



Cultivating the human sense of old age.  
A permanent pedagogical responsibility  
Coltivare il senso umano della vecchiaia.  
Una responsabilità pedagogica permanente

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**ABSTRACT**

Is it possible to cultivate the human sense of old age?

The contribution, from a pedagogical perspective, tries to answer a question that has all the characteristics of a social emergency as well as an educational one. And which recalls pedagogical knowledge to the assumption of a strong responsibility.

The Authors explore some specific categories of old age “discourse” through pedagogical and didactic coordinates useful for rethinking the last age of life in a human sense, *nourishing* it with dialogues, exchanges, reciprocity. In particular, the authors trace the “place” in which elderly people can continue to become in the promotion of inter-generationality.

È possibile coltivare il senso umano della vecchiaia?

Il contributo, in una prospettiva pedagogica, prova a rispondere a una domanda che ha tutte le caratteristiche di una emergenza sociale oltre che educativa. E che richiama il sapere pedagogico all’assunzione di una forte responsabilità.

Le Autriche approfondiscono alcune categorie peculiari del “discorso” vecchiaia attraverso coordinate pedagogiche e didattiche utili a ripensare in senso umano l’ultima età della vita *nutrendola* di dialoghi, scambi, reciprocità. In particolare, le Autriche rintracciano nella promozione della inter-generazionalità il “luogo” in cui le persone anziane possono continuare a *divenire*.

**KEYWORDS**

Old Age, Education, Intergenerationality, Pedagogy of the course of life. Vecchiaia, Intergenerazionalità, Pedagogia del corso della vita.

## 1. Background\*

First, it is necessary to clarify the background of this discussion: old age as a modern emergency, to justify the choice of considering pedagogy's ethical and social commitment today called to assume responsibility in contributing to the transformation of how to understand and face the question of aging. Vis-à-vis the specific idea of old age, a society manifests «an unsustainable dysfunction» (Oliverio, 1977, p. 12) due to its very growth. It safeguards the evolution of anyone who ages, protects the various ways of aging, and supports the construction of—a future—existence through all stages of life and its course.

“Longevity” has become the favored vantage point where pedagogy can be found to redefine the meaning given to old age and the whole course of life.

First, looking at modern life, recent demographic projections show how the process of longevity has now become a mass social phenomenon.

Increased life expectancy, reduced mortality, and a shrinking birth rate are the basis of a profound, rapidly evolving demographic change that has led to an unprecedented aging population<sup>1</sup>.

The most immediate reaction to long-life prospects regards the repercussions on social security and welfare costs. Prevailing economic thought indiscriminately reduces the elderly to a fragile, non-functional, and unproductive group in need of care. In other words, older people become a social *problem*, with longevity devalued, obscuring the dynamic and transformative potential of people's abilities as they age.

This notion is inadequate for grasping the most authentic, profound, and more *humane* sense of aging and being old, as well as all an inability to “see” old age as the most precious consequence of a long life.

A discussion of old age can only be based on certainly fascinating, scientific perspectives and worrying, rather than engaging, socio-cultural perspectives. The latter substantially strengthens flawed social representations, running the risk of not guaranteeing quality of life until its end. There is an imbalance between an “extended” life and quality of life. The growth in a widespread rejection of aging and awkwardness in being elderly corresponds to increased longevity. They are both partly the result of an inadequate educational process (Pinto Minerva, 1974; 1988) that does not wholly escape the conditioning of a consumerist and utilitarian system.

## 2. Pedagogical implications

From a pedagogical viewpoint, the discussion's objectives seem quite interesting. The educational processes and a personal existential plan establish, *in a certain way*, the idea of old age as defined by respect for the elderly *or* by their marginalization, choosing either to love and understand *or* to dehumanize them. The real possibility of old age being interpreted anew depends largely on the ability of ed-

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1 The increase in the elderly population and the continuous decline in births have made Italy the second country in the world with the oldest population, with an estimated 177.9 elderly people for every 100 young people as of 1 January 2020.

ucation—and pedagogy as regards lifelong learning—to cut through, making it an object of careful and critical reflection, a symbolic-cultural system serving a specific consumerist economic model, an efficiency-driven and lifelong worship of the fountain of youth, which perpetuates prejudicial attitudes towards the elderly (Ladogana, 2020).

Thus, the question is whether education, as a category of pedagogical knowledge/action, can be a “suitable tool to protect those people essential to ensuring a future for generations to come and the whole world facing the risk of those figures of human knowledge (regarding all living beings and the entire planet) being scattered”. (p. 17).

One would like to think so, nourished by the hope that they can

achieve the utopia of people’s continuing educability [as individuals and a society] by restoring everyone’s right/duty to be active and responsible participants in their own lives, up to the final moment of their earthly existence. They may reclaim the possibility of continuing to be capable of “generating” ideas, knowledge, emotions, relationships, values, and projects. In other words, they will maintain an important and active role in social contexts in which the elderly can continue to be a natural developmental resource for people and territories (Loiodice, 2019, p. 29).

Indeed, it is at this contradictory age that education confirms “the endurance of its accompanying intent alongside an uninterrupted process of constructive change” (Pinto Minerva, 2011, p. 44). Moreover, it reveals its proper calling to support the continuous formation of a man and a woman (Fadda, 2016).

The call for education to reassess old age also comes from the World Health Organization, which, in August 2020, proclaimed the *Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-2030*. The initiative seeks to improve elderly people’s quality of life by implementing policies oriented in four directions, one of which is education: «we need to change the way we think, feel and act towards age and aging by investing in education».

Continuing along this line, the European Commission presented its *Green Paper on Ageing. Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations*, in January 2021 and initiated a political debate on population aging, opening a forward-thinking reflection on the impacts and alternatives of this demographic transition from an educational point of view.

Above all, adopting new models of sustainable life based on multi-generational bonds is urged, identifying intergenerationality as *one* possibility to support active aging and ensure a good life for those who age.

The educational implications of these issues raised by the Green Paper are clear.

1. How can active aging policies be promoted to everyone from an early age throughout their lives?
2. How can children and young people be better prepared for the prospect of longer life expectancy?
3. How could intergenerational dialogue be supported to encourage knowledge sharing and civic engagement? (European Commission, 2021, p. 6).

The importance of “laying the groundwork” is emphasized in this also pedagogically interesting document:

The years from early childhood to young adulthood influence us for the rest

of our lives: what we experience and learn and the habits we acquire are all factors that shape our points of view, health, and wellness. Thus, *laying the proper foundation* from the start can help prevent, limit, and delay some of the challenges associated with aging. In particular, the two policy concepts of active, healthy aging and lifelong education can lead to a thriving society that is growing older. Both approaches work best when adopted at a young age as they are relevant all life-long (European Commission, 2021, p. 4).

All this is in the belief that if it is true that aging is a natural, physiological phenomenon contained in our genetic heritage, one's way of aging and life quality in old age are primarily correlated to cultural context and education.

Pinto Minerva spoke of «educational prevention» (1974, p. 25) focused on:

- educating an individual to grow old and to live one's advancing years in a "different" way as a social and cultural function is different from other life stages, «making qualities that remained unexpressed in earlier life phases stand out» (Montalcini, 1998, p. 143), and "genuinely" resisting the fear of aging with a desire to grow old. Fear corresponds to entrenchment in a sort of eternal present, in the illusion of endless youth. By rejecting the modifications induced by aging, this attitude reveals the falseness of a life plan that compromises the developmental process. Too often removed from an existential plan, old age becomes "invisible" (Iori, 2004, p. 32), its identity humiliating. Moving in the opposite direction is a desire to live, understood as curiosity and a motivation to act. It is an impulse «to get involved in the events of aging» (Hillman, 1999, p. 22), to take risks and rediscover oneself in what had not appeared before. Because that desire assists the individual in discovering the deeper meaning of life, while also having the courage to be open to life, and accepting the idea of death, «namely, being there for the end» (Pinto Minerva, 1974, p. 12);
- educating society to recognize and value the elderly: training for loving by cultivating the *humaneness* of old age and, with it, hope for the future.

Simone De Beauvoir's words (1971) in this regard were visionary,

In the future that awaits us, the meaning of our life is at stake; we do not know who we are if we ignore who we will be: we must recognize ourselves in this old man, in that old woman; it is necessary if we want to fully accept our human condition (p. 496-498).

It is, therefore, a question of beginning and supporting a project of humanization; of great social responsibility, possible only if included within a pedagogy of commitment and of a *militant knowledge* (Tomarchio, 2016), which knows how to courageously voice "disapproval" of socio-cultural models meant to impoverish and hobble the "integral" and multidimensional development of the individual/person.

A pedagogy that can be configured as a *pedagogy of life* (Pinto Minerva, 1988; Ladogana, 2020) is focused on the permanent educability of people. As individuals and as a community, insofar as both are closely interrelated, human beings are part of the society in which they live, just as society is a part of every individual. Therefore, it is committed to promoting and implementing a formative and transformative endeavor with a strong civic and ethical sense, which invests in the totality of life by *choosing its human meaning*.

### 3. The main idea of lifelong education

It was said that the option of giving human meaning to old age (and to all of one's life) lies in lifelong education, «characterized by pedagogical *intention*» (Pinto Minerva, 1988, p. 20). Indeed, the main idea of lifelong education can only be realized if, once activated, «an individual's availability and a society's willingness can [constantly and continuously] persist» (Lorenzetto, 1976, p. 79) throughout one's life by constantly reviewing their approach to life, orienting (and re-orienting it) in an authentically humane way.

Hence, the need to underscore that this ongoing willingness to review one's attitude towards life (to define and redefine the meaning of one's own existential plain) is particularly possible if promoted and supported beginning with the «first stages of life [from birth, as Maria Montessori reminds us] which constitute a "work in progress", an «area of proximal development for a future life» (Dozza, 2016, p. 60).

Lifelong education is a natural, social process that starts before one is born and stretches throughout one's lifetime up to an advanced age (*lifelong learning*). *Lifewide learning* is built through *diverse* educational and experiential *milieus*. However, it should above all be a process that provides the cognitive and emotional anchors for narrative possibilities, reflection, and an appreciation of stories and identities. All of these acquire the value of *life-deep learning* and provide a secure base on which to build throughout one's life (Dozza, 2016, p. 60).

Therefore, it is a process that permeates people's lives in all directions and *also* defines the meaning of aging. Even more, the *life-deep* aspect, at the time when it "creates a mold" of thoughts, desires, hopes, and fears on which our way of being-in-the-world (and of *thinking* about the world) depends, and «tends to be transmitted from one generation to the next» (Dozza, 2009, p. 31) Thus, it contributes to influencing our idea of old age.

The anchors reach greater depths, making it possible to build "for" a life, which our discussion permits the explicit creation of those conditions that define old age in a human sense.

For example, to say that the choice to either dehumanize or love and understand the elderly depends mainly on how *that* "future old" child has formed their idea of old age, the ineluctable opportunity, or not, to cultivate emotional availability and a capacity for love by feeling compassionate for otherness (Pinto Minerva, 1988, p. 27).

Because, from childhood, one learns to grow old in a present that contains the future within it.

In this regard, one of the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales (2015) is significant:

Once upon a time, there was a poor, old man who was deaf, couldn't see well, and whose knees trembled. When he sat at the table, he could barely hold a spoon, spilled the soup on the tablecloth, and dribbled a bit. His son and daughter-in-law were disgusted by him. So, in the end, the old man had to sit in the corner behind the stove, where they gave him just a little soup in an earthenware bowl. He used to look sadly towards the table, with his eyes full of tears. Once, too, his trembling hands could no longer hold the bowl, and it fell to the ground and broke. The young wife scolded him, but he sighed and said nothing. Then the woman bought him a wooden bowl for a few pennies, and he had to eat from that. As they sat in this way, the four-year-old grandson began collecting some pieces of wood on the ground. 'What are you doing?' the old man asked. 'I'm making a

small trough," the child replied, "for mom and dad to eat from when they're old." Suddenly the old man once again sat in his place at the dinner table.

The Grimm fairy tale opens up more pedagogical ideas (Ladogana, 2020), reinforcing the idea that lifelong learning is constructed from birth. It shows that children may be taught how to grow old through grandparent-grandchild relations by emphasizing the *formative and transformative* aspect of this relationship (and intergenerational relationships more broadly), on the richness of possible reciprocal exchanges of knowledge and experiences intended to guide the future.

#### 4. The main idea of an intergenerational pact

One possibility for preserving an elderly person's quality of life and purpose in life is represented by intergenerationality. The elderly can glimpse within an intergenerational dialogue new existential directions and grasp the idea of indefinite and unpredictable growth throughout life's journey, redefining its meaning from various perspectives and nourishing it with conversations, mutual exchanges, and forms of intergenerational sociality.

In the following pages, the discussion will be structured around the choice to "looking after" this intergenerational pact, in the belief that dialogue between generations can become a *place* for transmitting knowledge, skills; behaviors; and cultural, social, political, and educational values. Thus, the collective and communitarian make the intrinsic value of old age come out, translating them into an opportunity for encounter and exchange. The value of experiential knowledge discovered and revealed as an unparalleled "common good" is what "binds people together and determines everyone's wellness and human progress" (Martini, 1993, p. 54) because the elderly's experiential knowledge is an archive of memories, stories, successes, setbacks, conquests, rebellion, resistance, knowledge, and know-how. Above all, it is a plan for the community's life and culture (Pinto Minerva, 1988).

Today, more than in the past, imagining the elderly as either a burden or a resource is a fundamental dilemma for our society and its future, jeopardizing the "basics" for humanizing our society.

Is it possible to create situations and conditions that enable experiencing, appreciating, and understanding the wealth of diversity (including generational diversity) and the values of reciprocity and sharing? How can *the past's present* and *an identity grounded in memory* with/in young people be co-constructed? It would be enough to be reflected in the giants, whether living or from the past, who have shaped the local history of one's own territory. [...]. Actions and initiatives need to start "from the bottom" as well as cultural and political choices interested in including the lives of the different generations in the local settings to which they belong, supporting the value of relational ties from the earliest stages of life: in families, schools, gatherings, and social life as well as urban planning and redevelopment (extraordinary opportunities for transformative acts). This is because the vision of a possible future (*the present's present*) is *the community* (Dozza, 2020, pp. 1572-1573).

In short, it is a question of co-constructing a "new intercultural between the stages of life, appropriate for a highly problematic historical period, embodied in uncertainties and crises, but also amazing insights" (Pinto Minerva, 1988, p. 15). It would be able to give the elderly an opportunity to tell and star in their "history"

and to see their function as “community memory” appreciated (Pinto Minerva, 2011), and younger generations the opportunity to *be recognized* in that memory.

So far, the theoretical reasons that form and nurture the choice to construct intergenerational education courses that promote and support active aging have been highlighted. The following paragraphs describe the distinctive features of some noteworthy initiatives by the University of Barcelona’s the Faculty of Education.

## 5. A wealth that shouldn’t be lost. Ageing and older workers

Ageism is the discriminatory attitude of a person towards another person due to their age, especially in the case of older people; it can be either individual or collective. This concept was coined in 1969 by the American gerontologist R.N. Butler, who described it as the interconnection between three elements: prejudices towards older people, discriminatory practices and institutional practices that perpetuate stereotypes towards older people.

Ageism can be found in persons and/or institutions, and can be either intentional or unintentional, but eventually it has the same consequences for the affected person(s).

There are different classes of discrimination but, coincidentally, ageism is one of the less noticeable and resistant to change; furthermore, people are less aware of its effects. For example, when we face the case of a small mistake or oversight in our work setting, we forgive the person by shifting the problem to the topic of age, but ultimately what we do is reinforcing the stereotype of the older person who’s losing their skills and must be treated with care, and we gradually adapt to this new normality.

As warned by the WHO, such attitude entails harmful effects, such as sadness, weakness, educational rigidity, digital illiteracy and, by all means, an economic issue for the company. On the other hand, from a social point of view, it has an economic value as a major consumer of medications, prostheses, and leisure trips.

Life expectancy means that we need to invent a new name for this stage of life, which is increasingly longer; in fact, summarizing it as “third age” is obviously no longer enough. Recently retired people are in much better physical and cognitive conditions than previous generations and, as a society, we need to take advantage of such potential. People in this age group bring value to companies, families and communities; this is why it is essential to build intergenerational teams within institutions, first of all to incorporate the importance that each and every age has, but also because such teams provide a higher number of possible responses to a problem and, lastly, because they reflect the existing pluralism of society.

Why should people leave their workplace abruptly? Why can’t they leave it gradually, while a junior employee, or their replacement, gradually becomes integrated in the company? Are we taking into account that this is causing a generation gap in several institutions? Why are we no longer establishing the role of mentor? Why aren’t we organizing meetings where knowledge can be shared? These and many more are the issues that come to our mind when we think that a large professional career can disappear from one day to the next, and that we haven’t trained or prepared ourselves for this new stage.

Given the progressive ageing of population and the continuous and rapid changes due to the technological advances, the most used strategy for older workers in the last decade has been early retirement, which has been backed by the

government. Although at first such strategy may seem beneficial, it really isn't for companies and workers; it's not that pleasant for those who are experiencing it in person, first of all because it fosters a climate of uncertainty and, sometimes, even harassment in the company, until you end up pretending it was an intentional action. It must be said that more than 40 percent of these people would like to continue working, and half of them will end up having emotional issues. For the company, this may lead to a loss of technical and personal knowledge, which can even affect the company's continuity.

We should take advantage of older workers' potential by paying attention to four aspects:

- *Adaptation*: to adapt the workplace to older people's needs, starting from specific provisions related to health and ergonomics, moving those workplaces with a significant physical burden and facilitating the integration in less physically demanding working environments.
- *Flexibility*: to provide phased and flexible ways of retirement, so that workers can continue to offer their knowledge to the company. The law on measures to establish a phased and flexible retirement system (Ley de Medidas para el Establecimiento de un Sistema de Jubilación Gradual y Flexible) was introduced in Spain in 2002, and it allowed workers to continue with active employment after the age of 65 or retire early, after the age of 61. Reduced working hours, some temporal flexibility or participation by means of consultancy are possible and adequate strategies.
- *Training and consultancy*: it seems that training plans in companies are focused on young people, but the recognition of talent should be taken into account, and everyone should feel a part of the company's interest in training. The transfer of knowledge and experience is essential, and an older worker can definitely act as a mentor for a new worker to this end.
- *Lack of discrimination*: although the European Union is expressing the need to prioritize the employment profile over age, a clear discrimination still exists towards older workers, without taking into account – as shown by several studies – that such workers are usually more productive, have fewer accidents in the workplace and are more loyal to the company.

In Catalonia there are a few associations and foundations that have been created for retired people: some of them are highly recognized, but all of them have extensive experience. They offer consultancy and partnership to young entrepreneurs, by helping them to create their own organization, and to small and medium-sized enterprises, by helping them to optimize their products and relaunch themselves during moments of crisis. Even public companies turn to them for advice, and these associations and foundations do not forget to help the most vulnerable groups either. As well as sharing their knowledge, they extend their working lives and enjoy an active and healthy ageing.

## 6. Path and conceptualization of intergenerationality

Moving back to the topic of the importance of older people in our society, and their need to relate to others, we believe that we should analyze more in depth the intergenerational aspect as the basis for a healthier, more equitable and responsible society.



On December 14th, 1990, the United Nations General Assembly, by Resolution 45/106, designated October, 1<sup>st</sup> as the International Day of Older Persons; the following year, the United Nations Principles for Older Persons were adopted (Resolution 46/91).

This had been preceded by the launch of initiatives in specific countries, among which we would like to mention the first World Assembly on Ageing (Wien, 1982), where the International Plan of Action on Ageing was designed as a reference model to prompt governments to intervene, make society more aware, in general, and give more visibility to older people by promoting their skills and quality of life. This Plan of Action differentiated between three basic lines of action: a) Ageing and development, b) Promoting health and wellbeing throughout life and c) Ensuring an enabling and supporting environment.

The second World Assembly on Ageing took place in 2002: during the assembly, the outcomes of the Plan of Action were analyzed, and progresses were made in terms of a change of attitudes, policies and practices in view of the challenges of the XXI century, with the key objective of promoting the development of a society for all ages.

From 1990 to 2020, the social, economic and demographic aspects have drastically changed: the age pyramid has inverted, and it is estimated that the number of older people will be doubled within the next two decades and will reach about 150 million in 2050, with the developing countries hosting over two thirds of this population.

Last year, the Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020-2030)<sup>2</sup> was enacted by the WHO: its great challenge is promoting the partnership between governments, international bodies, civil and private society, professionals and a broad sample of persons and institutions, for ten years of “concerted, catalyst and collaborative action to improve the lives of older people, their families and the communities where they live” (WHO, 2020).

This Decade of Healthy Ageing was coined by taking advantage of the global agreement on the well-known 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG) and focusing on its goal 3 (to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all persons at all ages).

Healthy ageing is the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age. Functional ability is defined as the health-related attributes that enable people to be and to do what they have reason to value (WHO, 2020).

And all this leads us to stress that one of the basic principles for active ageing is intergenerationality, an aspect we will focus on in this section, but that also has a small history at a European and world level.

In 2005, the Secretary of State for Social Security of Spain created the so-called Intergenerational Network<sup>3</sup> to provide information and training on this topic which, back then, was still in the early stage.

Nevertheless, in 2009, an attempt was made to obtain more information on the status of intergenerational solidarity in all European countries, and 92 percent of them asked the government to focus on the importance of such intergenerational contact as the most adequate proposal to promote this active ageing, which was mostly theoretical, with the exception of some very specific actions.

2012 was declared as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. For a society to age in a healthy manner, all its members need to be involved, hence the importance to implement concrete proposals, backed

by a mix of the different age groups and not only focused on the extremes – children and older people –.

To develop and coordinate international programmes, we must have a strong experiential base, keep up-to-date on the demographic, community and socio-cultural movements and have a broad and open vision.

The main goal of an intergenerational programme consists in generating a purposeful exchange between different generations, accompanying it with strategies related to education and human, material and organizational resources. In fact, this exchange is the backbone of any programme and leads to the interaction, partnership and learning between people from different spaces and ages; furthermore, it satisfies the needs of individuals, families, communities and societies.

## 7. Intergenerational educational proposals

Starting from our concept of Intergenerational Programme, in this section we would like to provide some examples that we are implementing to show the benefits of this initiative, both for society in general and specifically for older people, since two clear ranges of employability have been socially established:

- a. Schooling (nursery school, primary school, university...) covers the period from childhood to post-adolescence or adolescence, and the life of people in this age group revolves around it. Despite the incorporation of other extracurricular activities, such as sports, music, information technology or leisure activities, to name just a few, the involvement in formal education occupies the most hours every day.
- b. Work covers this large second stage of life, from youth to the moment of retirement – in recent years, such stage has been extended to include the pre-retirement stage. Working life occupies the most hours too, and we should add to it the specific time needed to cover the distance from home to work, as well as the time spent for continuous or specific training related to the job.

However, when someone gets to retirement, it's the start of a new and wide stage for which we don't even have a name: should we call it post-work stage? Should we call it leisure? We haven't found a word yet to describe the different and possible activities following retirement – 55 years old, 60 years old... - because this is an undefined stage, with several possibilities to spend the hours of the day in a proactive and healthy manner, and this will very much depend on the person and the surrounding environment.

Our emotional wellbeing, our curiosity to learn, the challenges we set and our friendships will somehow stimulate the performance of tasks.

On the other hand, the family, social and community environments are co-responsible for a person's wellbeing, both at the beginning and during this new stage of life. We would like to highlight the role played by close family: abandonment may lead to isolation and loneliness, and making excessive reference to issues which are out of scope, or feeling responsible for them, may lead to physical, or even mental, exhaustion. Neighbours, partners and friends are also important, because you can socialize with them with a certain degree of relaxation and, at the same time, engage in leisure activities to occupy the time you didn't have before. Through its social policies, also community is in charge of offering learning, leisure or entertainment activities, which provide the opportunity to meet new people or make new friends.

In Catalonia there are different spaces which are supplied free of charge or at a nominal cost by the Public Administration: these are meeting points that offer different kinds of activities, even if most of them are targeted at age groups which are more or less homogeneous, and priority is given to recreational activities to spend the time.

Such centres have different names: nursing home for the elderly, civic centre, senior centre, and they are predominantly public.

Some activities stand out: board games (dominoes, cards, draughts, game of the goose...), manual activities (crocheting, painting) and psychomotor activities (gymnastics, swimming, dancing...).

Despite the variety of activities, there are still only a few intergenerational proposals – or none of them, in certain populations – even if it has been clearly demonstrated that they facilitate personal wellbeing, learning exchange, mutual respect and social engagement.

We show below a few good practices that are being carried out, although they have been interrupted for a long time due to Covid-19.

### **7.1 Intergenerational project by the municipality of Barberá del Vallès**

The project takes place in this city of Barcelona metropolitan area, which has about 35.000 inhabitants and where we observe a predominance of the low-medium social class.

This intergenerational project<sup>4</sup> has been in place since 2005, within the framework of the Municipal Programme for older people; it gathers a set of relational activities between older people, children and young people from all the education centres of the city, to encourage the interrelation and exchange between different generations. Some of the practices that are carried out are:

- Activa't+60. These are intergenerational physical activity sessions with third- and fourth-grade students (approximately 8-10 years old), aimed at breaking stereotypes and highlighting the role of cultural transmission which, in the past, was given to older people. A session is organized by the class group at school, whereas the other session is organized by the older people group at their meeting centre. Cooperative play is promoted, and knowledge is fostered by developing activities in small groups or in pairs.
- Intergenerational meetings on new technologies. Starting from a centre of interest selected by the class group, eight-grade students work with older people to exchange information and, at the same time, teach them specific strategies and information technology resources.

### **7.2 Maria Gay Geriatric Centre**

The Maria Gay geriatric centre is a nursing home for people over 65 years old, located in the city of Girona (approximately 105.000 inhabitants). Some people visit the centre during the day, whereas other people reside there. However, these people perform different activities with centres in the same neighborhood, and we will run through a few of them below:

- A child, a godfather. It's an activity performed with the primary school kids from the Col·legi Sagrada Família, particularly those who come from immigrant

families and live only with their core family: a grandfather becomes a godfather, and by doing so the grandfather figure is strengthened, different generations spend time together and exchange experiences and knowledge.

- Faig project. The project is carried out with secondary education students (12-16 years old) from De la Salle School, where the people who visit the geriatric centre only during the day – day hospital and day centre – perform recreational activities one or two days per week, such as playing bingo, acting, singing.
- Intergenerational conversation. One day per week, a conversation takes place between an older person who only visits the centre during the day and a 16-19 years old kid from the Centre de Noves Opportunitats, which belongs to a foundation, involves children who haven't completed compulsory schooling and works with them to promote their social and labour insertion.

### 7.3 Fundació Salut i Envelliment (Health and Ageing Foundation)

This multidisciplinary foundation, belonging to the Universidad Autònoma of Barcelona<sup>5</sup>, was born to satisfy the need for rapprochement between people from different generations and show that the transfer of knowledge always enriches us. As well as performing several activities, the foundation carries out investigations from an intergenerational perspective. The following investigation looks interesting to us:

- *Sharing a flat*. The Universidad Autònoma is located outside the city centre, and even if a university residence is available, a few students prefer to share a house with older people who are alone because they've lost their family – their sons have left the house, their partner has died... – but have space and are willing to share. For a small fee, students live with these persons as if they were their grandfather or grandmother, in a more familiar environment, and immediately establish a relationship.

### 7.4 Banc del Temps (Time bank)

The value of time is one of the elements of change in our current society, both for those people who don't have much time and for those who have a lot of time, and because of this it can be offered as a kind of currency of exchange. Starting from this idea, an interesting proposal was born at the end of the XX century from different departments of the Municipality of Barcelona (Social Services, Education, Work, Disability Services)<sup>6</sup>: the time bank network, open to all those people who are willing to share their time with other persons, starting from services and knowledge. Over the years, this network has been expanding to different neighborhoods and populations of the metropolitan area and, subsequently, the number of involved people has increased, as well as the diversity of the developed projects, which has adapted to the needs and projects of each territory. There are several proposals, such as caregiving of disabled children, caregiving of people in a situation of dependency, caregiving of young people or adults with some disability, co-parenting projects, sharing a house with older people.

We conclude this small compendium of experiences with some final insights on an altruist, free of charge and psycho-social-educational kind of caregiving, which requires some degree of personal and temporal involvement.

## **7.5 Fundación Amigos de las personas mayores (Friends of the elderly foundation)<sup>2</sup>**

It was created in 1987, with the aim of fighting against undesired loneliness among older people and the actual isolation experienced by many of them. The foundation is concerned about showing to society how to acknowledge the great value of older people, which isn't very much acknowledged by our rushed Western society. To this aim, people of different ages share a day per week, either in the morning or afternoon, with an older person who's alone, and they talk or go for a walk. This strengthens their self-esteem and emotional wellbeing, as well as the so much spoken about caregiver's solidarity, social engagement and friendship.

## **7.6 Asociación de familiares y amigos de niños oncológicos (Association of relatives and friends of oncological children)<sup>3</sup>**

Older people who, for one or two days per week, share activities with children undergoing long-term care, or simply keep them company, to offer a respite to their parents. As well as this association, there are other associations which accept this type of voluntary work for sick children at home.

## **7.7 Aprendizaje-Servicio (Learning-Service)<sup>4</sup>**

Kids and adolescents who perform some educational and/or community activities, offering a service to the community. This project has a long history in the Nordic countries, and has been implemented in the last decades in secondary schools, high schools and universities. As explained by J.M.Puig (2009), it's an educational proposal which combines processes of learning and service to the community, starting from a very well structured project where the participants receive training by working on real needs in their environment, with the aim of improving it. Among the diverse range of proposals on offer, you can also find intergenerational exchange experiences, aimed at facilitating mutual knowledge as well as the exchange of knowledge and skills.

## **7.8 Plataforma per la Llengua (Platform for Catalan language)<sup>5</sup>**

It's a non-governmental organization which works to promote Catalan language as a resource for social cohesion. A local offers themselves as volunteer to teach Catalan language and culture to another person who's recently arrived, in order to help their integration. We can find proposals for all ages, and intergenerationality finds also here its reason for being, since older people have this time and this basic knowledge.

2 <https://amigosdelosmayores.org/cat>.

3 <https://afanoc.org>.

4 [www.aprenentatgeservei.cat](http://www.aprenentatgeservei.cat).

5 <https://www.plataforma-llengua.cat/qui-som/>

## 7.9 La Universitat de l'Experiència (The University of Experience)<sup>6</sup>

It's a training proposal in different areas, offered by the University of Barcelona, for people over 55 years old who are willing to enjoy the pleasure of learning. We would like to highlight both the social function of university for those who didn't have the opportunity to go to university and are willing to participate in a training course and, similarly, the possibility for those who studied but would like to acquire new knowledge. The academic curriculum is less heavy, there aren't any exams or too many assignments, but there is an educational exchange between university teachers – of any age – and older people.

We conclude by remembering that in our country there are several cases, although on a one-off basis, of grandparents or older people who visit nursery schools or primary schools to tell stories or tales of their childhood/youth, to help children with some disability with their homeworks or also to facilitate new, more material contributions (creating and maintaining school gardens, manufacturing game elements, painting courtyards...) and, in turn, translate this learning to students.

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6 [http://www.ub.edu/experiencia/index\\_es.php](http://www.ub.edu/experiencia/index_es.php)

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