
BENEFITS AND RISKS OF INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM PARTICIPATION BY SENIOR CITIZENS

D. Scott Herrmann

Superior Court of Arizona,
Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Athanasia Sipsas-Herrmann

Washington School District,
Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Mary Stafford

Arizona State University,
Tempe, Arizona, USA

Nancy C. Herrmann

Norman P. Murray Senior Center,
Mission Viejo, California, USA

This study investigated changes in senior citizens who participated in a school-based intergenerational program with students. Over 8 weeks, 71 seniors taught 1 of 2 life-skills training programs. Participating seniors had significantly higher levels of positive psychosocial change at posttest time compared to nontrainers. Further analyses revealed sharply different outcomes based upon which life-skills training program the seniors taught. These results underscore the importance of not assuming positive outcomes for all seniors who participate in intergenerational programming. Suggestions are made regarding ways to maximize positive outcomes while avoiding unintended negative effects in seniors who participate in such programs.

Address correspondence to D. Scott Herrmann, Superior Court of Arizona, Juvenile Probation Department, 3125 W. Durango Street, Phoenix, AZ 85009. E-mail: donher@juvenile.maricopa.gov

The main purpose of intergenerational programming is to bring together different generations to collaborate on purposeful activities, while supporting and nurturing each other in meaningful ways. During the past 20 years, intergenerational programming has grown as a form of human service between the nation's oldest and youngest generations, while at the same time addressing resource issues related to dwindling human-service funds. In recent years intergenerational programming has been employed in schools as an alternate vehicle for delivering services to students when formal counseling services are limited. For the elderly, such intergenerational program participation may be beneficial by addressing loneliness and isolation, low self-esteem, inadequate support systems, and increasing physical and mental activity (Newman & Smith, 1997). For children and adolescents, such programs may be beneficial by providing resources and services that students would not otherwise have access to. Intergenerational program participation has also been reported to increase student self-esteem and reduce a host of negative behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, school dropout, gang involvement, poor school achievement, and teenage pregnancy (Allis, 1989; Dellman-Jenkins, 1997; McCrea & Smith, 1997; Midlarsky & Kahana, 1994; Re Ville, 1989; White, 1989). Because most anecdotal reports found in the literature cite only positive outcomes, it is not surprising that many consider intergenerational programming to be a "win-win" situation for all involved, and many have sounded a call to adopt widespread implementation of such programs. However, the way intergenerational programming affects *all* participants involved, especially retired senior citizens who participate in such programs, has not been adequately explored through empirical investigation. Little is known regarding the psychological benefits or consequences of such participation on seniors.

TYPES OF INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

While there are many models of intergenerational programming that are thought to benefit both senior citizen and student participants, the three most common types are (a) those in which the elderly provide a service to youth, (b) those in which the youth assist the elderly, and (c) cooperative programs where the two generations collaborate on activities as equal partners. Such programs may be highly developed and operate on a long-term basis, while others are informal and short-term.

Benefits to Seniors

While most empirical evaluations of intergenerational programming have sought to determine how such programs affect the

young people involved, far fewer have examined how older adults may be affected through their participation. Erik Erikson's theory of human development offers some guidance, however, as to why older adults might benefit from intergenerational programs. Specifically, Erikson (1963) believed that throughout their life-span, individuals progress through a series of psychosocial stages, with each stage contributing to and influencing the one either preceding or following it. Each stage is described in terms of tasks and conflicts that must be resolved. There is the possibility for either positive or negative outcomes within each stage. The stages are: trust versus mistrust (birth-1 year), autonomy versus shame and doubt (1-3 years), initiative versus guilt (3-5 years), industry versus inferiority (6 years-puberty), identity versus identity diffusion (adolescence), intimacy versus isolation (young adulthood), generativity versus stagnation (middle adulthood), and integrity versus despair (late adulthood). Conflict within a developmental stage intensifies when psychological, social, or biological factors all lead to a focus on the central issues associated with a particular developmental stage. Thus, ego integrity versus despair is the central developmental theme of late adulthood because there are many factors during this point in an individual's life that intensify this conflict. Intergenerational experiences are thought to represent ideal ways for older adults to resolve critical issues that arise during the latter part of one's life span. For example, intergenerational programs can represent vehicles for passing along values, culture, and life skills to members of a succeeding generation, thus resolving the issue of generativity versus stagnation, which typically arises in middle adulthood (Newman & Smith, 1997). Similarly, older adults who become involved in intergenerational programs designed to assist youth can accomplish resolution of the integrity versus despair stage (Re Ville, 1989). Erikson discussed that, in the eighth and final stage of life (later adulthood), life review takes place. Then, the positive outcome of integrity prevails over despair if one accepts the shape his or her life has taken and is prepared to face its ending. However, if an individual harbors regret for what one has done or not done with one's life, or is disgusted with oneself, despair sets in.

While Erikson's (1963) theoretical tenets provide a rationale for why certain changes might occur in seniors who participate in intergenerational programming, empirical evidence supporting such changes has not been established. In fact, the majority of intergenerational programs operate without formal outcome measures in place that would allow for the evaluation of a program's impact on

participants. Thus, the present study attempted to determine if a group of senior citizen volunteers participating in an intergenerational program with students would indeed show changes in their psychosocial wellbeing as a result of their participation. As a posthoc objective, the study also sought to determine if the specific program content of an intergenerational program would influence the direction or way in which psychosocial change occurred.

METHOD

Participants and Trainers

Senior trainers were recruited from a large community senior center in southern California. Advertisements were placed in community newspapers, announcements were made on a local cable TV station, and flyers were distributed at a community senior center asking seniors to volunteer for an "intergenerational project working with community youth." Some announcements distributed at the community senior center requested seniors to volunteer for an unspecified "intergenerational program." Others sought recruitment of seniors to participate in a violence/anger-management program with community youth, but made no mention of the parallel vocational-education intergenerational program that was to be operating at the same time. Consequently, when interested seniors arrived for orientation to learn about the intergenerational project and its various components, many expressed an interest in wanting to teach *only* the violence/anger-management curriculum to youth. It was only after the senior-center director discussed the importance of having an equal number of seniors willing to participate in *both* intergenerational programs that an equal number of seniors agreed to enroll in the vocational education component (more will be said about this recruitment dynamic in the concluding section of this report).

In total, 36 retired senior citizen volunteers aged 60 to 81 participated as trainers in this combined intergenerational project. Eighteen trainers were assigned to teach a violence/anger-reduction curriculum, and 18 were assigned to teach a vocational-education and career-development curriculum. The violence/anger reduction trainers consisted of 7 males and 11 females, while the vocational-education trainers included 3 males and 15 females. To facilitate program administration, clusters of at least two trainers were assigned to each group of 8 to 12 students. During the course of the project, two violence/anger-reduction trainers and one vocational-education trainer dropped out due to either personal illness or the

illness of a close family member. Also, one of the violence/anger-reduction trainers ending up succumbing to an illness before the project was completed. Incomplete posttest data was obtained from one trainer. Thus, the final sample of trainers across both groups consisted of 32 senior citizens, 10 male and 22 female.

Nontrainers

Thirty-seven retired senior-citizen volunteers (14 male, 23 female), aged 60 to 92, who did not actively participate in this project were recruited as nontrainers for the control condition. Due to attrition, the final sample of nontrainers included 30 individuals (12 male, 18 female). These nontrainers were recruited from the same community/senior center as the program participants.

Instrumentation

Euler (1992) proposed a shift in the evaluation of intergenerational programs from "superficial measures of life satisfaction" to measures assessing "deep psychological well-being." According to Euler, traditional life satisfaction measures fail to adequately diverge from the confounds of social desirability. Therefore, studies measuring life-satisfaction may be primarily measuring a desire by the elderly participants to be seen in a positive light, and may not necessarily reflect their inner well-being. In his review of 30 years of intergenerational literature, Euler found that the majority of the researchers evaluated their outcomes based on superficial variables such as life satisfaction, happiness, or morale, as opposed to deeper psychological constructs (or inner states) such as depression, self-esteem or locus-of-control. Euler regards Erik Erikson's life cycle theory of psychosocial development, which is the preeminent late-life theory, to be a good model of deep psychological well-being. Thus, the Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD), Hawley (1988), a self-report measure based on Erikson's eight-stage theory of human development, was selected as this study's measure of deep psychological well-being. The MPD provides an index of overall psychosocial health, and measures positive and/or negative stage attitudes for each of Erikson's eight stage conflicts. It has 27 scales, representing the dynamics outlined in Erikson's work: eight positive scales (P1 through P8), eight negative scales (N1 through N8), eight resolution scales (R1 through R8), and three total scales (TP, TN, TR). For the purpose of this investigation, only four scales were utilized—those relevant to the final two stages of human development, generativity vs. stagnation (P7, N7), and ego integrity vs. despair (P8, N8).

Design

A pre-post, quasi-experimental design with multiple dependent measures was used to assess the effects of intergenerational program participation on volunteer senior citizens. Hawley's (1988) Measures of Psychosocial Development constituted this study's dependent measures (generativity [P7], stagnation [N7], ego integrity [P8], and despair [N8]). Raw scores were converted into T scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. These measures were compared at posttest and follow-up between participating seniors versus non-participating seniors. Additionally, focused analyses were also conducted at posttest and follow-up to determine if participating seniors' psychosocial well-being differed according to which intergenerational program they were assigned to teach (violence/anger management versus vocational education). Personal interviews and a narrative journaling exercise were also utilized at posttest to qualitatively assess the seniors who participated in the intergenerational project.

Procedure

The particular model of intergenerational programming used in this study involved the elderly providing services to young people in a semistructured fashion. Senior-citizen trainers completed two 4-hour training workshops 2 weeks prior to the beginning of the intervention as well as a 2-hour booster session 4 weeks into the project. At the beginning of the first training session each senior was asked to complete an MPD pretest. Thereafter, 18 senior-citizen teams traveled to a local middle school twice per week for 8 weeks in order to participate in an intergenerational teaching program with small groups of sixth grade students. Nine senior teams provided lessons in violence/anger management, while 9 senior teams provided lessons in vocational education. Students who received the interventions consisted of sixth-graders who were randomly assigned into clusters of 8-12 students. Each cluster was then randomly assigned to receive either the violence/anger-management or the vocational-education curriculum. Following 8 weeks of program administration, trainers were asked to reconvene for a short debriefing session. During this session they completed an MPD posttest, a narrative journaling exercise, and a qualitative interview with project staff. Follow-up assessment consisted of administering the MPD once again, 8 weeks after the initial posttest was administered.

Control data were obtained at pre and posttest from a group of senior citizens who did not participate in the intergenerational

program, but who were similar to the participating seniors in terms of age and demographic variables. These seniors were recruited from the same community/senior center as the seniors who participated in the intergenerational program. All control seniors were also asked to indicate whether they were currently involved in working with another intergenerational project involving youth. Those who responded affirmatively were not included in the data set.

VIOLENCE/ANGER-REDUCTION CURRICULUM

The SCARE (Student Created Aggression Replacement Education) program (Herrmann & McWhirter, 2001) was selected as this study's violence/anger-reduction curriculum. SCARE is a 16-session program designed for use with middle-school students. This program has been experimentally validated, and has been shown to be effective at reducing overall levels of anger, aggression, and violence among student populations. Each session takes approximately 45 minutes to complete. Trained senior citizen volunteers served as the facilitators for each session.

VOCATIONAL-EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The Enter Here program (Enter Here, 2001) was selected as this study's vocational-education curriculum. Enter Here is a video-based program designed to help students at the beginning stages of formulating their interests and ideas regarding future vocational work. The program has been shown to be effective at enhancing student's career maturity and career self-efficacy. The program was used as the basis for 16 different vocational sessions, each highlighting two different vocations or jobs. Each session consisted of two videotaped presentations on particular jobs, followed by facilitator-led discussions of each video. The length of each video presentation was approximately 7 minutes, and the subsequent discussion entailed the remainder of the 45-minute session. Trained senior-citizen volunteers served as the facilitators for each session.

RESULTS

Quantitative Analysis

The senior-citizen sample decreased from 73 to 62 (22 males and 40 females) following deletion of cases with incomplete data sets. See Table 1 for a complete description of the final sample composition.

Trainer/Nontrainer Comparison

The effects of participating in this intergenerational project were analyzed by utilizing a one-way MANCOVA with treatment group (trainer versus nontrainer) serving as the independent variable, MPD scales P7, N7, P8, N8 as the dependent variables, and respective pretest scores as covariates. Each dependent variable was considered to be multivariately normal, an important assumption underlying MANCOVA (Green, Salkind, & Akey, 2000; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). This determination was based on the nonsignificant results of both the Bartlett-Box F and Cochran's C tests of homogeneity of variances. Similarly, the Box's M test for homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrices was also nonsignificant. Thus, the population variances and covariances among the dependent variables were the same across all factor levels.

Overall MANCOVA results indicate significant differences between the two groups of senior citizens on the dependent measures, Wilks' $\Lambda = .75$, $F(6, 49) = 2.72$, $p < .05$. The multivariate η^2 was a moderate .25. Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) on each dependent variable were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANCOVA. Using the conservative Bonferroni method, each ANCOVA was tested at the .008 level. Results of these analyses, which took pretest differences into account, revealed that the trainers demonstrated significantly higher scores on the P7 variable (generativity) at posttest compared to the nontrainers, $F(1, 54) = 10.37$, $p < .005$, $\eta^2 = .16$, large effect size (see Figure 1).

This change in the trainers was not maintained at follow-up, however, according to a paired sample t -test between the trainers' P7 pretest scores and follow-up scores, $t(27) = .34$, $p = .74$. Differences were not apparent between the two groups on the N7 scale (stagnation), $F(1, 54) = 1.24$, $p = .27$, $\eta^2 = .02$, and no other significant differences were observed for any of the other variables when trainers and nontrainers were compared. Additionally, there were no statistically significant differences by gender either. See Table 2 for a complete summary of the different means and standard deviations for each dependent variable assessed.

TABLE 1 Composition of Seniors in Final Samples

	Trainers N	Nontrainers N
Males	10	12
Females	22	18
Total	32	30

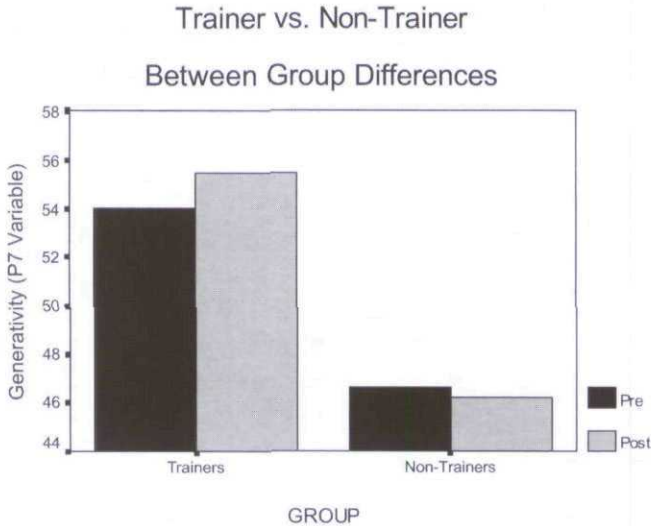


FIGURE 1 Pre and postdifferences on Generativity between trainers and nontrainers.

Violence/Anger Reduction vs. Vocational-Education Trainer comparison

Following the initial analysis, closer inspection of the data revealed gross within-group differences between the senior-citizen trainers, depending upon which program they facilitated (violence/anger reduction or vocational education). Separate analyses were conducted in order to examine these differences more closely. As Figure 2 reflects, the increase in generativity by the trainers (discussed earlier) was, in fact, an increase solely demonstrated by the trainers of the violence/anger-reduction curriculum. In fact, the vocational-education trainers showed a steady decline in the positive outcome of generativity from pretest to follow-up (see Figure 2).

A one-way ANCOVA assessing the group differences at posttest while controlling for pretest differences revealed that this difference between the means of the violence/anger reduction and vocational-education trainers at posttest was, in fact, significant, $F(1, 29) = 6.72$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$, with a large effect size. Similar results were present at follow-up with violence/anger-reduction trainers being significantly higher on the P7 (generativity) variable than the vocational education trainers, $F(1, 25) = 7.20$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .22$, with a large effect size. Table 3 below depicts the unweighted means on the P7 variable for both the violence/anger-reduction and vocational-education trainers.

TABLE 2 MPD Sample Size, Unweighted Means, and Standard Deviations Across Time

	Trainers			Nontrainers		
	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Pretest						
P7	32	54.03	10.06	30	46.63	8.83
P8	32	49.84	9.92	30	50.10	10.84
N7	32	47.09	10.52	30	48.30	10.14
N8	32	47.25	9.90	30	48.27	9.92
Posttest						
P7	32	55.50	9.29	30	46.23	9.09
P8	32	52.94	10.59	30	50.63	11.88
N7	32	46.22	9.30	30	49.43	9.51
N8	32	45.66	8.63	30	48.83	9.38
Follow-up						
P7	28	53.36	9.13			
P8	28	50.86	11.57			
N7	28	44.50	8.50			
N8	28	46.00	10.20			

P7 = generativity, N7 = stagnation, P8 = integrity, N8 = despair.

Violence Prevention vs. Vocation Education

Between Group Differences

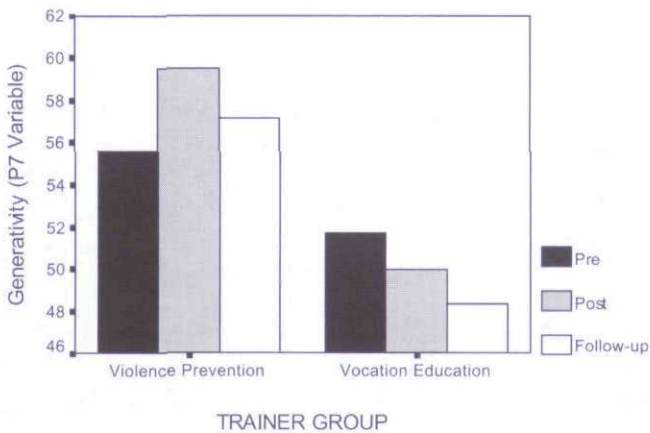


FIGURE 2 Pre, post and follow-up differences on Generativity between violence/anger reduction trainers and vocational education trainers.

TABLE 3 Sample Size, Unweighted Means, and Standard Deviations for Violence/Anger Management and Vocational Education Trainers on Variable P7 (Generativity)

	Violence/anger management trainers			Vocational education trainers		
	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
P7						
Pretest	17	55.82	11.4	15	52.00	8.16
Posttest	17	59.41	7.31	15	51.07	9.50
Follow-up	16	57.13	8.07	12	48.33	8.21

P7 = generativity.

Qualitative Analysis

Following completion of the intergenerational program, senior-citizen trainers were asked to write a narrative describing their experiences in the project and the effect that their participation had on them. They were also given the opportunity to dialogue with the program coordinator and to express their thoughts, feelings, likes, and dislikes regarding their participation. An "analytic induction" method of qualitative data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Robinson, 1951) was used to assess their input, and to determine the effect that program participation had on the participants. Unlike the quantitative analysis described earlier, the qualitative analysis was open-ended, did not seek to provide answers to predetermined questions, and was intended to assess aspects of program participation that were previously undisclosed.

Of the 33 narratives and personal interviews completed, 27 indicated some sort of positive experience, 3 reflected disappointment, and 3 provided information that was unquantifiable. Overall, the trainers in both groups (violence/anger-management and vocational-education) reported their experience to be satisfying, and said they might consider volunteering for a similar project again if offered in the future. The three respondents who did report disappointment were from the vocational-education component, and reported that they were dissatisfied, in part, because their initial intent of teaching the violence/anger-management program was not honored. They also said that they felt the vocational-education training was not salient and meaningful to the children they worked with. Other information gleaned from the qualitative analysis of participants is summarized in the recommendations section that follows.

DISCUSSION

The benefits of using retired senior citizens in intergenerational programs with students are numerous. Intergenerational programs can represent alternate vehicles for delivering services to students when formal counseling services are either lacking or nonexistent. Seniors are often dependable, mature, experienced, have considerable free time to devote, and are often willing to work for free. The United States now has more healthy and well-educated retired senior citizens than ever before, and the opportunity for establishing intergenerational programs is ripe. While there is abundant empirical evidence suggesting that youngsters who participate in intergenerational programs are likely to show diverse and varied benefits (Chapman & Neal, 1990; Dellmann-Jenkins, 1997; McCrea & Smith, 1997), less is known about the way such programs affect senior participants. There is, however, ample theoretical justification for involving seniors in intergenerational projects, and reason to expect that seniors who participate may show important benefits as well (Newman & Smith, 1997; see also Chapman & Neal, 1990; Dellmann-Jenkins, 1997; McCrea & Smith, 1997; Midlarsky & Kahana, 1994; Re Ville, 1989).

The purpose of the present study was to determine exactly how seniors who participate in intergenerational programs might be affected in terms of their psychosocial well-being according to Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial development. An interesting, albeit not surprising, finding of this study was that robust pretest differences existed between the senior citizens who participated as trainers versus the nontrainers. The seniors who were trainers were already more healthy than the nontrainers in terms of generativity—the positive form of psychosocial development linked to Erikson's seventh developmental stage. Such suggests that there are distinguishing premorbid features within the personality constellation of individuals willing to participate in intergenerational programs with youth.

Another major finding of this investigation was that participation in intergenerational programming did, in fact, appear to influence generativity. Specifically, those seniors who participated as trainers showed significantly higher scores on generativity (P7) at posttest compared to nontrainers, suggesting that participation can translate into important psychological gains for seniors. However, the present research also demonstrated that uniformly positive results cannot be anticipated for *all* seniors who take part in such programs. Results from the present study found that seniors who participated in the violence/anger-reduction component showed significantly greater gains than those who participated in a vocational-education component (who consistently *reduced* their level of generativity at each

subsequent point of assessment after the program was initiated). Such a finding underscores the importance of not assuming widespread benefits for all seniors who participate in intergenerational programs.

Although examining differences between the two groups of senior participants in our intergenerational project was not initially a major focus of this investigation, the discovery of differential effects based on program assignment is an important finding that deserves special consideration. As previously noted, when the vocational education trainers were qualitatively assessed at the end of their participation, several reported being dissatisfied with the curriculum they were asked to teach. Some reported being upset that they were asked to teach a program that they were not initially interested in. Some also reported being dismayed that the program they were assigned to teach did not receive the same positive publicity as the violence/anger-reduction program. A convergence of such factors may have resulted in lowering the rates of generativity for the vocational education group by robbing them of the feeling that they had made a meaningful contribution through their participation, or that their time had been well spent.

"Meaningfulness" thus seems to be an extremely important factor for how intergenerational programs are both perceived and received by senior participants. This is congruent with past research conducted by Dellman-Jenkins (1997). When intergenerational programs are perceived as meaningful, senior participants are likely to show improvement in terms of generativity, the fundamental belief that one has had active involvement in improving the world, has acted in service to others, and has contributed something worthwhile to the betterment of society. When meaning is absent or lacking, the beneficial aspects of program participation seem to rapidly evaporate and, as our data suggest, can even result in the erosion of psychological well-being. The differential experiences reported by the two groups of seniors in this study clearly suggest that intergenerational programs should not be viewed as uniformly positive for all participants, but rather should be viewed as possessing both inherent risks and benefits to participants. While intergenerational programs can be effective methods for delivering life-skills education to school-aged students, such programs should be carefully monitored by the administrator or counselor in charge. Additionally, the way program participation affects *all* participants should be regularly evaluated.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

In order to capitalize on the benefits and minimize risks associated with intergenerational program participation by seniors, a collection

of recommendations are presented below that are based on lessons learned from the present study. The recommendations also reflect our several years of combined experience coordinating intergenerational programs between the elderly and students. Because school counselors are often responsible for initiating, coordinating, and managing intergenerational programs between the elderly and students, the below suggestions are primarily directed towards them.

- Prior to initiating an intergenerational program, seek the assistance of local senior center director(s) who can often provide access to energetic and motivated seniors. However, keep in mind that intergenerational programs do require extra time and effort to implement, and may not be universally popular among all directors.
- In some communities the distance between a school and senior center may create a logistical obstacle. If the distance is great, transportation may pose a problem for both students (who are usually too young to drive) and seniors (who may no longer drive). Coordinated busing or vanpools are essential for program success in such situations.
- Intergenerational programs can take place on either a school campus or at a community senior center, but factors such as room size and space availability are paramount considerations when determining when and where to hold an intergenerational program.
- Within most schools there will often be a mix of teachers both for and against intergenerational programs. Programs that have received a solid administrative endorsement tend to fare better than those that have not. Strong partnerships between principals, counselors, and senior-center directors usually set the tone for the way in which an intergenerational program is received by teachers.
- When organizing intergenerational programs, avoid running simultaneous program components at the same time. Having two or more intergenerational programs running simultaneously can encourage conflict, create a class hierarchy, and foster competition rather than cooperation among senior participants.
- Exercise caution in how an intergenerational program is advertised to ensure that false expectations are not fostered. Even subtle misstatements on advertisement material may be taken literally by senior participants, and may influence the way an overall program is received.
- Providing senior participants with written manuals, calendars, schedules, and directions is important. Ensuring that large font type is used on all written program materials is a consideration that should not be overlooked. Also, providing seniors with the

names and contact information of other senior participants allows them to discuss ideas and techniques with each other, and to support each other throughout the duration of a project.

- Pair senior participants in groups of two or more. Absenteeism due to illness, doctor's visits, etc., can be more easily managed if a partner is available to take up the slack. Additionally, pairing seniors with a partner can result in enhanced camaraderie and collegiality, and often results in greater overall enjoyment with the project.
- Creating ways for seniors to feel validated for their participation (e.g., postprogram student letter-writing campaigns, recognition luncheons, award certificates) helps seniors feel valued for their involvement, and enhances the perceived "meaningfulness" of their contribution.

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