

## **Concept of intergenerational and intercultural approaches in the education for the third age people in Saint Petersburg (Russia)**

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### **Abstract**

*The concept of intergenerational and intercultural approaches in education and learning are changing nowadays. Intergenerational approach in the third age education and learning programs can be defined as planned activities that link various generations with the goal of exchanging knowledge, experiences and receiving mutual benefits. The goal is to connect people by using mutually beneficial activities that encourage understanding, cooperation and respect between generations, as well as contribute to the society. Intercultural approach in the third age education is connected with activities that link people of various cultures aimed at receiving mutual benefits.*

*This paper discusses the development of third age education in Saint Petersburg, Russia and shows how the intercultural and intergenerational approaches are used in this type of education. The third age universities in Saint Petersburg do not have a lot of experience in this. In the article examples of the using intercultural and intergenerational approaches in the third age education are showed.*

**Key words:** *Intergenerational approach in education, third age education, intercultural approach in education*

### **1. Introduction**

The main demographic trend of our time is aging of population. Due to increasing duration of life and the number of elderly citizens in society science and social practice has significantly increased interest to gerontological issues. Retirement is one of the most crisis periods in life of elderly people, resulting in significant changes in the conditions and way of life. The situation requires to rethink about the values, attitude to yourself and to the world, to find new ways how to continue to be active. For many elderly people this process is long and painful, accompanied by experiences, passivity, inability to find new possibilities and contacts. In this regard, the need to preserve the active life of elder people through their education is one of the important themes of modern scientific research in the field of gerontology, andragogy and social learning for adults

Starting point for the theoretical understanding of the nature and role of learning for elder people was launched in the mid 70-ies of XX century. The first University for the elderly was founded in 1973 in Toulouse

Professor Pierre Vella. In Russia the tradition of non-formal education developed in the context of charity since the mid-nineteenth century. In 1855, the famous physician and teacher N.I. Pirogov opened the first free school for adults. Currently, educational programs for people of the third age are widespread throughout the world. University of the third age has the aim to engage seniors in the active life of the community [2, 108-110]. This type of learning refers to the so-called non-formal education, with the goal of personal development, social adaptation, conservation of the active position of the elderly [3, 110-115]. Communication and the acquisition of new knowledge allows students of the retirement age to realize their ability to remain independent and to be less exposed to stressful conditions during the crisis period.

Human aging, not only changes the state of health, but also a reorientation of values, interests, needs, changing social status in society and family [4, 107-108.]. Reaching retirement age and retiring from professional activity means for most people severe break with the previous perception of himself as a useful member of society. Many people submit to fate and stay away from active public life.

In this article the authors describe the main trends in third age education and experience of using intergenerational and intercultural communications in the third-age education in the city of St Petersburg (Russia).

## **2. Research of major trends in the education for the third age persons in St Petersburg**

St Petersburg is the third largest city in Europe (after Moscow and London) and the first populous city in Europe, which is not the capital of the state. About 40 % of residents have high education. In St Petersburg, as well as in most European cities, number of older people is increasing. It is connected with demographics, and with the improvement of medical care of the older generation. In St Petersburg on January 1, 2013 lived 1441.2 thousand people aged over 55 years, which is 28,66 % of the population.

Data show that the maximum number of people in the group older than 70 years. And there are more women in all age groups than men. So if the amount of women in the age group 55-59 years 1.5 times more than men, in the group older than 70 years, this figure is more than 2.5 times. According to the demographic forecast until 2031, the population of retirement age will grow. The dependency ratio (showing how many persons in the age more than working age will be in 1000 persons of working age) to 2031 will be 453 .

All the work for the third age people organized by Complex centers for social service is concentrated in Social-Leisure Departments in each District. Education for the third age people is organized by providing different courses. Most popular are: Computer Literacy, Handicraft, Dances, Singing, Foreign languages. The Government of St Petersburg pays special attention to the training of senior citizens computer literacy. Courses, schools, clubs on computer literacy for older people are organized in 37 Social-Leisure departments of Complex centers for social service. Libraries began to organize educational programs for third – age persons about 10 years ago. Computer courses, schools were organized in 76 public libraries in St Petersburg in 2014.

Education for the people of the third age is also organized in different universities & schools: School for the third age people of Nevsky District, School of the third age in Central District, Online-the University of the Third Age created on the basis of the St Petersburg national research University of information technologies, mechanics and optics (NRU ITMO).

The training needs assessment was done in the frame of the international conference and exhibition "Third-age generation" that was held in St Petersburg on the 18-21. 03.2015. A questionnaire was created about the demands for education of the third age people. In the questionnaire nine questions were included. 146 questionnaires were received from people of the third age who visited the exhibition.

The investigation showed that the most active ages, who are interested in active social life are 56-60 years

old, 61-65 years old and 66-70 years old. Women are more active in any age. Analyzing the data about the amount of retired people who is still working can be concluded that most of women and men in St Petersburg are working till 65 years old: men 5 years after official opportunity to retire and women 10 years after official opportunity to retire. After the age of 65 the share of the persons who are working is decreasing in all age groups.

In the questionnaire there was a question about the training programs that the University of the third age of St Petersburg State Technological University of plant polymers are planning to organize.

Respondents mostly like such courses as:

1. Foreign language. Women are more interested in this program than men.
2. Computer skills. Men and women are interested in this program.
3. Exchange programs with Third age universities from foreign countries. Mostly women are interested in this program.
4. Healthy longevity. Men and women are interested in this program.

Analyzing how often the third age persons would like to study, can be concluded that most of men are interested in studying once or twice in a week.

The more active ages 56 - 60 and 61-65 are ready to study twice a week. Most of women are ready to study once or twice a week. In an active ages 50-55, 56-60, 61-65 years old a lot of woman are ready to study twice a week.

One of the main questions connected with organization of Third Age University is the question about financing these activities. Obviously it can't be financed only by third age people but it was interesting to understand to which extent they are ready to pay.

Most of men of the third age are ready to study free of charge, but in the ages 50-55 ad 61-65 most of them are ready to pay not more than 1000 rubles for the course. Most of women of the third age are ready to study free of charge, but in the ages 50-55 ad 56-60 most of them are ready to pay not more than 500 rub. For the course

The contribution of the elderly in the scientific-technical, social, cultural and educational creative potential of St Petersburg can hardly be overestimated. The solution to the problem of sustainable development of St Petersburg requires knowledge of the laws of interaction of generations in a transforming society. Programs aimed at the connection of generations are actively developing and implementing in St Petersburg in recent years. They, of course, require scientific analysis and further development.

In the frame of sustainable development of St Petersburg it should be taken into account not only the features of adaptation of different generations in the conditions of developing city and society, but also multi-dimensional, multivariate relationships existing between generations. It is especially important because city need to use of personal and professional experience of third-age persons in St Petersburg.

Analyzing the behavior of older people in St Petersburg it can be concluded that a big group of third-age people have a need to continue to learn, to gain new knowledge. They are actively participating in different courses and universities for the third-age persons.

The programs for such people are made in connection with such important factors as: education of adult learners, professional status of the person in the present and the past, gender differences, reflexive capacity to adequately assess the possibility of their participation in specific social and socio-educational programs.

The providers of the development and implementation of such programs in St Petersburg are state organizations, public organizations, including veteran organizations, universities of the third age, folk high schools, clubs and libraries.

The survey, which was conducted in March 2015 in St Petersburg showed great desire and need of people

of the third age in education. 80 % of respondents expressed a willingness and desire to increase their level of awareness and literacy through education in the "University of the third age". Moreover, women are more focused on training – 86 % willing than men (57 %). However, only 58 % of respondents willing to pay for the education, among which 51 person (60 %) would like to pay not more than 500 rubles , 29 (20 %) persons – not more than 1000 rubles and only 5 persons – more than 1000 rubles.

37 % of the respondents are interested in studying foreign languages, 34 % in studying computer, 33 % in ensuring healthy longevity and 27 % in exchange programs with Universities of the third age in foreign countries.

Conducted investigation helps to understand the preferences of the third age persons, to suggest the courses in which they are interested and to organize the education in a such way that it will be more convenient for the third age people.

Education for the third age people in St Petersburg can develop only under conditions of adequate perception of aging and images of older persons. Among the main tendencies in active ageing in St Petersburg can be mentioned: a reduction in discrimination of persons working in old people, expanding their opportunities for education, retraining, and new incentives for formal and non-formal education, more intensive use of the potential of informal learning in recent years. In the frame of this the third-age education is developing nowadays in St Petersburg.

### **3. Education for the third age students in St Petersburg (Russia)**

Significant attention is paid to the education for older people in the city of St. Petersburg. Special courses, training centers, public universities and faculties for the third-age persons are opened. Training programs for this category of citizens are based on psychological and sociological research with regard to their life experience and diverse interests. The range of studied disciplines is quite wide: medicine, law, psychology, economics, ecology, foreign languages, gardening, local history and much more. A feature of education is bringing the rich life experience of older people in the learning process, their high motivation, because the training is built without the required programs. Thus, the organization of educational programs for people of the third age raises the level of social welfare of older people, playing an important role in the prevention of negative consequences of the crisis, connected with retirement, increasing their adaptive capabilities to internal and external changes [1, 47-48].

A lot of work for the third age people in St Petersburg organized by Complex centers for social service is concentrated in Social-Leisure Departments. Such centers are organized in each district of the city. Social and leisure departments of Complex centers of social services focused on the elderly by place of residence, their task is leisure activities, socialization and socio-psychological support, overcoming the isolation of certain parts of the population, the preservation of the continuity of the work day-care centers, seniors, and others. A feature of these centers is the proximity to the place of residence, the constancy of the catchment population of the neighborhood and a good knowledge of their needs. Education for the third age people is organized by providing different courses. Most popular are: Computer Literacy, Handicraft, Dances, Singing, Foreign languages. Special attention is paid to the training of senior citizens' computer literacy. Since 2009, the city began to organize computer courses for older people in Social-Leisure Departments of Complex centers for social service. Nowadays, courses, schools, clubs and advice centers on computer literacy for older people are organized in 37 Social-Leisure departments of Complex centers for social service and in 76 public libraries. Computer courses are also organized in the Centralized library systems (CBS) via internet in which senior citizens, regardless of area of residence can take part. The education for the third age persons is also provided by libraries.

Most popular school for people of the third age in St. Petersburg is located in the Nevsky district. In September 2004, a charitable non-governmental organization civic education "House projects" initiated in the Nevsky district of St. Petersburg program "School of the third age". For more than 10 years it was engaged in education retirees and involved them in an active social life. The students are free to engage in various directions: from painting to biking. It represents an innovative model of social work with older people. Educational programs tailored specifically to work with older people.

University for the third- age people «Silver age» is organized for seniors over the age of 55 years from St Petersburg. It is designed to address key challenges facing any elderly person who has attained the venerable age. Simultaneously at the University in St. Petersburg are more than 300 people who continue their education within 6 months, and then most of the students of the University become members of the «Club of volunteers, alumni and other forms of post-graduate work». The number of graduates who continue contacts with University is estimated about 1000-2000 people. Educational activities of the University includes: the ability to take the initiative; development of creative abilities and curiosity; the development of new fields of activity, adequate to the current needs of the elderly and the current time; the opportunity to participate actively in the social life of the country, acting as a volunteer that promotes self-realization of the elderly.

The programs for the seniors are realized nowadays in the Institute for the Third Age Education founded in St Petersburg State University of Industrial Technologies and Design. It is the first third age educational institution that is functioning in the frame of high educational institution. A lot of attention is paid to inclusion of the intergenerational and intercultural into the education for the third-age students.

#### **4. Intergenerational and intercultural approaches in the third age education in St Petersburg (Russia)**

The contribution of the elderly in the scientific-technical, social, cultural and educational creative potential of St. Petersburg can hardly be overestimated. The use of the creative potential of older people is not only associated with obtaining socio-economic and socio-cultural effects, but with the possibility of improving the quality of life of this social group and the city in general. They can transfer their experience to the coming generations. Using intergenerational approach in the education for the third age generation will provide opportunity for sustainable development of the society.

The solution to the problem of sustainable development of St. Petersburg requires knowledge of the laws of interaction of generations in a transforming society. Opportunity to increase the adaptive capacity of different generations depends on the social controls and social mechanisms of interaction between generations. Unfortunately, this problem is poorly studied from a scientific perspective, but practice is always ahead of theory, and offers a new and effective solutions.

Nowadays in St Petersburg third age education the intergenerational and intercultural approaches are not used a lot. The programs, realized in the Institute for the Third Age Education founded in St Petersburg State University of Industrial Technologies and Design, are closely connected with the intergenerational and intercultural approaches in the third age education.

There are different courses organized in cooperation between young and elderly generation. Young students are teaching seniors to use computer, to find information through Internet that helps seniors to communicate with their grandchildren and to be involved in active life, which today is closely connected with the Internet. The other group of students is teaching foreign languages for retired people. Program, connected with making family album in which all the family history will be showed is also realized in this institute based on intergenerational approach. Based on the results of this course intergenerational

communication in the individual family will be strengthened.

The experience of using intergenerational approach shows that it is effective for the seniors and also for the young students. The pensioners feel that they are involved in the active life and students can receive experience of the seniors. Communication with the 20-25 years old students allows retired persons to be connected to modern life and to get to know what is happening among the young generation. They are feeling more involved in the life of the society.

Innovative approach in the education for the third age generation in St Petersburg also includes using the intercultural communication for seniors. Institute for the Third Age Education founded in St Petersburg State University of Industrial Technologies and Design has experience in organizing activities for seniors to investigate the cultures and peoples of other countries. The cooperation is organized with European Universities of the third age from such countries as Slovakia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Malta, and others. It is organized in such way that the group of senior students from Russia is coming to foreign Third Age University and groups from foreign Universities are coming to Russia. Meetings and joint studies of seniors from different countries are organized. They help retired persons from different countries to get to know the culture of the other countries.

Intercultural and intergenerational approaches in the third age education allow seniors to be more connected with the development of modern society. From one hand, globalization is one of the main trends in the society today and it is connected with necessity in using intercultural communications. From another hand, gap between generations can be less, if different generations will be connected in different activities. The good example of such connection is intergenerational approach in the frame of third age education.

## **5. Conclusion**

Analyzing the behavior of older people in St Petersburg it can be concluded that a big group of third-age people have a need to continue to learn, to gain new knowledge. They are actively participating in different courses and universities for the third-age persons. The programs for such people are made in connection with such important factors as: education of adult learners, professional status of the person in the present and the past, gender differences, reflexive capacity to adequately assess the possibility of their participation in specific social and socio-educational programs. The providers of the development and implementation of such programs in St Petersburg are state organizations, public organizations, including veteran organizations, universities of the third age, folk high schools, clubs and libraries.

Programs aimed at the connection of generations are actively developing and implementing in St. Petersburg in recent years. They, of course, require scientific analysis and further development. In the analysis of these programs it is necessary to pay attention to such aspects as:

1. The social aspect that determines the position of the generations in the big city.
2. The economic aspect that characterizes the employment rate of the age groups in different fields of work, professional advancement, career and income in big city. Within this aspect there are initiatives to attract generational cohorts (disabled people of working age, elderly) to feasible for them to work, leading to increased economic effects.
3. The political aspect is connected to relations between generations in the power system, differences in political culture, pluralism, or the dogmatism of judgments, participation in political organizations, etc.
4. Socio-psychological aspect associated with the personal relations between members of generation and generations in the communication process, identifies the factors contributing to the consolidation of generations.

In the frame of sustainable development of St Petersburg it should be taken into account not only the

features of adaptation of different generations in the conditions of developing city and society, but also multi-dimensional, multivariate relationships existing between generations. It is especially important because city is needed to use of personal and professional experience of third-age persons in St. Petersburg. That's why it is necessary to take into account the following factors:

- Society is currently faced with a shortage of labor; this trend will dramatically increase in the future;
- Significant proportion of older people is invaluable personal and professional potential, the use of which is economically and socially important;
- Many older people still learning and their motivation is a need to make practical use of new knowledge in combination with the former professional potential, which creates conditions for the prevention of intellectual decay and strengthen more productive independent position in society.

Intercultural approach to third age education allows exchanging the best practices of teaching third age persons from the point of view of the educational institution. Using intercultural approach in the third age education is very important because nowadays society includes more and more representatives from different cultures. Intercultural approach to education for the third age persons allows lowering the social tension in the society.

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