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MY STORY – THE STORY OF NOW AND THEN

Dr. Stefan COLIBABA

Al.I.Cuza University, Carol I, no.8, Iași, Romania
E-mail: stefan.colibaba@euroed.ro ,

Dr. Lucia Elena PETRESCU

Fundația EuroEd, Florilor 1C, Iași, Romania
E-mail: lucia.petrescu@euroed.ro

Dr. Nicoleta MUNTEANU

Fundația EuroEd, Florilor 1C, Iași, Romania
E-mail: nicoleta.munteanu@euroed.ro

Abstract: *"Because history is larger than history books" this is why MyStory (Creating an ICT-based inter-generational learning environment; Project no. 511641-LLP-1-2010-1-RO-KA3-KA3MP) has been planned to explore and bring out into the light the stories of the past. Their stories matter! The stories of all those who have had history for a daily life. It is through these stories that we hope to bridge the gap between generations. Understanding the other is the first step towards embracing generations which may seem so far away or ahead of times. Seniors and teenagers - two social extremes in the present world, each of them carrying an impressive load of knowledge, values and abilities. Seniors have the memories of a world slowly fading away while teenagers have the pulse of present and vision of future. It is therefore a must that these two ends bound to create a constant interconnection through sharing, input and intake on the part of both sides. Factual information is molded by personal experience and in this particular context, subjectivity brings an added value to already stored historical information.*

The "I" stands not for distortion of reality but for personal experience which needs to be valorized and treasured for its great potential of casting light upon present. Past itself can be updated and present technologies be put in its service. MyStory project empowers seniors and encourages them to share their stories with the young generation through interviews collected by young people. Films, the final form of these interviews, are presented to other beneficiaries on the project website at www.mystories.eu and are accompanied by complementary information on the historical and social background.

This is mainly targeted at teenagers, educational institutions, museums, researchers etc who can use the processed or raw material in their professional activities. On the other hand, seniors are involved in training classes to develop basic ICT skills which allow them to have access to online information and thus add a new alternative to daily activities. Training is being done with the help and support of teenagers and this ensures a bidirectional transfer of knowledge and abilities. Technology in the case of MyStory project is being used to facilitate access to online information but also to equip the user with transversal competences which can be used either on the virtual or the face-to-face medium. Combining past experiences with present innovative technologies is a means of reviving history in a functional way and making it part of the present dynamics.

Keywords: *intergenerational learning, ICT, history, films*

I. THEN,...

...in those times things were different, or so they seemed. It was THEN that history happened and it was THEN that today's elderly were in their youth. For them history is more than the historical

event it itself – it is the way they lived it and the impact it had upon their lives. As a result of this, THEN smoothly found its way into NOW, the present, enclosed in each carrier aging from those times on. But does it have the same value? Does THEN trigger the same responses from those around, NOW? As time passes, the past tends to shade its story and lock it away in the minds of those who lived it, with few chances of ever being restored its former glory. Peeling off the metaphor, THEN stands for the elderly, for their stories, for the society they were part of, for the buildings and the architecture, for the music and the arts, for customs, traditions and ways of the world which are no longer the way we take today. Apparently misplaced and long forgotten in a society craving for the new, the now, the next in line – elderly people feel neglected, unimportant and abandoned. They are on the edge of an era. But are they to pass quietly into the mist of time or is there still a lot more society can offer them?

There is no doubt that the feeling of alienation is a present reality for the elderly, a reality that consumes individuals, lowering self-esteem and, in the end, weakening connection to the world around. Their revival is to come from the younger generations – the helping hand bringing them back into the NOW with the added value of the past experience and knowledge of what was THEN. But bringing them back does not mean teaching them our ways only. Updating their knowledge, their abilities and competences all need to be molded onto the structure they already have, be it in terms of knowledge, approach, availability or interest. Contextualizing a world which for many elderly people does not look or feel familiar, bridging a gap in between generations must start with the seniors and slowly work its way towards the new. Gradual and well balanced input is the key to a meaningful, fruitful collaboration. The specificity of the input can be organized around major areas of interest or common group needs. They can either build on the already existent knowledge and competences or they can place a new start.

In a world in which technology goes hand in hand with daily life supplying the means and often suggesting event the content, computer literacy can come in hand not as a must of functionality but as a socializing tool stirring curiosity and adding novelty. It enhances a more diverse daily routine for the elderly too. MyStory project therefore uses this as a starting point to engage elderly in personal development within the structure of intergenerational learning. The course prepared for the representatives of the elderly focuses on basic IT aspects such as using the computer, browsing through the internet with a special emphasis on the web tools developed within the project, the website and the gallery of stories. Though the idea might at a first glance seem all in place and favoring the elderly there are still many challenges ahead.

People from five countries will participate in this training based on a common training tool and support material. Despite the fact that the same age category is mainly targeted in all the project countries, there is still the element of cultural specificity which might enhance or inhibit certain aspects in the implementation of the training. Therefore, selecting the topics and developing the material also includes developing a work methodology specific to the elderly and taking into account their learning styles and characteristics. Training materials are developed by an IT expert using mostly demonstrations and visual materials to complement and support work on the computer and internet. The project team is presently working on selecting a user friendly environment so that access to the main online materials which are targeted at the elderly be more easily presented and afterwards used. The system the project team is going to launch in the autumn of 2012 is intuitive, based on visual anchors and guides the senior users towards the areas which might interest them within the story gallery in the project website. Added to this area are the socializing tools which will be generally presented to seniors and then, according to their preferences, introduced in more detail in terms of functionality.

Conducting such a training with people presently computer illiterate can, other than the major challenges of ability, technical and language knowledge, provide both beneficiaries and organizers with insight on new ways and means of getting informed; it can establish new dynamics in the daily socializing habits of the elderly and it can also develop new interests and therefore open new opportunities for an active life after retirement.

Nevertheless the IT training experience is developed to contextualize and present the stories of the past in the new light of the present not by adjusting the information but by making them more visible on an international level to age categories starting from seniors up to the teenagers. Making the

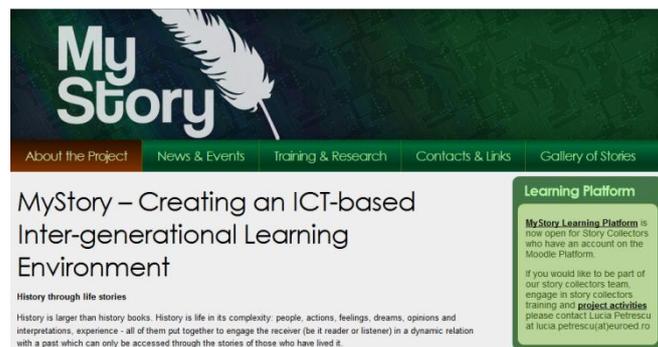
stories visible online, teaching seniors how to go online to watch their and other people's stories will prove to them that their past is still present, that their lives can be traced back and that beyond the individual experience, these stories can act as social enhancements with regards to history, tradition and national specificities. It will prove that their story matters.

II. NOW....

...we are said to live the unfortunate times when the young no longer treasure their past. When they, the future of today, simply share no true interest in what was THEN. But then again, there is this song which says that "just because everything's changing, it doesn't mean it's never been this way before" (2). The one constant thing about change is that it is constant and illustrative of all generations. Each and every generation has added that one extra bit to their interest, slightly retouring the rout of the past. There will always be past glimpses heading on into the future as well as there will always be the interest of what is to come, what is new and what is different. No matter the starting point, be it their past or our past, the future, the youngsters of today, will take it further. Commenting on this as a matter of good or bad is a simplistic way of looking at the gap between generations.

The gap is there not because the elderly were good and the young are not. The gap is there because of the lack of communication. This is most often being interpreted as a result of the young's attitude, who look more into the future than into their grandparents' past. As mentioned above about the need to adapt the IT training to the needs of the elderly, the same is to be applied NOW. Past, history, tradition must be updated so as to attract. We can no longer expect that what was of interest once, to a certain category of people, will be of interest today. The value of the past is not denied. However, its promoters need the wisdom and the time to make this value visible to the young, in another shape, in another form. It is not that they are not interested in the facts. They are not interested in the facts the way they have been shared up until now – history books, long list of data, tests and papers. History, subjective history of the elderly, need to be made dynamic, contextualized and linked to NOW so that they make sense. Teenagers should consider it and use it not for school but for their lives.

It is this that MyStory project envisages and has already started to work on. The stories of the elderly brought to the attention of the young people through dynamic activities of interviewing, filmmaking and online sharing in international teams.



www.mystories.eu

Teenagers volunteering in this project have the active roles of both trainees and trainers. They are trained in the methodology of preparing and taking interviews, camera use, camera angles, film processing and film production. Part of these are indeed related to the elderly – how to communicate with them, how to connect and create the necessary ethos of story sharing. This raises their awareness on socializing channels and creates competences in the area of inter but also intra-personal knowledge. All these are developed on during the initial training of the story collectors – the ones who interview the elderly and collect the stories. The training is developed with the support of a Moodle platform which presents information but also contextualizes it within the forums through the questions

addressed to the trainees. Thus, transfer has the added value of engaging young people in thinking about the facts and turning them into intake.

Teenagers take the role of the trainer during the IT trainings targeted at the elderly. This manner of valorizing the IT knowledge and competences of the young empowers them. We have discussed the aspect of self-esteem in the case of the elderly. The same is relevant for the teenagers. Instead of criticizing them for the lack of interest in the past, the project team tries to provide them with the opportunity to use their knowledge, their IT interest and put it to the use of those who can also benefit from it – the elderly. This shows the young that they are being appreciated, they are valued and that they can be in charge and take control, no longer having to wait until they graduate. They can start helping now. But this has to be done half way between THEN and NOW.

III. AND...

...in conclusion, MyStory project tries to bring THEN and NOW together. It is not a matter of who is right and who is wrong. The past is the root but the present has its way heading towards the future. The only way to maximize the best from both of them is to help them complement each other. This must be done taking into account interests but most of all age characteristics, social and educational background.

The project team does not expect the trainings and the story collecting process to have a standardized impact. We are looking towards several types of impact depending on the specificity of each beneficiary. Still, the major objective of the project is that of supporting intergenerational learning with the use of ICT. Self-esteem, personal and inter-personal development are included in this major objective as key aspects which trigger future self-enhancement of the project beneficiaries.

In other words – MyStory envisages the story of NOW and THEN as a means of looking into the future, of building on transversal and transferable skills and attitudes within society, especially at the age categories of elderly and teenagers.

However, the project deliverables are offered to a wider range of beneficiaries – schools, museums, libraries, researchers, film makers etc. who can use first of all the raw materials – the interviews, the processed materials- the films, but also the training methodology and support materials developed in the project.

In the end, MyStory can be the story of everyone.

References

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