

Lifelong learning and participation: a pedagogical turn in social work and social policy.

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This article is inspired by an EU-founded project on intergenerational mentoring: 'HEAR ME', which was conducted from 2009 – 2011 in five European countries. Starting from the demographic challenges that affect all European welfare states, the authors discuss attitudes to and possibilities in involvement of older people in voluntary social work as mentors for young people.

The challenge of the ageing societies is quite often discussed as the 'burden of the elderly' and discussed as an economic problem. However, the challenge is not only economical. It is also a social and cultural challenge, among other things because a unilateral focus on the economic aspects may cause dissolution of the social cohesion and decrease in well-being for far too many people.

The HEAR ME project aimed at developing strategies for lifelong learning and new roles for older people based on their competences, network and an assumed desire of generativity. Action learning seems to be an appropriate learning concept in relation to keeping older people engaged in the community.

The authors thus point at participating and lifelong learning as part of the answers to the demographic challenges, and they suggest what you might call a pedagogical turn in social work and social policy.

Keywords: older people, mentoring, action learning, lifelong learning, participation.

Introduction

This article is written as a reflection on a project on intergenerational mentoring. The project named HEAR ME¹ was conducted by five European partners and supported by

the EU Lifelong Learning programme ‘Grundtvig’. The challenge our project intended to meet, was the need to rethink the European welfare societies in the light of demographic changes and in the context of a globalized world. We shall argue that lifelong participation and learning may be part of an answer to those challenges, provided that both notions are conceived within the framework of a new paradigm or philosophy regarding older adults. First we shall discuss changes in contemporary welfare systems as well as the ambivalence they induce regarding roles of older adults in the society, and after introducing a new perspective on the core concepts of welfare and participation, we shall discuss possible and probably also desirable roles for older adults in that framework. Drawing upon our experiences from the HEAR ME project, we shall then reflect on the kind of learning processes in which older adults can be involved in order to improve the potentials of these roles. The concept of action learning will be introduced on the background of what we know about older adults’ learning capacity and motivation and within the framework of a changed philosophy of ageing. Finally, we shall discuss a need for what might be called a general pedagogical turn in social work and social policy to meet the challenges that European welfare societies are facing nowadays.

Innovation in social work in the spirit of Grundtvig

The Danish bishop, poet, and philosopher N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) experienced a society undergoing drastic changes. He had a strong conviction that popular enlightenment and education and a people taking responsibility for a shared life are mutually dependent on each other. In one of his many poems he formulated a vision that became a common ideal for the Danish welfare society: *‘And then in wealth we have progressed far, when few have too much and fewer too little’*. Grundtvig thus connected the

ideas of welfare, mutual responsibility, personal freedom, and enlightenment. His pedagogical ideas and practices correspond to later pedagogical concepts as e.g. Paolo Freires' conscientization (Bell et al, 1990) and action learning. A living heritage of Grundtvig in Denmark is the folk high school that offers courses for people in all age groups and with all kinds of educational background.

Throughout this article we shall argue that Grundtvig's conviction about the interdependence of popular education and shared social responsibility can inspire new directions in which to look for answers to the above mentioned challenges of the European welfare societies.

It will also be argued that such answers should not only be provided by professional politicians, but also by citizens and welfare workers in line with contemporary perspectives that advocate for the recovery of a sense of shared social responsibility in face of current social challenges (Sáenz de Ugarte & Martín-Aranaga, 2011). Answers must be developed both in theory and in practice, e.g. as entrepreneurial, innovative experiments with new partnerships between organizations rooted in the state, in the market, and in civil society (Hegyesi, 2004). Since there is no blueprint for a better society, small scale experiments might be a source for learning and provide an opportunity for deliberation.

The experimental project HEAR ME that confirmed our ideas about possible directions in social work and social policy was funded by the EU Grundtvig programme, aimed at fostering innovative experiences and practices to improve adult education all over the EU. The project's main objective was to develop and try out a mentor course to train older adults as mentors of potential school drop-outs, providing them with knowledge and skills required to carry out a role as mentors for the disadvantaged youth. As will be seen in this article, our project was conceived in the

spirit of Grundtvig, with the intention to contribute to enlightenment, well-being and social cohesion at a time when demographic and political changes present a fundamental challenge to the European welfare states.

Challenges: an ageing society in transition

After the depression in the 1930s and the war in the 1940s there was an urge for a new social contract between government and citizens. Esping-Andersen et al. (2001:15) mentions the most notable achievements: progressive taxation, educational expansion, pension improvements, income maintenance, health care, job protection, and a set of social citizen guarantees. Although the social contract was implemented in different forms in different countries, at the end of the 20th century all European countries were to some degree committed to a social contract with the word 'welfare' in the headline. Despite the historical differences in the types of welfare states in Europe, all of them are now in the paradoxical situation that the number of unmet needs raises while the willingness to pay taxes goes down. In this context, the question is no longer how the state can provide services, but 'how can society function in order to produce welfare' (see e.g. 2020 Public Services Trust). It seems that new roads and new contracts have to be explored.

The HEAR ME project can be seen as a contribution to deliberations on the revision of what can be called the generational contract. We face a decrease in the proportion of young and productive people, together with a substantial increase in the proportion of older population. A projection of the demographic dependency ratio, that describes the number of old people (65+) in relation to the number of people at working age (15-65), shows that it will double in the EU area, from its current level of 26% to 50% in 2050 (Wöss, 2011).

This “pragmatic” reason for the revision of the social contract is supplemented by a political one: The ‘social state’ that flourished during the central decades of the 20th century was based upon the assumption that the state should provide political spaces of ‘social de-mercantilization’ - that is, social spaces that escape the market regulation (Esping-Andersen, 1996). Thus, the main function of the states was to secure their citizens’ autonomy regarding market mechanisms.

However, technological, organizational, legislative, and ideological changes in the latest decades linked to an accelerated globalization process have prompted a significant transformation in the social construction of the political subject. Social citizenship, that provides subjects with protection regarding asymmetrical market rules, is increasingly substituted by an economic citizenship based on market participation (Saint Martin, 2001). In this context, the central meaning of the ‘social question’ undergoes a deep re-definition: the ‘social question’ is no longer about providing individuals with resources and security throughout their lives, but rather about warranting their economic participation. One of the most prominent effects of this change is the increasing shift from traditional welfare care schemes for the unemployed toward a concern about activation and employability (Crespo, Revilla & Serrano, 2009). Pedersen (2011, forthcoming) signals a shift in the function of the state: more focus on stimulation and control of resources and possibilities and less focus on protection; a transition from a welfare state to a competition state. In a through and through competition state, social cohesion and solidarity will be replaced by a controlled war of all against all *‘without anybody knowing why they are participating in this war’* (Kemp, 2012:203).

While the ‘welfare regime’ tends to regard older adults as a burden relying heavily on public financial resources through retirement pays and health care, the

‘competition regime’ regards them also as potentially productive economic assets by means of activation policies and lifelong learning schemes.

From welfare to well-being

At the moment there is a focus on older adults as a potential burden, and the recipe for evading this burden seems to be to keep them into the workforce as long as possible, even in a situation with considerable unemployment. While that is one notion of active ageing, there is another one that implies the activity of older persons within society, through participation in a range of social, economic, civic, or cultural activities (UN European Union, Eurostat 2011, especially Ch. 6). Therefore we will take a broader outlook and focus on the resources of older adults, and on how these resources can be put into play in order to avoid social exclusion and to promote intergenerational solidarity, social cohesion and well-being.

Greve (2008:58) defines welfare as: ‘the highest possible access to economic resources, a high level of well-being, including happiness, of the citizens, a guaranteed minimum income to avoid living in poverty, and, finally, having the capabilities to ensure the individual a good life’. By connecting welfare and well-being, the focus is moved from the technical question of services to the philosophical question of the good life, the “eudaimonia” the ancient Greek were concerned about, and that Aristotle connected to ethics and relationships - not to simple satisfaction of desires but to the quality of a whole life. We shift focus, so to say, from employability to enjoy-ability and responsibility.

Recognition, identity, participation, meaning, understanding, accomplishment, love, friendship, enjoyment, trust, hope are some of the basic psychological needs of (probably) all people. The state may provide a framework that secures opportunities for

those needs, but it cannot provide them. People's own activities as citizens, on the market and in civil society, are crucial, not only for their own identity and well-being but also for the social cohesion in society. This participation and functioning well depends on as well as promotes proper skills, virtues, emotions, and motivation. Being excluded from participation is therefore not only a social phenomenon, but also a personal tragedy. In relation to our project we thus consider older people's possibilities for participation in society as basic for their well-being, just as we consider their participation as basic for the cohesion of society. This is in accordance with the views expressed in the 2002 UN assembly on ageing in Madrid, Spain, in order to promote '*a society for all ages*'. The concept of a society for all ages implies intergenerational solidarity, which does not only imply supporting older persons, but also fostering the conditions in which they can participate and contribute to social development and welfare (see UN 2008, UNECE 2010).

Answering the political question "how can society function in order to produce welfare" is a concern for all, not only for politicians and economists. Answers are developed both in theory and in practice, e.g. as entrepreneurial and innovative experiments with new partnerships between organizations rooted in the state, in the market and in civil society (Hegyési, 2003).

The HEAR ME-project was such an experiment that can be a source for participation and lifelong learning and can provide an opportunity for learning more about possible pathways to promote intergenerational solidarity, social cohesion and well-being. Although the focus in this article is on the senior citizens, the project is equally relevant in relation to the challenges in relation to youngsters, as the share of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs) in the EU was 12,8% of the population in 2010 (Eurofound, 2011).

Not a burden but a resource

We assume that older people in general have many resources to build on and to bring into play in mentoring. One of them is that they often have a social and cultural network that can play a role in the transition process their mentees may go through.

Another assumption is that older people go through what the developmental psychologist Erik H. Erikson (1950) has named the life stage of ‘generativity’, which means that in the perspective of a limited lifetime older people may perceive an impetus to leave a legacy and to pass on to future generations what they themselves have learned (Taylor, 2006). According to Erikson, one of the deepest impulses of adult human beings is the impulse of ‘generativity’, by which he means ‘the instinctual power behind various forms of selfless caring’ (Erikson, 1972, p. 131). This ‘instinctual power’ of generativity manifests itself in the need to teach, or ‘the teaching passion’. This generative impulse, this need to educate and help others to thrive, develop, and flourish, is a fundamental and central component of adult identity. Enacting generativity means not only enacting an identity but helping others to achieve a generative identity as well. If enacting generativity means helping others develop and enact their identities to the fullest, their identities will reach such a state only to the extent that they also realize and enact their own generativity and educational passion.

The idea of older people as sources to knowledge, network building, and generativity is in accordance with our philosophy of well-being that stresses both participation and virtues. An example from the Finnish part of the HEAR ME project might illustrate these points:

Anja is a retired teacher and mentor for Narges, a young Afghan girl. She studies to become a practical nurse. They had known each other for two months when the following episode took place. Anja had planned a trip to the woods for some time. But she has hesitated to invite her mentee Narges, because she always wears such

beautiful skirts and scarves. Anja thought they wouldn't be appropriate in the woods and that her clothes might get dirty and torn. One day she plucked up courage and asked Narges. Contrary to what she feared, Narges was very excited and enthusiastic about the idea of going to the woods to pick mushrooms. So they agreed on a date. Up to even to the last minute, Anja was still worried about whether Narges would show up and what she would be wearing. Would she know what to wear in the woods? Just in case, Anja took an extra pair of boots with her. When Narges showed up, there was no reason for Anja's concern. Narges appeared in suitable clothing and wore a good pair of goretex shoes. Anja had also invited two of her friends to join, one was a middle aged woman and the other was a retired woman. The trip succeeded above expectations. Narges was very excited and she ran around the woods and filled her basket with plenty of mushrooms. Everybody got along with each other, they had a great time and they had a lot to talk about with each other. In the end Anja checked Narges' findings and taught her which mushrooms were edible and which were not. Narges also wanted to learn how to make some food from her collected mushrooms. The elderly ladies told her a few good recipes for mushrooms. They also gave the mushrooms they had picked to Narges, so that her whole family could enjoy and taste Finnish mushrooms.

The case illustrates not only a passion to teach. It also illustrates that the mentor learned something about an Afghan girl and probably also about her own prejudices about Muslim girls.

Lifelong learning

We do not only assume and recognize that older people in general can be important sources of experience and accumulated knowledge that young people can benefit from; we do also assume and recognize that older people have learning potentials as a platform for their further learning.

Learning can be described as understanding, seeing things differently, and, perhaps, changing as a person (Boulton-Lewis, 2010) and in a perspective of lifelong learning we can be delighted with the fact that research in the field of gerontology has

produced solid evidence showing that ageing processes as such do not influence people's learning potentials as dramatically as usually assumed. Decline in learning competences of adults in their third age (60-80 years old) are mainly caused by lifestyle and poverty or problematic living conditions rather than of ageing as such. Human senescence has been delayed by a decade. Today's 80-year-olds are in general quite as strong as were 70-year-olds a generation ago, and 70-year-olds as 60-year-olds (Vaupel, 2010). Among healthy older persons you do not find a significant decline in cognitive functions before the age of 80 (Mortensen, 2001), but there are large individual variations. According to a Danish study (Avlund et al., 2004), the 80-year-olds which showed the least decline functioned cognitively just as well as they did when they were 50 years old.

Social conditions and lifestyle factors are extremely important for older people's potential for activity and learning. It is well known that a healthy lifestyle, high social position, regular contacts with other people, and participation in social and cultural activities are crucial factors for a successful old age, and it is well known that activity in old age prevents loss of functions (e.g. Small et al., 2012; Evers et al., 2012; Field, 2009; Kirk, 2008; Avlund et al., 2004; Hansen, 2002). Cultural conditions are also crucial for older people's functioning and potential for learning. Society's expectations to and demands on older people determine their ability to keep going and shape their views of themselves. Low expectations lead to low self-expectations, low self-esteem, and poor performance (Haslam et al., 2012; Seim, 1997). In short: Learning at old age is a question of social, cultural and pedagogical conditions rather than of biological ageing. Hence we have no good reason for exclusion of older people from societal activities. On the contrary we should use their resources even more in the future.

Since older people's learning potential is individual, shaped by biological, psychological, social, and cultural conditions, we also know that you cannot give some general directions for pedagogical methods in activities, which are about older people's learning. However, we can emphasize that content, objectives, methods, and relationships must be both relevant and interesting to the target group. You can use new technologies and new forms of teaching, but the didactics must respect the older people's life experiences, the different levels of education, and create confidence in learning situations, because some elderly people are insecure in situations when they meet new requirements (Kirk, 2008; Boulton-Lewis, 2010).

Convinced of the idea that older people in general have good learning potentials, generativity, experiences, and networks, the project aimed at bringing those resources into play in intergenerational mentoring, and in a wider perspective to contribute with new answers to the questions regarding the demographic and economic challenges in European societies.

Intergenerational mentoring

The attention for intergenerational practice is growing (Hatton-Yeo et al., 2010; Beth Johnson Foundation, 2011) and there is positive quantitative and qualitative evidence for the positive outcomes of intergenerational interaction (Butts, 2011). In the HEAR ME project we organized and trained groups of older people (55+) as mentors for (potential) early school leavers. We will first deal with the topic of intergenerational mentoring, and then we will deal with the idea of educating the older people and with the concept of action learning, that turned out to fit to the learning and developing processes carried out in the different countries.

Intergenerational mentoring involves processes in which children or youth are mentored by adults 55 years of age and older (Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe & Taylor, 2006). The increase in mentoring programs for at-risk young people enacted by volunteers, and its flourishing as a movement and as a promising trend in social policy started in the late 80s and early 90s in the US and UK (Baker & Maguire, 2005; Liabø, Lucas & Roberts, 2005; Evans, Jory & Dawson, 2005). Freedman (1999) traces their expansion back to a context where an emerging 'light State' ideology had an interest in eradicating poverty and preventing social breakdown while eschewing the expenditure of significant government funding at the same time.

Nowadays, youth mentoring programs are widespread in many Anglo-Saxon and European countries (see DuBois & Karcher (2005), and Allen & Eby (2010), for a panoramic review), and an increasing proportion among them are intergenerational, involving both youth at-risk and older adults (Taylor, 2006). Freedman (1999) attributes at least part of their success to the inherent appeal of the idea of mentoring, that would be regarded by people and policy-makers alike as a simple, direct, cheap, and legitimate strategy for meeting the needs of youth at-risk as well as the aspirations of a growing number of adults wishing to make a significant social contribution. Thus intergenerational mentoring programs are regarded as a win-win issue for both youth and older adults. Rogers (1997), Vander Ven (2004), Seepersad et al. (2007), and Larkin et al. (2010) among others, have in their reports on intergenerational mentoring projects stressed the importance of adult relationship in the lives of young people as well as the positive function of mentoring for older adults. Our project confirms this. The following from the Dutch part of the project illustrates a case of strong emotional relationship between a mentor and a mentee:

Khadisha was a Dutch mentee, living in a religious Muslim family. Her mother never left the house, and was completely veiled. Also Khadisha wore a veil in which only her face was uncovered, and she only left the house for visiting school. Through her mentor, Khadisha came in contact with things that she had no knowledge of before. She had e.g. never been in contact with white Dutch adults except her teachers. The mentorship led to a very special and close relationship, based on trust. At the end of the project, Khadisha indicated the following: 'I do not want to lose my mentor, because she is my window to the world.' Her mentor, Dorrit, stated at the end: 'Khadisha is the daughter I have never had.' Both Khadisha and Dorrit did not want to end their contact, and have stayed in touch after the mentoring project.

In Denmark, the HEAR ME project was anchored in a drop-in centre for children and youth. Here the mentors first had to "gain a position", and processes of bonding as well as of cultural bridging seemed important in a process that lead to building of social capital for both youngsters and older people:

Anne had been living at the other side of the street for about ten years, on the borderline between two different areas of the town. It is not because she was not curious, but it was just too difficult to cross the border. *'You stay at your place, and when you cross the street you suddenly are a stranger. If there is no obvious reason to mix with the world over there it remains a strange world.'* The project was a good reason to cross the border.

Once she entered the drop-in centre she was welcomed, but she understood that if she wanted to be there, not as a guest but as a person belonging to this place, she had to find a role. It was not that easy, she could not just choose a role, and there was nobody who had the power to assign her a role. She had to find "an empty place" and she found it in the room for creative practice. In fact she did not think about herself as a creative person, and it was far from her favourite occupation. But the children loved it, and they were enthusiastic about her in this role as activity leader. There were mostly girls, but also boys showed interest, in various ways. Her car was a Skoda and there were quite a few jokes about it: 'How do you increase the value of a Skoda? Throw a penny in it'. It was clear her status was low among them.

After some months her star was rising and she considered another role –the one she had wanted to take from the beginning: joining the boys in indoor football tournaments. It was difficult to drop her creative activity, as the children liked it, but one of her mentor colleagues took over, so with only a little bad consciousness she changed her role. At her first tournament one of the boys started joking, but now another boy said very definitely: ‘Anne is okay and so is her car!’ She was a good caretaker at the tournaments, but more than that. She observed that boys from other clubs, and sometimes even the judges, were prejudiced, especially when “her boys” were competent and winning. She felt a bit like a UN observer, whose presence helps those present to behave in an appropriate way. She was the perfect networker and “bridge-builder”. Next step is joining a few boys when they start playing in the club at the other side of their street!

Also in this case we see that the mentor equally was a learning person and a teacher. We assume that her mentor assignment gave her insight into young people's lives; good experiences and the sense of being able to give her life experiences on (cf. Eriksson's theory of generativity).

Educating the mentors

An intergenerational mentoring project has to be developed –though the concept may be clear, it is not given how to put it into practice. We developed different models in the different countries, due to cultural, political and organizational differences (Rothuizen et al. 2011). The models were developed in cooperation with the older persons, so we did not present a ready-made concept and organization for them, but a possibility that had to be filled out in cooperation. The course we provided for them was therefore not only a course that facilitated their mentoring relationships, but also a course that helped both us and them in finding the direction for the organization and carrying out of the activities.

The course was thus based on social constructivist pedagogy and in Grundtvig's words a ‘*School for life*’ rather than on what Paulo Freire called the banking concept of

education, in which the student is viewed as an empty account to be filled by the teacher (Freire, 2006). We shall stress that involving older people in voluntary work does not replace professional social work. It is a supplement guided by professionals, and we know that professional support is an important influencing factor for effectiveness and sustainability of the voluntary work (Ehlers et al., 2011).

We used the concept of action learning as a name for a didactics based on the interplay of action and reflection, of learning and living and we chose the “action wheel” designed by Enderby and Phelan (1994) as the graphic representation:

FIGURE 1: action learning wheel

Action learning involves attacking problems (or opportunities) not puzzles. A problem has no existing solution, whereas a puzzle has a solution that is not presently known (e.g. a crossword puzzle). Action learning is appropriate when the task is challenging - a problem for which there is no known single "right" solution. Mentoring is not just “one thing” but “doing the right thing at the right time”. Mentoring is thus connected to practical wisdom - what Aristotle called ‘phronesis’ - it is not just a technical skill, and the main focus of the mentor courses has been to qualify the mentors to “do the right thing” in the local context.

We think our mentoring projects are more like problems than like puzzles. Action learning helps in developing new mental models. The concept of 'action learning', which comes from Reg Revans (1983) seems most often used for learning at work, but the concept is of equal relevance in other contexts where you want learning and change. All forms of action learning share the elements of real people resolving and taking action on real problems in real time while learning through questioning and

reflection (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). To put it simply, it is about solving problems and getting things done. Serrat (2008) describes the benefits of the method:

‘Action learning sets have been used by civil and nongovernment organizations.

They

- Increase awareness and enable individuals to identify personal development challenges.
- Develop self-confidence and readiness to take responsibility and initiative.
- Help people relate to and communicate and network with others more effectively.
- Provide structured peer support.
- Enable more disciplined ways of working in powerful teams.
- Enable individuals and teams to learn while working.
- Build leadership competencies.
- Develop systems thinking, creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving skills.
- Foster the emergence of corporate cultures that can handle change and learn.
- Support innovation.’

In order to obtain those benefits the teacher has to be able to take a position of not-knowing, acting more like a researcher and facilitator than like a traditional teacher.

Even though the teacher normally has a greater experience and more knowledge in the specific field than the students, she does not have the answers beforehand, and sometimes she does not even have the appropriate questions. The teacher’s role is as varying as the mentor’s role. Inspired by Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) and Pawson (2004) we used this model for reflection over the various roles:

Figure 2: different roles

The setting of the mentor course is different in this ‘school for life’. A playful

approach with use of role-playing and narratives is part of the concept as is socializing and dining together, and regarding contents all HEAR ME-countries had the following elements:

- Mentoring and different mentor roles and reflections on own potentials.
- Voluntary work, social capital and networking (bridging and bonding).
- Young people (life circumstances, life world, and psychological development).
- Multiculturalism (religion, gender etc.).
- Ethics in relationships.
- Communication skills, presence and active listening.

Do we need a pedagogical turn in social work and social policy?

Our starting point was a claim that it is no longer fruitful to meet the demographic challenges for Europe by continuing along the usual policy paths, where one of the widely used answers to the demographic challenge is to keep older people at the general labor market. We have not argued against older people working at the labor market, but we have argued against the widespread and rather one-dimensional focus on the traditional labor market and we have suggested that a focus on the traditional labor market should be supplemented by other solutions, because we accept that the states cannot provide lifelong resources and security. We have suggested that there is a need to rethink the question of how our societies promote intergenerational solidarity, social cohesion and well-being.

We have suggested that part of a new paradigm could be to focus on the involvement of older people in new ways - ways in which people become dedicated to be involved in social and cultural activities and to experience themselves as active citizens who are helping to solve community problems. In five countries we did an

experiment by carrying out projects in which older people were mentors for young-at-risk. As an integrated part of the project the older persons participated in a course. We have argued that in the spirit of Grundtvig and Freire it makes sense to connect the handling of social problems to pedagogical processes.

This solution is closely linked to the idea of generativity, participation, lifelong learning, and learning through action. In projects like our HEAR ME project, learning for the older people as well as for the youngsters becomes not only for the school and the labor market, but for life, to put it with a quote from the Danish philosopher Grundtvig. In that way we suggest a pedagogical turn in social work and social policy.

¹ *HearMe* is an acronym for ‘*Highly EducAted Retirees Mentoring Early school leavers*’: senior citizens mentoring youth at-risk. It was a two-years project (January 2010 to December 2011) involving universities, universities of applied science, and organizations dealing with education, adult education, community work and volunteering in five countries: Denmark, Finland, The Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. The project was funded by the European Commission through the Lifelong Learning programme for adults “Grundtvig”, aimed at fostering innovative experiences and practices to improve adult education all over the EU. The project dealt with two different problems regarding education and learning in Europe:

- a need to train a growing population of healthy, generative older persons so as to increase effectiveness in their post-retirement social participation and contribution;
- a need to prevent early school drop-out by committing youth to a lifelong learning approach.

As historical, cultural, and organizational circumstances are different in the five countries, the projects differed in order to be able to address the same challenges. There is elaborated a guide for the mentor course and the organization of the project in each country (see:

www.viauc.com/hearme for more information and reports).

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