



Mind: Intergenerational Learning : What Is Old Is New Again

Body: Learning and The Adult Brain

Spirit: Wisdom of the Ages

Intergenerational Learning : What Is Old Is New Again



Imagine young and old coming together to experience, learn, and share. Innovative new programming, or a dusting off of the way it used to be?

With our aging population, we see emerging examples of intergenerational programs being offered on many continents. Although it would be over-stating it to suggest this has 'taken-off,' some of the experiences and results are both encouraging and positive.

Some Examples:

We turn first to Seattle where a long-term care facility shares space with a pre-school and child care center¹. Monday through Friday, babies and toddlers come to Providence Mount St. Vincent to mingle and connect with the residents where the average age is 92!

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Canada boasts a variety of examples where select secondary school students on a regular basis, attend local retirement or long-term care centres for a full school day that includes elements of their academic curriculum, social engagement with the residents, and service to the facility.²

The United Kingdom showcased an imaginative program initiated by a group of seniors.³ This program brought together teens and older persons to explore mutual stereotypes and fears, and to ultimately discover appreciation and common ground. They worked together to compose, produce and perform a song about ageism, while also creating digital photography that illustrated their experience, and posted these on the website they created jointly. Japan, long known for its history of three-generational families and sharing, is also experiencing the compartmentalization of modern day living.

As a result, Japan is now turning to more structured initiatives ranging from reminiscence programs, to more formal inter-generational mentoring and skill sharing.⁴

Does it work?

Research suggests that simply throwing multi-generations together in one space will not

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necessarily promote greater understanding or attitudinal change. More structured initiatives, with skilled introductory work to prepare participants will generate the greatest potential gains. Effective programs can indeed lead to an exploration and release of destructive stereotypes, creating deeper empathy and understanding, and true appreciation for the gifts the generations have to offer.

To quote one student from the program at Retirement Concepts, *"When I first came here I thought they would be mean and chase us off the lawn with a stick. But they are not and they love us, and can teach really good life lessons."*

Tyler summed it up well when he brought a cake to his new 'grandpa' on Father's Day and told him,

"Thanks for being my buddy."

Rhonda Latreille, MBA, CPCA, Founder and CEO, Age-Friendly Business®

References:

¹ Mount's Intergenerational Learning Center (ILC), Providence Mount St. Vincent

² An Intergenerational Experience at Retirement Concepts, Williams Lake, BC, Seniors Village

³ Free to be your age - Intergenerational project, Wester Hailes Education Centre.

⁴ Inter-generational Programs, Support for Children, Youth and Elders in Japan, Matthew Kaplan, Atsuko Usano, Ichiro Tsuji, Shigeru Hisamichi

Learning and The Adult Brain



According to Kathleen Taylor, professor at St. Mary's College of California, adult learning needs to be more than simply adding new facts and data. Brain development needs us to expand from established pathways, and we do this by exploring alternative concepts and positions. Our brain ceases to develop when we only seek out like-minded people, read material that continually validates our life view, and engage in the same old activities. We need to get out of our comfort zones -- step outside of those comfortable ruts and bump up against ideas that are new, different, and perhaps even a bit provocative. So, learn a new language, join a debate team, truly explore and consider other positions, or develop a new skill. Your brain health will be happier for it!

Wisdom of the Ages

"In each generation, there is this certain wisdom of the ages that gets reburied in the fleeting drivels of modernity; then, like a diamond in the rough, it is yet again unearthed by a very small minority who not only restores it, but also polishes it and presents it as something new, something highly valuable and refreshing as understood by the current."

Criss Jami, Healology