

# MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF GENERATIONAL CHANGE IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION: TOWARDS A EUROPEAN MODEL FOR INTERGENERATIONAL TEACHER COLLABORATION

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## Abstract:

In a European-wide effort to improve the professional development of teachers, the 2AgePro project was conducted from November 2008 to October 2010. One of its goals was to develop and test different forms of intergenerational teacher collaboration among junior and senior teachers in primary and secondary schools. Another aim was to utilise the results from these pilots, which were conducted in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, to create a model for intergenerational collaboration that could be used in any national or cultural setting. This article reports on the national pilots and proposes a European model for intergenerational collaboration for teachers.

**Keywords:** Collaborative learning; continuing education; junior teacher; senior teacher; collaboration scripts; supporting system; teacher learning.

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## **1. Challenges for the European Teaching Profession**

One of the most alarming problems facing the teaching profession in Europe today is generational change. Reports indicate that one-third of all teachers in Europe are older than 50 and that many senior teachers contemplate retiring as early as possible (European Commission, 2009). At the same time, a significant number of junior teachers leave the profession a few years after starting (ETUCE, 2008). European schools face a shortage of trained educational staff and the resultant degraded educational quality, so it is necessary to support junior teachers at the early stages of their careers and encourage senior teachers to remain in their profession and continue their professional development.

The number of teachers expected to retire in the next few years is especially high (European Commission, 2008), and these senior teachers take their expertise and knowledge about the schools' micro culture with them. Therefore, the schools in Europe need to increase the rate of data transfer between senior and junior teachers in order to maintain the quality of teaching. The challenge is to motivate senior teachers to share their knowledge and expertise with younger teachers and to remain in the profession as long as possible. Furthermore, a number of junior teachers contemplate leaving the teacher profession soon after they start due to workloads, excessive demands made by the schools and parents, disciplinary problems in the classrooms, and low incomes (Fransson and Gustafsson, 2008). Facing such problems, it would seem likely that these junior teachers should seek guidance from senior colleagues, but they might perceive it to be too overwhelming to contact older and more experienced colleagues (Fantilli

and McDougall, 2009). Therefore, the schools should offer systematic support to help junior teachers overcome this problem. Moreover, a collegiate support system could improve the motivation of both senior and junior teachers and, as a consequence, improve the well-being of the school community. Unfortunately, until now schools have not helped senior and junior teachers solve their problems (2AgePro, 2009).

## **2. Learning through Teacher Collaboration**

In addition to on-the-job training, interactive learning is considered to be an important activity by those who have studied teacher learning (Bakkenes, Vermunt, and Wubbels, 2010; Meirink, Meijer, Verloop and Bergen, 2009; Van Eekelen, Boshuizen and Vermunt, 2005). Despite studies that have promoted the importance of collegiate support and pedagogical discussions in the teaching profession (Little, 2007; Shulman and Shulman, 2004), earlier studies showed that collaboration in schools is rare and difficult to support (Gräsel, Fussangel and Pröbstel, 2006; 2AgePro Consortium, 2009). Those who have studied teacher learning have given little consideration to the fact that teachers have differing levels of expertise, which affects their learning needs. On the one hand, we know that junior teachers are facing a multitude of problems, including classroom management and demanding students, during their early years in the profession (Fransson and Gustafsson, 2008; Sawyer and Rimm-Kaufmann, 2007). Such problems could be reduced if discussions among senior and junior teachers were encouraged and formalised (Colaric and Stapleton, 2004; Little, 2007). At the same time, senior teachers in the later stages of their careers need motivational support

(Lahtinen, 2009). Discussions among senior and junior teachers could provide the senior teachers with new perspectives on their profession and the necessary motivation to continue working (Lahtinen, 2009). Existing support systems frequently focus on junior teachers (Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä, 2008; Hudson and Savran-Gencerb, 2009; Soares and Lock, 2007) and provide little support for senior teachers. (For a notable exception, see Achterberg and Koster, 1999; Achterberg, 2005). Furthermore, the literature shows that successful collaborative projects are determined by clear instructions and good support for the participants (Fischer *et al.*, 2007; Heikkinen *et al.*, 2008).

Successful collaboration is dependent on a certain degree of support (Fischer *et al.*, 2007). Teacher collaboration can be supported by collaboration scripts that instruct and support interaction and behaviour so that all participants may benefit from such an effort (Kollar, Fischer and Hesse, 2006). With the aid of scripting, participants can engage in cognitive (questioning, explaining), meta-cognitive (monitoring, regulating, and formulating arguments and counter-arguments), and social activities (taking turns, listening, playing specific roles). Collaboration scripts distribute and sequence these different cognitive, meta-cognitive, and social activities among the group members and also assign them specific roles. Therefore, a variety of scripts provide different levels of structure. The pilots presented here aimed to investigate the best methods for structuring and supporting intergenerational teacher collaboration.

### 3. The 2AgePro Project

The 2AgePro project ([www.2agepro.eu](http://www.2agepro.eu)) was set up by the authors of this article to meet the challenges due to generational change in the teaching profession in

Europe. Contributing to the accessibility and development of professional development and lifelong learning for teachers, the aim of the project was to motivate senior teachers to remain in the profession by offering them opportunities to develop their professional skills and to share the competence and knowledge they have accumulated with junior teachers. Another aim was to provide junior teachers with pedagogical and social support during the early stages of their careers. The national pilots for designing and testing intergenerational teacher collaboration were implemented from September 2009 to March 2010 (2AgePro Consortium, 2010a).

In the following sections, we present a short overview of each of the pilots and describe the outcomes. In each country, the participating teachers provided feedback on the benefits and challenges of the pilots and the intergenerational collaboration that took place. We summarise this feedback, which was collected through diaries, questionnaires, and interviews.

#### 3.1. The Czech Approach:

##### *Using ICT to Support and Evaluate Teacher Collaboration in Pairs*

The Czech pilot started when the staff at Charles University in Prague cooperated with local schools to launch a 2AgePro pilot project for teachers. The teachers worked in pairs – one senior and one junior teacher – to facilitate intergenerational discussions and the transfer of knowledge. The discussions revolved around issues that the teachers themselves considered important, for example, workload, classroom management, and teacher-parent communication. The participants, who all worked at the same school, were encouraged to use a designated ICT environment for storing digital material, for communication, and for planning and implementing collaborative activities.

This password-protected environment was built by the university staff using the Moodle open source course management system (moodle.org).

### *3.2. The Participants and the Procedure of the Czech Pilot*

A group of senior teachers (>15 years work experience; n = 3; mean age 45) and a group of junior teachers (<5 years work experience, n = 3; mean age 30) from two schools were recruited to participate in the pilot. The teachers worked in intergenerational pairs with support and guidance from the local school management and the university staff. Each pair met weekly to discuss issues that arose in their everyday teaching. They also visited each others' classes and participated in teachers' seminars together. All participants kept a diary about their experiences regarding, for example, the ways they had supported and provided feedback to each other. There was a monthly meeting of all participants and the university staff for further discussion and to collect feedback. The staff also visited the password-protected website regularly to monitor the contributions, such as the weekly reports submitted by the pairs. The staff commented on the contributions and feedback to further encourage the pairs and to help them develop their activities.

### *3.3. The Results of the Czech Pilot*

The feedback collected shows that the pilot enabled the teachers to collaborate and to share ideas and knowledge regarding, for example, teaching materials and the use of new ICT techniques in teaching. The results also show that the Moodle system worked well and that it facilitated, among other things, communication and feedback processes and, consequently, the evaluation of the intergenerational teacher collaboration that took place in the pilot. From the headmasters' point of view, the

pilot was a success since they felt that it had encouraged collaboration and the dissemination of knowledge and skills among junior and senior teachers at their schools (Cernochova and Prokysek, 2010). The feedback collected from the headmasters also shows that they were planning to launch similar projects at their schools in the near future.

### *3.4. The Dutch Approach: Training Sessions for the Teachers*

The Dutch pilot had a coaching foundation, and it was situated within the University of Utrecht's nestor-coaching programme for senior teachers, a successful programme that this institution has been running for several years (Achterberg and Koster, 1999; Achterberg, 2005). The pilot was developed by university staff in a network with regional school directors and school boards. Building on this, they formed initial networks to discuss and determine the format and content for the pilot and the teachers' participation in this intergenerational teacher collaboration programme. The university staff was responsible for recruiting the teachers, working with the school boards and the schools.

### *3.5. The Participants and the Procedure of the Dutch Pilot*

The participants were senior (>15 years work experience; n = 4; mean age 57), intermediate (5-15 years work experience; n = 2; mean age 35), and junior teachers (<5 years work experience, n = 6; mean age 26). The participants worked in group sessions and in pairs. The university staff instructed the participating teachers about how to improve personal coaching skills and how to develop the ability to reflect on their own teaching. The teachers were also given tasks to complete, and the results of these tasks were discussed at the regular meetings. Some of the tasks were keeping a diary, preparing a special

approach for a difficult classroom situation, setting up an observation log, and researching and applying a piece of theory. Each pair decided on the topic on which to focus, for example, classroom management, cooperation with parents, teaching pupils with special needs, or using ICT in teaching.

### 3.6. *The Results of the Dutch Pilot*

The results show that the teachers appreciated being able to decide on a focal point. Both junior and senior teachers felt that participating in the pilot was a good learning experience and that it enhanced their professional development. Working together enabled the participants to make use of each other's expertise, and it helped them develop their teaching skills. The results further show that the participating teachers were able and willing to make the time to participate in the pilot. The outcomes from the Dutch pilot confirm that there are many benefits from intergenerational meetings where teaching is discussed and where ideas are exchanged among junior and senior teachers.

### 3.7. *The Finnish Approach:*

#### *Senior Teachers as Group Leaders*

The Finnish pilot started when the staff at the University of Oulu contacted two local education authorities in two cities near the university. This enabled the recruitment of teachers with the help of local education departments. In each city, one of the participating senior teachers acted as group leader and a mentor to the other participating teachers, and three groups were formed. The coordinating teachers were also responsible for organising the meetings and the group activities. The foundation for this kind of peer-group mentoring was developed in an earlier Finnish project, the Verme-project, which focused on the needs of newly qualified teachers (Heikkinen *et al.*, 2010). The challenge for the 2AgePro

groups was to expand on the ideas from the Verme-project to include senior teachers.

### 3.8. *The Participants and the Procedure of the Finnish Pilot*

Two groups engaged in meeting intergenerational challenges. One group consisted of junior teachers (<5 years of experience, n = 6; mean age 31) and a peer group mentor, who was an experienced teacher. The other group consisted of six junior teachers (<5 years of experience; n = 6; mean age 29) and 6 senior teachers (>15 years work experience; n = 6; mean age 52). In this group, one participant was selected to act as a group mentor. The participants came from different basic education backgrounds and upper secondary education schools in the Oulu and Raahe areas. The base for this collaboration pilot was the teachers' discussions regarding everyday challenges in their profession and their sharing of ideas with each other. The groups had monthly meetings that lasted approximately two hours, and there were a total of 3-5 meetings. Initially, the university staff led discussions with local education departments and teachers. Then the mentoring groups were organised. The university staff took on the overall responsibility for running the groups. One teacher per group was appointed as group coordinator with the responsibility to run and supervise the group meetings. The university staff visited each group at least once, and they conducted the evaluation at the end of the pilot.

### 3.9. *The Results of the Finnish Pilot*

The results show that the group leader (the mentor) was important to group participants who said the leader contributed to the cohesion of the group and helped develop the discussions and mentoring processes that took place. The results also show that most of the discussions in the teacher groups

focused on professional issues, such as events that occurred in classrooms or communication with parents. Although the pilot was not intended to replace ordinary support systems offered by the schools, it did offer some support for the participants regarding everyday professional challenges. According to the participating teachers, it was important to be able to participate in open discussion with peers and not focus on one particular school. This provided the teachers with a forum in which they could discuss questions and problems in a comfortable and non-stressful atmosphere. The results further show that the junior teachers appreciated hearing the ideas and opinions of more experienced teachers concerning the same problems and challenges the younger teachers faced. The results also show that both junior and senior teachers learned from the process. The local school districts in Oulu and Raahel have agreed to continue these types of activities in the future.

### 3.10. *The German Approach: Flexibly Scripting Intergenerational Collaboration*

In this pilot, a script was designed in order to help junior and senior teachers to optimise their collaboration (see also Mekota, Fischer, Kahlert and Mäkitalo-Siegl, 2010). Collaboration scripts can provide well-defined scaffolds for interaction. A collaboration script is a set of instructions that aims to guide and support learners to interact during collaborative learning so that everyone benefits from the collaboration (Kollar *et al.*, 2006). The collaboration script was printed on six cards and contained the following general outline: 1) select the topic; 2) share your experiences (good and bad) with respect to the topic with your colleagues; 3) select 3-5 thought-provoking questions and discuss them with your colleagues; 4) choose a task (for

example, plan a lesson/homework assignment/group work, do a role play) from the card and accomplish it together with your colleagues; and 5) utilise the suggested Internet links to find more information about the topic. A single topic was presented on a card, for example, pedagogies, parent-teacher-meetings, feedback, group work, homework, and demanding students. These topics were difficulties encountered by junior and senior teachers according to the literature (Colaric *et al.*, 2004; Dauber and Vollstädt, 2004).

### 3.11. *The Participants and the Procedure of the German Pilot*

Twelve teachers (6 pairs) from three primary and secondary school levels participated in this study. They included senior (>15 years work experience; n = 6; mean age 58), intermediate (5-15 years work experience; n = 2; mean age 33), and junior teachers (<5 years work experience; n = 4; mean age 34), who worked together in pairs – where a senior teacher was paired with either an intermediate or a junior teacher – for three months.

The university staff contacted a number of schools in the region to recruit teachers to participate in the project. Headmasters introduced the pilot to the teachers, and teachers who were interested in participating were asked to contact the university staff. The university staff helped the pairs set goals and explained how to work with the collaboration cards and monitored this collaboration. The pairs were asked to meet 3-5 times for two-hour meetings during the three-month-period. After each meeting, the teachers were required to fill out a log diary form. Contact between the teachers and the university staff was handled mainly by phone and email. The pairs of teachers worked independently. The university staff also evaluated the pilot by

gathering feedback from teachers (log diaries, questionnaires, and interviews) on how teachers utilised the collaboration cards and the benefits and challenges of using them as a support tool for collaboration.

### *3.12. The Results of the German Pilot*

Most teacher pairs met and used collaboration cards frequently. The qualitative content analysis reveals that the teachers worked on several tasks, such as sharing materials, observing a demanding student, doing a role-play, and holding a parent-teacher conference about an especially demanding class. Both junior and senior teachers indicated that the collaboration script supported their intergenerational collaboration and that they mutually benefited from it. Junior teachers got support and advice from the senior teachers, and senior teachers got the opportunity to pass on their knowledge. Teachers also reacted positively to the interaction with their colleagues, stating that it led to establishing social networks. The collaboration script designed by the university staff was tested by teachers in both primary and secondary schools, and one of the most interesting outcomes was that the German pilot showed that the tool could be used by those in any type of school.

### *3.13. The Swedish Approach:*

#### *Subject-Centred Peer Mentor Groups*

The Swedish pilot was run by the Department of Education at Umeå University. The university staff contacted authorities in the municipality of Umeå and the headmasters at local schools to recruit participants. This pilot used subject-focused groups made up of eight participating teachers who all taught the same subject.

### *3.14. The Participants and the Procedure of the Swedish Pilot*

The participants were senior (>15 years work experience; n = 5; mean age 49) and junior (<5 years work experience; n = 3; mean age 33) physical education teachers who worked in the primary and lower-secondary schools. The group met a total of eight times to share experiences and to discuss problems in their everyday work as teachers. The teachers were also given tasks by the university staff, and they worked on these tasks between the meetings. These tasks involved problems and challenges in everyday teaching situations, and they are related to the concepts of senior/junior teacher collaborations and the concept of mentoring. The participating teachers had access to a password-protected project Web site where they could download material and discuss current issues, including each week's task, with each other. The university staff attended all meetings in order to provide guidance and to support the group, but their role was more prominent during the first meetings. The participating teachers decided among themselves what work-related issues and problems should be discussed at each meeting.

### *3.15. The Results of the Swedish Pilot*

The results showed that teachers gained support from colleagues and that they were thankful for the opportunities to discuss, give feedback, and reflect upon their own work. The pilot succeeded in creating and testing intergenerational teacher collaboration for exchanging ideas among junior and senior teachers from different schools in the local municipality. The feedback from the school management (primarily the headmasters at each participating school) also confirmed that outcomes of the pilot were positive. The administrators appreciated the low (non-

existent) costs and the fact that the schedule for the Swedish pilot was distributed well in advance (before the summer of 2009, which was 3 months in advance). This early distribution of the schedule enabled the headmasters and the teachers to synchronize the lesson plans and school schedules to free up the dates for the pilot meetings. In summary, and from the perspective of the headmasters, the pilot enabled low-cost professional development for teachers and helped boost the quality of teaching at the schools concerned. From the perspective of the teachers – both junior and senior – it was a great opportunity to share ideas and to discuss issues related to mentoring and coaching. Junior teachers learnt from the seniors and vice versa. When asked to compare the pilot with other similar initiatives for teachers in the region, both junior and senior teachers replied that they had seldom (if ever) participated in something similar to the Swedish pilot.

#### 4. The Joint European Model for Intergenerational Teacher Collaboration

The analyses of the common elements

in the collaboration scripts used in the national pilots in the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, and Sweden led to a foundation for a design of a joint European model for intergenerational teacher collaboration (see more details at 2AgePro Consortium, 2010b). This model includes five components – goals, types of activities, sequencing, role distributions, and media representations (see Kollar *et al.*, 2006) –, which are explained in more detail below. The joint European model was designed to be used at different educational levels (from pre- to secondary education and special education) in any country or region where there is an interest in intergenerational collaboration regarding the teaching profession (see Table 1-4).

Table 1 shows that each participant has specific goals – building on their development needs – and that these goals are a focus of the intergenerational teacher collaboration.

Table 2 shows the sequencing of events and the different parts that need attention in that process, for example during the recruitment phase.

Participants	Goals
Junior teachers	Professional development and successful integration into the school community. Need support to remain in their profession.
Senior teachers	Professional development and systematic method to pass on experience. Need support to stay in their profession as long as possible.
School community	Improvement of teacher collaboration in the schools. Integration of junior teachers and professional development of all teachers.

*Table 1. Component #1 of the joint European model: Goals for the teachers and the school community (local school management and regional school authorities).*

Stage	Type of content	Approximate length
1. Recruitment process	Initiated and implemented by university staff via headmaster, personal contacts, and/or educational departments	3 months (whole recruitment process)
2. Introductory meeting	Held by university staff for all interested teachers and headmasters	2 hours (presentation and discussion)
3. Training sessions	Coaching is done by the university staff and grouping by teachers and/or university staff	3 meetings (each 3 hours)
4. Teacher collaboration	Teachers meet alone or with a coach from the university.	6 meetings (each 2 hours)
5. Final meeting	Facilitated by university staff for teachers (their headmasters may be present)	4 hours (presentation and discussion)

Table 2. Component #2 of the joint European model: The sequencing of the different stages.

The activities in the joint European model (Table 3) vary, depending on the actors and the roles they play. The teachers, for example, start their collaboration by selecting topics and setting goals. They can discuss the topic, select tasks to be performed, and take part in the evaluation of the project activities. The university staff present and organise the project, hand out materials, train teachers, and act as coaches at the collaboration meetings. The regional school authorities can

support teacher collaboration by offering working hours and school facilities for the meetings, and by reimbursing teachers who act as coaches if they think doing so is appropriate. The local school management could inform teachers about the project and provide the necessary facilities and equipment. The headmasters at the schools that are involved may also participate at one or more of the stages in the project's lifecycle, for example, the introductory meeting or the final meeting.

Participants	Roles	Activities	Content
Teachers	Peer-peer and/or mentee-mentor	Collaboration	1. Select topic 2. Set a goal 3. Discuss 4. Select a task 5. Perform a task, for example, lesson planning 6. Evaluate
University staff	Organiser, presenter, observer, trainer, coach, evaluator	Monitoring and coaching the teachers' collaboration	Present and organise the project, hand out materials, train teachers, and act as coaches during the collaboration
Regional school authority	Approver, sponsor	Overall approval of the project	Let teachers use working hours and school facilities for the meetings, reimbursing teachers who act as coaches
Local school management	Mediator between the university staff, regional school authority, and teachers in their schools; supporter	Support the collaboration	Provide facilities and equipment, inform teachers about the project; headmasters may participate

Table 3. Components #3 and #4 in the joint European model: The roles and activities.

Table 4 shows that media type and content are connected to different forms of support. The collaboration cards (including instructions for collaboration), for example, are developed beforehand, probably by the university staff, and offered to the teachers for use at meetings or between meetings. Their purpose is to

inspire and challenge users and stimulate reasoning and discussions concerning topics and questions deemed to be important to the participants. The cards can be used in pairs, in groups with a group leader, and/or in groups with an external coach.

Type	Content
Material	Presentations, lecture materials, leaflets, collaboration cards, and other texts
ICT	Email and the Internet (to facilitate communication among teachers and between teachers and university staff, information searching, and information sharing, for example, via a password-protected Web site)
Meetings	Introductory meeting, training and coaching sessions, and final meeting
Telephone	Questions to the university staff, teacher collaboration

*Table 4. Component #5 in the joint European model: The media representations.*

The aims of the 2AgePro project were to work with national collaboration pilots and to develop a joint European model of intergenerational collaboration, which has been presented above. Hopefully, the model can be of help to those who wish to conduct development projects to motivate senior teachers to remain in the profession and to provide support to junior teachers to in the beginning of their careers. More information about the challenge of generational change in the teaching profession and the outcomes the pilots and the model, including examples of collaboration cards, are given on the 2AgePro project website ([www.2agepro.eu](http://www.2agepro.eu)).

## 5. Conclusion

The dilemma put forward at the beginning of this article was the one facing a high proportion of senior teachers who contemplate retirement, while at the same time many junior teachers, who are at the early stages of their careers, question whether or not they should remain in the teaching profession. The joint model acts as a point of departure for any group or organization that wishes to implement similar intergenerational collaborative activities

for junior and senior teachers. The aim of such a model is to encourage, motivate, and support junior and senior teachers and to develop and enhance educational quality, and, in a broader perspective, to meet the challenges of generational change in the teaching profession. The idea behind the model is that it can, and should, be adjusted to fit different national, regional, and local contexts.

The pilots that are described in this article demonstrate that local adjustments are possible and that certain aspects worked well in local settings. The Czech pilot, for example, showed that working in pairs (junior and senior teachers) may be an effective way to organise intergenerational teacher collaboration. This pilot also showed that a password-protected ICT area where the participants could store material and communicate, plan, and implement collaborative activities, may benefit the participants. The Dutch pilot utilized the concept of coaching for both junior and senior teachers, and it showed the importance of collaborating with local school authorities. The Finnish pilot, which also demonstrated the importance of collaborating with local authorities, for example to recruit participants, showed that senior teachers may act as designated group leaders. The German pilot

demonstrated how flexible collaboration scripts may be designed and used to facilitate the meetings and collaborations between junior and senior teachers. Finally, the Swedish pilot demonstrated the benefits of having a subject-focused group made up of junior and senior teachers who taught the same subject. In summary, these pilots demonstrate that it is possible to adjust to local circumstances based on what is deemed useful and important in a respective setting. Consequently, one of the most important strengths of the joint European model presented in this article is its flexibility. It takes into consideration different learning needs, motivations, and interests of teachers, which, in turn, means that teachers, headmasters, teacher educators, and other stakeholders, in different cultural and educational contexts can use the model to facilitate intergenerational teacher collaboration.

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