

STORY – BRIDGE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

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Abstract: *In our contribution we introduce one of the possibilities to improve the relationship between generations and thereby also the relationships at school. We introduce the project Story – Bridge between Generations (seniors, teenagers, university students) done by the students of Drama Education, Faculty of Education, Masaryk University. This project was so successful that it is currently carried out in several places of South-Moravian region. It uses a story to bridge the gap between generations. In the project, we used stories to gain better mutual understanding, to improve the way seniors view teenagers and vice versa. We also point out the relevance of the project for the Drama Education students, future teachers and educators, who by the project completion gained skills and experience that are vital for their future jobs.*

Key words: *healthy school, healthy relationships, senior, teenager, student, project, story.*

Motto:

“Today we live, but by tomorrow today will be a story. The whole world, all human life, is one long story.“

(I.B. Winter, Fairy Tales and Short Stories)

The school nowadays witnesses violence, aggression, bullying, stealing and exceptionally also killing. What causes these pathological phenomena? There are obviously several causes, but one of the most important one is the bad relationships between pupils and teachers and the service staff, relationships among pupils, pupils and school visitors, relationships between generations. What can we do to improve these relationships? Our mutual **communication** should be **better and more open**, in this way we get to know each other better; we learn to be **empathic, open, and less reluctant to help** each other. We achieved all this by the project **Story – Bridge between Generations**. This project originated as a response to “**the misunderstood old and the misunderstanding young**”.

It all started by a discussion within a seminar. Students that are also regular trainee teachers contemplated over stupid remarks the teenagers make at the expense of senior citizens, who take their grandchildren to school every day. The students also noticed the unpleasant answers of the older people, the disrespect the pupils showed for

cleaners, who are usually advanced in age. The students discussed the healthy relationships, the generation problems and not so good interpersonal relationships at school. We decided to create a project, in conclusion of which the two generations would meet. The target groups were senior citizens and elementary school pupils. The connecting link between these two groups was a group of students of Faculty of Education, MU.

We started the project by a survey on the seniors' view of teenagers and teenagers' view of the seniors.

We were surprised at the stock answers. **Most frequent response of the pupils** were the following: *Senior citizen is a retired person who does nothing but gets money; useless person; nervous person who spends his/her time chasing discounts in the supermarket; person who watches stupid soap operas all the time or sits at the doctor complaining about his/her pension; person who likes lecturing others etc.*

Among the most frequent answers of the seniors belong the following: *teenager's behavior is often emotions-driven; mostly a rude individual; oaf; a child with no manners ad time to do something properly; rowdy frightening everybody around; child imitating the worst habits of the adults etc."*

We thought a lot about the answers. The most discussed answer was: senior is a person who likes lecturing others. This response was the last impulse for us to imply the project. Our aim was to arrange meeting of seniors and teenagers so that both sides get to know each other, learn to listen to each other and amend their opinion of other, alter their point of view. We didn't want the meeting to be just a formal one; the aim was real meeting each other and getting to know each other. And as it is typical of drama education to work with a story, a story became the connecting bridge between the generations.

Generally, the **stories don't instruct, they want to be heard**, they happen again, just in different times, but they are eternal. We decided to use that aspect. To use the story for both groups to get to know each other. We started to look for concrete groups that would later meet. We addressed a group of senior citizens in the course "What life gave and took", one of the many courses in the Brno Family Centre. The group of teenagers was the ninth grade of the Elementary school at Horacke Square in Brno. A group of students began to attend the meeting of seniors regularly. The students actively contributed to the work with the seniors, they offered games to enlarge their vocabulary, they brought extracts from technical literature and fiction, the participants began to sing at the meetings, tell stories etc.

Almost fascinating was for me to observe the students working, to witness the story sharing, listening, living, but also the feedback, to witness the stories of people that want to listen to each other, that look for company of people, that came to talk about the contemporary problems, some try to cope with their past, some want to warn others against errors. The stories were very thrilling, often very funny and at the same time very deeply human, therefore we recorded them and later edited. We always brought them for the next meeting and read them to the seniors. And I have to say the seniors were really pleased to hear them. With every story told the students gained something deeper than just life stories of the individuals. They gained tiny stones of mosaic, which – when put together – pictures a **sense of human life**. Some of the students, especially the students of special pedagogy, were so attracted to the work that they continue the

work even now. The stories of general nature were adapted for stage and performed to the teenagers.

The elementary school pupils were supervised by their Czech language teacher, but the students took part as well. They had some of the lessons of Czech language at their disposal. The pupils' task was to write stories that tell about the joys and worries of teenagers, stories that could alter the seniors' view of teenage generation. Even though the pupils worked on the task during their school lessons, we have to say that they took the job to introduce their generation to the senior citizens very seriously.

The meeting itself was preceded by huge preparations. The university students met both sides, their observations were discussed at the drama education classes and the students were very curious if the project reaches its goal: if the generations will get to share their experience, listen to each other and understand.

Four of the seniors' stories were adapted for stage during the classes of Drama Education towards a Theatre Form. The students chose stories that were funny, spoke about problems that appear in every generation – forcing children to eat, bullying, harmonic relationships among siblings, first love. The rest of the stories was rehearsed within the phonetic lesson.

The project was implemented in the Leisure Centre Labyrinth. There were 20 senior citizens present, 20 university students, 30 ninth graders from Horacke Square Elementary School. The theatre hall was full. The individual stories started after the welcome. The tension that paralyzed us in the beginning has disappeared after the first story, because we saw tears glistening in the eyes of the seniors, the ninth graders vigorously clapped their hands. It was clear that their applause was genuine, it came from their heart. The stories adapted for stage alternated narrated stories. In the end the pupils themselves read their stories. The students and senior citizens listened carefully. After the last story had been read it was time for discussion, for questions and answers. We feared this moment a little. Would there be any questions at all? But our worries were unnecessary, there was a wave of questions and which the seniors eagerly replied. Their fear that the subjects of the stories wouldn't be topical enough was gone. All of sudden the teenagers had a different view of the senior citizens sitting in front of them. Their problems were so similar to those the pupils are having now – first love, violence, betrayal of a friend, nasty tricks, questions whether to forgive or not etc. And as one of the girls asked if she could read the story about the dill sauce at home to her parents, because she has the same problems with parents forcing her to eat, it was the best answer to their fears. The seniors had many questions to ask the teenagers as well.

In the final reflection in the end of the project, we came to the conclusion that the most important thing is passing stories further, because we realized that all the stories were eternal, they happen again only in different times. It is vital to meet, listen to each other and try to understand each other. The project was also a great encouragement for the seniors: they still have things to say to the new generation. The teenagers again realized that the things they are going through are similar to the memories of the seniors and these stories can lead them on their knowledge path. And the university students? The project was carried out by 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students of pedagogy and special and social pedagogy. It follows from their reflection that the project not only attracted them but also enriched everybody in their way. The students learned to listen to other people, they learned mutual understanding, empathy, but also literary and theatre skills, they learned

to prepare and implement a project and many more things. Even though the project came to an end, some of the students carry on the idea of Story – Bridge between Generations in their home towns to improve the relationships on their school, in the community and there by also the society; they see it as a way to enrich the life in their community.

I give here two examples of stories that are still very topical nowadays:

Love Letter

As a sixth grader I wasn't interested in boys, therefore I was very surprised to find the following letter in my desk:

Snášelová, I love you, come to church at five, if you don't come I'll smash you face in.
Daufek

Daufek failed several classes; he was the biggest ruffian of the whole school. Everybody was afraid of him and served him. As others learned about my love letter they were very curious what will happen. They all thought I'd better go there otherwise he will really smash my face in. But the fate decided differently. After I came home from school the parents ordered us all to go to the field to work. There was no point in arguing. While I was working I forgot all about Daufek, but after I had gotten to bed I couldn't fall asleep. What will be tomorrow?

In the morning, I was very scared to go to the bus stop, Daufek was already there and other schoolmates too. They were waiting what will happen. The day before they all came to church to see if I turn out and what will Daufek do if I don't. Now they were waiting if Daufek fulfils his promise and smashes my face in. If we made bets back then he would be the 99 % favorite.

When I came to the bus stop I didn't say a word and faced Daufek. He watched me a while and then it all started. We started fighting so hard that we didn't even notice the bus coming. Out of the bus comes Mr. Kadaňka, the bus driver, flying, he tore us apart, he almost carried us into the bus and said: "And I want no teasing inhere." He seated us close to him and off we went. The whole journey was very quiet, because it could be very dangerous to contradict Mr. Kadaňka. All the way to school, I was trying to figure out what to do after we get off the bus. In the end I decided to rush to school. I managed to outrun Daufek, put my schoolbag into the desk and get my things ready. I didn't have the time to check my homework though, because at that moment Daufek came and dragged me out of the desk pulled me to the ground and started beating me. I didn't like that and tried to defend myself as hard as I could. I was all done in when the bell rung and our teacher came into the class. I gathered my strength the whole lesson and with the bell it all began over again. Really nasty fist fight. And it went on and on through all the breaks that day. In the end of the classes I was all black and blue; I had torn sweater, some scratches and my little finger sprained. Daufek had his ear split, scratches and torn shirt.

The cooks used to come with us to the bus so there was no fight. Mr. Kadaňka noticed our slightly torn appearances turned to the cooks and ordered them: "Keep an eye on those two!" The cooks sat so that we could not reach each other. I was glad,

because I was exhausted from the whole day fighting. But I could see that Daufek had enough as well, because he only barked at me something getting out of the bus and walked away. I felt like a winner. I defended myself! I wasn't disgraced. I also felt that my fight encouraged my friends to stand up against Daufek. Even now, when I recall the story I feel enough strength to face any violence.

Dill sauce

Říčmanice is a village near Brno where I spent my childhood. As I was an orphan my old aunt adopted me, I called her grandma and spent happy childhood in her home. We both enjoyed it. We did what we pleased, cooked what we wanted, so we were very satisfied. The only disturbing factor was always the arrival of my aunt Adélka from Brno, she was grandma's daughter. We were always very nervous when she was to come. But we kept saying to each other that she comes in the morning and leaves in the afternoon, so it is only one day we have to endure.

Aunt Adélka was a real boss. Her word was the law and we never tried to change it. So one July Sunday she came to visit us again. The apricots were ripening in the garden, the sun was shining, and it was a beautiful Sunday. As the aunt walked through the garden, she found out that the dill spread over the whole garden, it is everywhere, so we have to use it. Instead of roasted chicken we would have dill sauce for the dinner. It was one of the meals granny and I didn't cook because it stunk! Granny tried to argue that it is Sunday, but the aunt didn't want to hear of that and started cooking. The bells rung the noon and we sat down at the table for the dinner. When she saw our unhappy faces over the plates, she said angrily: "Mom, I can't force *you* to eat it but Eliška won't get up from the table until she finishes it. She is very spoilt with the food and I won't budge this time." And she didn't. Granny ate some of the dill sauce, Adélka was satisfied. They cleaned the table, washed the dishes, but I was still sitting at the dill sauce plate. I thought the aunt would have some mercy, when she sees my tears falling into the plate, but I was wrong. As she was leaving the kitchen she just said: "You will sit here until you eat it all up." The aunt and granny went into the garden to read Vlasta Javořická. I hated the dill sauce so much! The tears didn't help so I started to look around the kitchen. The cupboard caught my eye and there it was: little statue of Virgin Mary. So I started to pray: "Virgin Mary, please, help me with the dill sauce, I really cannot eat it." And all of the sudden it dawned on me! I went to the cupboard, took the statue, and examined it from all sides: it was hollow! The venture started. First the sauce, then the egg and in the end the dumpling to cork up the hole. I put the statue back and closed the cupboard door. I'd just finished my thanks to Virgin Mary for such a wonderful idea as the aunt entered the kitchen. She looked at the plate, smiled, stroked my hair and said to grandma: "See, she ate everything, you have to be stricter with her and Eliška will be a nice and well-behaved girl." I was a bit ashamed, but after all it was Virgin Mary herself who helped me.

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PŘÍBĚH – MOST MEZI GENERACEMI

Souhrn: V příspěvku představujeme jednu z možností, jak zlepšit vztahy mezi generacemi, a tím zlepšit i vztahy ve škole. Představujeme projekt Příběh – most mezi generacemi (seniorů, teenagerů, vysokoškoláků), který připravili a realizovali studenti specializace dramatická výchova PdF MU v Brně a který natolik zaujal, že v současné době jej studenti realizují na několika místech Jihomoravského kraje. V projektu bylo využito příběhů jako mezigeneračního mostu, pomocí nichž jsme se snažili docílit lepšího vzájemného poznání, zlepšit pohled seniorů na teenagery a opačně. Poukazujeme i na význam projektu pro studenty specializace DV, budoucí učitele a vychovatele, kteří během něj získali dovednosti a zkušenosti, které jsou tolik potřebné pro jejich budoucí práci.

Klíčová slova: zdravá škola, zdravé vztahy, senior, teenager, student, projekt, příběh.