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XXIAdults

Adaptation of the adult educational system to the XXI Century

The Good Practices Template

Co-funded by the European Union

Name of the Good Practice
Back to the Future – Seniors as Digital Storyteller Gurus

Summary of the Practice Brief, easy-to-understand summary: What is the practice, for whom, and for what purpose?
Back to the Future – Seniors as Digital Storyteller Gurus is an intergenerational learning project that empowers older adults to become digital content creators by sharing their life stories through digital storytelling tools and social media. The initiative enhances digital literacy, personal expression, and social inclusion. The project brings together older adults and young facilitators who work collaboratively to develop short videos, visual stories, and digital narratives based on the seniors' life experiences. It is designed to bridge the generational gap, reduce digital exclusion, and promote creativity and emotional well-being among older learners. Implemented across several European countries, including Portugal (through RUTIS), the project uses a structured yet flexible methodology that can be easily adapted to local contexts such as community centres, universities for seniors, and adult education settings.

Description of the Practice – min. 2000 characters **1) Context / Background** What was the initial need or problem? Who was the target group? Was it part of a larger programme or project?
In an increasingly digital society, many older adults face exclusion due to a lack of digital skills, confidence, or access to appropriate learning opportunities. While much of the focus in digital education is placed on younger generations, older adults are often left behind, leading to a digital divide that affects not only their access to services but also their social participation and self-expression. The *Back to the Future – Seniors as Digital Storyteller Gurus* project emerged to respond to this gap by creating an inclusive and empowering learning environment where older adults could gain confidence in using digital tools, while also engaging in meaningful, creative work. The initiative focuses on **digital storytelling**—the use of photos, videos, voice, and text to craft and share personal narratives.

The target group of the practice is:

- **Older adults**, generally aged 60 and above, who have limited experience with digital technologies and wish to improve their digital competence in a relevant, engaging way;
- **Young volunteers or facilitators**, who assist seniors in learning and using the tools, creating a mutual exchange of skills and perspectives.

The project is part of an international Erasmus+ partnership, involving institutions from several European countries, including **RUTIS** in Portugal. It builds on a collaborative learning model where the sharing of personal stories becomes a tool for both **digital empowerment** and **intergenerational connection**.

The context is both social and educational: seniors learn how to use smartphones, tablets, and software to record, edit and publish their stories, while also strengthening their self-esteem, creativity, and sense of belonging in the digital world.

The project is typically implemented in **non-formal educational settings**, such as senior universities, local associations, or community centres, where learning is guided by interest, experience, and participation rather than formal curriculum or assessment.

2) Objectives

What were the goals of the practice?
What did it aim to improve or change?

The *Back to the Future – Seniors as Digital Storyteller Gurus* project was designed to combine digital inclusion with personal and cultural empowerment. Its objectives are both technological and humanistic, focusing on digital competence, creativity, and intergenerational learning.

Main objectives:

- **To enhance digital literacy among older adults** through engaging and purposeful use of technology;
- **To enable seniors to share their life stories** using digital tools, fostering self-expression and legacy-building;
- **To promote intergenerational learning**, by connecting seniors with young volunteers or facilitators in a cooperative learning process;
- **To reduce digital and social isolation**, helping older people feel more connected and valued in today's digital world;
- **To encourage active ageing**, through participation in meaningful and creative activities;

- **To develop accessible digital storytelling methodologies**, that can be replicated in various adult education and community contexts.

Rather than focusing on abstract skills, the project aims to use digital storytelling as a bridge to connection, self-worth, and creativity. Participants learn not just to use digital devices, but to use them for something that truly matters to them: telling their story.

3) Implementation / Methodology

How was the practice carried out step by step?
What activities or methods were used?
How long did it take?

The *Back to the Future* project follows a practical, creative, and intergenerational approach. It is structured around hands-on learning experiences that support older adults in becoming digital storytellers, with the guidance of younger facilitators or educators.

Step-by-step Implementation:

1. **Recruitment of Participants**
   - Older adults are invited to join through senior universities (like those in the RUTIS network), local associations, or community centres.
   - Young facilitators (often volunteers or students) are recruited to support the sessions.
2. **Training of Facilitators**
   - Facilitators receive basic training on digital storytelling techniques, intergenerational learning dynamics, and how to support adult learners.
3. **Workshops and Story Circles**
   - Participants meet in small groups or pairs to explore their life stories and discuss meaningful events or memories.
   - Story circles are used to share ideas, foster trust, and build emotional engagement before working digitally.
4. **Digital Literacy Development**
   - Seniors are guided through the use of smartphones, tablets, and free multimedia apps (e.g., for voice recording, photo editing, video montage).
   - Activities are adapted to each person's skill level and pace, focusing on confidence building.
5. **Story Creation**
   - Participants create short digital stories combining images, text, voice, and music.
   - Stories may include photo slideshows with narration, mini-documentaries, or simple voice-over videos.
6. **Sharing and Exhibition**
   - Completed stories are shared within the group and, if participants agree, presented at community events or published on project websites or social media.

- This final step gives participants visibility and recognition for their work.

7. **Feedback and Reflection**
   - Sessions conclude with collective reflection from both seniors and facilitators, discussing challenges, learning outcomes, and personal growth.

Duration and Format

- The project is typically implemented in cycles of 8–12 weeks, with 1–2 sessions per week (1.5 to 2 hours each).
- Sessions are held in informal, friendly environments such as senior universities, libraries, or local cultural spaces.

4) Results / Outcomes

What were the concrete results?
How did the practice impact the participants?

The *Back to the Future* project has produced significant and multi-layered outcomes, both at the individual and community levels. Its impact goes beyond digital skill acquisition, encompassing emotional, social, and intergenerational transformation.

1. Improved Digital Competence

- Seniors learned to use digital devices (smartphones, tablets) and basic apps for media creation.
- Participants developed confidence in navigating technology for personal use—photos, voice notes, browsing, and video sharing.

2. Empowerment through Self-Expression

- Older adults created personal digital stories that gave voice to their experiences, memories, and identities.
- Many participants reported increased self-esteem and pride in producing and sharing their own narratives.

3. Reduced Social and Digital Isolation

- Participants became more engaged with family, friends, and community—often using the same digital tools learned in the project.
- The sense of belonging and accomplishment reduced feelings of loneliness or disconnection from modern life.

4. Strengthened Intergenerational Bonds

- The collaboration between younger facilitators and seniors built mutual respect, patience, and shared learning.
- Both generations gained new perspectives, breaking down age-related stereotypes.

- Mistakes were part of the process, and experimentation was encouraged.

3. Intergenerational Collaboration

- Younger facilitators supported seniors in a respectful, empowering way, creating learning relationships based on empathy and patience.
- This two-way learning benefited both generations and fostered social bonds.

4. Flexible, Non-Formal Environment

- Learning took place in friendly and accessible community spaces (e.g. senior universities, local centres), with no exams or formal assessments.
- Sessions were adapted to the participants' pace and comfort level.

5. Cultural Expression and Visibility

- Publishing the digital stories online or presenting them publicly gave participants a sense of pride and social relevance.
- It challenged stereotypes about ageing and showcased older adults as active digital citizens.

6. European Collaboration and Resources

- Being part of an Erasmus+ project allowed access to pedagogical resources, training materials, and peer support across countries.
- The collaboration enabled testing and refining the methodology in multiple contexts.

7) Transferability / Recommendations

Can the practice be used elsewhere?
What conditions are needed for successful implementation?

The *Back to the Future* project is highly transferable to other adult education and community learning contexts, especially those working with older adults or intergenerational groups. Its simple, low-cost methodology and meaningful content make it adaptable to various settings across Europe and beyond.

Why it is transferable:

- It uses **widely available technologies** (smartphones, free apps) and does not require specialised infrastructure.
- The **pedagogical model is flexible**, centred on storytelling, which can be adapted to local languages, cultures, and interests.
- The focus on **peer learning and informal education** makes it suitable for diverse environments, from senior universities to libraries or local associations.

Conditions for successful implementation:

1. **Access to facilitators** – Ideally young volunteers or students who are patient, digitally literate, and willing to learn alongside the seniors.
2. **Safe and supportive spaces** – Community venues where participants feel welcome and confident to explore digital tools.
3. **Storytelling-based approach** – A commitment to treating learners not as "trainees" but as narrators and knowledge holders.
4. **Basic digital equipment** – Smartphones or tablets (personal or shared), headphones, and possibly speakers or projectors for showcasing stories.
5. **Time and flexibility** – Sessions should move at the learners' pace, respecting their autonomy and personal rhythm.

Recommendations:

- Start small with a **pilot group** to test tools and methods before scaling up.
- Integrate **reflection and sharing moments** to strengthen social bonds.
- If possible, **connect the stories to family or community events**, making the learning more visible and relevant.

The project's success demonstrates that digital learning for older adults can be joyful, expressive, and socially impactful—when the process respects their identity and life experience.

8) Tips / Implementation Advice – optional

Checklists, lessons, or advice for those wishing to implement the practice.

Based on the implementation of *Back to the Future* and lessons shared across partner organisations, here are practical tips for those wishing to adopt or adapt the practice:

Before Starting

- **Select facilitators with strong interpersonal skills**, not just technical knowledge—patience and empathy are essential.
- **Map local resources**: check for available equipment (phones, tablets), accessible venues, and potential partners (senior centres, municipalities).
- **Prepare simple tutorial materials** with visuals and step-by-step instructions, in large fonts.

Working with Seniors

- **Respect their pace**—repetition and reassurance are key to building confidence.
- **Avoid jargon**—use plain language and relatable examples in all instructions.
- **Celebrate small wins**—completing a recording or saving a file is a big step for many learners.

On the Technical Side

- Use **free and intuitive apps**, such as Google Photos (for slideshows), Canva (for visuals), or apps for voice recording and simple video editing.
- Always do a **tech-check before each session**, ensuring devices are charged and Wi-Fi is available.
- Consider creating **demo stories** in advance to show what's possible.

Sustainability

- Encourage participants to **continue creating stories after the project**, perhaps through informal groups or storytelling clubs.
- Train local staff or volunteers to **replicate the method**, ensuring knowledge is retained beyond the initial implementation.
- Use public events to **showcase the stories**—this raises awareness and validates the learners' efforts.

9) Lessons Learned - optional

Biggest surprises, obstacles or key takeaways during implementation.

The *Back to the Future* project revealed several key insights during its implementation across different countries and communities. These lessons helped refine the methodology and underline important considerations for working with older adults in digital contexts.

1. Personal meaning drives motivation

Older adults are more likely to engage and persist in digital learning when the task is personally meaningful—telling their story creates emotional investment and pride, far more than generic tech training.

2. Intergenerational dynamics require guidance

While collaboration between young and older participants is enriching, it's important to prepare both sides for respectful and supportive interaction. Age stereotypes and digital confidence gaps can be reduced with patience and structured reflection.

3. Small technical issues can create big obstacles

Forgotten passwords, poor Wi-Fi, or touchscreen frustration can quickly discourage learners. Having simple technical solutions, printed guides, and hands-on support on hand is essential to maintain engagement.

4. Participants need time and space to reflect

Storytelling isn't just technical—it's emotional. Some seniors may revisit difficult memories or hesitate to share publicly. Giving space for private reflection, discussion, and emotional safety is crucial.

5. Not all participants want to go "online"

Some learners prefer to keep their stories private or within family circles. Respecting this choice is important and demonstrates that digital inclusion does not mean public exposure unless freely chosen.

These lessons affirm that adult education, especially for older populations, must balance technology with empathy, structure with flexibility, and learning with dignity.

10) Photos illustrating the described practice

Please attach at least 3 photos related to the described good practice

PRACTICE PROFILE – CLASSIFICATION CHECKLIST

Please tick all categories that apply to your described practice. You may choose more than one.

TYPE OF THE PRACTICE	
☒	Learning by doing
☒	Intergenerational learning
☒	Community-based learning
☐	Digital / blended learning
☒	Peer learning
☒	Mentoring / coaching

☒	Cultural / creative approaches
☒	Collaborative / partner-based
☐	Other (specify):
TARGET GROUP	
☐	Adults with low qualifications
☐	NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)
☐	Migrants / Refugees
☒	Older adults
☐	Women
☐	People with disabilities
☐	Other vulnerable groups
☒	General adult population
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	
☐	Formal
☒	Non-formal
☒	Informal
SKILLS / COMPETENCES DEVELOPED	
☒	Literacy (reading, writing, comprehension)
☐	Numeracy (maths, logical thinking)
☒	Digital skills
☐	STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics)
☒	Personal, social and learning to learn
☒	Civic competences
☐	Entrepreneurship
☒	Cultural awareness and expression
☐	Language skills
☐	Job-related / vocational skills
☐	Green competences
☐	Other (specify):
POTENTIAL USERS	
☒	Teachers / Educators
☐	Administrative staff
☐	School / Centre management
☒	Policy makers / Public administration
☒	NGOs / Community organizations
☐	Other (specify):

Glossary of Categories (Explanation of Checklist Items)

Type of the Practice

- Learning by doing – learning through hands-on activities, practice-based methods such as workshops or real tasks.
- Intergenerational learning – activities involving participants from different age groups learning from each other.
- Community-based learning – learning that takes place within the local community, often through real-life engagement.
- Digital / blended learning – education using digital tools (online), or a mix of online and face-to-face methods.
- Peer learning – learning among participants of similar status or experience, supporting each other.
- Mentoring / coaching – one-to-one support from a more experienced person to help learning and personal growth.
- Cultural / creative approaches – use of arts, music, theatre, storytelling etc. as learning tools.
- Collaborative / partner-based – practices involving cooperation between organisations or groups.
- Other (specify) – any other method not listed above.

Target Group

- Adults with low qualifications – adults who have low levels of formal education or basic skills.
- NEETs – people Not in Education, Employment, or Training (often young adults).
- Migrants / Refugees – individuals who moved from another country, often facing integration challenges.
- Older adults – Adults aged 65+
- Women – practices specifically addressing women's needs.
- People with disabilities – individuals with physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental health disabilities.
- Other vulnerable groups – groups at risk of exclusion (e.g. long-term unemployed, homeless).
- General adult population – average adults not in specific categories.

Learning Environment

- Formal – learning within official education systems, certified courses (e.g. schools, universities).
- Non-formal – organised learning outside the formal system (e.g. workshops, community training).
- Informal – learning through everyday experiences, without a structured course (e.g. volunteering, family).

Skills / Competences Developed

- Literacy – reading, writing, and understanding texts (including functional texts like forms).
- Numeracy – using mathematics and logical reasoning.
- Digital skills – using digital tools e.g. CV creation, online tools, online platforms.
- STEM – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- Personal, social and learning to learn – self-awareness, motivation, teamwork, lifelong learning skills.
- Civic competences – active citizenship, understanding of democracy and social responsibilities.
- Entrepreneurship – creativity, innovation, project management, risk-taking.
- Cultural awareness and expression – appreciation and creation of cultural content (e.g. arts, music).
- Language skills – ability to communicate in one or more foreign languages.
- Job-related / vocational skills – practical skills useful in specific jobs or professions.
- Green competences – knowledge and behaviours supporting sustainability and environmental care.
- Other – any other skills developed (please specify).

Potential users – groups who could benefit from applying, adapting, or being inspired by this practice in their work context.

Note: These categories follow EU frameworks such as the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018), the Action Plan on Basic Skills (2025) and the Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2025 – Glossary

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