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ABSTRACT

This paper describes intergenerational (IG) programming and its benefits for children and elders, focusing on the preschool IG program at the Champaign County (Illinois) Nursing Home Child Care Center. The paper begins with a definition of IG programming and describes theories of adult development that may provide insight into how each age group involved in IG programming may benefit from such an arrangement. Erikson's adult development stage of "generativity versus stagnation" and the "age of integrity" are highlighted with regard to adult development, and Erikson's and Piaget's theories are discussed regarding how children might relate to the intergenerational experience. The second major section of the paper concerns IG programming. This section discusses three types of IG activities that are relevant to a preschool IG program: (1) recreation/leisure; (2) education; and (3) personal development. Factors related to the success of IG programs are discussed, including the staff's commitment to the program, matching the project to goals, considering the interests and abilities of the groups involved, and assessing the practical aspects. The third major section describes the philosophy and goals of the Champaign County Nursing Home Child Care Center, four needs that IG programming fills, and typical experiences of nursing home residents with young children. The paper concludes by noting that IG programming has resulted in positive experiences for both elders and children. Contains 13 references. (KB)

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Intergenerational Programming-  
The Impact on Children and Elders

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The title, "Intergenerational Programming", has two components. The first word, intergenerational, means that members of the group are from more than one age group. Programming is more than scheduled activities, according to Vickery (Brummel, 1989). Vickery states:

"Program is the planning of activities and the interaction that takes place among individuals when they participate in them. Activities, however enjoyable, have little value in helping individuals cope with persistent feelings of loneliness, uselessness, and depression. Programs are primarily important because they provide the settings in which members may experience acceptance by others, the feeling of belonging to a group, and recognition as individuals of worth. Such feelings strengthen the older adult's self-image and help him feel good about himself. Program is not only what happens and when it happens, but what meaning it has for each member as he participates."  
(Brummel, 1989)

The meaning of the activity for each participant is paramount in the planning. So intergenerational programming is the interaction between two or more age groups with activities and sharing of skills, knowledge, and experiences that brings meaning to each of the participants in a positive way over a period of time. The National Council on Aging adds that the experiences are mutually beneficial, meet some needs of each generation, and foster growth, understanding, and friendship.

Human development theorists such as Erik Erikson and Butler and Lewis believe that a person's life stages are formed by social influences interacting with a physically and psychologically maturing organism and positive intergenerational contact may be an especially important facet of healthy mental, emotional, social, and spiritual growth (ReVelle, 1989).

push for independence and autonomy, then once again try to feel connected to the family unit (Crites, 1989). IG programs can provide ways of fostering the development of children through the natural stages of life. By the same token the children provide a social support for the elder. The adults are taken out of the "isolation" and are brought to an environment that supports and nurtures each other.

Research found articles by different persons discussing the human development theories of Erik Erikson, Piaget, and Butler and Lewis. One article by Shari ReVille was from the perspective of how children fit into the elders world and the other article by Marsh Crites was how intergenerational programming worked with elders interacting with the children. Each described the stages of development then discussed how the other generation was helpful to the age group being described.

In ReVille's(1989) article, Erikson's adult stages of development are shown to correlate with children. Middle adulthood(ages 40-59) and later adulthood(over 60) are the stages relevant to this discussion. Erikson maintains in Level 7 the conflict of "generativity vs. stagnation" occurs during the middle adulthood period of one's life. Caring for others is the outward goal of this level. The transference of customs, rituals, and legends are passed throughout generations by adults to the children. Adults have a need to teach and preserve these experiences by instilling in children the knowledge of the culture. Teaching extends one's life beyond him/herself to

others who gain knowledge. This age of caring and need-to-teach fits with the intergenerational concepts. Children need to learn about their own culture and all the intricacies involved in living in it. Witnessing this first-hand is much more beneficial than just reading about it. My own children who are now twenty and twenty-two stated how fortunate they felt to have their great-grandparents in their same town while they were growing up. Their great-grandparents provided many stories about themselves growing up that enriched my children's childhood. Their great-grandparents were also excellent role models for "later adulthood". Since not everyone can be as fortunate as my children to have grandparents or great-grandparents living nearby, intergenerational programs provide a niche in society whereby we can teach and care about others' children in the same manner as our own. Intergenerational programming insures that our culture will reach out from generation to generation. It is great when it can occur in one's own family, but when it cannot then outreach IG programs are an answer.

In Erikson's last stage, "later adulthood", he expounds on the "age of integrity". Basically, he describes it as when one has taken care of things and people and adapted to the successes and failures of life which gives meaning and order within a larger order (ReVelle, 1989). Wisdom is the life goal that emanates from this stage. Persons in this stage of living can impart a feeling of wholeness and completeness to those of younger generations. Combine that with knowledge of the

past and children gain so much. Modern technology cannot replace the human connection that grows from one generation to another.

Butler and Lewis (ReVelle, 1989) contend that older adults need young people to stay healthy in mind and spirit. Their research indicated that older people need to continue to change and learn in order to keep healthy. When an individual is in an environment which supports and nurtures his/her strengths and potentials, then optimal growth can occur (ReVelle, 1989). This is true for both the young and old and that is why intergenerational programming is so important to each. Emotional well-being benefits each group as well as the knowledge that is imparted to each other.

Martha Crites (1989) examined Erikson and Piaget's theories of child development as they related to the intergenerational experience. The goals that are useful in a preschool program would be the ones from birth to age six. These are broken down to birth to three and three to six. In the first stage, Erikson states the central task of life is developing a sense of trust in the primary caregiver and in one's own ability to make things happen. Piaget labeled this stage the sensorimotor period when a baby learns about his/her world by how it tastes, feels, smells, and looks. Older adults can play a role by giving physical affection and tender, loving care (Crites, 1989). In the nursing home situation the babies recognize the friendly faces and are not fearful.

In the next phase the primary work of children is play and they begin to understand that they are separate autonomous

beings. This is the age of initiative, according to Erikson, when a child can plan ahead to meet goals such as dressing himself. Intergenerational programming activities expand to include many, many areas. The older adult can model cooperation, non-violence, and other pro-social behaviors, plus provide another source of positive reinforcement for the children. These activities enable the elders to provide emotional development to the children by widening the circle in which they feel at home (Crites, 1989). The children learn there is more to life than just themselves. Their world is extended beyond their families to the community.

Programming is the next section for discussion. Ames and Youatt (1994) developed five categories of potential intergenerational activities: 1. Recreation/Leisure; 2. Education; 3. Health promotion; 4. Public service; and 5. Personal development. Then they developed a four-stage hierarchical model for determining a potential activity's appropriateness and success. This information is important to persons involved in the planning of IG programs.

Three of the five categories of IG activities which are relevant to a preschool IG program are: 1. Recreation/Leisure- This would include having fun together in an unstructured activity. Although this activity is a good way to establish rapport, more opportunities for enriching activities need to become part of the program. 2. Education-This activity encompasses one generation teaching or imparting knowledge of some kind with the other generation. 3. Personal development-

Each generation can experience an increase in self-esteem by participating in IG programs. Social interaction is enhanced and participants experience higher levels of happiness (Short-DeGraffe and Diamond, 1996).

The four levels provide criteria to be met in order to proceed to the next level. If the criteria are met at all the levels for a particular activity, that ensures a greater opportunity for success, according to Ames and Youatt (1994). To summarize each level's criteria the "Model For Selecting IG Projects and Activities" was used: "Level 1--Match the project or activity to goals. Level 2--Determine the developmental appropriateness of projects or activity. Level 3--Consider interests and abilities of specific client group. Level 4--Assess the practical considerations" (Ames and Youatt, 1994, p. 760). These levels are general and I believe may be applied to any intergenerational program activity. Each group has its own unique characteristics and the planners need to be mindful of the individuals involved in order to create a successful program.

In addition to the two components of intergenerational programming that have been discussed, a third component that is vital to the success of the project is that of the staff. They are usually the middle generation between the two groups. They must be committed to the success of the program. They need to be knowledgeable about both age groups to be able to understand peculiarities pertaining to the other groups' characteristics. Flexibility in planning is a major factor



in the success of the program. Staff members serve similar roles in IG programming as middle generation family members which would be facilitating interaction and meaningful activities between the young and old (Ames and Youatt, 1994).

As the third component in IG programming, staffing can also include members of the elder population. Enhancing the concept of generativity in older adults, working in a child care center offers opportunities that promote positive aging experiences which contribute to the well-being of older adults (Newman and Riess, 1992). Elders and child care providers can be a meaningful connection in more than just an occasional activity (Galinsky, 1989). Younger teachers find that children have increased motivation, cooperation, and positive behaviors when a senior is employed. "...Older workers may play important generative roles for both younger teachers and children, while benefiting from a sense of usefulness and self-respect." (Newman and Riess, 1992, p.59). Not to dampen enthusiasm for this concept, but one must always give careful consideration to the selection process of any child care worker candidate.

Champaign County Nursing Home Child Care Center's philosophy and goals are:

"...providing an unusual setting for seniors and youngsters to share in an awareness of mutual needs. Our goal is to utilize the activities of both the nursing home and child care center into a cheerful learning environment that benefits both groups. CCNHCCC wants to provide children the opportunity to understand the normal aging process. At the same time, seniors will feel closer to the community by having contact with the children.

"The primary intergenerational goal is to draw elderly residents out of seclusion and isolation with the help of young children. Likewise, these children will benefit from the love and affection given by the residents. The intergenerational program offers activities and promotes interactions that are

designed for the elderly adult and young child that will focus on their physical, emotional, and social interests and needs. Activities and interactions promote a fresh and unique understanding among the two age groups in an atmosphere of happiness and compassion." (Foster, 1997, p. 6)

Children's Family Center identified four needs that IG programs fill:

1. Contact between young and old enlightens both generations.
2. IG programs are a powerful social influence.
3. Seniors gain an appreciation for the life experiences of the child.
4. Both the young and the old learn to give something of themselves. (1992)

The residents benefit from just seeing the children. It brings a new environment to them. The elders remember their own childhoods or their own children, grandchildren, etc. One benefit that had not been considered in the beginning was how the children fulfill a need for those who had no children. Two residents in particular were very close to the children for this reason. Bernie had had a stroke and his right side was paralyzed. But he maneuvered his wheelchair to the Center almost on a daily basis. Even before the Center opened he would come by to check the progress. He continued to visit the children and they made special trips to see him in his room. The children were very important to him. How important was not realized until he died a few months after the Center opened and we learned that he had never married and had no children of his own. For that period of time that he was with the children, they were like his family. It was gratifying to know that they brought him happiness at the end of his life.

Daisy is another resident who told the staff every time that she saw the children how much she loved them because she was never able to have any of her own. Many other residents smile brightly or respond positively when the children are near. One man with a European-like accent asks if the children are from the "orphanage". That points to the fact that their generation thinks differently about seeing groups of children. Their life experiences are from a previous era. We cannot assume that others think the same ways as ourselves. He is relieved to know that their moms or dads will be there to pick them up. Making a difference in lives is what it is all about!

Not only do the children benefit, but in one family the girls taught their mother about the residents. The girls are four-years old and eighteen-months old. On more than one occasion they took their mom to the room of a resident who had jelly beans! Then they wanted to take her on a tour of the nursing home. The older girl would pop into rooms greeting the residents. The mom was surprised at her daughter's ease at greeting them because most of the residents were not "pretty" and she herself felt uncomfortable. Through the intergenerational spirit of the child care center located in the nursing home, the children have a foundation on which to build many skills in addition to the usual motor, cognitive, and affective domains. Realizing that people need wheelchairs, walkers, hearing aids, and other assistance gives a new dimension to daily living. Over time, children learn to accept disabilities as normal experiences.

Through intergenerational programming, hopes are that the children will have positive experiences to carry throughout their lives. The positive experiences by the children may even lead some to the Health Care field. They learn respect for the elderly and not perceive nursing homes a negative places. Nursing homes are a place for the living and through intergenerational programming the children help to make them that way!

Kris Jeter (1989) introduced a provocative concept called "ancestor worship" and linked it to intergenerational families. I want to conclude with her connection of the Apache Indians and how they recognize the importance of the vertical strata of elders and youngsters in their communities. In fact the word for "grandfather" and "grandson" is the same. "The continuity between ancestors, elders, youth, and descendants is emphasized in the saying, 'We do not simply inherit the land from our ancestors; we lease the land from our children.'" (Jeter, 1989, p.215-16) Our past and future are woven together to become today.

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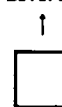
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