



IMPRESA DA  
UNIVERSIDADE  
DE COIMBRA  
COIMBRA  
UNIVERSITY  
PRESS

# PROMOTING CONSCIOUS AND ACTIVE LEARNING AND AGING

HOW TO FACE CURRENT  
AND FUTURE CHALLENGES?

ALBERTINA LIMA OLIVEIRA  
(COORD.)

**INTERGENERATION EDUCATION AS A STRATEGY FOR  
PROMOTING ACTIVE AGING: ANALYZING THE NEEDS OF  
A LOCAL COMMUNITY AS A WAY TO DEVELOP RELEVANT  
AND SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS OF INTERVENTION**

**Susana Villas-Boas<sup>22</sup>, Albertina L. Oliveira, Natália Ramos, Imaculada Montero**

**Abstract**

Population aging is happening throughout all European countries, including Portugal. This general trend brings important challenges at several levels and therefore the importance of intergeneration education programs gains relevance. Nevertheless and in order to succeed, these projects ought to be built through a realistic identification of the needs and potentialities of the local communities (Caffarella, 2002). This assessment is essential to the real achievement of the goal of active aging. Active aging is defined by the Second United Nations Assembly on Aging (Nações Unidas, 2002) as “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age”. Social intervention must be built according to the vital life cycle and is important during the entire life course. Intergeneration education concerns “activities or programmes that increase cooperation, interaction and exchange between people from any two generations. They share their knowledge and resources and provide mutual support in relations benefiting not only individuals but their community” (Sáez, 2002, p. 29). This kind of education promotes change and individual evolution as the result of learning with others. Several studies (MacCallum, 2006; Kaplan, 2004) show the benefits of these programs not only for the seniors but also for the younger people and for the community in general.

---

<sup>22</sup> University of Coimbra/ Centre of Migrations and Intercultural Relations Studies - CEMRI, Open University  
Email: [suvboas@gmail.com](mailto:suvboas@gmail.com)

We intend to demonstrate that relevant and sustainable programs of intergenerational education can actually be an important strategy for the promotion of active learning and a possible answer to the social problems brought up by the recent changes in population structure in developed countries.

**Keywords:** Intergenerationality; Intergenerational programs; Intergenerational education; Community intervention.

## Introduction

The present article is a brief presentation of the doctoral project “Intergeneration education as a strategy for promoting active aging: analyzing the needs of a local community as a way to develop relevant and sustainable projects of intervention”<sup>23</sup>, to be undertaken, starting this year, at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Coimbra. This project aims to:

- Highlight the importance of intergenerational education as a way of promoting active aging and the development and well-being of individuals, groups and communities.
- Point out the importance of planning intergenerational programs starting from the individuals and communities involved, paying special attention to the specificities of its conception and development, from the active aging point of view.
- Create instruments that can help to identify the needs and potential of the communities, concerning human, social and material resources
- Conceive a plan of intergenerational education programs to be developed within the studied community, settled on sustainable bases regarding its development and implementation, with the purpose of fomenting active aging.

Due to the demographic aging observed in developed countries and to the economic, social and medical progress of the end of the last century

---

<sup>23</sup> Co-funded by Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT).

currently there is a growing investment in active aging. According to the European Communities (2006), European demographic aging is the result of the following demographic tendencies: (i) the reduction in the number of sons/daughters per woman is 1.5 sons/daughters in EU25, which is far lower than the substitution rate of 2.1 needed to stabilize the population's size; (ii) the decline in the fecundity during the last decades followed the post-war baby-boom which explains the growth of population in the 45 to 65 years age group; (iii) life expectancy at birth has grown eight years since 1960 and will continue to grow five years or more until 2050.

In Portugal the scenario isn't much different and life expectancy at birth is 76.3 years for the men and 82.4 years for women, values that are above the European average (Carrilho & Patrício, 2010). The projections for the period of 2000-2050 according to three scenarios, conclude that Portugal will witness a reduction of the young population (0 to 14 years of age) so the elderly population (65 or more years of age) will increase between 63.2% and 76.5% (INE 2004). The same study indicates that the number of elderly per active worker can triple in the next 50 years (Abreu & Peixoto, 2009). This situation will lead to a rise in the number of people with more than 80 and 90 years of age which means more people reaching an age of dependency and potentially spending several decades in retirement.

Thus scientists and leaders are thinking about the future and new measures of action and, therefore, we begin the 21st century with an increasing political attention to the problematic of aging and with a rise in political measures and of new intervention axis, such as: healthcare, economics, social security systems, education and change in the attitudes and practices that concern older people and their role in society (Kupiszewski, 2005).

Assuming that demographic decline is inevitable, it becomes evident that if we don't introduce changes in our societies in the future the lack of the young population's capacity to support the elderly population can increase the intergenerational conflicts and have a negative impact on social cohesion. To avoid this outcome it is urgent to change mentalities, attitudes and practices.

Intergenerationality is one of the possible strategies to achieve solidarity, social cohesion, participation, inclusion and equity. For some

time, international policies have been trying to convey the urgency in developing solidarity between generations:

- The United Nations, in Article 14 of the Political Declaration from the Second World Assembly on Ageing state the following: “We recognize the need to strengthen solidarity between generations and intergenerational partnerships, keeping in mind the particular needs of both older and younger ones and to encourage mutually responsive relationships between generations” (United Nations, 2002a, p. 10).

- In the European Council’s green book “a new solidarity between generations” is referred to as a means to tackle the demographic challenge, “demographic changes are creating a new society, and these changes are set to speed up from 2010 onwards: ever fewer young people and young adults, ever more older workers, pensioners and very elderly people. Our societies will have to invent new ways of liberating the potential of young people and older citizens. Dealing with these changes will require the contribution of all those involved: new forms of solidarity must be developed between the generations, based on mutual support and the transfer of skills and experience” (CCE, 2005, p. 6).

- The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (United Nations, 2002b), refers to education and intergenerationality as means to appropriate the full potential and knowledge of the senior.

Consequently we consider that demographic aging shouldn’t be seen as a “social problem”, but rather as an increment of social and human capital (experiences, education, etc.) which, through intergeneration education programs, can improve society’s development in general and active aging in particular. Next we present some of the key issues that will be further developed in the doctoral project.

## **Active aging is intergenerational**

The concept of intergenerationality hasn’t yet been completely uniformed and established (Kuehne, 1999; Montero, 2002), meaning that we are still witnessing its development. However, from the analysis of

various definitions of intergenerationality we can state that this concept leads to the interaction between generations.

It is a polysemous concept that we can define according to different criteria, for example: family lines, group belonging, stage of life course (childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age), etc.

We agree with the sociologist Magalhães when he states that “the generations are more than demographic cohorts. They involve social segments that contain family relations, relations between friends and co-workers, among neighbours, between sports groups, arts, culture and scientific associations. They imply lifestyles, ways of being, knowing and doing (*savoir faire*), values, ideas, patterns of behaviour, degrees of scientific and technological absorption. They contain memory, science, legends, taboos, myths, totems, religious and civil references” (2000, p. 37). Intergenerational relations are part of the several levels of social relation referred to by Magalhães that by promoting dialogue and exchange among the generations allow people to change. Authors such as Saéz (2002) and Pinazo and Sanchez (2007) mention that the most important thing about intergenerationality is interaction, in other words, exchange among generations which can change and remake generations.

Active aging is defined by the World Health Organization (2002) as a multidimensional concept that affects several political areas and people’s wellbeing, anchored on the idea of a lifecycle and articulated with health optimization, of the participation and safety of people as they get older (Sánchez, 2009, p. 297). Understanding intergenerationality as a sum of a set of life stages improving and changing continuously, we can conclude that intergenerationality is active aging.

Thinking about active aging should be based on the recognition of human rights: the right to participation, to independence, to dignity, to assistance and to the fulfilment of one’s own desires. This way of conceptualizing active aging means that people have the right to decide if they want to remain in the labour market and whether they want to contribute to society or not. Garcia says that “retired seniors have already met their primary needs, and can afford to spend time living in solidarity and cooperation or, otherwise, lose themselves in isolation” (2002, p. 17).

Meaning that if, on one hand, we should respect the will of older people in not wanting to participate in social life, on the other, we should create the necessary conditions for those who do wish to participate. This way, we can encourage inclusion of seniors, and education – intergenerational education in particular – can play a relevant part through intergenerational solidarity that refers as much to equity among generations as to the opportunity to develop activities that bring together different generations.

### **Intergenerational education and intergenerational projects**

According to Saéz intergenerational education is a set of “processes and procedures that are supported and legitimated emphasizing cooperation and interaction among two or more generations, seeking to share experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, in pursuit of self-esteem and personal self-achievement. The goal is to change and be changed while learning with others” (cit. by Sáez, 2002, p. 29).

We can say that intergenerational education has a double purpose: on one hand it is a way of contributing to integral education of the young, promoting their personal and social development; on the other hand it is an instrument for reducing isolation and emptiness of seniors’ daily lives by raising their self-esteem and physical and psychological well-being.

In addition to international policies pointing to intergenerational education as a strategy that promotes active aging, international intergenerational project evaluation studies demonstrate that the list of benefits these programs can produce regarding participation and quality of life is extensive. We now present some of the benefits to older people, the young and the community relying on the analysis by MacCallum et al. (2006) concerning 120 programs developed in Australia (cit. by Pinazo & Kaplan, 2007):

a) Benefits for older people:

Better mood and a greater vitality; increased capacity in dealing with psychological and mental diseases; increased awareness of their personal

worth; increased opportunities to learn; escape from isolation; appreciation of their past experiences; reintegration in family and community life; creating bonds of friendship with younger people; increased self-esteem and motivation; sharing experiences with people that appreciate their achievements; respect and acknowledgment of their contribution on behalf of the community; learning from the young, developing competences, especially social and use of new technologies; opportunity to transmit traditions, culture and language; exposure to diversity and increased ability to deal with diversity.

b) Benefits to children and young people:

Increased feeling of self-confidence; increased sense of personal worth, self-esteem and self-confidence; less loneliness and isolation, access to adult support when dealing with difficulties; increased social responsibility; better impression of older people; greater knowledge regarding the heterogeneity of the older; more practical skills; better school results; increased reading habits; less involvement in episodes of violence and use of drugs; better health habits; more optimism; strength in times of adversity; increased citizenship and social responsibility; learning about history and their origins; gaining respect for the achievements of adults; getting support from professionals; reduction in leisure time linked to problems of antisocial behaviour.

c) Benefits for the community:

Development of a sense of belonging; building a more inclusive community; deconstruction of prejudices and stereotypes; increased social cohesion; appreciation of culture; change in stereotypes; revitalization of the community and public structures; production of public art; development of voluntary work; creation of a common story.

Other studies add further benefits, such as: improvements of community services for both groups (Kaplan, 2004); preservation of local history (Generations United, 1994); promoting recycling and the development of environmental conservation activities (Kaplan, 1994). Granville, in his

study of 60 intergenerational projects in England, concluded that intergenerational programs have been effective in achieving (i) improving the lives of participants, (2) reducing the tensions and misunderstandings between generations; (iii) the increase of intercultural understanding and multiracial tension of isolated adults; (vii) improving social capital by promoting social networks and community support systems (cit. by Sánchez & Diaz, 2005, p. 13).

The studies mentioned above confirm that intergenerational projects optimize health, participation and safety of the people involved therefore we can conclude that they promote active aging.

Nevertheless, to attain the aforementioned benefits takes more than putting seniors, children and youngsters together in the same space. Fox and Giles (1993) studied the relationship between intergenerational contact and the change of attitudes and concluded that the mere fact of putting different age groups in contact is not a guarantee of success even if the objectives are achieved (Sánchez & Díaz, 2005).

So, it's important to know in depth what intergenerational projects are and how are they drawn up and executed in order to successfully attain the proposed goals and the above mentioned benefits.

Intergenerational programs began to be developed in the 60s and 70s of the last century and initially were focused on mitigating the conflict between generations and promoting activities of assistance to seniors with limited resources and achieving greater proximity between the generations situated at the life cycle's extremes. In the following decades there was a change: these programs became interested in the community's development: education, family support, child and senior care, intercultural relations, social capital putting emphasis not only on relations between different generations but also on the benefits to society (Henkin & Butts, 2002).

The International Consortium for Intergenerational Programs (1999) defines intergenerational programs as "vehicles for the determined and continued exchange of resources and learning among the older and younger generations, in order to attain individual and social benefits" (quoted by Sanchez & Diaz, 2005, p. 2). According to Sanchez and Diaz an

intergenerational education program is “an intergenerational co-learning program aimed at exchanging information, knowledge, experiences and actions between seniors and other distinct generations, contributing to their continuous development – open to change – to the increase of knowledge, to shared and mutual learning, and therefore, to enrichment of their lives” (2005, p. 3).

In essence, an intergenerational program is an ordered and planned set of activities involving people that belong to different generations, intending to achieve benefits for both participants and the community hosting the program.

The main feature of an intergenerational program is to be aimed at the interests of those involved in it. Whereby, practice and intergenerational relationships become more important, notwithstanding the need for a clearly defined plan.

The design of an intergenerational program is a working tool, a resource that provides a basic orienting scheme. The first step will be to make a diagnosis to acknowledge reality concerning the needs, capabilities and interests of the population involved. The plan must be, on one hand, solid and congruent, and on the other, it must have a certain degree of flexibility because as the different strategies, activities and practices take place, the project can change its path according to the shifting interests and complex realities. It is important to note that in an intergenerational program, changes that are unpredictable and uncontrollable often occur, as they are a result of the interrelationship between the people involved (of the diversity of each human being). In this case, the program must be constantly adapted to new circumstances in order to achieve its objectives.

Montero and Gallego (2002) present guidelines for achieving the possible exchange of knowledge and skills between different generations, which we now present considering that these guidelines are fundamental for elaborating an intergenerational project and at the same time demonstrate the complexity of the task.

## Principles

The general principles of any socio-educational activity are the same principles that should apply to the development of an intergenerational program:

- *Participation*: all people involved must have and maintain an active role.
- *Originality*: be a vehicle of creativity and emotions, in order to motivate participants to bring into play intellectual processes in search of alternative solutions to concrete circumstances.
- *Transference*: facilitate the practice of different experiments through the diversity of materials, situations, relations.
- *Flexibility*: allow participants to choose the means and manner of developing any given Action or task, after having explored a range of possibilities.
- *Continuity*: coherence between the activities and the program's development.
- *Implementation and adaptation*: be adapted to the needs and motivations of people within the group.
- *Inter-relation*: plan situations that favour personal and social relations.

## Objectives: what is intended to be achieved?

- Encourage intergenerational relations as a means of overcoming stereotypes and a greater integration and social participation.
- Raise attention of the population in general and in intervening groups about the benefits of contact between different generations.
- Facilitate the exchange of experiences among the different sectors.
- Give priority to contact and social interaction, sharing spaces, times and resources, in achieving the same goal.
- Awaken new interests.
- Practice psychophysical and social dexterities needed for the exchange of knowledge, dexterities and skills.

- Promote moments of meeting, of interaction and mutual personal enrichment.

### **Contents**

- Addressed to achieve the proposed goals.
- With formative aspects.
- Recreational/leisure activities and preservation and disclosure of cultural traditions.
- Specific tasks, aimed at stimulating and developing intergenerational relations.

### **Recipients**

- A function of the context where we want to intervene, as well as the circumstances, motivations and the requests of intervening people.
- In principle, youth and seniors.

### **Methodology**

- Based on the group's participation and interactivity.
- Time and scheduling should follow the objectives in order to achieve them.

### **Resources**

- Involving the human resources that exist in the group and/or the community from the beginning.
- Collaboration of some organisms to obtain financing to provide the necessary material and technical resources.

## **Evaluation**

- Always assess the activities and take into account not only what was accomplished, but also that which was not possible to achieve.
- The group should be involved in the evaluation, taking into account their suggestions and orientations.
- Can be systematic, continuous and participative (at the end of each session).
- Can be continuous and final (study the results obtained).

Preparing and executing an intergenerational program isn't an easy task; it requires knowledge, skills and competencies and an enormous forecasting effort. Thus, it is essential to train technicians to work in this area, since good intentions are not enough.

## **Final note**

The current year of 2012 is the European Year of Active Ageing, therefore it will be a year in which policies, practices and knowledge will be developed in this context as well as in the context of intergenerationality.

Keynote authors on this subject alert to the importance of investigation in this field (Kuehne, 1999; Newman & Smith, 1997; VanderVen, 1999). In this article, we have briefly presented intergenerational education and intergenerational programs as a strategy to promote participation, health and safety of all people and of all ages, that is, active aging. This is a theme to be further developed in the doctoral project "Intergeneration education as a strategy for promoting active aging: analyzing the needs of a local community as a way to develop relevant and sustainable projects of intervention", which aims not only to produce knowledge in the field but also to contribute to the development of intergenerational education programs in Portugal.

## References

- Abreu, A., & Peixoto, J. (2009). Demografia, mercado de trabalho e imigração de substituição: Tendências, políticas e prospectiva no caso português. *Análise Social*, *XLIV*, 719-746.
- Caffarella, R. S. (2002). *Planning programs for adult learners: A practical guide for educators, trainers and staff developers* (2<sup>a</sup> ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Carrilho, M. J., & Patrício, L. (2010). A situação demográfica recente em Portugal. *Revista de Estudos Demográficos*, *48*, 101-145.
- Comissão das Comunidades Europeias (2005). *Livro Verde - Uma nova solidariedade entre gerações face às mudanças demográficas*. COM (2005) 94 from 16.03.2005, consulted on the 29th of March 2011, [available at [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/pt/com/2005/com2005\\_0094pt01.pdf](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/pt/com/2005/com2005_0094pt01.pdf)]
- Comissão das Comunidades Europeias (2006). *O futuro demográfico da Europa: transformar um desafio em oportunidade*. COM (2006) 571 de 12.10.2006, consulted on the 29th of March 2011, [available at [http://www.presidenciaue.parlamento.pt/inicativas\\_europeias/sec\\_com/com2006\\_0571pt.pdf](http://www.presidenciaue.parlamento.pt/inicativas_europeias/sec_com/com2006_0571pt.pdf)]
- Feedman, M. (1999). *Primetime: How baby boomers will revolutionize retirement and transform America*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Fox, S. A., & Giles, H. (1993). Accommodating intergenerational contact: A critique and theoretical model. *Journal of Aging Studies*, *7*(4), 423-451.
- García, J. (2002). Introducción: Una aproximación al concepto de Educación intergeracional. In J. García & M. Bedmar (coord.), *Hacia la educación intergeracional* (pp.11-22.). Madrid: Dykinson.
- Granville, G., & Hatton-Yeo (2002). Intergenerational engagement in the UK: A framework for creating inclusive communities. In M. Kaplan, N. Henkin & A. Kusano (Eds.), *Linking lifetimes: A global view of intergenerational exchange* (pp. 193-208). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Generations United. (1994). *Young and old serving together: Meeting community needs through intergenerational partnerships*. Washington DC: CWLA.
- Henkin, N., & Butts, D. (2002). Advancing an Intergenerational Agenda in the United States. In M. Kaplan, N. Henkin & A. Kusano (eds). *Liking lifetime: A global view of intergenerational exchange* (pp. 65-82). Lanham, NY: University Press of America.
- Instituto Nacional de Estatística. (2004), *Projeções de população residente, Portugal e NUTS II - 2000-2050, destaque informação à Comunicação Social*. Consulted on the 29th of March 2011, [available at [http://www.ine.pt/ngt\\_server/attachfileu.jsp?look\\_parentBoui=96942&att\\_display=n&att\\_download=y](http://www.ine.pt/ngt_server/attachfileu.jsp?look_parentBoui=96942&att_display=n&att_download=y)]
- Kaplan, M. (1994). *Side-by-side: Exploring your neighborhood through intergenerational activities*. San Francisco: MIG Communications.
- Kaplan, M., Higdon, F., Crago, N., & Robbins, L. (2004). Futures festivals: An intergenerational model strategy for promoting community participation. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, *2*(3/4), 119-146.
- Kupiszewski, M., Bijak, J., & Nowok, B. (2005). *Impact future demographic trends in Europe, Central European Forum for Migration Research*, Council of Europe DG3/CAHP10(2005) 6, consulted on the 29th of March 2011, [available at [http://www.coe.int/t/e/social\\_cohesion/population/impact%20pop%20trends%20report%202005.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/e/social_cohesion/population/impact%20pop%20trends%20report%202005.pdf)]
- Kuehne, V. (Ed.). (1999). *Intergenerational programs: Understanding what we have created*. New York: The Haworth Press.

- Maccalum, J., Palmer, D., Wright, P., Cumming-Potvin, W., Northcote, J., Booker, M., & Tero, C. (2006). *Community building through intergenerational exchange programme*. Australia: National Youth Affairs Research Scheme.
- Magalhães, D. (2000). Intergeracionalidade e cidadania. In P. Serafim, *Envelhecer com cidadania: Quem sabe um dia?* Rio de Janeiro: CBCISS, ANG/RJ.
- Montero, I. (2002). La intergeneracionalidad como ámbito de la participación social. In J. García & M. Bedmar (Coord.), *Hacia la educación intergeracional* (pp.89-101). Madrid: Dykinson.
- Montero, I., & Gallego, A. (2002). Los programas intergeracionales: Una alternativa socio-educativa para todas las edades. In J. García & M. Bedmar (Coord.). *Hacia la Educación Intergeracional* (pp. 167-177). Madrid: DyKinson.
- Nações Unidas/United Nations. (2002a). Declaración política de la II Asamblea Mundial sobre el Envejecimiento. *Revista Española de Geriatria y Gerontología*, 37(s2), 8-10.
- Nações Unidas/United Nations. (2002b). Plan de Acción Internacional de Madrid sobre el Envejecimiento. *Revista Española de Geriatria y Gerontología*, 37(s2), 12-36.
- Newman, S., & Smith, B. (1997). Development theories as the basis for Intergenerational Programs. In S. Newman et al., *Intergenerational programs: Past, present and future* (pp. 3-19). Washington. DC: Taylor and Francis.
- Organização Mundial de Saúde (2002). Informe activo: Un marco político. *Revista Española de Geriatria y Gerontología*, 37(S2), 74-105.
- Pinazo, S., & Kaplan, M. (2007). The benefits of intergenerational programmes. In M. Sánchez (Dir), *Intergenerational programmes: Towards a society for all ages*, *Social Studies Collection*, 23 (pp. 64-91). Barcelona: The la Caixa Foundation.
- Sáez, J. (2002). Hacia la educación intergeneracional: Conceptos y posibilidades. In J. García, & M. Bedmar (Coord.). *Hacia la educación intergeracional* (pp.25-36). Madrid: Dykinson.
- Sanchez, M. (2009). Intergeracionalidad y envejecimiento activo de las personas mayores. Aportación de los programas intergeracionales. In A. Martinez, L. Gil, P. Serrano & J. M. Ramos (Coord.), *Nuevas miradas sobre el envejecimiento*. Madrid: Imserso.
- Sanchez, M., & Díaz, P. (2005). Los programas intergeracionales. In S. Pinazo & M. Sánchez, *Gerontología: Actualización, innovación y propuestas*. Madrid: Editorial Pearson.
- VanderVen, K. (1999). Intergenerational theory: The missing element in today's intergenerational programs. In V. S. Kuehne (Ed.), *Understanding what we have created* (pp. 33-47). Binghamton: The Haworth Press.