

# A Case study on Intergenerational learning<sup>1</sup>

Project: “Elderly people now online: school in the afternoon project”

## Introduction

The political changes that have taken place since 1989, the transition to a market economy and the restructuring of the Bulgarian economy alongside with the economic crisis have led to a big migration in the Bulgarian society. Many, mostly young people, migrated to bigger cities looking for a job, and almost 10 per cent of the population left the country to live, work or study abroad. This process has led to a breakdown in the communication between generations and the growing need of the elderly people to find alternative ways to be in contact with their children and relatives who are in other parts of the country or abroad. The poor economic status of the elderly has clearly identified the need for some cheaper or free options of staying in touch with their children and grandchildren using new technology and tools like the Internet and Skype in particular.

## Content

Retired elderly people from the village of Patalenitsa, District of Pazardjik, Bulgaria, returned to school to learn how to work with the internet-based communication programme Skype. The “School in the afternoon” project was implemented with the assistance of the Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation (WCIF). The idea came simultaneously both from the retired elderly and from the school board.

The programme *Skype Conversation in Real Time* (children train grandparents to use Skype) was focused on computer literacy and use of Skype. It envisaged a two-week training in the local school computer lab. The programme was developed by a team of pedagogues, including the school director Mr. Nikola Kolev, who guided the training process<sup>2</sup>.

The trainers themselves were schoolchildren and the appointed ‘senior trainers’ were young teenagers from the Computer Studies class, supervised by their ICT teacher Ms Yuliana Peeva.

This was the second ‘wave’ of retired elderly trainees after 10 elderly completed the computer literacy course last year. The Intergenerational Learning initiative has become increasingly popular, thanks to the local Senior Club, where the enrolment takes place.

The second ‘wave’ in 2011 was successfully completed by another 9 seniors, the eldest one being 69 years old. The certificates were given out at a special awarding ceremony.

## Conclusion

The study on seniors' quality of life reveals that it is not only important to ensure active aging, but also to have a dignified participation in modern society.

Loneliness has a psychological dimension which affects people's attitude towards their life and has important influence on their behaviour. Seniors often tend to express negative feelings and the feeling of being lonely, which is a result of the combination of the ageing process and social stereotypes, both influencing their quality of life. Therefore, loneliness is considered a critical indicator in estimating the quality of life and vice versa. The training proved that the communication opportunities ICT offers can help older people to overcome their loneliness; that the elderly have a need to use modern computer technology, and, last but not least, that the school teachers and children can help them achieve this knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> Konstantin Velichkov Medium School, village of Patalenitsa, District of Pazardjik

<sup>2</sup> A video material can be found at: <http://www.vbox7.com/play:fb40624d>

On the whole, this intergenerational learning environment on one hand allowed the school children trainers to share their knowledge and acquired skills, and on the other hand helped the retired elderly trainees to acquire some competences and skills, allowing them to communicate better with the young, as well as building a positive attitude to new technology and innovations, and to continuously improve their knowledge and skills.

This text is part of the book “Education and quality of life of senior citizens”. See the full book in <http://www.edusenior.eu>

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