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Empowerment in the Lifelong Learning Perspective.
Example from the "ICT Guides" Project[*]

Empowerment w kontekście uczenia sie przez całe życie.
Przykład z projektu "ICT Guides"

Streszczenie. W pierwszej części artykułu poddano analizie koncepcję całożyciowego uczenia oraz scharakteryzowano kategorię *empowerment*, co tworzy teoretyczny kontekst rozważań. Pojęcie *empowerment* (upełnomocnienie) jest tu definiowane jako złożona kompetencja, którą rozwinąć można w wielowymiarowym procesie społecznego uczenia się, wiąże się ona z uzyskaniem kontroli nad własnym życiem poprzez zdobycie wiedzy i umiejętności, które umożliwiają poprawę sytuacji życiowej. Upełnomocnienie można analizować z perspektywy indywidualnej i zbiorowej. Indywidualny aspekt upełnomocnienia zwraca uwagę na dostęp ludzi do takich typów wiedzy, które umożliwią rozwój wykraczający poza rolę pracownika czy konsumenta; odnosi się do sposobu, w jaki ludzie postrzegają siebie i myślą o sobie, oraz świadomości w zakresie wiedzy eksperckiej i umiejętności, które rzeczywiście posiadają. Upełnomocnienie zbiorowe z kolei, odnosi się do przełamywania barier, do zmiany pozycji społecznej, umożliwia bycie „aktorem społecznym" w pełni zdolnym do wnoszenia wkładu indywidualnego i kolektywnego w zmianę świata wokół siebie.

W drugiej *części* artykułu zostały przedstawione cele i założenia projektu „ICT-Guides", który jest egzemplifikacją nowego sposobu określania zadań edukacyjnych i organizacji pracy dydaktycznej w zakresie rozwijania wiedzy i umiejętności, przyczyniających się do upełnomocnienia jednostek zarówno w obszarze indywidualnym, jak i zbiorowym. Projekt jest realizowany m.in. w miastach Goeteborg, Berlin, Madryt, Sheffield, w których od lat notuje się wysoki odsetek osób (głównie imi-

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grantów) zagrożonych ubóstwem i wykluczeniem społecznym. Celem projektu jest zbadanie możliwości zastosowania technologii teleinformatycznych (ICT) jako narzędzia łączącego młodych imigrantów, zagrożonych przedwczesnym porzuceniem edukacji szkolnej, z pokoleniem starszym, w celu ograniczenia wśród imigrantów zjawiska porzucania szkoły i wykluczania społecznego. Wstępne wyniki badań potwierdzają założenie, że projekt „ICT- -Guides" to przykład „dobrej praktyki" pełniącej funkcje upełnomacniające.

Słowa kluczowe: całożyciowe uczenie się, *empowerment*, ICT

Summary. The paradigmatic change in adult education that took place in the 1990s, involving "a shift from teaching towards learning", resulted not only in deeper reflection of andragogists on the epistemological issues concerning the specific character and conditions of adult learning, but also in the redefinition of andragogic notions including the title category of empowerment. Another consequence of this change is a different attitude towards the educational activity of adults, an example of which is the international educational project "ICT-Guides" described in the article. The first part of the article analyzes the concept of lifelong learning and characterizes empowerment, which provides the theoretical context for further deliberations. Then, the assumptions of the "ICT-Guides" project are presented. The project shows a new way of determining educational tasks and organizing educational work in the context of lifelong learning. The "ICT-Guides" project is also an example of a good practice serving empowering functions.

Key words: lifelong learning, ICT, empowerment

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to *empowerment* and to show – using the example of an educational project – how *empowerment* can be implemented in educational practice. This study focuses in particular on elderly people and youth and their opportunities for participation in ICT-based activities, exploring variables associated with their empowerment. The approach taken in this paper with regard to the review of the literature is to look not only at academic books, articles in journals or research papers, but also practice-based materials from reports, websites or information articles in relevant educational or development publications.

At present time, the idea of lifelong learning is high on the *European Agenda for Adult Learning* (2011) for the years 2015–2020. The document outlines priorities such as improved access and quality assurance, economic competition, and skills in literacy and numeracy, including digital skills. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and developments in digi-

tal and online learning in relation to such groups as early school leavers and older adults occupy key roles within the EU policy in the Agenda.

Over the past couple of decades, the research work on learning and education has outlined the importance of technology that "can make lifelong learning a reality" (Regan, 1998) by offering learning opportunities anytime and anyplace. As information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been rapidly integrated into people's everyday lives, some inequalities have occurred among ICT users, with the main barriers to ICT adoption being anxiety or deficiency of motivation and interest rather than ICT skills (Lee, Chien, & Hewitt, 2011).

Seniors' usage of new technologies consistently lags behind that of the younger generation (Czaja et al., 2006). They remain at the opposite end of the digital divide from youth and their pervasive adaptation of mobile devices and social networking applications (Czaja et al., 2006). The rapid development of the Internet and web-based programs is mainly targeting the youth, and so the potential of seniors is underestimated or overlooked in a number of different ways.

The paper is structured into the following four main themes: (1) lifelong learning as a theoretical context for the topic presented in the paper, (2) youth-adult partnerships towards empowerment in community practice, (3) ICT and seniors – approaches to teaching and learning, and (4) presentation of the "ICT Guides" project as an example of a good practice building empowerment of young people and adults through ICT. We claim that partnerships with youth enrich the lifelong learning of adults, as youth and adults share planning and decision-making responsibilities to achieve certain goals. In conclusion, we show how to use ICT in order to overcome polarization between youth and adults, addressing our message to schools, education authorities and organizations implementing lifelong learning principles.

Lifelong Learning – **Theoretical Context for the Discussion**

The concept of lifelong learning is one of the leading ideas within the public discourse about adult education. The term lifelong learning is difficult to define; it is unclear and has several meanings (Alheit, 2009; Malewski, 2009, 2013), however, the concept is present in everyday life and andragogy as an academic discipline. In this article, following the proposal of Peter Alheit, we treat lifelong learning as "an educational strategy that can undergo scientific

analysis but is not a scientific term offering analytical precision or theoretical content" (Alheit, 2015, p. 27).

Starting in the 1990s, there was a shift in the area of adult education from considering adult education in the context of formal education towards using this term more often in connection with informal learning, which is largely due to the increasingly popular theories and socio-cultural concepts (Malewski, 2009, 2013, 2016). Their promoters assumed that learning is a social process taking place within interactions characteristic of all social practices adults participate in. This allows to view adult education from a broad perspective, drawing attention to less known (and less frequently explored) leaning environments, such as processes occurring "during informal, situational learning that results from the participation procedures within the culture of a given community" (Gołębniak, Zamorska, 2012, p. 11).

Considering the above, this article assumes that learning is always located in a cultural environment and that it depends on the extent to which its resources are used; leaning is a social practice settled within the everyday life, which takes place through social interactions. Referring to the possible levels of study and reflection on adult learning, as distinguished by Duccio Demetrio, we locate our deliberations on the level Demetrio calls deliberations about the education of adults, where the analysis covers different situations in which adults "learn not only from the surrounding world but also from themselves" (Demetrio, 2006, p. 116).

The adoption of this definition of learning requires us to reformulate our thinking about the adult learning process, for which – as Peter Alheit points out – the central point is no longer the effectiveness of teaching, an effective teaching strategy or the consistency of educational programs, but the situation and conditions on the part of the student (Alheit, 2009, p. 15). It means a shift towards non-formal and informal learning, and so the most important task of adult education is to stimulate subjective learning and to create conditions for adults to assume responsibility for their own learning. Responsibility for one's own learning and the ability to generate motivation for self-education are the key determinants of adult learning (Illeris, 2009).

From this perspective, the term empowerment is an example of the revision and extension of the andragogic vocabulary, which was secondary (absent) in the modernist concept of lifelong learning education. Raising and characterizing the notion of empowerment is also important for reasons indicated by Peter Mayo (Mayo, 2015). In his opinion, the global educational discourse is now dominated by a reduced understanding of learning,

which means that the issues addressed are those of employability and learning as a path to employment and improving one's status. Thus, we are losing sight of the category of empowerment, which draws attention to people's access to other types of knowledge, enabling development that goes beyond the role of an employee or a consumer. Empowerment makes it possible to become "a social actor" who can fully contribute individually and collectively to changing the surrounding world (Mayo, 2015). The perspective focusing on lifelong learning processes of "individual social actors" clearly highlights the significance of informal, non-formal, non-institutionalized and self-governed learning (Alheit, 2002). This perspective is already visible in andragogic studies, such as *Learning Communities* (Kurantowicz, 2007) and *Educational Worlds of Andragogy Practitioners* (Nizińska, 2008), which more and more frequently appear within the academic discourse and research projects concerning adult education.

Empowerment in Community Practice Through Youth–Adult Partnerships

Youth–adult partnerships involving engagement in a joint work are widely recognized as developmental processes and community practices. Cooperation on a daily basis is seen as a partnership towards active participation in creating projects or voluntary work through selecting activities, settings objectives and mentoring peers. What is characteristic of youth–adult partnerships is the fact that they build both emotional and instrumental relationships between youth and adults. Advantages of such partnerships for youth include positive youth development, health and empowerment (Camino, 2000; Serido et al., 2011; Li and Jullian, 2012), a greater sense of community attachment and belonging, confidence, and civic empowerment (Zeldin et al, 2015).

Pluralistic participation recognizes the strengths of both youth and adults working together, in order to create and sustain both healthy youth and community development. In this type of participation, the relationship between youth and adults is reciprocal. That is, youth and adults share planning and decision-making responsibilities to achieve goals. As partners, youth offer creativity, a fresh perspective, readiness to try out new ideas, and a youth-centered understanding of themselves and their peers, whereas adults can contribute their experience, expertise on planning, decision-making and evaluation practices, and knowledge of the community history,

lessons learned and best practices (Libby et al., 2005). Mitra (2004) observed that high school students included in the school-wide policy setting built stronger relationships with the faculty and displayed a greater sense of school belonging compared to students who participated in peer-to-peer programming. Thus, youth–adult partnership research is beginning to suggest that pluralistic participation may be ideal for both youth empowerment and community development (Wang et al, 2010).

In the context of youth and adults from marginalized groups and those that feel lack of capacity for work and life, the research work is also focusing on the empowerment idea. Starting at the beginning of the 1990s, the empowerment approach began to play an essential role within development programs oriented towards poverty alleviation, welfare, and participation in the community. Empowerment can be defined as a process of increasing personal, interpersonal or political power (Gutierrez, 1990, p. 149) that seeks to increase the personal, interpersonal and political power of oppressed and marginalized populations for individual and collective transformation (Lee, 2001). It can be also understood as an ability that is developed within a multidimensional social learning process and means gaining control over one's own life by acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to improve one's life situation (Payne, 1997), with power and powerlessness, oppression and liberation as the key variables of the term (Hage and Loresen, 2005). Regarding empowerment, older adults are marginalized as economically unproductive and psychophysically dependent, and it is assumed that empowerment applies to various disciplines such as social welfare, social work or education (Green, 1993). Empowerment can be discussed from individual and collective perspectives, where the individual aspect of empowerment relates to the way people perceive and think about themselves, and also to the capacities, expert knowledge, and skills that they actually possess (Staples, 1990). Various studies emphasize four dimensions of empowerment: a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995; Hur, 2006). Collective empowerment refers to the group, meaning overcoming barriers and gaining capacities to change social position as a group. It assumes collective action towards helping one another, learning together and developing skills to engage in collective actions (Boehm and Staples, 2004; Fetterson, 2002). In consequence, the group resolve social problems and collectively achieve social change, being empowered through collective, collaborative action (Hur, 2006; 1999; Staples, 1990).

The empowerment discourse varies in terms of approaches to how empowerment programs need to be distributed. Noticeable is the shift from

"top-down" approaches towards the focus on the "bottom-up" growth and change (Shah, 2016). An example might be the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Commission that enables people at all stages of their lives to take part in stimulating learning experiences. Trying to implement the idea, the European Commission moves toward expanding partnerships with a range of civil society organizations, implementing the "bottom-up" approach. The trend towards expanding partnerships with NGOs in supporting the state is visible worldwide in activities where the state provision has been unable to meet the demand, and the non-state educational provision has grown to fill the gap (Lewin and Sayed, 2005; Rose, 2007, 2009).

Another term that is mentioned with regard to empowerment and lifelong learning is "popular education", an innovative way of promoting lifelong learning and community empowerment in a developing country context (Naidoo, 2001). "Popular education" is a form of "adult education that encourages learners to examine their lives critically and take action to change social conditions. It is 'popular' in the sense of being 'of the people'" (Kerka, 1997, p. 2). The aim is to support the capacity of individuals to change their socio-economic situation through problem solving in the group and participation, reflection, and critical analysis of social problems (Bates, 1996). It is based on Paulo Freire's assumption that people might become aware of oppression when meeting and collaborating with others, at the same time trying to construct actions to liberate themselves (Naidoo, 2001). The elements distinguished within popular learning are (1) teaching, learning and sharing leadership by everyone, (2) starting with learners' experiences and concerns, (3) active participation, (4) creation of new knowledge, (5) connecting the local with the global, and (6) collective action for change (Arnold et al., 1985).

Empowerment has also been considered in relation to ICT skills, in the context of marginalized individuals, such as the elderly who are often excluded from ICT-based social environments (Letch and Carroll, 2008; Klecun, 2008). It needs to be noted that ICT activities might depend on the skills and positive attitudes towards such ICT tools as tablets or smartphones. There is also a correlation between overcoming weaknesses and enhancing empowerment through different activities using ICT tools, which leads to the development of skills in using ICT tools. Strong research evidence suggests promotion of the elderly empowerment through particular skills, such as ICT skills (Selwyn, 2004). The motivation to engage in ICT-based activities includes information collecting (Cambell, 2008), social relations (Thayer and Ray, 2006), and online learning and shopping (White and

Weatherall, 2000). Hur (2016) claims that the empowerment of older adults may be promoted through ICT-based activities, which is particularly visible in the improvement of social relations, information gathering, shopping, learning, and also promoting business activities.

ICT and Seniors – Approaches to Teaching and Learning

In order to use ICT effectively it is necessary to understand different ways of learning. Richard Mayer (Mayer, 2013) claims that the successful use of ICT is based on the experts' opinion and it depends on practice. In this context, the process of learning should be based on professional research. We do not take into account opinions or popularity.

Over the last 100 years, psychologists and teachers invented many different theories about the ways of learning. These theories can be divided into three categories, within which, significantly, ICT plays different roles (Mayer, 2013, p. 286–291).

- Response reinforcement – this approach evolved at the beginning of the 20th century. It is based on the assumption that learning involves the strengthening and the weakening of associations. If we reward the response, we make it stronger. If we punish the response, we make it weaker. In this case, ICT can be used to provoke specific responses, and to reward or punish learners.
- Gaining knowledge – it was developed at the beginning of the 20th century. It assumes that learning means adding new information to the student's memory. The role of ICT is to provide access to information.
- Knowledge construction, which became popular in the late decades of the 20th century. It is based on the assumption that a person can learn when they use their experiences connected with knowledge, thus creating their own "construction". The student tries to understand it and the teacher's role is to be a guide who supports the student in this process. In this case, ICT use means not only obtaining information but also working with the student.

As Mayer claims, all three approaches had a vital influence on the ICT development. Knowledge construction seems especially significant, because in this approach the student is treated like a real participant of the learning process.

Table 1. Three metaphors of learning.

Metaphor	Student	Teacher	ICT role
Response reinforcement	Passively accepts rewards or punishments	Actively gives punishments or rewards	Provokes responses and provides feedback
Gaining knowledge	Passively accepts information	The source of information	Provides access to information
Knowledge construction	Actively searches for meanings and constructs knowledge	The cognitive guide	Supports the cognitive processing of information during learning

Source: R. E. Mayer, 2013, *Learning with technology*. In Dumont, H., Instance, D. Benavides, F. (eds.). *The nature of learning. Using Research to Inspire Practice*. Warsaw, p. 287.

ICT is about teaching with the use of technology. There are two approaches to ICT: (1) concentrated on technology, and (2) concentrated on the student.

Table 2. Differences between the approach concentrated on technology to the approach concentrated on the student.

Approach	Main aspect	The role of technology	Aim
Concentrated on technology	What is technology capable of?	Teaching assurance	Use of technology in teaching
Concentrated on the student	How does the human mind work?	Teaching support	Make technology settled in teaching

Source: R. E. Mayer, 2013, *Learning with technology*. In Dumont, H., Instance, D. Benavides, F. (eds.). *The nature of learning. Using Research to Inspire Practice*. Warsaw, p. 283.

The first approach, which was very popular in the 20th century, insisted on the use of technology in education by providing access to it. Unfortunately, this approach, despite the development of ICT, did not cause any significant educational changes. In Mayer's opinion, the problem was that students' opinions were not taken into consideration. He claims that this approach requires that students and teachers adapt to ICT, whereas ICT

should be adapted to students and teachers. The second of the approaches presented is about how people learn with technology and how technology can help them with teaching. According to it, technology should be adapted to people, both to youngsters and elderly people. Within this approach, concentrated on the student, it is crucial to get to know the differences between how we teach younger and older people.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an emerging and important tool for any age group of users, and it is used for developing social relations, shopping or as a source of information. Age-related conditions influence functional abilities and social relations, and so it is reasoned that ICT facilitates seniors' access to health services, allows them to stay in contact with their family and friends, and supports their involvement in leisure activities and completion of routine activities (Boot et al., 2013).

The research work on barriers to using ICT faced by seniors emphasizes seniors' limitations and the age-related decline of cognitive skills. Other research shows, however, that the skill deficit is not the main barrier to ICT adoption, but rather anxiety or deficiency of motivation and interest (Lee, Chien, & Hewitt, 2011). Mitzner et al. (2010) claim that the difference between young computer users and seniors is the seniors' tendency to underestimate knowledge and skills, which results in low confidence. This indicates the need to pay attention to developing in seniors such competencies as a sense of agency and responsibility.

Community-Based Project "ICT Guides" as an Example of a Good Practice in Empowering Youth and Adults Learning Through ICT

An example of a good practice in supporting lifelong learning as a means of empowering youth and adults through ICT is a community-based intervention program "ICT-Guides", funded with the support of the European Commission and the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The idea for the project was developed in the years 2016–2017 in four European cities: Sheffield, Berlin, Madrid and Gothenburg. It involved cooperation of schools, daycare centers for the elderly, and city councils departments responsible for social inclusion. In each of the cities, a series of ICT courses for seniors, planned and conducted by young immigrant pupils, was organized. The project was developed with the aim to foster positive outcomes, such as prevention of early school leaving, among young immigrants, and to

increase understanding between marginalized groups of young immigrants and older adults (65+). Before the courses started, it had been determined that seniors felt socially excluded because of their lack of ICT skills necessary to obtain information from the Internet, to use social media or to contact family members through telecommunications application software.

When developing the project idea, one of the assumptions made was based on the research work of Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Zumbo (2011) which showed that relationships with non-parental adults in the community were significantly and positively associated with life satisfaction among adolescents. Relationships of this kind also showed resilience and reduced problem behaviors in adolescents (Allen, Kuperminc, Philiber & Herre, 1994), positively influenced youth development, (Camino, 2000; Serido et al., 2011; Li and Jullian, 2012), and fostered greater degree of community attachment and belonging, confidence, and civic empowerment (Zeldin et al, 2015). The project idea is unique thanks to the "bottom-up" perspective of empowerment programs supporting growth and change (Shah, 2016) within both youth and senior groups. In the "ICT Guides" project, the concept of bottom-up empowerment of youth is based on the idea of young immigrant pupils (12–16 years of age) planning ICT training courses on how to use ICT devices such as tablets or smart phones for older citizens, with only minor support from established teachers and coaches. In the project, immigrant youth facilitated ICT courses for seniors. Young people were encouraged to develop a plan identifying key problems encountered by seniors when using ICT. The primary objective of the intervention was to initiate the process of community-based learning that was then up to the community to sustain and lead. In the "ICT Guides" project, empowerment was also considered in relation to skills and in the context of seniors who are often excluded from ICT-based social environments (Letch and Carroll, 2008; Klecun, 2008).

Summary

The paper describes one of the important categories of the lifelong learning discourse – empowerment, and presents the "ICT Guides" project as an example of a good practice in introducing empowerment.

In particular, our findings suggest that it is crucial to start taking preventative measures against social exclusion of marginalized groups using ICT tools, and that the main barriers to ICT adaptation are not ICT skills but anxiety and deficiency of motivation and interest. This draws our attention

to the category of empowerment, which, as we have shown above, enables full participation of those individuals that, because of various social or biographical processes, have been marginalized or excluded. The overview of research work documents shows such significant issues of lifelong education as (1) encouragement to gain new knowledge, (2) the fight against marginalization, (3) learning foreign languages, and (4) the fight against poverty. It also needs to be noted that lifelong learning is the most crucial foundation for the development of society, being a remedy for the social activity

Empowerment has been considered in the paper in relation to ICT skills and in the context of marginalized individuals, such as the elderly being often excluded from ICT-based social environments. Experiences from the "ICT Guides" project prove the need for promoting adults' empowerment through ICT-based activities, which visibly influences the improvement of social relations, information gathering, and learning activities. Adults' learning processes might be enriched through collaboration partnerships with youth, where youth and adults share planning and decision-making responsibilities to achieve goals and share experience and expertise on planning and evaluation. This project has shown that cooperation between young people and adults contributes to building the sense of agency and lowering the sense of social exclusion due to lack of skills, thus empowering both groups.

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