Integrating the Generations

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For most of Christmas Eve and Christmas day, four generations of my family ate, told stories, argued, laughed, played games, or watched movies at my brother's home where my Mom has a small apartment. My Mom, the matriarch, is approaching 85, and the youngest great grandchild just turned 5. Through her three grandchildren and then, in turn, her five great grandchildren, my mother keeps her inner child alive. She has shared her love of family, humor, sewing, reading, and jigsaw puzzles with all of them, and she so enjoys listening to them talk about their passions and their lives.

In the Boston neighborhood where I lived through college, it was common for multi generations to live in the same house or apartment building. As we have become a more mobile society, such a living arrangement has become less common. Families living in the same city are rare. Add to this phenomenon, the increasing number of divorces and the opportunity for the generations to share their stories and lives become fewer and fewer. Children miss having frequent interaction with grandparents, and grandparents miss out on the daily adventures of their grandchildren. All of us miss out on the benefit of learning from each other. The Foster Grandparent Program of the District of Columbia Senior Citizens Counseling and Delivery Service began in 1972. To find a list for your state, visit the web site of Senior Corps, of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Many communities are developing programs that bring the generations together. The more creative of them are helping to alleviate the issues of latch key kids and lonely elders. Children and teens are finding surrogate grandparents and mentors, while the elders in the programs are becoming more engaged in the life of the community and finding that they still have valuable roles to play.

Again, occupational therapy (OT) practitioners recognize the value of intergenerational activities, and you will find references specific to OT amidst the citations below. Several organizations exist just to promote and support intergenerational programs:

Generations United (GU)

The Grandparenting Organization

Intergenerational Innovations

Into the 21st Century: Intergenerational Programming
Select Citations


Abstract: Children have a natural curiosity regarding whom they are and where they come from. Sifting through old photos, sharing family stories, and filling in family trees can link parents and grandparents to children like nothing else. In addition, as more people trace their family roots today with the aid of the Internet and new software, useful research skills can be picked up in the process. The writer provides advice on getting children interested in genealogy.


ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to examine attitudes of college students and senior citizens towards each other by incorporating successful components of a senior citizens’ music program into the "Adopt-A-Choir" program established in a university music education/therapy program. Data collection was accomplished using the Age Group Evaluation and Description Inventory (AGED), providing insight into attitudes classified in 4 domains/evaluative scales: Goodness, Positiveness, Vitality, and Maturity. Subjects were members of the Senior Singers (n = 15, 15) and music education/therapy students enrolled in the Woman's Glee Club at a local university (n = 15, 12). Results of the pre/post AGED survey were compared using the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs test, with means increasing significantly for the four domains (p < .02). Gains were greatest for the seniors, suggesting a stronger move from negative to positive attitudes. Though the gains were smaller with the university students, all changes were positive, with one exception: in the "vitality" domain, university student attitude ratings decreased on the continuum for "timid-assertive." Informal predictors further suggested the partnership between seniors and university students was enjoyed by both sets of participants.


ABSTRACT: An intergenerational program bringing together older adults with dementia and preschool children in one-on-one interactions is described. Montessori activities, which have strong ties to physical and occupational therapy, as well as to theories of developmental and cognitive psychology, are used as the context for these interactions. Our experience indicates that older adults with dementia can still serve as effective mentors and teachers to children in an appropriately structured setting.


ABSTRACT: As the percentage of elders to the overall U.S. population continues to grow, there will be an increased need for occupational therapy services. Some, but not all, occupational therapy professional curricula currently emphasize coursework in gerontology. This paper presents a means of supplementing academic coursework with intergenerational experiences. These experiences involve contact with both the well and frail elderly using graduated levels of activity. The purposes of intergenerational experiences are: (1) to provide students with positive contact with an aged person who they are, for the most part, segregated from, yet with whom they are expected to function effectively as future clinicians; (2) to help eliminate stereotypes and to enable them to perceive the elder population as a heterogeneous group; and (3) to instill clinical skill of critical thinking as applied to treatment planning.


ABSTRACT: PURPOSE: This article describes the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a program that introduced children into a nursing home. METHOD: A qualitative descriptive design was employed to measure the responses of children to the program. The sample consisted of 61 children, including preschoolers and adolescents. Data were collected from children who participated in the activities (n = 33), and from children who had not participated (n = 28).

Content analysis was used to analyze the data. RESULTS: There were no differences in perceptions of preschoolers who participated or did not participate in the nursing home visitation program. In contrast, adolescents who had not participated in the activities with elders described physical infirmities and negative experiences with elders, and talked about smells and boredom. However, adolescent participants in the program demonstrated positive perceptions and descriptions of elders. A favorite activity for all ages was hearing the residents' stories and memories. Adolescent participants reported that their experiences and activities in the program had altered their opinions and beliefs, and they expressed the intent to include elders in their lives in the future. CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS: Because adolescent children exposed to these visits expressed positive perceptions of elders it is prudent to plan larger scale studies with these populations, and also to evaluate the effects of the visits on nursing home residents.


ABSTRACT: Analyses of observational, survey, interview, and journal data gathered on a diverse group of pregnant and parenting adolescents indicate that the relationships between adolescent girls and their mothers are influential forces in promoting (or in preventing) teenage childbearing and in shaping adolescent mothers' attitudes and behaviors toward their children. Although in some ways overlapping with a range of other social, economic, and psychological factors, mother-daughter relationships also play a distinct and prominent role in patterns of teenage childbearing and child rearing.

**ABSTRACT:** This pilot research project focuses on a description of the role and identifying activities of grandparenting within a lower income New York City Hispanic community. This study has three components: a comparison of Hispanic and white grandparents, an exploration of models derived from the gerontological and growing grandparenthood literature, and a discussion of the therapeutic potential of grandparenting activities. The research design involved two interviews with 10 subjects at a senior center. Research instruments included: Kornhaber and Woodward's Life Story Approach and Grandparenting Questionnaire, a genogram activity and the McNevins Test, "Describing the Older Person." Results of the comparison between the two groups of grandparents suggest that interesting differences exist. Testing the theoretical models opens up new ways of looking at the Hispanic grandparent...


**ABSTRACT:** Describes the explosion in *intergenerational* programs linking school children and *seniors* in Ontario and in other Canadian provinces. Discusses program benefits, form and content of programs, service-reciprocity programs, age segregation in today’s society, and social context for the increase in programs. United Generations Ontario is dedicated to promoting programs that bring young and old together.


Abstract: The authors argue for intergenerational programs based on two contemporary orientations to teaching and learning: constructivist and sociocultural. They provide examples of school-based intra- and inter-generational activities that challenge conventional notions about the capabilities of young children and speak to the learning benefits of collaborative decision-making. The authors offer several specific guidelines for intergenerational developers and researchers that focus on assessing the learning potential of intergenerational initiatives. They also recommend case studies and participatory research approaches as particularly useful for gaining insight into intergenerational learning processes.


**ABSTRACT:** The results of a mail survey to child and adult day care administrators in Virginia indicate a preference for certain categories of intergenerational activities and an overall willingness to provide intergenerational programs for their clients. Included in the paper is a discussion of the developmental and functional benefits, the child/elder co-exploration value of frequently offered intergenerational activities and suggestions for future directions of intergenerational programs targeting young children elders.

ABSTRACT: Various modifications to current theories of human development are suggested along with potential applications to intergenerational programming. It is argued that a new intergenerational theory of human development should be developed that accounts for an increase in life span, contemporary societal values, and the role of environmental variables in shaping behavior. Such an intergenerational theoretical approach should be used to examine the potential developmental outcomes for specific age-group dyads engaged in programmatic activities. Implications of such an approach for research and program evaluation are also suggested.


ABSTRACT: This paper reports on a project that sought to demonstrate the value of intergenerational activities for long-term care residents who participated in weekly music activities with young children and in similar activities without the children. Videotaping and a natural observer gathered data on residents' positive behaviors (for example, laughing). Analysis found two statistically significant differences between those times when children were and were not present: touching was more frequent when children were present while head nodding was less frequent. Caregivers observed residents' agitation levels later in the day on which the activities took place. Analysis showed that participation in activities with small children lowered residents' agitation levels.


ABSTRACT: The current study addressed the sharing of traditions, beliefs, and customs (i.e., culture) between grandparents and grandchildren. Two hundred and forty-six adult grandchildren were surveyed on both existing and newly created measures of grandparenting. Results indicated that extent of shared activities, attitudes toward grandparents, and perceptions of cultural sharing were significantly related. Additionally, it was found that minority and female participants were more likely to engage in intergenerational culture sharing and reported more positive statements about this sharing in response to open-ended questions. Findings highlight the importance of cultural sharing to perceptions of grandchild-grandparent relationships.