



INTEGRATION OF TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES IN THE "LET'S SPREAD THE RAINBOW OF FRIENDSHIP AMONGST GENERATIONS" PROJECT

Vanja Božič

Anton Aškerc Velenje Primary School, Velenje, Slovenia

Abstract

For the fifth year in a row, the project called 'Let's spread the rainbow of friendship amongst generations' has been carried out at the Anton Aškerc Velenje Primary School premises. The project was designed as a form of intergenerational cooperation between the students and the younger as well as the older participants in- and outside of the school. Within the project the school was connected to three units of the Velenje Kindergarten (the units are called Najdihojca, Vrtiljak and Jakec) as well as to the Velenje Centre for Education and Qualification, the Velenje Home for Elderly Care and the Velenje Third Age University. All the above mentioned partners, the children's parents and grandparents as well as the teachers working at the school participated and worked together in various activities and events. The aim of the project was to present examples of technical activities within the project and their integration in the form of a creative technical cooperation of different generations.

Key words: *intergenerational cooperation, bird house, branch, desktop stand for office supplies, waste wood remnants.*

Introduction

In today's society, the lives of many generations are intertwined. Each generation has a different length of its life gone by, each has wandered through its path in a slightly different way in different life situations, and each has gained different experience. All these are most likely the reasons why there are different views on things, different expectations, desires, needs and even disagreements among these generations. The more distant generations are when it comes to age, the more different their ways of life are. The conflicts and disagreements between the generations, which are usually the result of ignorance and consequent misunderstandings, are often greater as well.

The quality of relationships in the society depends on the interrelations of all generations who live and co-create with it. The young learn how to live in a community, how to shape their own lives and personalities regarding values and the way of life in their community through contacts with other generations. They search for their way, but lack experience which is the reason why the advice coming from older, more experienced life travellers is of great value. On second thought, these are not really pieces of advice since the young tend to ignore well-intended advice; they are simply words – kind, encouraging, reproachful, angry; and yet merely words that can be ignored if someone does not like them. Only joint co-creation and thus co-experiencing raises the feelings, emotions and experience that can disrupt the misunderstandings and conflicts between generations and therefore build bridges for the exchange of the positive and valuable which allows different generations to enrich one another. (Zlata leta. Retrieved 17/2/2014.)

Particularly in a city, children and young adults nowadays usually live in a family without grandparents. Sometimes the grandparents live in other cities or even in other countries (this is mainly the case with the immigrant families from the former Yugoslav republics). This is why so many young people lack the experience of living with a grandmother and grandfather, with someone of the older generation that would allow the young to emotionally attach to them. Through contact with the older generation, the young would also learn about the features, skills, knowledge and values of the older generation. (MDDSZ. Retrieved 17/2/2014)

At the same time, when they retire and their children become independent, the older people are often faced with loneliness, monotony of everyday life, lack of social contact and activities that would help them fill their free time. Later, if they live alone, they are faced with other problems such as their limited physical and health abilities and how to attend to their basic daily needs. Intergenerational solidarity in this case is not only needed, but almost necessary. (MDDSZ. Retrieved 17/2/2014)

Even if they are set in a retirement home where their basic needs are taken care of, their desire to socialize and to actively spend their free time is no less intense. On the contrary, the more their lives slow down, the longer and more monotonous the days seem to be. Every event that breaks this monotony, an expectation of an event and particularly active participation in an event brings new life energy, joy, purpose and meaning to their lives. (MDDSZ. Retrieved 17/2/2014)

These are just a few reasons why intergenerational interaction, collaboration and co-creation are so important. Especially for the two generations – the young and the old – that seem to be the most distant from each other (and therefore often very critical of each other). Even so, if they find proper contact, both of these generations have a lot to gain and enrich each other.

Project Presentation

Five years ago, the students at the Anton A kerc Velenje Primary School selected and highlighted the following values as the most important for positive interpersonal relationships, life in- and outside school: respect, tolerance, honesty, responsibility and learning – knowledge. At that time, manual ways of intensively developing these values which were chosen to be the most important part of the school's educational plan were being discovered.

Values cannot be learnt like a lesson from the textbook. The only effective way how to impart values to the young is to give them a chance to develop, shape and confirm them through co-experiencing with others. When they live and accept them, these values will hopefully be built in their personality.

As a possible way of developing values, the students themselves suggested a closer cooperation between generations: between older and younger students at our school, as well as the older and younger outside the school. The activities that had already been in progress at the school were merely complemented and enriched with some new ones and bound together into a new project named '*Let's spread the rainbow of friendship amongst generations*'.

The project activities are divided into two sets:

- Cooperation of the students with preschool children (with two units of the *Velenje Kindergarten*) and with children with special needs from the *Velenje Centre for Education and Qualification (CVIU)*)

- Cooperation of the students with the older generations (parents and grandparents, the *Velenje Third Age University*, the *Velenje Home for Elderly Care* etc.)

The first set includes the students, preschool children and children with special needs who co-create on a regular monthly basis. They attend creative workshops that also cover some technical activities (for example boat making). Older students also participate as mentors, especially when it comes to selective courses like Modern Cuisine, Woodworking and Fine Design. This helps them to affirm their knowledge, practise the skill of transferring knowledge onto someone else and to develop communication skills and social as well as emotional intelligence. When showing the working procedures to younger students and children, the older students are often more successful than the adult mentors because it is easier for them to come closer to the communication level of a child than it is for an adult. Student mentors gain a lot since they need to find a way to show their knowledge and skills to someone younger, less skilful.

The second set includes active co-creation of three generations (children, parents, grandparents) and consequently the transformation of knowledge and skills onto each other with intense emotional interaction. Although certain activities take place throughout the entire school year, it is important to point out two major 'projects'. The first one includes the cooperation of all participants involved in the cultural sphere – choirs' appearances at the Slovenian Cultural Holiday. The second one is a creative and sociable day called '*We're knitting threads*' when all three generations work together and co-create in various workshops. Here, the long lost and forgotten skills of the grandparents are revived and upgraded with modern technologies that are more the domain of the younger generation. Numerous technical activities are always included in this day. The teachers, various external collaborators, students' parents, grandparents, members of the Third Age University and even some students participate as mentors to the young. These sociable afternoons carry a lot of emotions, the establishment and strengthening of ties between generations, but the most valuable component of these gatherings is the transformation and intertwining of knowledge and skills of different generations, which also enriches and modernizes the old manual skills and crafts with new approaches, techniques and creative ideas of the young. This way these skills and crafts become interesting and popular even for new generations.

Examples of Good Practice

Among technical activities, two are presented in more detail:

- Making of bird houses
 - A branch somewhat differently
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- *Making of bird houses*

On Tuesday, November 26th, 2013, a sociable afternoon intended for co-creation and learning, and especially for socializing of three generations was organized. It was designed by the newly established Intergenerational Learning Centre at the *Velenje Institute for Adult Education* as a part of the intergenerational learning week within the '*Let's spread the rainbow of friendship amongst generations*' project. In the afternoon, the participants worked together in five different workshops:

 - In the first workshop they made bird houses.
 - The second workshop was for those who made bird flat cakes to fill the bird houses with.

- In the third workshop they moulded clay and made birdhouses out of it.
- In the fourth workshop they sewed colourful birds made of felt.
- The fifth workshop was for baking birds made of dough according to the recipes of our grandmothers.

The main focus was on making bird houses, which involved exercise of knowledge and development of manual skills. Several grandparents, parents and, of course, children attended this workshop. The first step was to draw a sketch of making a bird house together. The participants suggested several different versions of bird houses. Together, the best possible versions according to the available time were chosen. Ideas were then taken to the computer room where the participants drew a plan of making of the bird house using the CiciCad computer programme. (Fošnarič 34-39) There, the students were able to help their grandparents and even parents with the knowledge gained at the Engineering and Technology classes. The learning process was extremely interesting because the students took on the roles of mentors to their grandparents and parents due to their better understanding of modern computer technology. After drawing and drafting the plan, which was also printed out, the work process continued in the technical workroom. Each participant was given protective clothing and selected a proper work place. Appropriate material was then chosen and the measures of various parts of the bird house were transferred onto it. The students were very familiar with the workroom, and therefore they easily directed their grandparents and parents in finding tools and requisites. Some of them used the machines, like a vibrating saw, to cut out some parts of the wood. Regulations and protective measures when working with machines were particularly emphasized. (Fošnarič 80- 89) The students brushed up on their knowledge about them and, with some help from the teacher, they repeated them to their parents and grandparents. Others, on the other hand, used the slower alternative and mounted a piece of wood into a vice and manually sawed out the wood parts.



Figure 1: Father helping his son.

The cut-out parts were then polished either manually or using a machine. It was essential that a larger opening was cut in the centre which serves for the attachment of the

hook to hang the bird flat cake on. The parts had to be precisely clipped and then grinded very carefully. After painting of the clipped parts with easily and quickly drying paints, individual parts were assembled using wood glue and nails. With the help of grandparents and parents, first bird houses were beginning to gain proper shapes. Those with better manual skills were kind enough to help those that needed help. After assembling all the houses, ideas on how to make them more appealing were searched. Each participant decorated his/her bird house with various patterns and drawings using the quickly drying paints. At the end, everyone fixed the hook onto which they hung the bird flat cake. All the finished bird houses were then reviewed by all the participants, who also found a few minor flaws in the production. Overall, the outcomes were very pleasing. The masterpieces were then taken into the school's hall and the bird houses were presented to all the participants of the sociable afternoon. The products of all workshops were then exhibited for some time, in order for all the guests to have a chance to see them. After the exhibition had finished, every participant could take their bird house home. Many bird houses enriched the school district and the children in the after-school class with their mentors still make sure that the birds are not hungry during winter seasons.



Figure 2: Making of bird houses workshop.

In addition to expanding knowledge and developing manual skills of students, the execution of the workshop showed some other positive effects. The workshop was also attended by some students who are less successful in their school work and are consequently often unmotivated and even trouble-causing in class due to their lower abilities and results. In the workshop, they were able to show different abilities and skills, shine in front of their parents and grandparents, all of which was reflected in their extreme motivation and commitment to work. It was also very interesting to observe the exchange of roles of the mentor – the student, the parent or the grandparent. In a computer drawing of the plans and later in initial preparation for work, students mainly took on the roles of mentors whereas later in the execution itself, grandfathers and fathers took over as mentors. At the same time, everyone was able to gain self-affirmation and show skills, and the final product was valued as an important, successful joint achievement. Verbally and non-verbally expressed

feelings of the participants were satisfaction, pride, mutual positive emotional interaction and desire to repeat this kind of experience.



Figure 3: Product presentation.

• *A branch somewhat differently*

On April 12th, 2014, another event was carried out; this time a creative sociable morning as part of the 'Let's has spread the rainbow of friendship amongst generations' project. The event called 'We're knitting threads' also included technical activities. Twenty-seven different workshops were organized. One of them, called *A branch somewhat different*, was making a desktop stand for office supplies made of an interestingly shaped branch. The general idea was to make an aesthetic product with as little cost as possible and out of waste material, and at the same time to enable the students as much creativity as possible.

A limited amount of available time (1.5 to 2 hours) and relatively limited technical possibilities in the school's workroom with its hardware and tools had to be taken into consideration. While browsing the Internet, the students found offers for mobile phone and tablet computer stands made of handled branches and roots. On the American market, these stands are currently very trendy and consequently also quite expensive. In February, the entire Slovenia suffered devastating sleet which resulted in numerous fallen trees, which provided useful branches and roots. The idea occurred for the students to find a special and useful piece of wood. This way, several interestingly shaped branches and roots were collected at the school. This workshop did not only demand woodworking skills, but also creativity on the part of the students for each and every one of them needed to find alternatives to make an entirely new and unique product out of an equally unique old one. Again, the students worked in teams with their parents and grandparents with some guidance from the teacher mentor.

After the introduction of the work task and methods of implementation, and after familiarizing themselves with the anticipated tools, every team found a proper work place, got protective clothing and prepared the necessary tools and the wood branch or root that had been brought to the school beforehand. After observing the wood piece, the teams roughly sketched their product and drew positions of the openings for various stationeries (like pens, pencils, phones). Using scissors, knives and scrapers, they then peeled off

the rind. Preliminary experiments had proven thick old vine to be the easiest and fastest material for rind peeling and, at the same time, the vines are frequently very interestingly shaped. The viticulturist, who was altering his plantation and was going to discard his old vines, brought several very useful pieces of vine. When properly peeled, the teams had to manually grind and smooth the surface of the branches. Following the preliminary sketch, they marked the holes and openings for pencils, cell phones, test tubes (small flower vases), clips etc. When making a wider horizontal opening, they hollowed a hole with a chisel and then processed it and smoothed it with sandpaper. They drilled the openings for pencils and test tubes with an electric drill using a larger drill bit. Fathers and grandfathers helped the students drill these holes. They then painted the products with clear water-based varnish. (Donzeli 114 – 135) If they wanted, the students could also attach a hook or a wooden pellet on their branch using appropriate screws. After all the work had been done, the products were exhibited in the workroom so that every participant was able to see and evaluate them, and also find good and a few bad solutions considering the possibilities the individual wood pieces had to offer. Then, all the products were taken into the school's hall and exhibited together with the products from all other workshops. The students could take the products home after the socializing event had finished.



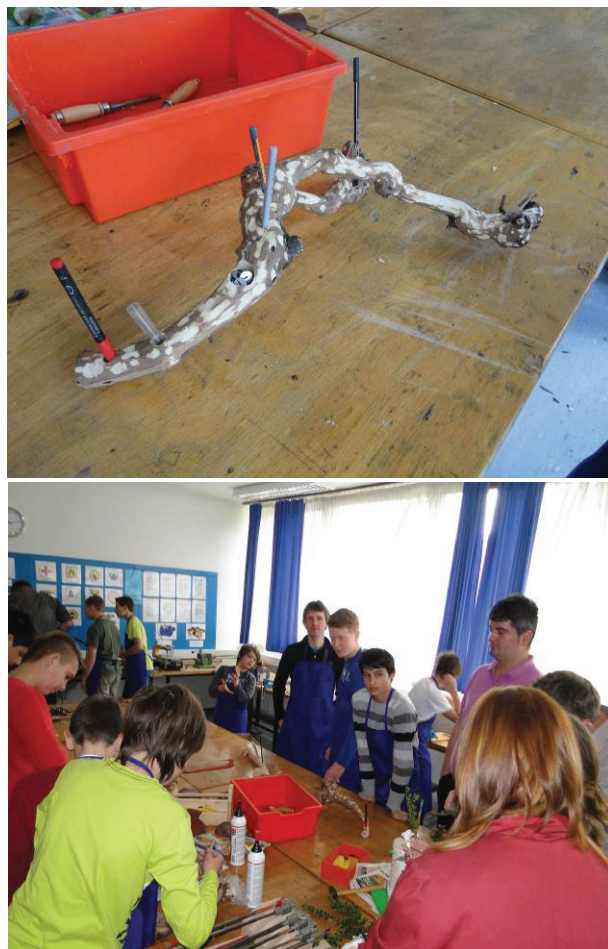


Figure 4: Making a desktop stand for office supplies from waste wood remnants.

An essential characteristic seen in this workshop was that students, their fathers and grandfathers were forced to find their own solutions in a creative way because it was impossible to follow the pre-drawn plan in detail. The planning turned out to be the most difficult part of the process. Some teams needed guidance and suggestions from the mentor and sometimes another participant offered a useful piece of advice. The planning part was also the most vivid one, where one could hear lively discussions and exchanges of various points of views. Many of the adult participants also expressed intention to make a similar stand at home for their own use. Throughout the working process, there was a working, yet relaxed atmosphere with many humorous remarks by the adults.

For the students, the most important part was the chance to work hand-in-hand with their fathers and grandfathers, which according to their comments does not happen very often. As the students expressed, they spend time with their parents and grandparents when watching a sports event or television together. But to manually work, be creative and gain ideas to make a final product is something that only happens on special occasions. It is therefore not a coincidence that, after the end of the workshop, several students addressed their fathers and grandfathers with the question: ‘Will we ever do something like this again?’

Summing-up

Intergenerational solidarity and the possibility of lifelong intergenerational learning can be developed only through the emotional experience of children, and therefore through teaching them, and later teenagers, that it is really a value worth being taught. The goal of the ‘*Let’s spread the rainbow of friendship amongst generations*’ project was to achieve just that: emotional interaction between different generations through a variety of joint activities and co-creation with older generations, and thus creating a rich emotional experience that will positively help shape the children’s personal relationship with people older than them. (Zlata leta. Retrieved 17/2/2014.)

Experience with the project so far have shown that this is without a doubt the right way, for both generations have experienced so many beautiful and precious moments throughout the years of cooperation that it is nearly impossible to describe all the positive responses from both, the children and the adults. This is also the reason why the school is going to continue with this project and the described activities in the future, and possibly even enriches them. It is extremely important to transfer knowledge and experience from older to younger generations which was clearly seen in joint workshops.

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Vanja Božič

Teacher, Anton Aškerc Velenje Primary School, Velenje, Slovenia.

E-mail: bozic75@gmail.com