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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

We have decided to devote this monothematic issue of *Studia paedagogica* to intergenerational learning in various social settings. It should be said that intergenerational learning is not a mainstream topic, despite the growing number of publishing and educational activities set in the framework of different generations coming together to learn and become involved in education. Intergenerational learning is increasingly of interest to researchers, politicians, adult educators, and employers who are beginning to appreciate its benefits for individuals as well as for society at large. Why is it that we now encounter intergenerational educational programmes and research projects dealing with this topic? There are, in our opinion, at least three answers to this question.

The first answer is obvious: The current demographic development brings a growing age diversity of the society. Most importantly, members of the older generations are growing in numbers and their life expectancy is continuously increasing. This is undoubtedly a positive process, on both the individual and societal levels. Intergenerational encounters provide an opportunity for sharing of knowledge and skills and for building of mutual respect and close cooperation. The main positive aspect is the chance to learn from and be inspired by the experiences of other generations when dealing with problems.

The second answer to the question of “why” is connected with concerns. Multi-generational society is a sensitive issue; relationships among generations potentially involve conflicts and may be interpreted as a struggle for resources, space, and attention. In addition, or perhaps at the same time, there are concerns about lack of understanding among generations, limited contact due to differences in lifestyle, or mutual alienation. The situation natural cohabitation of generations in families is weakened is part of the picture, and there have been attempts at designing intergenerational programmes aimed at compensating for this development.

The third answer is related to the potential of intergenerational encounters, the possible benefits of intergenerational learning for personal growth, building social capital, and sustaining social coherence. Intergenerational learning plays a key role in unlocking this potential. Hence, researchers, politicians, and practitioners are faced with a new challenge of finding ways

for knowledge to be transferred from generation to generation that would facilitate the process of learning and making use of what has been learned. In families, leisure institutions, and businesses, the following questions arise: What knowledge can be shared among generations? What methods of knowledge transfer facilitate learning and identification with shared content of learning? Is it possible to achieve a situation in which the benefit of experience gained through intergenerational learning is fully utilised by the recipient (i.e. the following or preceding generation)?

It is surprising how little we know about these processes. The intergenerational dimension of learning has so far not received much attention. This is also one of the reasons why the editors of this issue focus on research dealing with intergenerational learning, driven by the questions of what and how members of different generations learn and what opportunities for mutual learning they have in different settings and life situations. We understand intergenerational learning as intentional and unintentional, conscious and unconscious, sensory-motor and verbal-cognitive, as well as social learning in situations in which two generations, either following one another or with one generation in between, learn from each other. The main object of transfer are knowledge and skills, but sharing of values, goals, and visions also plays an important role. Transfer of knowledge and skills is usually based on mediating the experience of members of one generation to others on the level of individuals, a group, or an organization. Such was the delimitation of the topic in the Call for Papers for this monothematic issue. What ideas do the authors of the papers carefully selected for this issue of *Studia paedagogica* put forward?

The body of the journal contains two theoretically-oriented papers that provide a systematizing perspective. Mike Bottery, in his paper “The Future of Intergenerational Learning: Redefining the Focus?”, summarizes some of the points of the debate on the need for intergenerational learning and then poses two somewhat provocative questions that he attempts to answer: Are all the possible relationships within an intergenerational context utilised? Why should intergenerational learning not be used for a number of other major global and societal changes? It is followed by a paper by Julia Franz and Annette Scheunpflug. It is titled “A Systematic Perspective on Intergenerational Learning: Theoretical and Empirical Findings,” and the authors combine empirical findings and theoretical background to describe, interpret, and further develop the idea of intergenerational educational activities. No matter how embedded in the specific reality of the German adult education setting their research is, their findings are inspiring also outside this geographic and social space, since they combine different concepts of generations with different concepts of learning in a stimulating way.

The next paper presents an empirical research study titled “A Family Business as a Space for Intergenerational Learning Interactions.” Its authors are Lenka Kamanová, Kateřina Pevná, and Milada Rabušicová. Exploring the concept of intergenerational learning in a family business environment seems to suggest itself because, among other things generations are clearly defined in this setting. Family businesses are a natural choice also because the need for sharing and keeping of knowledge inside the business is a precondition for sustaining a family business. Intergenerational transfer of knowledge represents in this respect a comprehensive and crucial determinant. Members of any given generation may be simultaneously the source and the recipient of knowledge in a business.

In the set of papers that follows, the authors apply different types of research to describe, interpret, and evaluate existing as well as newly established intergenerational programmes. Julie Melville (in her paper “The Development of an Intergenerational Centre within the UK: How Several Generations Used the Centre and Interacted with(in) the Building”) tells the story of a London-based intergenerational centre. The emphasis placed on interaction of people in the space and with the space makes the study both original and valuable for visionaries, politicians, and municipalities that might contemplate launching a project of this kind. In the paper “Intergenerational Learning with ICT: a Case Study,” Maria Raquel Patrício and António Osório deal with the role that intergenerational learning can play with respect to digital and social inclusion. They use data collected in implementing ICT intergenerational workshops as a basis. As in the previous text, this paper presents several conclusions, in this case formulated as a set of recommendations for building more socially and digitally cohesive societies. And finally, Giulia Cortellesi and Margaret Kernan contributed their paper “Together Old and Young: How Informal Contact between Young Children and Older People Can Lead to Intergenerational Solidarity,” sharing the results of a European project called “Together Old and Young.” Their findings concern some less obvious mechanisms that facilitate effective bridging of the gap between generations and promote opportunities for mutual sharing.

The composition of the papers is – we hope interestingly – supplemented with two papers based on student research, by coincidence both representing Masaryk University. Drawing on empirical data, Eva Nováčková, in her text “Effects of Intergenerational Learning in a Small Manufacturing Company,” points out that a closer look at business reality reveals not only positive, but also zero or negative effects of intergenerational learning. She is thus adding a fragment into a mosaic of our understanding of intergenerational learning. The last original paper of this issue, written by Eliška Michlíčková and

Monika Španielová (“The Parent and Grandparent Role from the Perspective of Contemporary Czech Grandparents”), takes us back to the basics when the authors interpret what grandparenting means through grandparents’ eyes. The collection of papers is closed with a review of one of the few more extensive monographs on intergenerational learning called *Learning Across Generations in Europe: Contemporary Issues in Older Adult Education*.

When careful readers immerse themselves in the papers in this issue of *Studia paedagogica*, it will become clear that even though firmly grounded in contemporary reality, the topics are essentially timeless: interaction among children, parents and grandparents, mutual learning in different settings, the role of generations. We may say that intergenerational learning is not a new, but rather a rediscovered topic. We hope that we, as editors, have at least slightly contributed to this rediscovery.

Milada Rabušicová and Petr Novotný
Editors