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# INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

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## **Table of contents**

<b><i>1. Introduction</i></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>2. Learning Objectives</i></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>3. Theoretical Background</i></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>4. Intergenerational Dialogue</i></b>	<b>2</b>
<b><i>5. Teaching and Learning Methods</i></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><i>6. References</i></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><i>7. Conclusion</i></b>	<b>3</b>

## 1. Introduction

This module, which designs trainers in adult education, focuses on the topic of intergenerational dialogue. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition in the European Union that the challenges of the future can only be mastered through dialogue between the generations. Since last December, for the first time, an EU Commissioner has been responsible for “intergenerational fairness.” The idea is that all decisions made today should be examined for their impact on future generations. Commissioner Micallef has emphasized that he wants to “attach particular importance to instilling a true and lasting culture of participatory democracy that applies to all ages, including senior citizens.”

Within the United Nations, too, multigenerational thinking has gained importance in recent years. In September 2024, various world leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York for a “Summit of the Future.” They decided to promote intergenerational dialogue and strengthen the participation of young people in national and international forums. The challenges currently facing humanity can only be overcome through the commitment of all generations. Both younger and older people must contribute their knowledge, skills, and experience to processes that shape the future.

Within the European Union, many initiatives addressed the needs of young people during the European Year of Youth in 2022. The Commission has now encouraged member states to appoint national or regional youth coordinators. These should develop cross-sectoral cooperation on youth issues. Commissioner Glenn Micallef, mentioned above, has announced the development of a strategy on intergenerational fairness. The aim is to identify ways of improving communication between generations and ensuring that the interests of current and future generations are taken into account as far as possible in EU policy and legislation.

The module focuses on adult education and uses a diverse concept of generations. We consider both family structures and age-based categorization of society. We would like to show concrete methods for actively engaging people of different age groups in dialogue and motivating them to shape the present and future together.

## 2. Learning Objectives

The following approaches to intergenerational learning aim to promote openness and creativity. We draw on concepts from intergenerational education, which connect the lives of different generations. In didactic methods, learners of all age groups should learn from, with, and/or about each other, depending on the setting. Active and open access to the topic is of crucial importance. Learners should develop openness to people of different age groups and broaden their perspectives through listening and empathy.

We pursue various goals with intergenerational learning, the primary one being to connect the lives of people from different age groups. This is intended to bridge the gap between different worlds. These bridges are a prerequisite for open and respectful dialogue between people of varying age groups. They should meet on equal terms, based on mutual understanding.

A key objective of creating spaces for a joint learning process between people of different generations is to rethink preconceived opinions and counteract prejudices and stereotypes. In addition, social engagement and a basic attitude of involvement can be promoted when a sense of cohesion and shared values emerge.

From a European perspective, it is essential for us to pass on the experience of the older generation to younger people and to develop suitable tools for this purpose. The older generation still alive today experienced the beginnings of European integration as a consequence of the horrors of the Second World War firsthand. They can convey this in an authentic way that would otherwise be inconceivable. Today, there are many ways to store memories. These will be highlighted in the module.

### 3. Theoretical Background

Various theoretical concepts were used in the development of this module. Key aspects of these concepts are presented below. First, we will look at a basic approach to the topic of learning. The pedagogical considerations in this area have undergone significant changes in recent years. The focus is now more on acquiring skills than on merely memorizing factual knowledge. We then turn to the topic of lifelong learning, which is of great importance in the context of intergenerational learning, as it is assumed that even people of advanced age are still willing to develop new skills in exchange with the younger generation. Ultimately, oral history is also an important concept for our module, as the transfer of knowledge from the generation that experienced the first phase of European integration to younger people is a significant concern.

**Learning** is a central human ability from birth and a lifelong task. Learning and education offer individuals the opportunity to develop, find their place in the world, become capable of acting, secure their existence, and participate in the tasks of society. This requires a two-pronged “strategy”: on the one hand, acquiring and building on traditional knowledge, and the other hand, questioning and critically examining it and creating something new. The promotion of learning and education for all social groups and age groups is, therefore, the most essential foundation for maintaining and developing a humane, democratic, and future-oriented society.

**Lifelong learning** is the concept that learning does not end after school or training, but is a continuous process that lasts throughout life. It encompasses all learning activities aimed at personal, civic, social, or employment-related development. It includes both formal educational institutions, such as schools and universities, as well as informal learning sources, including the media, online courses, and hands-on experiences.

**Oral history** is a method of historical research based on conversations with contemporary witnesses. These conversations are conducted and recorded under specific conditions. This allows the information obtained to be handled scientifically. The selection of questions is crucial in this case. They should encourage the interviewee to answer, but not anticipate answers, i.e., they should not be leading. Careful documentation and transcription of the interview are also essential. A historical source created in this way must also be comprehensible to others. However, only the interviewer and the eyewitness can experience the interview itself. This means that the interviewer must try to make both verbal and nonverbal communication transparent within the context of the interview. This is achieved by choosing a suitable recording technique and carefully transcribing the conversation. Notes supplement the transcription on observations that were not recorded. These include, for example, particular gestures, changes in the way of speaking, or situations in which the eyewitness slips into a dialect.

## 4. Intergenerational Dialogue

### 4.1 Introduction

The term “generation” is used in different ways today. To establish an educational and didactic concept, it is therefore necessary to define the term “generation.” For example, generations within a family are typically characterized by the age sequence of descent, such as grandparents, parents, and children. Generations in a society, on the other hand, are understood as an age-based categorization of societies to which specific tasks, rights, and duties are assigned or denied: e.g., young generation, middle generation, older generation. The term “generation” as an age/birth cohort refers to a group of people who were born in the same period and have therefore experienced the same historical events: e.g., the war generation, the 1968 generation. Finally, there is the term “generation” as a designation for belonging to a particular age culture (label), such as the media generation (digital natives) or the Facebook generation.

Today, the field of intergenerational education is broad and therefore challenging to overview. In any case, the fields of practice must be viewed in a differentiated manner, as they range from completely random age-heterogeneous offerings to deliberately designed intergenerational projects. It is essential in intergenerational education that older and younger generations learn from each other – and, as a rule, on an equal footing. Intergenerational learning has, among other things, the task of imparting knowledge, passing on knowledge, and securing knowledge—all of which takes place between and within generations. In earlier societies, older individuals were often regarded as the repositories of knowledge. They introduced younger people to knowledge, and the younger ones had to acquire (learn) it accordingly. Industrialization in the 19th century and technological developments in the 20th century have significantly changed generational relationships. As a result, younger people are now one step ahead of older generations in many areas.

Intergenerational learning is a response to several different requirements. On the one hand, older participants in educational settings want more contact with other age groups. There is a need to exchange the professional knowledge and life experience of older people. Random opportunities to pass on and acquire this knowledge have become increasingly scarce. It is therefore necessary to explicitly encourage intergenerational learning and to create the conditions for it.

On the other hand, contact between generations has become less commonplace under current social conditions. At the same time, intergenerational coexistence and social integration are highly desirable. Intergenerational education programs can facilitate contact between generations. Learning together (with each other, from each other, about each other) enriches all generations. Intergenerational learning is about building contacts and breaking down stereotypes.

## 4.2 Application in Adult Education

To ensure the participation of all generations, intergenerational projects must be low-threshold and located close to where the target groups reside. The participation of the various target groups is essential; they should be able to get involved and help shape the project themselves. This also involves coordinating regional offerings to address diverse local needs. In addition to providing individual added value, the project should also bring societal benefits. Networks and cooperation with other educational organizations, such as associations or academic institutions (e.g., parent-child centers, senior citizens' associations), not only generate this added value but also contribute to the sustainability and visibility of intergenerational projects.

Intergenerational learning needs clearly defined target groups. An offering can only be planned and prepared once it is clear which generations are to be brought together. Members of different generations have different expectations and ideas, which must be made explicit and reflected upon at the beginning of a project. Different learning needs and habits must be taken into account through the generation-sensitive selection and use of methods. Intergenerational learning processes take time, so longer-term educational programs should be designed if the intention is to focus on intergenerational exchange. General intergenerational projects are primarily aimed at young and older adults. Adult education institutions must involve the middle generation in this process, not only as moderators and organizers, but also as participants.

### 4.3 Case Studies and Examples

#### - **Generations Theater**

Generations Theater enables young and old to exchange experiences and perspectives, which strengthens mutual understanding. At the same time, it promotes social skills, creativity, and cohesion by bringing all age groups together to work on an artistic project.

<https://generationen-dialog.at/projekte/#theater>

#### - **Children – Books – Creativity – Adventure Reading for all generations**

Grandparents, parents, and children were invited to this multi-part workshop to read, tell stories, listen, and get creative together. The first part of the event focused on the story “Frederick.” Young and old brought the heroes and heroines to life in a joint drawing. At each session, stories from different generations and different genres were explored. Care was taken to ensure that the stories were both entertaining and adventurous. The children's books contained wisdom and values that older listeners could also identify with.

[https://fgoe.org/sites/fgoe.org/files/inline-files/dokumentation\\_treff\\_generationen\\_intergenerationelle\\_good\\_practice\\_modelle\\_wien\\_2018.pdf](https://fgoe.org/sites/fgoe.org/files/inline-files/dokumentation_treff_generationen_intergenerationelle_good_practice_modelle_wien_2018.pdf)

#### - **War children – Life stories to the present day**

The aim of the project “War children – Life stories to the present day” is to enable and strengthen the participation of all people in their local communities, to develop understanding between generations, to break down mutual prejudices, and thus to promote coexistence. Participation, in this sense, means that young people and seniors contribute ideas locally, participate in events, and undertake their own projects. It is very rare for young people and seniors to come together in the same projects. Instead, there are often reservations about other age groups: Seniors, for example, would like young people to show more appreciation for their life achievements. Young people usually feel that older people do not take their current problems seriously. Young people and seniors lack opportunities to get to know each other and exchange ideas about their own lives, essential experiences, dreams, and problems.

[https://www.annefrank.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Bildungsarbeit/Dokumente/Kriegskinder/Kriegskinder\\_Generationen\\_im\\_Dialog\\_Tipps\\_und\\_Methoden\\_fuer\\_intergenerative\\_Begegnungen.pdf](https://www.annefrank.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Bildungsarbeit/Dokumente/Kriegskinder/Kriegskinder_Generationen_im_Dialog_Tipps_und_Methoden_fuer_intergenerative_Begegnungen.pdf)



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DANET focuses on education and learning in later life, social participation, intergenerational dialogue, and cross-cultural cooperation. Each area is related to active aging, learning, and education in later life, all of which are integral to active aging. In addition, learning in later life and intergenerational learning are ways of changing individual lives and promoting active aging within the community of generations.

<https://de.danube-networkers.eu/tatigkeitsfelder/intergenerationeller-dialog/>

## 5. Teaching and Learning Methods

### 5.1. Methodology approach

Five Intergenerational learning is a response to several different requirements. On the one hand, older participants in educational settings want more contact with other age groups. There is a need for older people to share their professional knowledge and life experience. Casual opportunities to pass on and acquire this knowledge have become increasingly scarce. It is therefore necessary to explicitly encourage intergenerational learning and create the conditions that facilitate its occurrence. On the other hand, contact between generations has become less commonplace under current social conditions. At the same time, intergenerational coexistence and social integration are highly desirable. Intergenerational education programs can facilitate contact between generations. Learning together (with each other, from each other, about each other) enriches all generations. Intergenerational learning is about building contacts and breaking down stereotypes.

The use of the following methods and approaches is recommended for teaching and learning in adult education:

**Biography:** A biographical approach links learning processes to the different life experiences of participants. The method of writing letters to one's own or other generations helps participants reflect on their generation-specific characteristics. Use the checklist on biographical orientation to check whether you are making sufficient use of the opportunities offered by biographical work.

**Social space:** Social space orientation makes it possible to incorporate the living environments and social space in which participants operate into the learning process. The social space analysis method incorporates social space into the learning process. The social space orientation checklist allows you to reflect on how you use the participants' social space.

**Interaction:** An interaction-oriented approach in intergenerational learning groups promotes dialogue between the generations and facilitates understanding and a change of perspective. To encourage interaction among participants, use the guidelines Rules and guiding questions for intergenerational learning groups, for partner work use the guidelines Changing pair situations: Carousel discussion, and for group work use the Group puzzle for intergenerational learning groups.

**Participation:** The aim of a participation-oriented approach is to support an equal process of mutual learning, in which no generation is assigned a prominent role based on age. The Mini Open Space Procedure: Encouraging Flower Meadows and Participation during the Learning Process. The collection of criteria serves as a method by which all participants can contribute.

## **5.2 Suggested activities**

### **Input by Workshop Leader or Speakers**

The concept of generations through the ages  
Contemporary witnesses of the Second World War  
The founding generation of European integration  
Generations and their relationship with technology  
Methods for bringing old and young together  
Technological possibilities for intergenerational dialogue  
Oral history concepts

### **Activities involving the participants**

Generations Café: Informal forum for exchange  
World Café: Seniors as experts on topics from the past  
Digital natives: Young people help the older generation with technology  
Theatre workshops: Different generations develop short improvisations on various topics  
Dialogue through art: Artistic formats as a stimulus for conversation  
Museum visits: Joint visits to exhibitions as a stimulus for conversation

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Julia Franz: Intergenerationelles Lernen ermöglichen: Orientierungen zum Lernen der Generationen in der Erwachsenenbildung. wbv Bertelsmann, Bielefeld 2009, ISBN 3-7639-3344-1.

## 7. Conclusion

In summary, this module provides adult educators with a practical method for exploring *space* as a dynamic learning tool. It challenges the conventional view of *space* as a mere physical backdrop. Instead, it highlights how cultural, sensory, and ecological spaces shape learning experiences, especially in the context of Europe's intangible cultural heritage. By integrating pedagogical approaches such as microlearning, constructivism, and sensory engagement, the method enables educators to establish a deep connection between learners and the cultural environments that shape their identity. This approach not only encourages reflection on local and shared cultural practices but also promotes empathy and intercultural understanding. Considering increasing fragmentation and nationalism in Europe, the method plays a crucial role in building bridges through cultural dialogue, promoting common European values, and strengthening an inclusive, resilient European community. Through interactive, reflective, and practical learning activities, this module equips educators and learners with the ability to engage meaningfully with their living environment and the cultural heritage that connects them to a larger European context.



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# *Overcoming Nationalism and Euroscepticism Through Culture*