreneurship and promoting active citizenship

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Abstract

The most important policy documents that have shaped European cooperation in the field of economic, social and educational sciences in the last decade, and which are also bound to influence what will happen until 2020 in an international context, recognize the need for the design of a new learning model focused on personal development throughout the course of life, in the spirit of positive interdependence and reciprocity between generations.

In this milieu, it is necessary to rethink some basic tenets of pedagogical thought, which has started taking into account the age of older adults only in recent years.

Through this paper we want to test how well the medium of intergenerational learning, fostered by experiential learning and by analytical, simulative, relational and narrative techniques, can lend itself to becoming an effective tool for defining new training and learning models to develop Entrepreneurship in non formal and informal contexts.

I più importanti documenti che, negli ultimi anni, hanno dato vita a policy di cooperazione europea in ambito economico, sociale ed educativo e che sono destinati ad influenzare a livello internazionale quanto avverrà in tali contesti entro il 2020, riconoscono il bisogno di disegnare un nuovo modello di apprendimento focalizzato sullo sviluppo personale lungo il corso della vita, nello spirito dell'interdipendenza positiva e della reciprocità tra generazioni.

A tal proposito, appare necessario ripensare alcuni principi base del pensiero pedagogico, che ha cominciato a prendere in considerazione gli anziani solo recentemente.

Con questo paper si vuole dimostrare come l'apprendimento intergenerazionale, attraverso l'apprendimento per esperienza, tecniche analitiche, simulative, relazionali e narrative possa essere assunto come un nuovo modello per sviluppare la competenza chiave dell'Entrepreneurship in contesti non formali ed informali.

Keywords: Senior volunteering, Intergenerational learning, Entrepreneurship, Vocational Education, Constructivism.

1. Introduction

This article reports on a case study of intergenerational learning between a group of retired managers (seniors volunteers) and a group of vocational students, aiming at enhance understanding of the sociocultural aspects of learning in an area where little research has previously been conducted: entrepreneurship education.

The first part of the article will provide an overview of constructivism and its implications on intergenerational learning (IL) aimed at sustaining active ageing.

The second part of the paper will present Plinio project: a possible application of constructivist theories for developing entrepreneurship in intergenerational learning contexts, for increasing job opportunities for younger generations and for promoting active citizenship and inclusion to foster the educational and generative potential of the older adults.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data gathered permits tentative conclusions to be drawn about intergenerational learning for entrepreneurship education. The article finally presents some pedagogical considerations about learning models to prepare younger generations not just to deal with problems and changes, but to learn how to turn them into opportunities. The role of older citizens in their communities and the importance of their educational contributions to future generations is taken into consideration.

The fact that a growing number of older adults retire early, sometimes after several careers, is creating a pressure to develop opportunities for such retirees non only to enhance their own personal development, but also to contribute more generously to the social well-being of their community and country (Perlstein, 1998; Larkin, 1999; Waddock & Freedman, 1999).

In this milieu, according to the Lisbon strategy 2000 and to the strategic program *Education & Training 2010*¹, the European Member States started to address their policies for Lifelong Learning strategies, aware of the necessity to increase participation of the older adults in an active form, with the final goal of achieving an economy based on knowledge and Lifelong Learning.

In the Communication from the Commission of 27 September 2007 presenting the Action Plan on Adult learning - *It is always a good time to learn*² the advantages derived from continuing education are explained in detail, to the point of self-realization, of aging in an improved physical and mental state.

¹ http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/general_framework/c11086_en.htm

² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0558>

Lifelong learning, recommended and sustained even from the World Health Organization,³ starts to obtain a crucial importance in political sphere towards active ageing, so much so that it is promoted even in formal, non-formal and informal contexts, to stimulate all dimensions (cognitive, meta-cognitive, relational, etc) of an older adult.

Even during the the Second World Assembly on Ageing (UN, 2002, Resolution), the need to create a society for all ages, in which the older adults have the right to be included in continuing education and participate in economical political and social life, is addressed.

The UN documents of 2010 (UN, 2010a – UN, 2010c), however, underline the insufficiency of the efforts made by various governments in this aspect and reconfirm the need to address their real interests to the needs of older adults.

The European Commission (2012) has also underscored some indispensable actions to promote Active ageing:

- the realization of sensible campaigns that evaluate the potential of the older adults, their knowledge, and their active participation in the society;
- the commencement of intergenerational educational projects, to increase the opportunity of reciprocal learning and to challenge the danger of elderly isolation.

Various intergenerational programs and projects were approved at a European and national level to foster older adult's participation. However, some academics (Findsen, Formosa, 2011) discovered evidence of a low percentage of elderly people participating in the projects in proportion to younger generation participants. The percentage of foreign elderly participants was moreover very low and a significant decline in participation over the age of seventy was observed, probably due to constructional, informative, or psychological obstacles.

In the majority of cases, the European actions based on Lifelong Learning are focused on a target audience of people over 50 who are still engaged in gainful occupations and aim to guarantee the sustenance of economic productivity and to alleviate the burden on the pensions system, which seems to be in line with today's mainstream political mantra which focuses on sustainability by increasing the competences of the elderly (Calza Bini, Lucciarini, 2011).

What is the real role of intergenerational learning? What types of didactics can be designed to work across generations? How can pedagogical paths be structured to ease and promote the transition to a new culture of learning? Which learning environments are best-suited to improve intergenerational relationships? The next sections will try to discuss these topics.

2. Constructivism and its implications for intergenerational learning

³ http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/who_nmh_nph_02.8.pdf

The majority of educational projects and programs between generations aimed at promoting active aging, volunteering, learning at a late age, active citizenship and solidarity on a European level, seem to emphasize the role of the experience of the learner (Dewey, 1947), as well as the empathy and authenticity of the relationships (Rogers, 1969). They also build on the models of education centered around the learner (Cantor, 1946), discovery learning (Bruner, 1993) and the adult learning theory (Knowles, 1989), putting the concepts of empowerment and intergenerational participation at the heart of the educational process.

Intergenerational education is also configured, in this way, as a social process that sustains a number of different relationships, among which it might be worth noting: cooperation, collaboration, reciprocal interdependence both in the context of formal learning and non-formal and informal learning, in accordance with four direct principles (Ripamonti, 2005):

- social skills education;
- active citizenship education;
- cultural education;
- empowerment education.

The first typology of projects and programs focuses on education as a social construct, a learning occasion to increase the quantity and quality of the social relationships of the elderly and to mitigate the risks of isolation and marginalization, improving their communication across different generations.

With regards to active citizenship education, the reference is to the formative tracks that develop competences in the realization of social, cultural or care services (Risi, 2009). It is important, from an educational point of view, to give priority to those actions that sustain the development of civil competences and that make people to assume a perspective that is not self-centered.

The concept of education, in the terms of culture and updates, refers to European learning projects and programs that want to satisfy the desire of the elderly to enrich their knowledge and competences, coming closer to discipline which they could not master before.

The concept of empowerment refers to the implementation of the conditions and the processes that permit someone to work with a view to reach their objectives and to overcome problematic situations, exercising their knowledge. Spigner-Littles and Anderson (1999) underline that these intergenerational learning activities take into consideration the six pillars of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1984):

1. the necessity of knowing: before being involved in educational actions, adults want to know why they have to learn something;

2. the concept of the self: adults feel responsible for their decisions, for their lives and develop a profound need of being treated like people capable of doing things themselves;
3. the role of experience: adults enter a formative activity with their own baggage of experience;
4. the availability to learn: adults are available to learn what they need to know in order to face situations in life;
5. the orientation about learning: adults learn from real life;
6. motivation: adults are motivated to learn from internal pressures.

They are structured so that the learners can develop new competences; construct their knowledge and reflect on their own experiences, while challenging their concepts and their beliefs of the world.

Another common pedagogical aspect in educational projects between generations is that of *scaffolding*, strictly connected to the concept of proximal development zone (Vygotskij, 1980).

Educational experiences between generations of mentoring and tutoring can be interpreted as «*a virtual interconnection of proximal development zones in which many possibilities are brought to help, stimulate and orientate the learner in various ways*», leaving space for autonomy and responsibility, in a climate of sharing and exchange (Calvani, 2000, pp. 80-81).

When talking about older adults, we have to bear in mind the fact that they have the need to maintain solid social bonds. This is done by making new friends and acquaintances, which develop the affective dimension which in turn facilitates the person's cognitive abilities (Rossi, 2012).

The factors involved in relationships play an important part in the learning process at any age, so much so that when a pedagogical project is planned, emphasis is made on the creation of an environment rich in relationships.

It is therefore fundamental to maintain focus on the learner and his experience, in such a way as to educate, through a didactics based on the interests of the participants, their expertise and their cultural baggage.

According to constructivists' models, learning passes across socialization and the cultural acquisition of the meaning that the learner elaborated autonomously.

Jonassen (1994) confirms that creating a learning environment, in a constructive way, is much more complex than implementing traditional pedagogical interventions and suggests shareable recommendations which may be practiced between different generations:

- putting emphasis on the construction of knowledge and not on its mere reproduction;
- offering learning environments derived from the real world;
- promoting reasoning and reflection; and
- favouring the cooperative construction of knowledge, across collaboration with others.

This is an environment in which the participants may confront each other, influencing learning ways and experiences, based on their rhythms, time and personal styles. Thus creating a formative context designed in a way that offers stimulus and personal experiences, adequate to the interests of the learners, facilitated by strong and structured scaffolding as support.

An environment in which the trainer/facilitator seeks to:

- create an atmosphere of dialogue and of reciprocal acceptance;
- promote positive and constructive interpersonal relationships, so that the participants feel they are part of a community;
- value the attendance of the learners;
- promote cognitive patterns and the plurality of intelligences;
- construct shared meanings;
- solicit meta-cognitive and self-reflexive processes.

Problem-solving, simulations, *cooperative learning*, *reciprocal teaching* are the most used strategies in educational projects between generations involved in practical activities.

This pedagogical approach focused on construction of knowledge as an interactive process in which people learn from each other. This approach, which will be applied to the project explained hereunder, will be used to test how well the medium of intergenerational learning can facilitate solidarity as a means of increasing the level of human capital for every generation. It will also attempt to demonstrate that it is within the nature of human cultures to form a community in which learning is the fruit of reciprocal exchange (Bruner, 1997).

3. “Plinio” project’s approach

Neuroscience, psychology of ageing and educational research consider that ageing assumes more positive characteristics in the older adults who immerse themselves in an environment full of stimulation, of interest and well-being, who dedicate their time to social, recreational and creative activities, who focus on their jobs or on voluntary work, or on the well-being of their family (Borowiak, Kostka, 2004; Trabucchi, 2005; Andreani Dentici, 2006; Cesa Bianchi & Cristini, 2009).

Taking into account these assumptions *Plinio* educational project’s partners (ManagerItalia, Municipality, the Scholastic Office, a Secondary school of Padua and the University Ca’ Foscari of Venice) tried to design an innovative and transferable training format for Intergenerational learning, so that the participants could bring past experiences and beliefs, as well as their cultural histories and world views, into the process of learning.

In this way, ten retired managers were encouraged to offer their entrepreneurial competences to help some youths, who were attending the fourth and fifth class of a vocational secondary school, with the creation of their start-up company. The students were coming from a low social and cultural background, with little motivation for school. They were meant to be learning how to care for dependent elderly. The older adults were used to work with high skilled youngsters and at the same time the students were use to attend to elderly persons with cognitive and physical difficulties: thus creating a real challenge for both generations. Would the groups have found it hard to relate to each other? Which kind of stereotypes could effect this intergenerational learning experience?

The project, designed on the real participants' needs, aimed at sharing knowledge and competences between generations, so that the older adults would have improved their capacity to transmit and share their competences and the younger students could have in turn acquired new competencies in order to be better equipped for their working life.

Unfortunately job opportunity for youths drastically declined in Italy in the last few years. According to recent information regarding unemployment in our country, one out of three youths between the ages of 16 and 24 are looking for a job.

The recommendation of the European Union's Parliamentary Notice dated 18 December 2006, related to the key competences of continuing education invited the European Member States to support the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship, as *«the capacity of a person that translates ideas in action. In which they retain creativity, innovation and the assumption of risks, even with the capacity of planning and of demonstrating projects in order to reach objectives»* in their educational policies.

The European Union has continued to promote entrepreneurship as a method for sustainable economic growth, and has underlined the importance of developing a business European culture articulated in the strategy Europe 2020.

The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan underlined that practical entrepreneurial experiences could also be gained outside formal education, and that entrepreneurship education and training were "brought to life through practical experiential learning models". When used between generations, experiential learning required learning by doing, learning from positive or negative experiences, learning from the past, learning from participation and from the others' experiences (Wang, Chugh, 2014).

Notwithstanding this, the EU Commission for 'Entrepreneurship Education at School in Europe' shows that only eight countries (Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Wales, Belgium) encouraged specific strategies to promote entrepreneurship, whilst another thirteen (in which Italy is not included) inserted it in their national strategies for continuing

education. Although entrepreneurial skills are considered to be part of the key competences to be reached at the end of secondary school, Italian educational policies do not consider this. Entrepreneurship is not included in the curriculum of studies and is not recognized as a fundamental element to access the working world.

How does one develop a proactive spirit essential to the adaptability of young people in today's globalized labour market? How does one acquire the following processes: planning, organization, analysis, communication, assessment, anticipation of events, independence and innovation?

The local educational project *Plinio* sustained the idea that development of entrepreneurship, of leadership and of creativity should commence at the beginning of school.

Thanks to their specific roles in the field of Education, Research, Social Services and Labour Market, and also thanks to their strict cooperation with relevant stakeholders, *Plinio's* partners decided to focus the project on: developing basic skills and entrepreneurship; increasing job opportunities for younger generations; ensuring participants a more competitive position in the Labour Market; bringing together generations; sharing knowledge and competences; promoting active citizenship and inclusion; and implementing a replicable pilot project.

4. The methodology

The ten older adults attended a twelve hours workshop during which they discussed their most significant learning experiences and professional opportunities in order to build their own educational and professional biography. They reflected on their own experiences, the job positions they covered, the procedures they used, the results they obtained when working alone or in teams.

The young students were selected on the basis of their attitudes and their commitment to participate in the project.

Three formal evaluations were carried out:

- 1) Initial Project Evaluation: At the beginning of the project expectations, knowledge and tools to be used throughout the project, and expected results were evaluated;
- 2) Mid-Project evaluation in order to check if the expected results had been reached and find out what needed an adjustment;
- 3) Final project evaluation at the end of the project to evaluate the results.

These evaluations were carried out using questionnaires forms, as well as focus groups and narrative interviews.

Setting the process of the teaching and acquisition of skills required the design of a teaching method aimed at providing instances for learning in real-life situations, in cooperative contexts, to

implement authentic tasks through problem solving, through individual and team work, through taking responsibility for the management of relationships, situations and results.

The older Adults worked together with the University of Venice to understand how to transmit their specific knowledge in their particular field, their enterprising spirit and also how to share their experiences in an empathetic way (social skills).

Constructive pedagogy based on the importance of the learning process, on the active presence of the learner, on transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003), on experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and on learning in action (Revans, 1980), was promoted.

At the end of the autobiographical workshop the older adults decided that they would transfer their knowledge to the younger generation by means of narratives (storytelling) and 'learning by doing' activities. Experiential learning, in fact, means learning from positive or negative experiences, learning from the past, learning from participation and from the others' experiences.

160 meetings (for a total of 1200 hours in two years) were held after school hours to teach planning, creating real life projects, valuing the expertise of the elderly acquired in the course of their personal and professional life.

The volunteers taught the students about:

- relationships with institutions and fund raising;
- organizations, administration, HR, legal aspects;
- marketing and communication;
- competition.

The elderly carried out many workshops to stimulate the youths, in order to facilitate new individual experiences. The lessons and the traditional training setting lost their centrality, so that learning became a process in which knowledge was built together. The co-construction of knowledge was a dynamic, active process in which learners constantly strove to make sense of new information. The elderly tutors actively supervised and offered immediate feedback, specific to the situation at hand.

The volunteers managed time and space during the workshops, favouring the development of the entrepreneurship and orientating youths to change their socio-cultural behaviors in favor of active citizenship and intergenerational exchange.

The seniors, talking about their own successes, but even about the obstacles they encountered in their professional life, stimulated the will to learn in the youngsters, their exploration of the self, their capacity of initiative, and their self-discipline necessary to communicate and cooperate with others for a common task.

By respecting students' ideas and encouraging independent thinking, the elderly helped students attain their own intellectual identity. They encouraged them to connect and summarize concepts by analyzing, predicting, justifying, and feeling comfortable enough to defend their ideas.

The volunteers taught through alternating moments of simulation, of individual work and researching information, within a context of concrete problems (real learning).

Youths were taught how to have faith in themselves, to demonstrate flexibility and availability for change. Students became responsible for all the aspects of development of a company, reproducing functions, processes and objectives of a company, preparing a business plan, determining promotional strategy, looking for funds. The students experienced pedagogical and cognitive scaffolding through their elderly mentors.

The 'pedagogical' approach adopted by trainers was focused on *learning by doing*, *problem solving*, reflective observation, active experimentation, analytical techniques (case analysis), simulative techniques (role playing), relationship techniques (*cooperative learning*), narrative techniques (stories), proactive techniques (*brainstorming*), executive techniques (exercises).

5. Results

At the beginning of the project, both groups found it hard to relate to each other: the students felt the older adults were too authoritarian, set in their ways, so alien to them; while the elderly thought the younger were lazy, work shy, too wild, unable to concentrate, etc.

The focus group organized with the elderly tutors, at the end of the project, showed that they considered important having created positive relationships, having adapted the project to the formative needs of the youths, having shown empathy, having collaborated, listened and observed (Cosentino, 2002), having developed support groups involving even the school itself.

The following questions were asked:

1) What could you say about this intergenerational learning experience?

They answered:

- The younger could observe real-life situations;
- This intergenerational project developed mutual respect and strengthened intergenerational relationship;
- Equal teaching and learning responsibilities became possible;
- Adaptive and integrative skills have been learnt through observation and experience;
- Strengthens self concept as more varied and numerous social interactions have been developed;

- The younger generation had the opportunity to demonstrate relevant skills and be recognized by adults;
- Intergenerational learning developed interdependence and presented more realistic image of the way people work together;
- Many observable models of autonomous and interdependent adults have been presented.

2) What could you say about teaching as a mentor?

- I tried to structure learning in ways that allowed students to learn from each other;
- I offered strategic feedback to students;
- I felt as a facilitator of exploration and a provider of experiences;
- We connected class work with real world work;
- Our feedback took many forms from conversation, to video;
- We introduced theory only as was beneficial to performance;
- I felt to be a guide to the students.

3) What did you learn from this experience?

- I understood what I could give back to society, contributing to something larger than myself;
- I challenged 'students' to justify and defend their positions so that they could change their conceptual frameworks (e.g., beliefs, assumptions, and conceptions).
- I learnt new 'teaching' strategies;
- I changed my idea on vocational school's students;
- I learnt that experience and social interaction played an important role in learning;
- I provided many opportunities for group dialogue aimed at fostering shared understanding of the topic under study;
- I learnt to facilitate the learning process.

According with their narrations it seems that adults at the age of retirement wish to look quite profoundly at what they have accomplished in their lives and what might lay ahead. One of them observed: "As the work world was playing less significantly in my life, I tried to identify myself with another activities or competencies". The ex managers felt the desire of contributing to the future generations and remaining actively involved in activities outside their former occupations. They demonstrated expertise in their past work skills and habits while, at the same time, were exposed to new perspectives and realities of adolescents.

The focus group organized with the students was based on the following questions:

- 1) Why did you choose to be involved in an intergenerational experience?

They answered:

- Because it represented a learning opportunity that you don't come across every day;
 - I was very attracted to the fact that it was us to create our business;
 - Because it was a working opportunity in an environment which I like very much;
 - It was an opportunity for personal, social and cultural growth.
- 2) What did you learn from a senior tutor?
- I learnt the capability of listening and relating;
 - I learnt not to give up as soon as I am faced with a difficulty; because anything can be overcome with a bit of work and patience;
 - I learnt that you can build something from nothing, if you really believe it;
 - From some tutors I learnt all about hard work, perseverance and determination, without which you cannot reach your goals; from others I learnt to behave in the adequate way with other people;
 - What got to me the most out of their teaching was how professional they were, their determination in facing different situations, their passion in transmitting their own personal experiences, their desire and their optimistic spirit in reaching their goals;
 - I understood the importance of experience.
- 3) Which were the most positive aspects and which were the difficulties related to this experience?
- It is a very different experience compared to what schools normally propose;
 - I liked to practice my own creativity working in a group, even if, not being used to it, I felt it to be a bit difficult;
 - The aspect I liked the most was being able to build relationships and work with elder people;
 - It was nice that we "built the project" by actively participating in every choice and activity;
 - I liked feeling part of a group with a common goal, and to have created an affective bond with the tutors, the seriousness of the project and the fact that I could have the opportunity to make them proud of us;
 - I liked the bond that was created between the students and the tutor who allowed us to face the project in a constructive manner, even if it was difficult to conciliate school time with the project.
- 4) Which were the innovative aspects of the project which you would transfer into the school context?
- The atmosphere far away from traditional lessons made learning a fun experience. We built a strong collaboration between ourselves and the tutors, who gave us the motivation to improve, which is something that can sometimes be missing from our schools;

- What struck me the most was the practical aspect, since at school it's much more theoretical;
- I believe that one of the best things was learning from people that work with passion;
- The innovative aspect was that we were immediately the protagonists. There was always high motivation; during our meetings, we did not just listen, but we were always actively included;
- The principal difference was the relationship with the elderly.

5) Which pedagogical techniques were most useful? Why?

- The cooperation with a common scope motivated me to work harder;
- Working with others made me understand how great is team-working;
- Cooperative learning because it was easier to learn together;
- The role-playing was the best pedagogical methodology;
- Certainly the experience of each of the tutors was fundamental and instructive, but even the brainstorming activities, aimed at choosing a name and a slogan apt for our project;
- The case studies were useful.

A summary of their observations is presented below:

<i>Seniors volunteer's teaching</i>	<i>School teaching:</i>
contextually rich	abstract and out of context
devoted to observation and to practice	devoted to thinking about practice
experiential, situation-specific learning	detached, generalized learning
holistic, systems perspective	discipline-based, linear
socially shared learning	independent learning
immediate feedback	delayed feedback
feedback focused on goal	feedback focused on assignment
authentic product	curricular objectives
activity from the adult world	activities of the school world

The students noticed that the elderly designed an environment where they could learn from one another, as well as from their tutors. Theory was introduced only when it could be absorbed and when it could be utilized. The product of the effort was real and valued. They experienced a real relationship and shared equal responsibilities.

John Dewey believed that strong self concepts were the results of positive experiences in social interaction with a variety of people. For the adolescents to empathize with an adult's viewpoint could be translated into great cognitive, as well as social growth.

Questionnaires were given at the end of the project to evaluate the qualities and skills that underpin entrepreneurship. These indicators emerged from data analysis:

1. Motivation to succeed: the tendency to set goals in the form of challenges to be pursued through personal effort (McClelland, 1965).
2. Creativity: the ability to find new ways of doing things and to develop new methods rather than using standard precepts and procedures (Born, Altink, 1996).
3. Sense of initiative: the motivation to start acting independently, to take the first step in something new and uncertain, and to be willing to try new ways and new methods (Kourilsky, 1980).
4. Risk taking: the acceptance of the unknowns in the creation of something, and the ability to expose oneself to loss.
5. Opportunity: the ability to search, find and identify dissatisfactions, needs and requirements, as well as the resources and capabilities that can satisfy and resolve the same dissatisfactions, needs and requirements.
6. Persistence: the propensity to persevere in a task – to keep trying – until it is completed.

To verify the competences acquired by the students (cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-relational processes) they were asked to define “how much they learnt ...”.

Data analysis (Figg. 1-2-3) shows how the transmission of knowledge and intergenerational sharing of practice is important; that it’s necessary to value learning from experience, to be able to generate innovative answers, opening up to the possibility of change.

Fig.1

The youths recognized the importance of using what they learnt to reach their predetermined goals.

The elderly appreciated their problem-solving, their knowledge of predicting the effects of their own actions, the way of keeping calm and solving conflict in an autonomous and responsible way, and always knowing how to share responsibilities.

Fig.2

Fig.3

The importance of relationships and communication within the group was appreciated by both generations. The group represented a privileged environment in which they could develop social abilities and collaborative behaviors, a means by which to improve their learning.

By learning from and with others, interpersonal relationships had an essential role, since they responded to the double need of feeling accepted and feeling part of a community in which they were sustained to develop their own personal potentials (Carletti, Varani, 2006).

The students felt their work was recognized and valued. The elderly encouraged open communication and free thinking; the students felt heard and respected, so that they were more eager to learn. They elderly made participating interesting by giving each of them the responsibility of constructing their own knowledge and business. Giving students a sense of ownership allowed them to feel accomplished and encouraged active participation.

The students believed that what they were learning was important: they directly researched how what they were learning could be utilized practically and shared their findings with the group. They were motivated to learn attentively. Learning was not *«merely a condition for membership, but was itself an evolving form of membership»* (Lave, Wenger, 1991, p.50).

After this experience, the youths gave their definition of entrepreneurship: *«improving yourself, coming up with new ideas, going outside the schemes, divergence»*.

6. Conclusion

Plinio project has been based on the real needs of the labour market in Europe. It has been systematized and organized according to the specific methodology for developing entrepreneurship between different generations. Both generations developed:

- reflexivity (Dewey, Knowles);
- adaptability to different situations - self-regulated behavior;
- creativity, (imaging possible scenarios for the application of new knowledge, strengthening identity and motivation to be part of the community (Wenger, 1998);
- sense of belonging and mutual commitment (Community of practice, Ajello, 2011);
- self-awareness, self-reflective and personal effectiveness / recognition of the other as a resource for the achievement of common goals.

The project results - learning/ teaching materials can be transferred to other entities and associations interested in developing innovative and socially responsible solutions for work and employment. All these facts gave the project a potential dimension to ensure sustainability and exploitation after ending.

Even if it has been realized with twenty six participants, some important indications regarding the significance of learning through competences, according to a constructive approach, can be underlined:

- learning occurred by merging new information with the students' prior experience;
- learning represented an active social process: each students had the possibility to develop his/her potential creating personal knowledge and social competence consciously;
- students found the meaning of learning themselves;
- students understood the gap between their previous knowledge and new knowledge they need to reach and this cognitive dissatisfaction was an internal drive to reach a higher level of knowledge;
- seniors volunteers were a fundamental resource for the passage of competence between generations; they had a role of facilitators, coaches, motivators to create a need for new knowledge;
- much learning occurred through cooperative strategies, promoting innovation, critical thinking, social and professional competence in the context of intellectual and human capital development in the knowledge society;
- seniors volunteers facilitated students to monitor their learning process to develop their learning skills: a crucial feature for successful process of knowledge construction and involvement into the labour market.

The constructivist approach emphasized active knowledge construction on the basis of self-experience. Tutors abandoned transmission of information, therefore the students developed their ability to control their own learning and assessed their learning outcomes.

Plinio project was focused on education based on the direct contribution of professional experience of elderly people: an intergenerational experience as a first approach to the entrepreneurship transmitted through observations.

Together with "non formal" learning, importance was given to learning by doing, so that youths acquired transversal competences, fundamental for their professional development.

Constructivism is an appropriate basis for successful development of entrepreneurship, as well because the main idea of it is an individual's ability to act demonstrating one's potential.

Given that adolescents have developmental 'needs' which can be assisted by the interaction with responsible and caring older adults, and that elderly also have developmental needs which can be assisted by the interaction with actively involved adolescents, intergenerational learning programs can be designed which benefit both adults and adolescents. They can place students in a variety of

opportunities to demonstrate relevant skills and be recognized as competent by adults outside the family and the school.

By involving the adolescents with this intergenerational learning program, they observed the actions and habits, heard the stories and saw the work of ‘real adults’.

Perhaps the greatest potential strength of Plinio’s intergenerational program was the ability to model the balance between autonomy and interdependence. Schools perpetuate a competitive structure of classes, learning, assessment; they judge students on what they can do by themselves, while outside of school, work is shared within social systems. Without adults from the ‘real world’ to illustrate this, we may continue preparing students for a world which is nothing like the one they will face upon graduation.

To give life to a school that simultaneously appeals to everyone and to each one, teachers need to think about a new didactic methodology that develops and encourages motivation and creativity, to elaborate a more effective learning strategy oriented to processes and not to content, and to capitalize on different styles of thought; an intergenerational environment, where the elderly can support the younger generation with their expertise, developing a reciprocal attachment which re-enforce the intensity and quality of interpersonal relationships.

Human development does not stop at adulthood. The elderly frequently face many of the same challenges which adolescents face, only in different contexts and forms. Experience from the elderly and fresh perspective from the adolescents directed toward the same life challenges can offer far better guidance to both that facing these issues alone, or only in the company of contemporaries.

As a vehicle for the broader goal of learning for understanding, intergenerational learning programs can teach all those involved that learning and development are truly life-long pursuits.

An intergenerational education as a resource at any age, to continue to construct one’s actual identity and leave a mark in the next generations.

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