

Intergenerational Learning: Creating Magical Moments

by

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Dedication

I wish to dedicate this project to the participants of Mountain View Intergenerational Learning Program. My heartfelt thanks go to: all of the children who delight and energize us; the staff and volunteers who support the intergenerational learning program without hesitation; and the residents who have become an extension to our Kindergarten family. This program would not be possible without your commitment and enthusiasm.

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to create the ripple effect needed to increase intergenerational learning programs. The literature review examines and overwhelmingly supports many benefits of intergenerational learning programs. Provision of inspiration, support, and professional development opportunities allows interest groups to understand, develop and implement their own intergenerational learning programs. Creating a blog provides an accessible and collaborative forum for those wishing to implement intergenerational learning programs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The quality of a nation is reflected in the way it recognizes that its strength lies in its ability to integrate the wisdom of its elders with the spirit and vitality of its children and youth.

-Margaret Mead, *Coming of age in Samoa, 1971*

Collaborative learning between all ages is fundamentally important to an enriched society. Intergenerational learning programs provide opportunities for sharing of time, development of relationships and reciprocal learning between generations.

Empowerment, understanding, and empathy of others through shared knowledge and experience are prevalent. Connections between generations and altruism through service-learning models benefit community and society. All children should have opportunities to benefit from intergenerational learning programs.

I was raised in a traditional three sibling, dual parent family that valued interactions between the generations. My grandparents lived in close proximity making day-trips possible. Visits were frequently scheduled family events. Occasional overnight stays became privileged memories and meaningful experiences. This was the cultural norm of the community and era in which I was raised.

Time spent with my grandparents was a privilege and they had a positive influence on my development. Having all four grandparents survive through my late twenties enabled a generative familial affect on my personal character growth and life skills. Alongside the traits of industriousness, loyalty, respect and honesty that I learned from my grandparents, I also learned valuable skills including – but not limited to – repurposing items, sewing, preserving food, and gardening. My paternal grandmother lived until age ninety-nine and was my longest surviving grandparent; I practiced

empathy and tolerance as her mental and physical health declined. Memories and reminders of time spent with grandparents continue to enrich my life today.

Adversely, I retain a vivid corroborated memory as a young child being terrified when visiting an elderly great-grandmother. I would not accept a cookie, believing it to be poisonous. There was no logical reason for this except for unfamiliarity with the very old and wizened. I feel fortunate that my early stereotypical behaviour reversed and greater understanding and empathy developed through close life-long relationships with elderly friends and relatives. These relationships provided many rich life experiences; I consider how deficient my life would be had I not had these opportunities.

Distance, frenetic lifestyle, and changes in relationship dynamics are among the reasons familial intergenerational relationships have declined in western society (Chamberlain, Fetterman & Maher, 1994). Communities need to value and recreate multi-generational relationships in order to enable: shared knowledge of past and present; empathy and acceptance over stereotypical views of ages; a slower pace; and purposeful living for all. Relationships between the ages need to be nurtured to enrich and civilize humankind.

Early in my teaching career I took primary classes to a local health care facility. Initial visits coincided with events such as Christmas, but became much more frequent after a health care worker noted contact occurred only during holidays. The implication that residents were usually left in isolation was disturbing. Monthly visits were immediately implemented until the make-up of this particular center changed; it became a place for high-care patients and was deemed unsuitable for our purposes. Not fully

recognizing the importance of intergenerational initiatives, I did not pursue this endeavor any further.

Fortuitously, many years later a small-scale assisted living facility was built across from my home. This coincided with mentorship and inspiration from colleague Barb Carriere who promised “a million magic moments” (Globe and Mail, 2011) resulting from intergenerational learning. After reading *The Element* by Ken Robinson (2009), Barb initiated a weekly intergenerational learning classroom in her local retirement home. She was galvanized by the cited benefits of an early childhood classroom within a retirement home. Supported by our school district and a *Growing Innovations in Rural Sites of Learning* grant, Barb created a ripple effect resulting in intergenerational learning opportunities in all three rural communities within the Rocky Mountain School District. This was the encouragement I needed to reconsider taking students to visit the elderly.

During the time between my early-career visits to what was known as an “old age home” and my proposed visits to an assisted living facility, my teaching pedagogy had changed. In this new venture I was no longer visiting with the children as a diversion for the elderly. I needed to create a program that was both meaningful and respectful for all participants, regardless of age. Though the phrase reciprocal learning was unknown to me it became my intention and has guided my approach. In this project, reciprocal learning is defined as collaborative opportunities resulting in shared knowledge and experience between all participants within intergenerational programs (Knight, Skouteris, Townsend & Hooley, 2014).

For the past three years intergenerational learning has become a valued component of my kindergarten program. I take my kindergarten class to an assisted living facility each Wednesday afternoon. The program takes place on a weekly basis from the end of September to the end of June. The average number of participants typically consists of seventeen kindergarten students, seven residents, five staff members and two parents. Participants in this program – children, residents, families, and staff – engage in multiple social, educational and magical moments. Everything I have witnessed from this experience leads me to believe intergenerational programs are not only beneficial for early childhood development, but also for the residents. My goal in selecting intergenerational learning as a research topic is to scrutinize my personal experiences using research and case studies and to provide guidance to other educators who wish to pursue an intergenerational learning program.

The scope of my research is broad as it is inclusive of birth to death intergenerational learning situated in various contexts and facilities. Readings provide evidence of intergenerational programs housed in shared recreational spaces, schools, early childcare facilities, senior centers, and various living facilities for elderly, with participants ranging in age from two months to ninety-seven years. Despite apparent championing of intergenerational learning, recent research specific to providing kindergarten programs within assisted living facilities is limited. Fortunately, I believe knowledge can be gleaned and transferred from the various situations represented in the readings. The literature review that follows in chapter two will define and synthesize findings about intergenerational learning focusing on rationale, philosophy, benefits, program considerations, and limitations.

My research question is a personal inquiry to improve intergenerational relations and programming – specific to kindergarten children visiting an assisted living facility each week – as well as a collaborative initiative with my colleagues in the Rocky Mountain School District. Although my focus is early childhood, due to the nature of the topic, attention must be given to all ages involved. The positive effects of intergenerational learning are mutual, intertwined between the groups. Professionals may benefit from this project by extracting information that they can transfer and adapt to the specifics of their program.

In this inquiry, I situate myself within sociocultural theories by acknowledging the social nature of learning and its affect on development of culture and society. I believe the sociocultural nature of intergenerational learning promotes social justice, empathy, equity, shared learning, communication and generativity. Erik H. Erikson identified generativity as the obligation to give back by establishing and guiding the next generation (as cited in Strom & Strom, 2012). John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Maria Montessori, and Jean Piaget all argue the premise that “education must involve the social world of the child and the community” (Mooney, 2013, p. 16). Modern sociocultural perspectives are inherent in the pedagogy of the prominent Reggio-inspired approach. Real-life situations, reciprocal learning, and values of families and communities acknowledge the social nature of learning and should be intrinsic to every child’s education thereby teaching children how to live in society. Intergenerational learning programs are judicious.

Increased involvement in quality intergenerational learning programs can be achieved when health care workers and educators become invested in creating

connections across generations. Professional development opportunities and quality local resources are essential components to implementation of intergenerational learning programs. I propose to create a blog to link interest groups implementing intergenerational programs within my local school district. The Rocky Mountain School District spans 335 kilometers and includes three separate communities. Finances, time, and distance of travel put limitations on in-person professional development opportunities. My research question will investigate whether a district intergenerational blog would promote intergenerational learning by providing professional development opportunities for both the education and health care communities.

Creation of a blog – for educators and health care practitioners as co-learners – with links to resources, articles, websites, and other blogs, will provide a forum for advancing intergenerational programs. I will develop and include a series of suggested activities linked to the British Columbia Ministry of Education kindergarten curriculum document to share knowledge and record successful learning possibilities; I am hopeful others will add extensions and additional activities specific to their unique intergenerational situations. Through shared experiences and mentoring, the blog will serve as a forum to celebrate successes, give advice and to problem solve.

Intergenerational learning programs are important for the wellness of society. Grateful for the inspiration that has reminded me of this, I intend to increase the ripple effect by encouraging others to initiate learning across the generations. Providing an online site for research-based rationale, professional development opportunities and suggested activities will promote intergenerational opportunities for others.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

My goal is to inspire educators and health care workers to provide intergenerational programs. And further, to provide resources and professional development opportunities for those already involved with intergenerational programs. Personal experience reveals the phenomenal benefits derived from intergenerational learning programs. This evokes a passion to share expertise and popularize these programs within the education and health care communities. Educating service providers through shared resources, suggested activities, collaboration, and provision of professional development opportunities made accessible on a blog will be the culmination of my final project.

The following literature review provides rigour, giving evidence to support my personal understandings on positive effects of intergenerational learning programs. The following research proves shared learning experiences between generations have multiple benefits. Sustained intergenerational programs are a humanistic way to provide service for diverse generations that result in improved health, social values, wisdom, and quality of life. Memories from my own childhood, combined with recent observations of kindergarten intergenerational experiences, move me to advocate for implementation of intergenerational learning programs.

Background

Key words and combinations for intergenerational learning include “intergenerational programs,” “elders,” “seniors,” “aging,” “early childhood,” “play,” “nature,” “death,” and “dying”; all were used to search research articles. Primary,

forward and backward, and secondary searches were conducted finding more than one hundred articles and dozens of books; these were viewed for topic relevance and rigour. Due to a lack of recent related articles, a liberal approach was taken aligning forty-four articles, four manuals, seventeen books and four web pages with the research topic.

Theoretical articles, position papers, and research within readings primarily adopted exploratory methods such as those in qualitative research. Case studies, participatory action research, grounded theory methodology, qualitative data, and phenomenology were applied methods. One mixed method study and limited empirical evidence were also cited. Ages ranged from two months to ninety-seven years, specifying preschool, kindergarten, elementary, junior high, and university students, parents, grandparents, non-familial older adults, educators, and health care personnel. Gender of children was more equitable than with adults, which favored females. Cultural diversity was rarely specified. Research and programs were situated in singular sites such as school settings, higher education institutes, various child care settings and senior facilities, as well as shared spaces with daycares housed in senior facilities, community centers, family homes, playgrounds and outdoor spaces. Time of day, day of week, length, frequency and duration of interactions varied. Visits were both scheduled and drop-in. Activities were formal and informal with shared information and peer teaching. Crafts, physical movement and play, societal and academic exploration of history, environmental concepts, science instruction, and the literacies were academic components. Social affairs included tea parties, birthdays, and visits.

Definition

Intergenerational learning refers to interaction and education between people of diverse ages with programs having both formal and informal qualities (Cabanillas, 2011; Istead & Shapiro, 2014; Smith & Yeager, 2008). Two or more generations share skills, knowledge and experience that benefit relationships with each other and community (Chamberlain et al., 1994; Corbin, 1998; Gonvea, 1999; Heydon, 2007; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Poole & Gooding, 1993). Although intergenerational relationships can be familial (Cabinillas, 2011; Instead & Shapiro, 2014), Knight, Skouteris, Townsend & Hooley (2014) caution familial intergenerational relationships are bound by obligation therefore less reciprocal in nature. Newman's seminal work states "intergenerational programs are designed to engage nonbiologically linked older and younger persons in interactions that encourage cross-generational bonding, promote cultural exchange, and provide positive support systems that help to maintain the well-being and security of the younger and older generations" (as cited in Newman, Ward, Smith, Wilson & McCrea, 1997, p. 56).

Sociocultural Theory

Introduction. Sociocultural theories align with the social nature of learning imbedded in intergenerational programs. Intergenerational learning promotes social justice and equity paralleling pedagogy of societal reconstruction theory (Whiteland, 2013). Reciprocal learning – through shared knowledge and experience to benefit culture and society – are sociocultural views associated with intergenerational learning programs.

Dewey. Dewey's foundational theory of reciprocal giving of knowledge and skills (Felten & Clayton, 2011; Knight et al., 2014) is supported by findings of Kenner, Ruby, Jessel, Gregory & Arju, (2007), in which intergenerational interactions are shared

with participants as equitable co-constructors of events. Older generations have accumulated wisdom around life skills such as cooking, gardening, and repairing, while younger generations have new competencies around technology and consumerism. Past life skills born of necessity are now desirable for environmental purposes. Kenner et al. (2007) illustrate how one school extended a “Grandparents’ Coffee Morning” into a “Grandparents’ Fair” in which the old and the young jointly participated and exchanged knowledge with mutual learning benefits.

Vygotsky. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory affirms learning in a cultural community through zone of proximal development and considers affects of social relationships on cognitive development (Heydon & Daly, 2008; Kenner et al., 2007; Knight et al., 2014). Learning is supported and enriched through shared knowledge and experiences by the adults (Macdonald, 2006) as well as children. Through scaffolding, cognitive support gives assistance helping the learner understand and succeed with the task; as the task is mastered the scaffold is withdrawn. Being within the zone of proximal development is a prerequisite to effective scaffolding. Misconceptions that older people provide the scaffolding are reversed in cases of immigrants, where children often acquire the new language first (Kenner et al., 2007). Intergenerational learning activities allow children to have their turn being purposeful by helping the elderly accomplish tasks new to them or made difficult by aging. Heydon and Daly (2008) see evidence of this in the technical aspects of the accordion book activity – an exercise in which word prompts provoke individual illustrations – when old and young participants take turns helping each other. This demonstrates the social nature of learning intrinsic to intergenerational learning programs.

Erikson. Erikson's model of psychosocial development theorizes fulfillment increases through generativity – the need to guide the next generation – and identity formation (Holmes, 2009; Knight et al., 2014; Strom & Strom, 2012). This urge to guide future generations thereby making positive contributions towards mankind is inherent to intergenerational programs. Angela Zusman (2010) argues the value of intergenerational oral history – to cross generational boundaries, define who we are, and preserve history and community through shared stories depicting lives and experiences of “ordinary” people – as she compares five intergenerational oral history projects. This “gift to society” is a teaching and learning medium that benefits all ages. “By participating in an intergenerational oral history project, the elder has the opportunity to not only experience life review but also contribute to a larger pursuit and engage with young people – a gift that is becoming all too rare” (p. 26). Knight, Skouteris, Townsend & Hooley (2014) identify that generativity provides opportunity to gain feelings of integrity and well being.

Montessori. Montessori education integrates holistic education with harmonious relationships between all human beings and the natural environment (Edwards, 2002). A study providing Montessori-based activities for persons with dementia and preschool children increased positive engagement for the older adults (Lee, Camp & Malone, 2007). Montessori principles such as breaking down tasks, providing manipulative materials, external cuing, and ability matching tasks to participants, were successfully implemented alongside interacting with children. While this research did not consider engagement of the children, the resurgence in popularity of Montessori approaches in

North America – as a progressive influence on early childhood education (Edwards, 2002) – suggests Montessori principles are suited to learning by the young and the old.

Reggio Emilia. Modern theory embraces insights from Reggio Emilia. Loris Malaguzzi, the founding director of Reggio Emilia envisioned and implemented early childhood education supportive of reciprocal relationships between children, family, teachers, society and the environment (Edwards, 2002). Learning as an emergent process between children and adults, that develops relationship and collaboration, gives generously of time, and enables open-ended projects, are all insights learned from Reggio Emilia that can be applied to intergenerational learning programs (Edwards, 2002; Hill, 2008). Inspired by learning's from Reggio Emilia, Virginia Tech Child Development Laboratory School revamped their environment into an intergenerational atelier resulting in a journey that fostered respectful relationships and reciprocal learning between generations (Hill, 2008).

Discussing children as competent citizens bearing culture, the mayor of Reggio Emilia, Graziano Delrio recognizes the importance of interactions between the diverse generations children encounter daily. This “web of relations created around schools” allows children to consider and construct knowledge from differing viewpoints (Vecchi, Cavallini, Filippini & Trancossi, 2011, p. 9). The concepts “taking care with people” and “collective living” (Delrio as cited in Vecchi et al., 2011, p. 9) are evident in intergenerational learning programs. “Education” is the realization of the possible through nurturing passage from past to present (Bruner as cited in Vecchi et al., 2011). Carla Rinaldi argues necessity for children to be embraced by a culture in order to

positively influence childhood. “Education is the right of all children, and as such is the responsibility of the community,” (as cited in Vecchi et al., 2011, p.212).

Summary. These sociocultural views support concepts of generativity and cultural knowledge imbedded within intergenerational learning programs. Collective learning that is reciprocal and benefits society is inherent to these theories providing pedagogy for intergenerational learning programs.

Rationale

Reasons for participating in intergenerational programs range from the mystical to the concrete. Magical moments (Hammer, 2011; Nussbaum, 2000), improved quality of life (Nussbaum, 2000), elimination of age-segregation and anti-aging attitudes (Bales, Eklund & Siffin, 2000; Chamberlain et al., 1994; Corbin, 1998; Dunham & Casadonte, 2009; Davis, Larkin & Graves, 2002; Heydon, 2007, 2013; Hynes-Dusel & Clements, 2001; Kenner et al., 2007; Middlecamp & Gross, 2002; Nussbaum, 2000; Williams, Renehan, Cramer, Lin & Haralambous, 2012) while promoting diversity of all stages of life (Heydon & Daly, 2008; Holmes, 2009) and lifelong learning (Cabanillas, 2011; Heydon, 2007; Heydon & Daly, 2008) have all been promoted as reasons to initiate intergenerational programs.

Distance, work schedules necessitating time in day-care/school, and supported living situations all contribute to age segregation and a diminished role for grandparents. (Bales, Eklund & Siffin, 2000; Chamberlain et al., 1994; Davis & Fischer, 2011; Heydon, 2007; Heydon, 2011; Heydon, 2013; Holmes, 2009; Middlecamp & Gross, 2002; Poole & Gooding, 1993; Williams et al., 2012). These social changes perpetuate isolation and stereotypical behaviour. Statistics Canada recorded nearly 5 million seniors aged 65 or

older, a growth of 14.1% from 2006 to 2011, accounting for a record high of 14.8% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2011). Bolstered by the increased aging population, non-familial intergenerational programs fill a gap providing opportunities for interactions and common understandings.

Development of intergenerational programs – through service-learning pedagogy – enables young and old learners to engage in, benefit from and reflect upon shared, meaningful, socially relevant learning opportunities (Fair, Davis, & Fischer, 2011; Felten & Clayton, 2011; Heydon, 2013; Whiteland, 2013). Istead and Shapiro (2014) propose intergenerational learning become a mode to further goals of sustainability and environmental education. Initiatives connecting intergenerational learning and the environment include: creating wildlife habitat areas at schools; multiple garden projects; and developing community capacity for recycling electronics (Steinig & Butts, 2013). *Generations United for Environmental Awareness and Action* is a worthwhile resource encouraging intergenerational environmental education (Kaplan & Liu, 2004). These projects align with older persons as “guardians of traditional values” (Chamberlain et al., 1994, p.195) and the importance of gaining cultural insights from family history and values of the past (Cabanillas, 2011; Chamberlain et al., 1994; Kenner et al., 2007; Poole & Gooding, 1993; Whiteland, 2013).

Philosophy

Service-learning. Important considerations for successful intergenerational programs include multi-generational participation and collaboration when decision-making and developing program activities and goals (Smith & Yeager, 1999). A service-learning schema combines meaningful learning with reflection as it provides community

service. This improves quality of life making it an appropriate framework for intergenerational programs (Fair et al., 2011; Felton & Clayton, 2011; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Whiteland, 2013; Williams et al., 2012). Integration of relationships and social development, collaborative planning and learning, academic achievement, and reflection all contribute to the success of intergenerational learning.

Planning. Intergenerational learning should provide diversity through multimodal activities and varied experiences (Heydon, 2007; Heydon, 2013; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Ross & Lynott, 2005; Whiteland, 2013; Williams et al., 2012). These should be based on inclinations of participants (Holmes, 2009). Heydon (2013) reminds us the importance of carrying out intergenerational learning programs ‘with’ people not ‘to’ people. Teacher directed activities should be superseded by participant selected activities as these promote feelings of ownership and an increase in positive interactions (Angersbach & Jones-Forster, 1999). Links to curriculum are fundamental (Heydon, 2013; Heydon & Daly, 2008) for meeting prescribed learning outcomes of our provincial education system.

Relationships. Programs must benefit all participants albeit in different ways (Corbin, 1998; Holmes, 2009; Istead & Shapiro, 2014; Knight et al., 2014). The children instill energy while the older persons slow the pace; the children are full of curiosity as older persons impart years of wisdom (Holmes, 2009). Heydon and Daly (2008) note how competencies of children and older persons complement each other as children assist older persons with fine motor activities while older persons elaborate on ideas. Reciprocity advances the importance of learning experiences for both children and adults, allowing each to value contributions of the other within their changing roles of tutor and

receiver (Heydon, 2013; Knight et al., 2014). Evidence shows that positive relationships develop through connections and understandings (Dunham & Casadonte, 2009; Fair et al., 2011; Heydon & Daly, 2008).

Play. Goals of cooperation and added independence – through sustained experiences valued by all participants – highlight the potential of intergenerational programs (Heydon & Daly, 2008). Play-based activities that are cooperative and fun contribute to the enjoyment of time spent together and foster social bonds and positive relationships (Dunham & Casadonte, 2009; Heydon 2013; Holmes, 2009; Williams et al., 2012). Challenging the conclusions of Williams, Renehan, Cramer, Lin, & Haralambous (2012), my experience finds enjoyment of play-based programs does not preclude incorporating learning goals and shared knowledge. Intergenerational play experiences help develop physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills (Davis et al., 2002; Hynes-Dusel & Clements, 2001). Brain stimulation through development of multiple learning pathways results from engaging in play-based activities (Anaka, 2010; Gelb & Howell, 2012). The relaxed, inherent quality of play breaks down boundaries by encouraging social participation and stimulating interaction.

Memory. Opportunity to reminisce and share knowledge and traditions of the past benefit participants and enrich intergenerational learning programs (Davis et al., 2002; Merola & Lynott, 2005). Inciting memory provokes sensory experiences as it stimulates the brain; it also helps the young and old make social connections as they share their stories (Heydon, 2007; Heydon, 2013; Poole & Gooding, 1993; Whiteland, 2013; Williams et al., 2012). Conversation becomes the stimulus for stories and connections as older persons share their histories with the children. Sensory experiences,

photographs and artifacts provoke memories and provide rich conversations and narratives of past events, generating shared knowledge and personal connections between participants.

Nature. Connecting children and older persons to nature is a sensory experience that invokes memory and links to the past (Hill, 2008). Opportunity to spend time outdoors together in activities such as gardening allows older persons to instill practical knowledge. Intergenerational sites with access to the outdoors are more conducive to nature-based activities such as nature walks and gardening (Christiani, 2001; kidsgardening, 2010; Larson & Meyer, 2006; Williams et al., 2012). I witness how sitting outside in nature stimulates conversation roused by sensory input. Allowing for similar occurrences by bringing outdoor experiences into care facilities is an important provision for the incapacitated.

Nature-based intergenerational learning programs cultivate environmental change (Ballantyne, Connell & Fien, 2006; Duvall & Zint, 2007; Ekstrom, Ingman & Benjamin, 1999; Hill, 2008; Kaplan & Liu, 2004; Steinig & Butts, 2013; Vaughan et al., 2003). As wisdom-keepers older people have the historical knowledge to teach the young to respect and protect nature and the earth (Ekstrom et al., 1999; Larson & Meyer, 2006). Through shared knowledge, the young can take their wisdom home to educate and influence others on environmental sustainability and survival (Ballantyne et al., 2006; Ballantyne, Fien & Packer, 2001; Duvall & Zint, 2007; Ekstrom et al., 1999; Vaughan, Gack, Solorazano & Ray, 2003). Parents are important recipients of this knowledge as they are the ones with the power to change practice and policy (Ballantyne et al., 2001). This multigenerational pedagogy on environmental education allows the eldest to impart historic knowledge and

memory of a world less damaged to the young, who transfer this knowledge to their parents. This illustrates the power of learning from our past with hopes of influencing the future.

Summary. The intent of intergenerational programs is to provide relevant experiences between generations, increasing awareness and instilling favorable attitudes (Kuehne, Newman, Smith & Yeager as cited in Middlecamp & Gross, 2010). Educators and workers need to work together to ensure needs of each generation are considered (Heydon & Daly, 2008; Holmes, 2009). Advantages of collaboration include: shared workloads; ability to generate more ideas and activities; additional perspectives to offer support and problem solve; elevated knowledge of diverse age groups; plus opportunity for deepening relationships and mutual commitment to intergenerational learning.

Benefits

Benefits of intergenerational programs include reduction of medication and mental and physical illness in the elderly (Corbin, 1998, Knight et al., 2014), increased opportunity for socially acceptable incidents of human touch (Angersbach & Jones-Forster, 1999; Corbin, 1998; Williams et al., 2012), increased self-esteem and confidence through valued contributions (Holmes, 2009; Hynes-Dusel & Clements, 2001; Knight et al., 2014), augmenting transfer of knowledge (Istead & Shapiro, 2014), increased opportunities for multimodal communication through social conversation, the arts, story, drama and music (Heydon, 2013; Merola & Lynott, 2005; Williams et al., 2012), and increased social connectedness (Davis et al., 2002; Istead & Shapiro, 2014; Kenner et al., 2007; Knight et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2012).

Social connectedness is a bi-product of intergenerational relationships. Interactions between older adults and young children enable formation of gratifying friendships unconstrained by schedules, patience, and role expectations demanded of family, teachers and peers (Davis et al., 2002). The slower pace necessitated by needs of participants creates a climate conducive to cultivating meaningful relationships and richer experiences (Kenner et al., 2007; Macdonald, 2006; Nussbaum, 2000; Williams et al., 2012).

Collaboration, equality in decision-making, reciprocity of contributions, and benefit to diverse ages determine the depth of the relationship (Heydon, 2013; Smith & Yeager, 2008) and context for transformative learning (Felton & Clayton, 2011; Heydon, 2007). Choice in degree of participation plus time and space to develop bonds proved important for elderly persons, children and their parents (Williams et al., 2012).

Symmetry with stage of life, mutual vulnerability and common attributes contribute to understanding and empathy between children and older persons (Hammer, 2011; Kenner et al., 2007; Whiteland, 2013). Intergenerational programs provide socially acceptable venues for the old to interact with the young (Corbin, 1998; Heydon, 2013) with benefits to the facility as a whole (Williams et al., 2012). Meaningful and genuine relationships develop through intergenerational learning programs (Bale, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000; Fair et al., 2011; Poole & Gooding, 1993; Heydon, 2013).

Sustained intergenerational relationships provide experiences that educate and combat ageism and negative stereotypes of diverse ages (Bales, Eklund & Siffin, 2000; Chamberlain et al., 1994; Corbin, 1998; Davis et al., 2002; Felten & Clayton, 2011; Heydon, 2013; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Holmes, 2009; Nussbaum, 2000; Penn State

College of Agricultural Sciences, 2003; Poole & Gooding, 1993; Whiteland, 2013; Williams et al., 2012). Fair, Davis & Fischer's (2011) findings concur with this but noticed some children felt uncomfortable when working with the elderly. Middlecamp and Gross (2002) identified an increased positive disposition to older persons within a preschool group that had an active, healthy, and friendly teacher that was older. Dunham and Casadonte (2009) found children's positive perceptions of older adults increased when the adults were perceived to be competent, willing to help, and present of their own volition because they like children. Participants should like and want to be around children (Heydon & Daly, 2008). Once recruited, elderly people who interact with the young usually continue to participate in intergenerational programs (Poole and Gooding, 1993).

Considerations

Location. The location of intergenerational programs impacts activities. Daycares, schools, swimming pools, recreational facilities, community centers, and museums are evidence of diversity of placement for intergenerational programs (Smith & Yeager, 2008). Churches/synagogues, centers for children with special needs, human service agency centers, detentions homes, and universities are additional sites noted (Chamberlain et al., 1994). Retirement homes usually have common rooms to meet within (Hammer, 2011; Poole & Gooding, 1993). Indoor gymnasiums and courts plus outdoor sites such as playgrounds, fields, and golf courses are suited to intergenerational movement and play experiences (Hynes-Dusel & Clements, 2001). Classrooms, hospitals and nursing homes outfitted with playgrounds are suggestions of intergenerational advocate Paul Nussbaum (2000). *Playgroup Victoria* affords residents

and children options of indoor or outdoor playgroup experiences; the enclosed outdoor space provides gardens, grass and paths (Williams et al., 2012). Family homes allow for intergenerational experiences between grandparents and grandchildren (Kenner et al., 2007). Shared intergenerational sites lessen impact of construction on the environment (Steinig & Butts, 2013). Permanent shared sites in which older persons and children share spaces and programming are considered advantageous for intergenerational programs (Chamberlain et al., 1994; Heydon, 2007; Heydon, 2011; Heydon, 2013; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Holmes, 2009).

Staff. Staff commitment is essential to a dynamic intergenerational program (Smith & Yeager, 1999). The ongoing support of health care staff and educators is needed to represent the young and the old when developing cooperative activities and independence (Heydon, 2013; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Poole & Gooding, 1993). Knowledge about both age groups is imperative to implement best practice (Heydon, 2007; Heydon, 2013; Holmes, 2009). High rates of staff attrition – due to poor job compensation and challenging hours – plus the predominant attitude that intergenerational programs are another burden to already challenging work affects implementation of intergenerational programs (Heydon, 2013). Reliance on volunteers calls further attention to society's undervaluing of those working with the young and old (Heydon, 2013). The hiring of a coordinator working exclusively with intergenerational programming is a reasonable option that would make intergenerational programs a priority (Heydon, 2013).

Schedule. Ongoing intergenerational learning programs are more meaningful than singular activities or events and give credence to lifelong learning (Bales, Eklund &

Siffin, 2000; Heydon, 2011; Heydon, 2013; Heydon & Daly, 2008). Predictability increases attendance as all participants can plan around scheduled intergenerational meetings. Staff, older persons, and children all benefit from a regular sustained schedule.

Foresight. Prior knowledge of upcoming activities helps older persons and children prepare for their time together. In a study on the effects of intergenerational program on older persons, Underwood and Dorfman (2006) note older persons sometimes feel unprepared for student visits. This highlights the importance of informing older persons of activities prior to arrival with the children.

Partners. Choice of who to engage with is beneficial, as some want the same partner (Fair et al., 2011; Heydon, 2013), while others prefer variety. Assistance matching children and older persons is needed initially but soon participants bond and group themselves (Poole & Gooding, 1993).

Year End. Transitions need to be transparent as both older persons and children feel the sense of loss as the school year ends (B. Carriere, personal communication, 2012). Knowing that the same children will not be returning regularly the next year is particularly difficult for those who have developed strong attachments. End-of-year celebrations and parting gifts signify an ending and give time for adjustments. Anticipation of the next school year can be a positive way to heal the sense of loss. On occasion, children supported by caring families continue their individual relationships with older persons after the school year ends. Visits during vacations and holidays – such as birthdays – further personal relationships beyond the organized intergenerational program (Poole & Gooding, 1993). Return of the past year’s class for a singular visit the

following year is a positive experience allowing residents, children and staff an opportunity to reconnect.

Magic Box. Personal experience reveals the loss felt by participants when programs are interrupted for school holidays. “Magic Box” activities (Davis, Vetere, Francis, Gibbs & Howard, 2008; Davis, Vetere, Gibbs & Francis, 2011; Vetere, Davis, Gibbs, Francis & Howard, 2006; Vetere, Davis, Gibbs, & Howard, 2008) study the impact of a physical box filled with artifacts delivered between grandchildren and grandparents. A magic box delivered between the older person’s care facility and the children – implemented by families that volunteer – might be a viable way to keep the intergenerational program alive during school holidays. Boxes filled with meaningful trinkets and activities could cumulate as they travel back and forth: a box with paint, brushes and paper might be returned with a completed painting; a shared activity such as a puzzle or game might accompany an invitation for a visit.

Staff and older persons report how much they miss the children during these breaks. The delivery of a magic box provides opportunity for interaction during the delivery as well as for playful behavior and creativity when filling and emptying the box. I wish to investigate whether supplementing class visits with delivery of magic boxes will strengthen and sustain relationships and promote continuity within the program. School holidays create a disconnection that might be bridged with a personalized version of the magic box.

Death and Grief. Death, dying and grieving are natural experiences that should be anticipated and taught to students participating in intergenerational programs. Prior knowledge and “anticipatory guidance” (p. 307) about death will help children

understand and cope when it happens (McGuire, McCarthy & Modrcin, 2013). According to Mosby's Medical Dictionary (2009), anticipatory guidance is the "psychological preparation of a person to help relieve the fear and anxiety of an event expected to be stressful" (as cited in McGuire et al., 2013, p. 207). Vianello & Marin maintain children can understand death by age four or five; Piaget and Nagy suggest age eight as the time to teach about death arguing this is the age at which children are able to understand the finality of death (as cited in McGire, McCarthy & Modrcin, 2013). Children move in and out of grief feelings (Fitzgerald, 2003) in alignment with Piaget's egocentric theory. Even if children are not able to understand the finality of death at kindergarten age, experiencing the death affects them (Heydon, 2013). Teaching about death helps children understand their emotions and sense of loss. One should consider Piaget's pre-operational stage of development taking into account how magical thinking, egocentricity, causality, and reversibility affect students' perceptions about death (Goldman, 2006; Huntley, 2002; Wolfelt, 2013). When students lead the inquiry it enables learning to proceed at a pace they can comprehend and accept. Open, honest and clear language conveyed in a caring manner is vital (Fitzgerald, 2003; Morrissey, 2013). Although we cannot control death experiences, we can empower children to be capable and caring by trusting their wisdom and nurturing them (Goldman, 2006). We must listen to children and guide them with care using direct and open communication to prevent misconceptions about death and dying. We must help children understand that death is an intrinsic part of life.

Challenges

The literature presents many questions for further investigation. Do intergenerational programs actually allow participants to work collaboratively, with reciprocity and equity to decision-make and determine activities and program goals? (Smith & Yeager, 2008). To what extent are children and residents included in the organization and planning of their intergenerational programs? Are their ideas valued and implemented? What impact do older adults and young children have on each other's learning and social values? If we want to empower all participants these become important considerations.

Perceptions of early childhood, aging, and elderly must be understood in relation to age and developmental stages. In a surprising finding, Middlecamp and Gross (2010) found no difference in attitude between daycare children exposed to an intergenerational program and those not. They discovered impacts of intergenerational programs differed depending on participant's age and developmental stage, conceptual understanding of aging, and selection of activities provided.

Can intergenerational programs with young children and older adults be considered service-learning? If so, service-learning requires reflection. This element is missing in intergenerational programs involving early childhood. Bales, Elkund and Siffin (2000) found "researchers have not given children opportunity to express, in their own words, how IG programs have affected their attitudes toward and their relationships with the elderly" (p. 678). Reflective methods need to be modified for young children's capabilities as reflection increases engagement and provides valuable information (Fair et al., 2011). There is little research analyzing benefits of volunteering time, knowledge,

and companionship (Knight et al., 2014) important to the premise of service-learning. Little research has been done focused on early learners participating in service-learning (Fair et al., 2011).

Continuity and duration of visits are variables worthy of study. It is generally understood that regular sustained visits have more benefit than singular visits. It is not known how many visits are optimal. Are there advantageous times of day and days of the week? How long should each visit take? Is scheduling and regularity of visits important and is there a way to bridge interruptions to visits? One speculates specifics such as these might be dependent on needs of individual participants. If so, how does one assess these needs and determine an optimal schedule? More should be known about individual learning requirements within multigenerational communities in a social context (Pinto, 2011).

Assisted living facilities are home to the older persons. When children come into their space there is loss of privacy and use of common areas for non-participants of intergenerational programs. Vulnerability in terms of germs, noise, mobility and tolerance needs to be considered and monitored with appropriate action taken. Some children estranged from older persons need encouragement to interact in a positive manner. Fortunately I have seen these barriers dissipate as mutual understandings and attachments grow.

Intergenerational research is mostly qualitative – interviews, observations and anecdotes – and rarely quantitative. This lack of measurability results in lack of validation by the academic community (Pinto, 2011). Case studies provide important information via descriptors of activities and accomplishments but omit impediments

encountered that might lead to research questions. Participatory research does solve practical problems by collecting and analyzing information to promote social and political change such as community participation, facility and equipment needs, funding, and resource sharing (Smith & Yeager, 2008). Knowledge of intergenerational learning is often based on practice more than research. How can we ensure qualitative research is rigorous enough to legitimize intergenerational learning within the academic community?

What is a respectful term to address the older participants of intergenerational programs collectively? Somewhat uncomfortable when students referred to our Mountain View friends as “the old people” I searched for a more suitable term. “Senior” does not fit, as one resident is relatively young. Deciding upon “elder” as a term of respect for those of greater age – and supported by local First Nations and Metis leaders (G. Strynadka & D. Dunn, April, personal communication, 2015) – we adopted this word for the past three years. Additional support came from the widespread use of the term elder, elders, and elderly within multiple recent professional readings (Bales, Eklund & Siffin, 2000; Dunham, Casadonte, 2009; Fair et al., 2011; Hammer, 2011; Heydon, 2007; Heydon, 2013; Heydon & Daly, 2008; Holmes, 2009; Istead & Shapiro, 2014; Knight et al., 2014; Merola & Lynott, 2005; Middlecamp & Gross, 2002), many which are Canadian publications.

In opposition, the British Columbia Law Institute recognizes the association of Elder with the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities. Counseling that words contain values – and not all persons of advanced age have earned the wisdom and respect elder implies – neutral terms such as “older person” and “older people” were recommended (British Columbia Law Institute, n.d.). I concur to this caution within my

academic writing situated as a citizen of British Columbia with no desire to expropriate cultural terms.

Gaps and questions revealed all indicate a need for up-to-date research to improve provincial resources and professional development opportunities. We must promote intergenerational learning programs within the education and health care communities to ensure many have opportunities to benefit from reciprocal learning between the generations.

Conclusions

Literature overwhelmingly supports positive benefits of sustained intergenerational programs (Dunham & Casadonte, 2009). Benefits include: friendships between diverse age groups; understanding and tolerance of different age groups; learning advantages from working together on projects; elderly persons as agents of history and world knowledge helping children find their place in the world; and increased physical and mental wellness. Intergenerational learning programs benefit all participants when they allow for meaningful reciprocal contributions. Intergenerational learning programs provide opportunities that increase self-esteem and happiness.

Schools should capitalize on an increased aging population and incorporate older adults into our learning plans (Cabanillas, 2011). Opportunity to understand, learn from, and develop relationships with older persons teaches students empathy and appropriate social behaviors around older persons. Slowing of pace creates a calm, reflective environment seldom seen in traditional classrooms. Occasion to share knowledge and memory empowers both young and old.

Coordination of programs, involvement and commitment of stakeholders – young children, older persons, staff, and families of both – are important factors when setting up intergenerational programs. Time must be made to plan and meet with participants giving all a valued voice. In this way programs nurture reciprocity with participants as equitable co-constructors of events. By following a service-learning model, intergenerational programs acknowledge benefits of volunteerism, and reciprocity of shared experiences and companionship. Incorporating time for reflection will authenticate experiences plus provide useful information for program development.

Pinto (2011) recognizes a lack of professional training pertaining to intergenerational relationships and learning. Most professionals are qualified to work with only one age group. Understanding common ground as well as differences between generations becomes an asset when planning programs that are engaging and developmentally appropriate for all participants. Professional training focusing on developmental needs of all participants is necessary for the provision of equitable and mutually beneficial programs. Practitioners need to understand the diversity of the clients and the unique circumstances of old and young.

In agreement with Pinto (2011) intergenerational learning programs need to be studied as pedagogy in which multiple concepts and modes of learning intersect; available guidelines, courses, and examples of how to develop intergenerational activities are not adequate. Developmental stages and limitations of all participants, connections to memory and prior knowledge, acknowledgement of death and dying as a natural part of life cycle, nature-based learning, intergenerational play, curriculum linked learning

activities, and social opportunities to develop relationships are important aspects to the success of intergenerational programs.

A provincial intergenerational curriculum based on research linking all areas of the curriculum to intergenerational learning is needed. Websites, blogs, guide and storybooks are additional references for practitioners of intergenerational learning programs. Many are available but must be viewed critically for local content and authentic activities and applications. Manuals available – *Connecting Generations, Strengthening Communities* (Bressler, Henkin & Adler, 2005), *Developing an Intergenerational Program* (Penn State, 2003), *Open Hearts, Open Minds* (Bressler, 2002) – to guide implementation of intergenerational programs are American and do not cover local culture and curricula.

Heydon (in press) identifies “a need for curricular and pedagogical development for practitioners” (as cited in Heydon, 2011, p. 54). She developed a program for intergenerational art literacies leaving a gap in other curricular areas. Quality local and provincial resources linking intergenerational learning to all areas of the curriculum need to be developed.

Staff working in intergenerational learning environments must be invested in intergenerational programs and need specific training in intergenerational ways. This takes a commitment of time and energy only given when motivation is strong. Advocates of intergenerational learning have an obligation to stimulate motivation in others if possibilities for intergenerational learning are to grow.

In an era of age segregation, frenetic lifestyles and increased time and attention diverted to technology over humanity, intergenerational learning is needed by society.

Increased involvement in quality intergenerational learning programs will only be achieved when health care workers and educators become invested in intergenerational ways. Professional development opportunities and quality resources are essential components to increased implementation of intergenerational learning programs. The key to success and growth of intergenerational learning programs includes continued research, well-founded professional development and mentorship opportunities, plus useful resources to support interactions and education of people of diverse ages.

Continued reading and research focused on ways to implement intergenerational programs, creation of a blog – for educators and health care practitioners as co-learners – with links to resources, articles, and web pages, would provide a forum for co-learning advancing intergenerational programs. Developing a series of activities linked to the British Columbia Ministry of Education kindergarten curriculum document is a way to share knowledge and successful learning possibilities. Through professional development and mentoring, intergenerational learning programs will provide many magical moments for all involved.

Chapter 3: Project Proposal

Rationale

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 overwhelmingly defends and cites many benefits of intergenerational learning programs. Engagement of reciprocal learning and experience across generations promotes improved quality of life, lifelong learning, generativity, and service-learning. Elimination of age-segregation and stereotypical attitudes develops empathy and meaningful relationships. These benefits are all expanded upon and documented in Chapter 2. This research supports my personal experiences implementing an intergenerational learning program for the past three years.

Taking kindergarten children to an assisted living facility Wednesday afternoon each week has enriched the lives of my students, residents, staff and myself. Onsite health care workers report that everyone dresses differently on Wednesdays; staff and residents don brighter clothes to welcome the children (T. Bowness, personal communication, 2015). The receptionist at my dental office – a daughter of one of the residents – claims when booking dental appointments parents say anytime are fine except Wednesday afternoons; she points out this coincides with the only time her father is not available for family excursions (A. Dahlberg, personal communication, 2013). A recent e-mail from a local citizen reported "...met up with Charlie from your class. We chatted and Jackie from Mountainview *[sic]* zipped by and she said with no inhibition, *[sic]* Hi Jackie! *[sic]* Jackie said, *[sic]* Oh hi Charlie. I'm looking forward to seeing you tomorrow. *[sic]* To which Charlie said, *[sic]* I'm *[sic]* going to sit at your table Jackie. *[sic]* Then Jackie motored over in her scooter to me and said, *[sic]* Wednesdays are my very favourite day. I love the kids. *[sic]*" (J. DeBoer, personal communication, June 9,

2015). Another student brought guests to tears as he spoke at the memorial of his “best friend”, a Mountain View resident whom he had promised to marry. I cite these examples in attempt to convey the deep relationships and sense of community built through our intergenerational learning program. Words cannot express the extreme joy and sense of belonging felt when we interact with our friends from Mountain View Assisted Living. It truly is magical.

I reflect back to a time when I was oblivious to the multiple advantages of intergenerational learning programs. Noticing a resurgence of school and community connections to the elderly since beginning the program, I feel an obligation to further promote such initiatives. I believe every child should have the chance to develop intergenerational connections and to benefit from the many positive outcomes previously addressed.

Participants

Limitations surrounding training and professional development opportunities for service providers are one of the factors that inhibit implementation of intergenerational learning programs (Heydon, 2013). Site managers and health care workers of care facilities, classroom teachers, and school and facility support staff should have opportunities to participate and promote intergenerational learning. Encouraging all parties to understand potential benefits, become knowledgeable about the spectrum of developmental ages and stages, and to implement and sustain an intergenerational learning program is a challenge to be addressed. The task must not be too onerous if one expects buy-in from those already busy in their work. An online forum is a convenient way to provide accessible information and support.

Rocky Mountain School district successfully acquired grant money through the “Growing Innovations in Rural Site of Learning” initiative – sponsored by the Ministry of Education and University of British Columbia – thanks to the foresight and efforts of colleague Barb Carriere. This grant enables colleagues from all three zones within the district opportunity to collaborate on local intergenerational understandings. “Educators in numerous schools in the communities of Golden [Kimberley] and Invermere investigate intergenerational learning to understand its benefits to participants, challenges for educators, related/emergent pedagogies and curricula and, by contrast, the norms of monogenerational learning sites in terms of new possibilities” (Growing Innovations Projects, 2013-2015). Although this initiative emphasizes sustainability, and the grant has been renewed for two years with a promise for a third year, physical meetings within our district have been a challenge.

One of the disadvantages of a rural district composed of three distinct communities spread 335 kilometers apart is the added time and effort it takes to travel when meeting in person. Our intergenerational learning group has noticed the will to meet has decreased from an intended three meetings to two in the first year, with only one meeting in the second year. Meeting dates have been delayed due to travel and scheduling difficulties. Attendance of health care partners has been non-existent for two communities and has declined for the third. The impact of this “deterioration of best intentions” has been professional isolation. Little communication between sites – lack of shared ideas, lesson planning that requires greater individual effort, plus lack of support for one program that was struggling – are repercussions of inadequate communication and assistance.

Only one guest speaker attended our meetings. An employee of Interior Health provided information and answered questions pertaining to health and welfare of the elderly. Arranged by request, this turned out to be a valued component of this meeting. Despite professional learning gleaned this experience was not repeated. Lack of local resources in rural areas plus scheduling difficulties contributes to this oversight.

Attendees at meetings have included seven teachers and one health care manager, with the district Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent checking in. Comprised of “Baby Boomers” (born 1944-1960), “Generation X” (born 1960 to 1980), and “Millennials” (born 1980 to 2000) we have been able to learn from and use the frame of reference of each generation to our advantage (Lovely & Buffum, 2007). “Baby Boomers” relate to ramifications of aging felt by older persons; “Millennials” provide energy and fresh perspective. Reciprocal intergenerational learning happens during collaborative sessions paralleling what happens within our programs. This provides firsthand knowledge and experience that can be applied to our intergenerational programs.

To date, grades included in local programs range from kindergarten to grade seven. A partnership between a grade three and grade six class – collaborating and visiting an intergenerational site together – provides further insight. We can learn about and adapt experiences from diverse grade levels to suit specific program needs. Intergenerational learning programs are of benefit to all grades and to combined grades.

Action Plan

During our meeting in January 2014, members of this group discussed the creation of an online forum to enable collaboration between physical meetings. Although

Natasha Burgess generously developed an initial blog, participants did not follow through with postings. Without our engagement the blog was not viable. Members of this group were doing university course work as well as participating in various professional committees; contributing to the blog while managing full-time teaching assignments was clearly too much.

This provides a challenging opportunity to create a blog that will provoke collaboration and support intergenerational learning within our school district. Although the target audience is the same intergenerational learning community within the Rocky Mountain School district, contributions will not be limited to this group. The blog will be public with outside perspectives and contributions welcomed. My personal incentive to create this blog as a component of my final master's project elevates my level of engagement and commitment. I am dedicated to managing this site for a year predicting success will lead to continuance beyond this year. Success will be evident by collaborative use and the level of participation with this blog.

I do not know what will happen with the blog after this initial year expires. If the blog is a success – evidenced by feedback and usage –it will live on. I foresee requesting others to co-manage the site to promote further collaboration. But, if the site sits stagnant I need to consider why. Surveying anticipated participants would help gain understanding as to why the site failed or succeeded. Hopefully taking a pro-active role throughout the year will ensure the blog is a success. In the eventuality I do not succeed attracting collaborative engagement, I will have to decide whether continuing the blog has any benefit or if my efforts should be diverted elsewhere.

To gain a favorable outcome the blog must be user friendly. Creating the site will be a learning experience for me, as a “Baby Boomer” not raised with technology. Design set-up needs to be clear and streamlined. Postings must be concise to provide knowledge expediently. By posting weekly and sending out reminders encouraging contributions, this blog will successfully become a virtual collaborative meeting space.

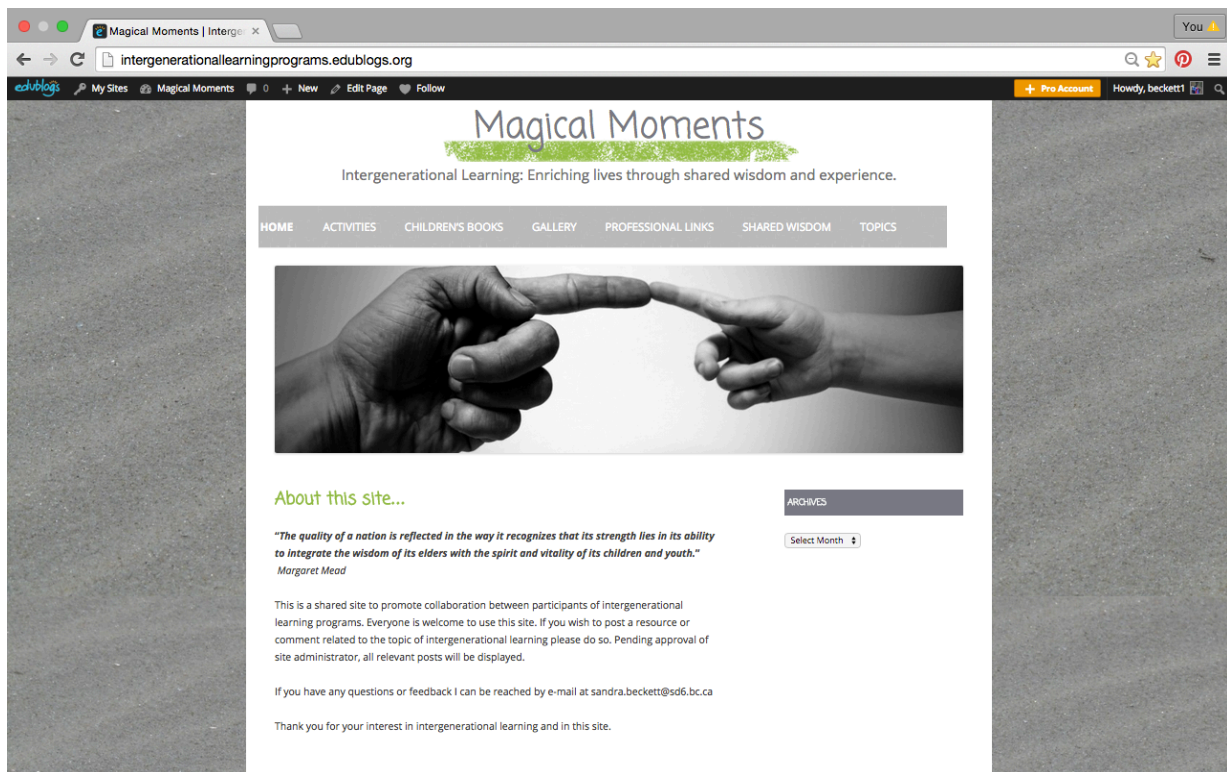
Suggested components of the blog – but not restricted to – are:

- links to professional research and related websites and blogs;
- bibliographies of children’s books;
- suggested activities and lesson plans;
- relevant topics such as bringing nature in and how to handle death and dying;
- a forum for shared wisdom including successes and problem solving; and
- a photo gallery.

As a “living document” I anticipate other topics and ideas will evolve as we utilize this collaborative tool.

The Blog

Home Page. The first page is an invitation for all to collaborate on this intergenerational learning site:



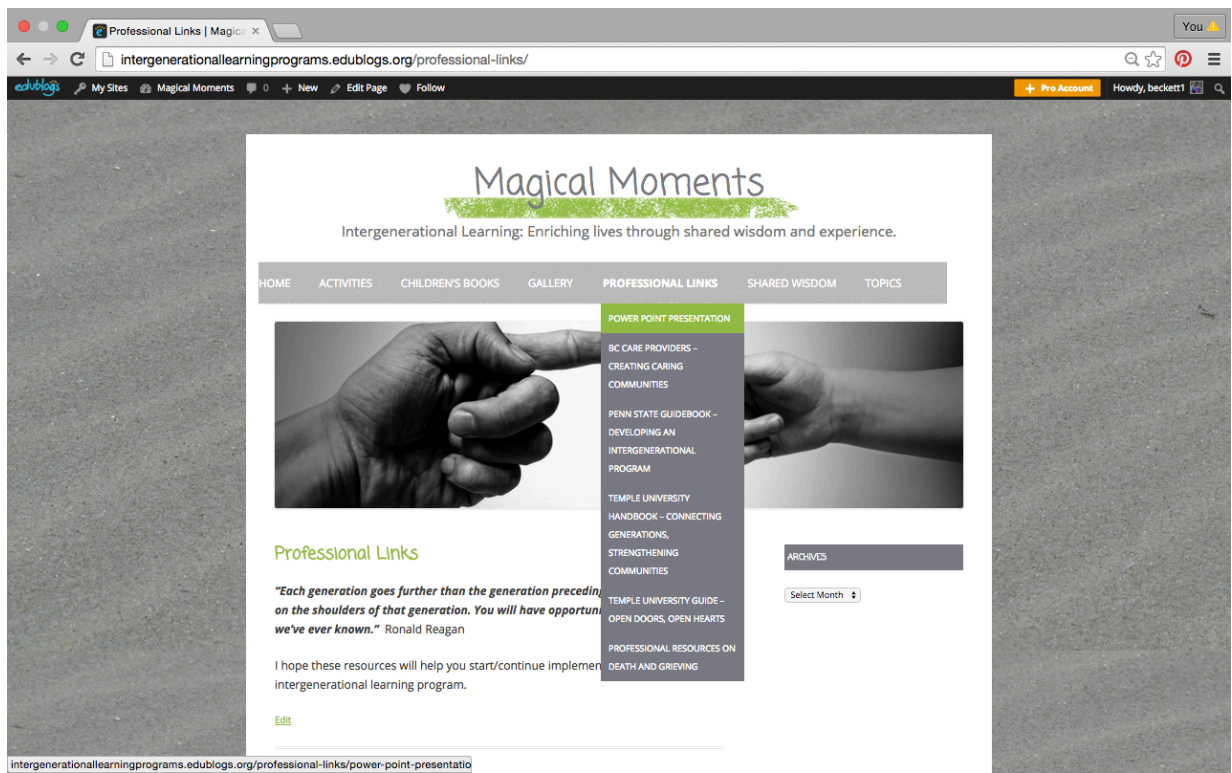
I will encourage more balanced input from stakeholders. Based on past experience, it is easier to engage educators than health care and support workers. Teachers initiate and manage the intergenerational learning programs I am familiar with. Health care and support workers vary in degrees of engagement but tend to take on secondary roles. Perceived limitations of duties, level of experience, burden of mandatory workload, and personality of participants are factors that affect engagement. Knowledge and perceptions vary depending on perspective; it benefits programs when we learn from each other.

Reaching out to health care and support workers and valuing their input is crucial. Inviting these partners to join the blog – then going to their workplace and helping them navigate it – will increase chances of bringing them on board. I will encourage health care and support workers with whom I have a relationship to post on the blog, thereby mentoring their fellow workers. I suggest the following to build equitable relationships:

- including health care and support workers in meetings;
- requesting and valuing their expertise and input; and
- giving them opportunities to plan and implement activities.

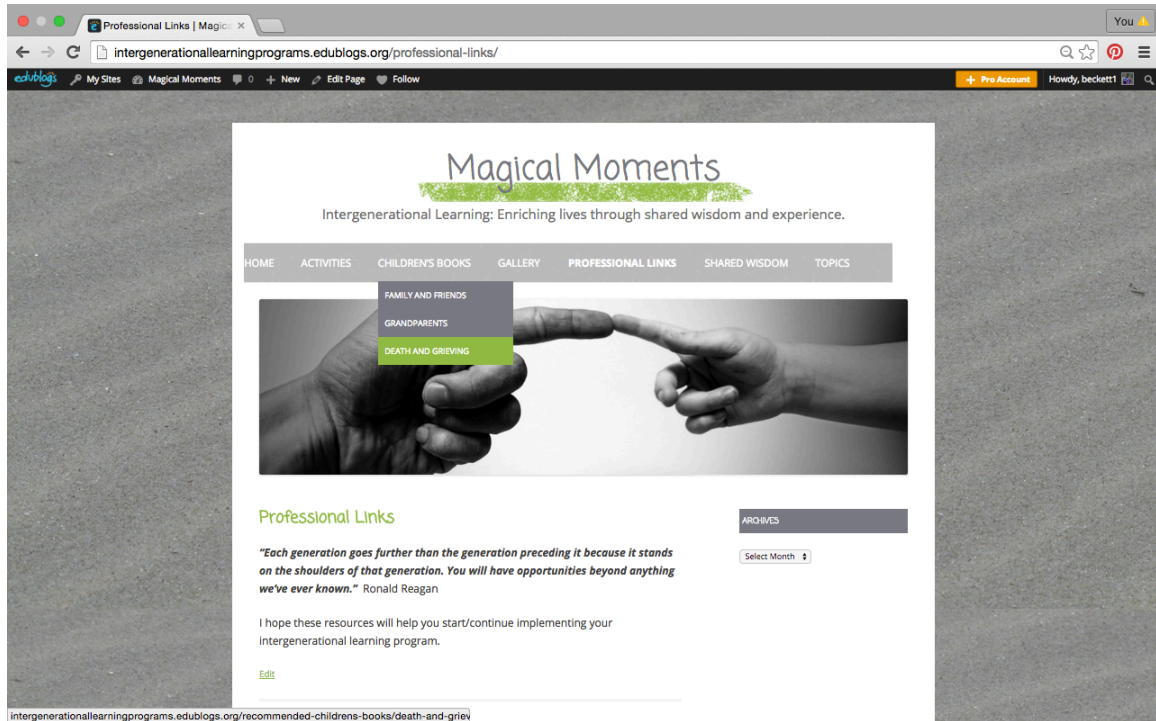
It is important to ensure all stakeholders are valued within the partnership; this is done through inclusion.

Professional Links. Links to professional research and online sites will incorporate useful manuals, journal articles, websites, blogs, and videos. Due to the volume of viable information found throughout this course, postings will be limited to the most advantageous.

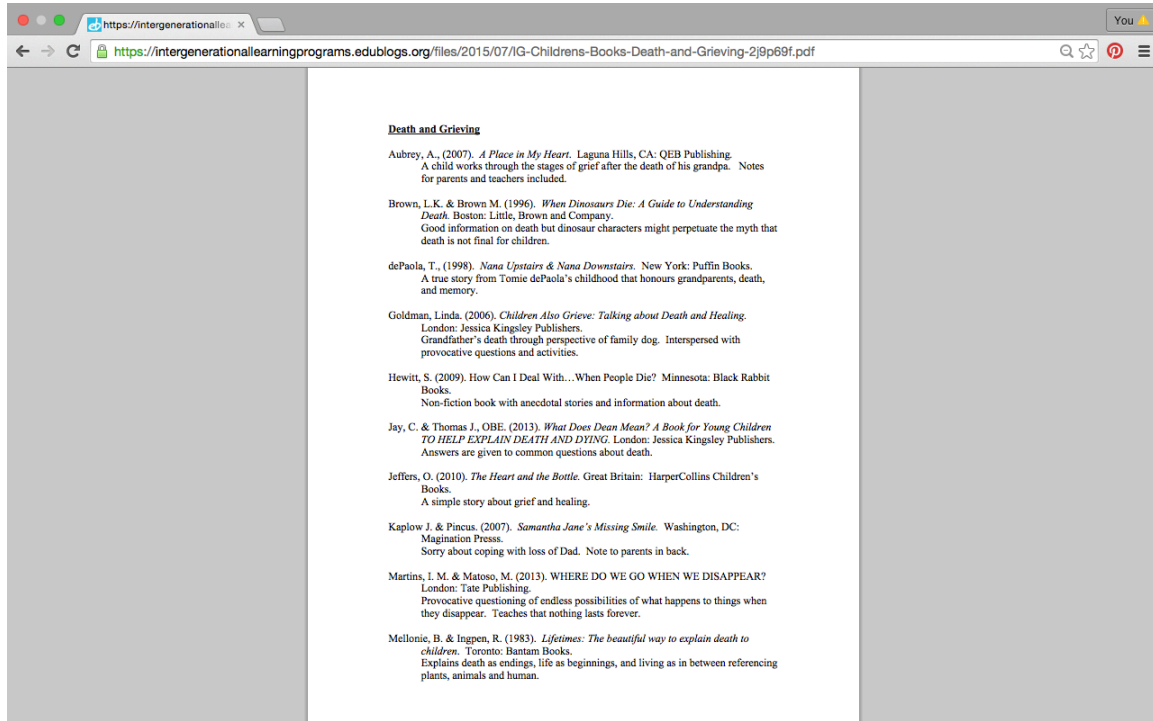


As site manager, I will survey users to see which links are useful and delete those that are ineffective. Users will be encouraged to provide additional recommended links and these will be included.

Children’s Books. Children’s bibliography lists are divided by topic – such as death and grieving –with brief descriptors of content. The abundance and richness of children’s literature requires recommendations to find the best resources in a timely manner. Collaboration and our shared expertise will result in a valued intergenerational learning resource.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/professional-links/. The page features a header with the title "Magical Moments" and the tagline "Intergenerational Learning: Enriching lives through shared wisdom and experience." Below the header is a navigation menu with options: HOME, ACTIVITIES, CHILDREN'S BOOKS, GALLERY, PROFESSIONAL LINKS, SHARED WISDOM, and TOPICS. A dropdown menu is open under "CHILDREN'S BOOKS", listing "FAMILY AND FRIENDS", "GRANDPARENTS", and "DEATH AND GRIEVING". The main content area includes a quote by Ronald Reagan: "Each generation goes further than the generation preceding it because it stands on the shoulders of that generation. You will have opportunities beyond anything we've ever known." Below the quote is a paragraph: "I hope these resources will help you start/continue implementing your intergenerational learning program." and an "Edit" link. An "ARCHIVES" section with a "Select Month" dropdown is also visible. The browser's address bar and various icons are visible at the top.




Activities. Posted activities follow an outline of title, intentions, curriculum links, supplies, photographs, related stories, related songs, snack ideas, conversation starters and suggestions. I chose these components based on the program with which I have experience. These are my perceptions and may not be suited to others. A collaborative approach requires that contributors modify this outline into a format that works efficiently for them. The value is in the shared knowledge not the format.

Activities | Magical Moments x

intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/activities/

HOME ACTIVITIES CHILDREN'S BOOKS GALLERY PROFESSIONAL LINKS SHARED WISDOM TOPICS



Activities

"The youth are very important to me, they're the next generation, but I want to instill in kids, even in playing, that it's never too late and there's no right or wrong way to do anything."
Sheila E.

This is a work in progress...

The activities posted are suggestions only. I hope they spark new ideas for you and your program. There is a noticeable emphasis on Euro-Canadian holiday traditions/celebrations. This is by design in consideration of the participants in my program. If this does not suit your program, please create alternatives. It would be great to see more diverse activities on this site.

Bringing nature into intergenerational learning programs is an important focus. Many tenants in the facility we visit do not get outside often. Bringing the outdoors in spurs memory and helps make connections to the past.

Watch the "Magical Moments" video in the gallery for related photos.
file:///Users/Sandra/Movies/Magical%20Moments%20Video.mp4 (sorry, you might have to copy paste this)

Please share any activities you have had success with.

ARCHIVES


Select Month

Activities | Magical Moments x

intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/activities/

HOME ACTIVITIES CHILDREN'S BOOKS GALLERY PROFESSIONAL LINKS SHARED WISDOM TOPICS

- NAMETAGS
- TABLETOP CHOICES
- GAMES DAY
- ARTIFACTS FROM THE PAST
- THANKSGIVING TURKEYS
- TRICK-OR-TREAT
- REMEMBRANCE DAY
- FEED THE BIRDS
- GINGERBREAD HOUSES
- CHRISTMAS TREES
- BRUNCH WITH SANTA
- SNOWBALL SNOW PEOPLE
- LANTERNS - SNOW KING
- FESTIVAL
- PIZZA
- VALENTINE'S DAY
- SAINT PATRICK'S DAY
- DYING EASTER EGGS
- EASTER BONNETS
- PUSSY WILLOWS
- SPROUTING SEEDS



Activities

"The youth are very important to me, they're the next generation, but I want to instill in kids, even in playing, that it's never too late and there's no right or wrong way to do anything."
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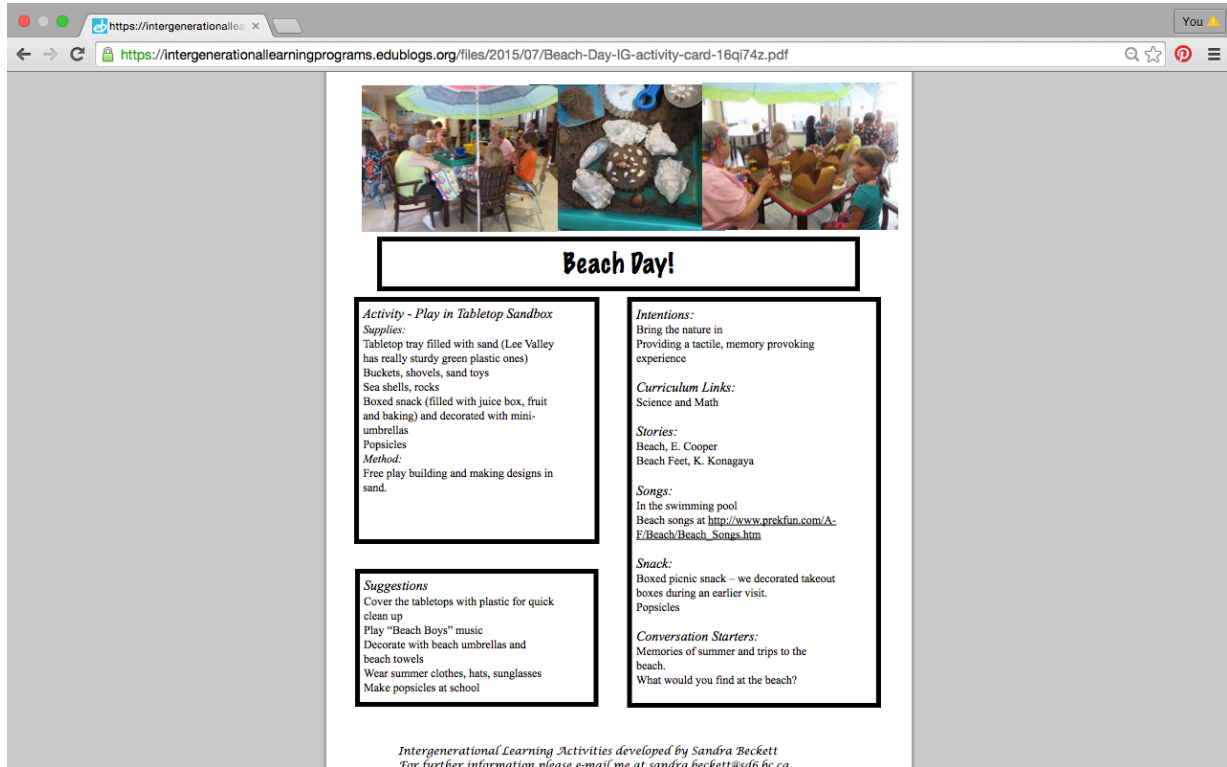
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ARCHIVES

Select Month



https://intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/files/2015/07/Beach-Day-IG-activity-card-16q174z.pdf

Beach Day!

Activity - Play in Tabletop Sandbox
Supplies:
 Tabletop tray filled with sand (Lee Valley has really sturdy green plastic ones)
 Buckets, shovels, sand toys
 Sea shells, rocks
 Boxed snack (filled with juice box, fruit and baking) and decorated with mini-umbrellas
 Popsicles
Method:
 Free play building and making designs in sand.

Intentions:
 Bring the nature in
 Providing a tactile, memory provoking experience

Curriculum Links:
 Science and Math

Stories:
 Beach, E. Cooper
 Beach Feet, K. Konagaya

Songs:
 In the swimming pool
 Beach songs at http://www.prekfun.com/A-E/Beach/Beach_Songs.htm

Suggestions
 Cover the tabletops with plastic for quick clean up
 Play "Beach Boys" music
 Decorate with beach umbrellas and beach towels
 Wear summer clothes, hats, sunglasses
 Make popsicles at school

Snack:
 Boxed picnic snack - we decorated takeout boxes during an earlier visit.
 Popsicles

Conversation Starters:
 Memories of summer and trips to the beach.
 What would you find at the beach?

*Intergenerational Learning Activities developed by Sandra Beckett
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Topics. Initial topics posted will include those pertinent to my master's coursework. The importance of play based experiences; how to deal with death, dying and grief; ways to transition school holidays and school years; how to bring nature and the outdoors in; and how to evoke memory and conversation are topics of relevance to me. I want others to add their wisdom and experience to these discussions as well as to initiate different topics.

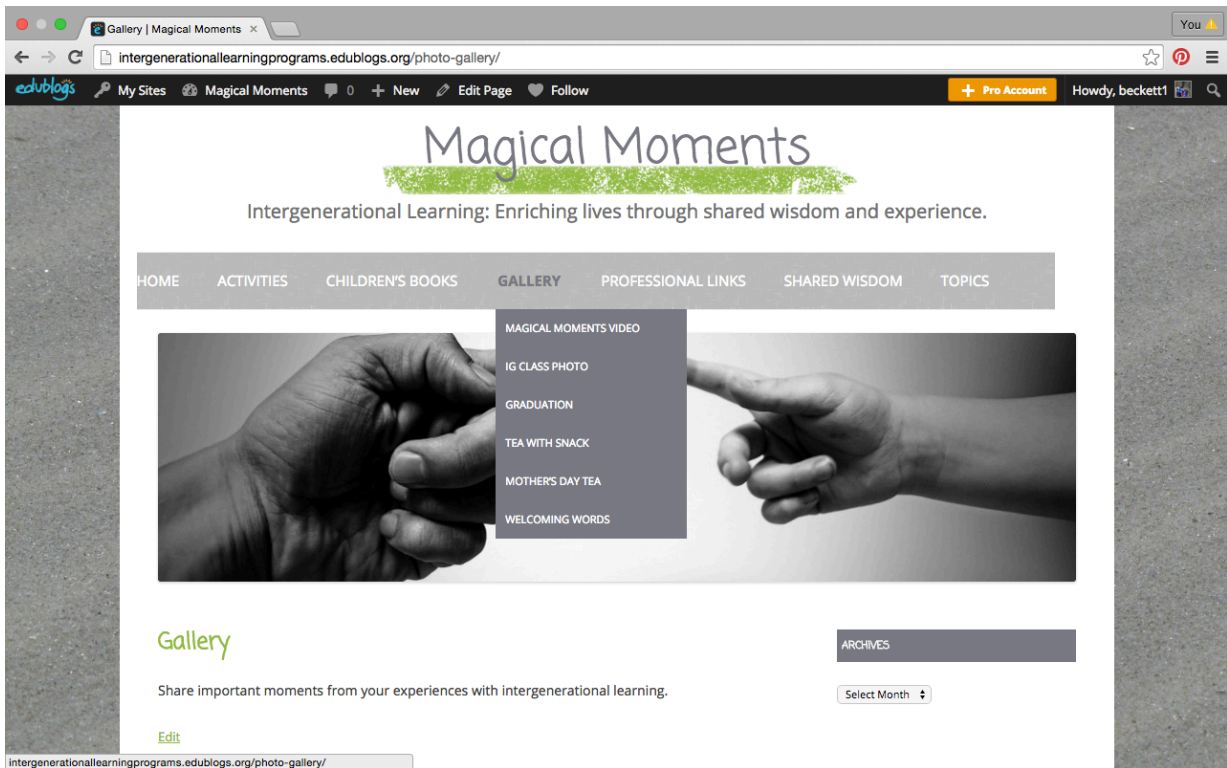
The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the 'Magical Moments' page on edublogs.org. The page has a clean, modern design with a white background and a dark grey navigation bar. The main heading is 'Magical Moments' in a large, green, handwritten-style font, with the tagline 'Intergenerational Learning: Enriching lives through shared wisdom and experience.' below it. A navigation menu includes 'HOME', 'ACTIVITIES', 'CHILDREN'S BOOKS', 'GALLERY', 'PROFESSIONAL LINKS', 'SHARED WISDOM', and 'TOPICS'. A central image shows two hands, one from an older person and one from a younger person, reaching towards each other. To the right of this image is a sidebar menu with items like 'INTERGENERATIONAL PLAY', 'BRIDGING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS - "MAGIC BOX" PROJECT', 'ACKNOWLEDGING DEATH IN KINDERGARTEN', 'BRINGING NATURE IN' (highlighted in green), 'EVOKING MEMORY', and 'PROVOKING CONVERSATION'. Below the image, the 'Topics' section is introduced with a quote: *"There is nothing I'm any more passionate than empowering the next generation."* T. D. Jakes. The purpose of the section is to provide support through discussion of relevant topics. An 'Edit' link and an 'ARCHIVES' section with a 'Select Month' dropdown are also visible.

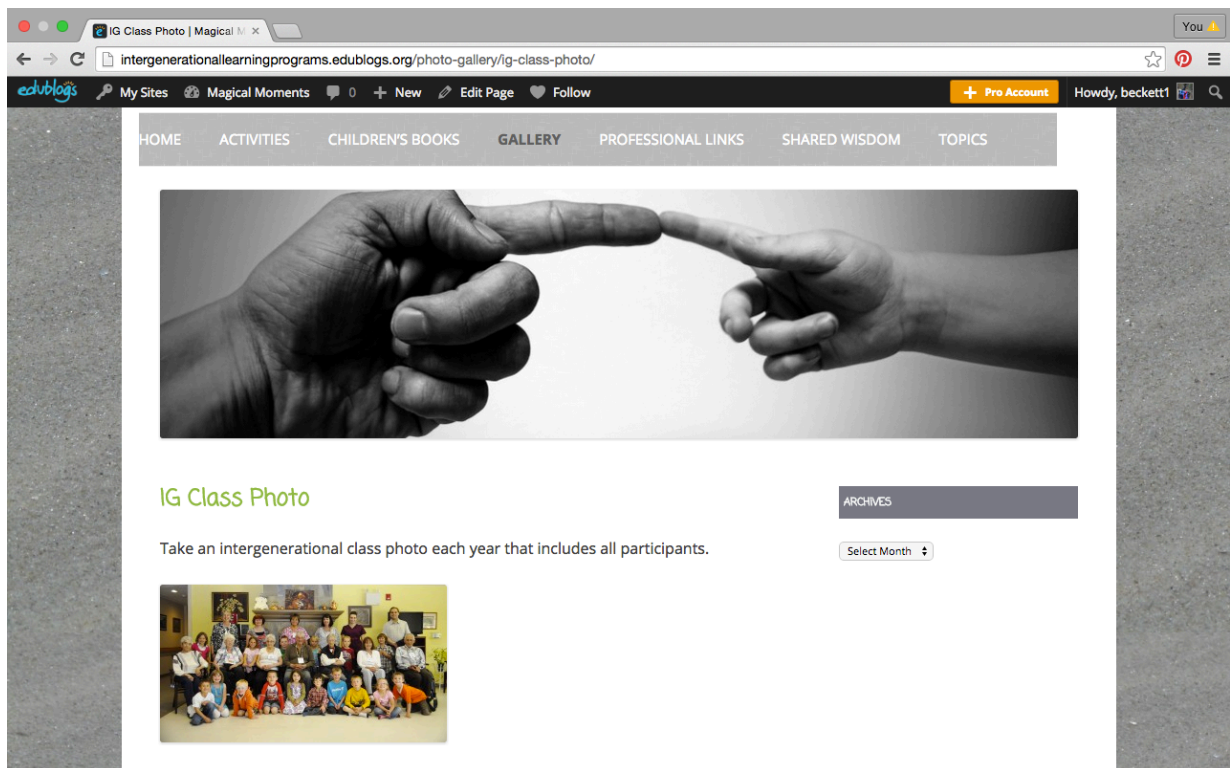
Shared Wisdom. I expect forums for celebrating successes and problem solving will be the most dynamic aspect of the blog. Encouragement to share and celebrate what has gone well will provide inspiration, reassurance and optimism for program providers. Positive stories will energize and motivate us to carry on. Of equal importance is space to problem solve and help those experiencing barriers to success. This was made clear at one meeting when a brainstorming session provided suggestions to improve a particular program. This meeting happened to be timely and provided assistance needed, but this might not always be the case. The blog will always be available; my commitment to check it each week will allow notifications to users to help stakeholders with complications. Collaboration and support for one another is a major focus for this blog.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the 'Magical Moments' website. The browser address bar displays 'intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/encouragement/help/'. The site features a navigation menu with options: HOME, ACTIVITIES, CHILDREN'S BOOKS, GALLERY, PROFESSIONAL LINKS, SHARED WISDOM, and TOPICS. A large image of two hands reaching towards each other is the background for the main content area. A dropdown menu is open over the image, listing: SUGGESTIONS, ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS, PLACEMENT, PERSONNEL, ILLNESS, FINANCES, and HELP!!!. Below the image, the text reads: 'Help!!! In the words of John Dewey "a problem well put is half solved." This is the place to pose questions and ask for support.' There is an 'Edit' link and an 'ARCHIVES' section with a 'Select Month' dropdown.

The screenshot shows the 'Suggestions' page on the website. The browser address bar displays 'intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/encouragement/suggestions-for-setting-up/'. The page contains several paragraphs of text with small images illustrating the suggestions. The text includes: 'If you are visiting a facility you will need a few things. We are lucky to have coat hooks, boot trays, and storage provided.'; 'It is handy to have a trolley for set up.'; 'Participation improves when we meet in a common area. Meeting in the dining room works best for our program as it is set up with tables and chairs.'; 'Prior knowledge of activities prepare residents for our visit. I deliver children's inside shoes (in a laundry basket) and wheel out our trolley of supplies while the residents are eating lunch. Giving our friends an informal "heads-up" of the task ahead puts them at ease.'; 'Sharing food is motivational for all ages. We end with a snack and herbal/"water" tea. The cook at the facility prepares a healthy snack or a treat. I try to help out by cooking with the children to provide the snack at least once each month. Manners are strongly enforced at this time. Children learn to serve the residents first and to clear the tables before we leave.'; and 'We are so grateful to have so much support for this program. All of the staff at the facility we visit are fully engaged. The site manager, cook, and care worker participate fully in all activities with the children and residents; snacks are regularly provided. The night staff - known as the invisible workers - finish off crafts and decorate for our many events. The school "Community Link" worker, and an alternate school student, plus parent volunteers also participate. The children and I try to recognize all of these people on a regular basis. We had fun when the cook got married, and again when she and the community link worker were due to have their first babies! A few extra residents joined us for these two special showers. And no, the babies in the picture are not real...but we are hoping to add another generation when the Moms bring their actual babies next year!'

Gallery. Nothing says it better than a picture. Photographs make sentiments, interactions and activities visible. A photo gallery is an expedient and entertaining way to share experiences. Parents of children in our school district sign annual photo release forms; if similar release forms were acquired from all participants a photo gallery would be an advantageous addition to the blog. My one caution is not to get too involved taking photographs. Intergenerational programs are based on relationships. Being fully engaged and present “in the moment” demonstrates personal commitment to the participants and to the program.





Realizing the more I contribute to this blog the less opportunity is left for collaboration; the time has come to suspend my activity and allow for contributions from others.

Concluding Remarks

I recommend interested persons visit the blog at <http://intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/> often. As a living document, information and dialogue through posts will be ongoing. I anticipate active collaborative participation to result from increased invitations to stakeholders and progression of the school year. Initial invitations will go out individually to district colleagues participating in intergenerational learning program, to the health care workers at the facility I interact with, and to our master's cohort. A mass invitation will be issued to my colleagues within the Rocky Mountain school district via our district "Learning Leadership Report"

(see Appendix). Invitations will include a request to pass the link on to other interested parties, with particular consideration to inclusion and engagement of health care workers.

I suggest presenting intergenerational learning programs to the following to promote the program:

- colleagues at school district and regional professional development days;
- school administrators and boards;
- related health care providers and seniors groups; and
- community liaison groups.

Through interconnections and promotion, advocates for intergenerational learning can educate communities about program benefits. As well as providing resources for these presentations, the blog can be featured with intentions of attracting a wider audience.

Developing this blog has actualized my research goal to scrutinize my personal experiences regarding intergenerational learning and provide guidance to others wishing to implement intergenerational learning programs. I believe the collaborative blog will increase the ripple effect by encouraging others to implement learning across the generations. This project demonstrates the importance of expanding participation in intergenerational learning programs to benefit all participants and society as a whole.

Chapter 4: Reflections

Effects and Influences of the Master of Education Experience

Returning to graduate school after twenty-five years of less structured learning opportunities was a questionable venture for me. Advancement of technology, procuring a formal writing style (APA), focussing, and managing time was a few of the challenges I conquered. At times the intensity of the program and the steep learning curve was daunting. I am happy to conclude that in the end, the accomplishment has been worthwhile.

I have always strived to learn new things and availed myself to new ideas through professional development opportunities and personal workshops. Although these events were provocative they often lack continuity and depth. My intention when enrolling in this master's program was to stimulate my older brain, to occupy time with an "empty nest", and to improve my practice as a kindergarten classroom teacher.

This master's program became an emotional journey. From the high feeling of accomplishment to a low of "I can't do this; I want to quit" other values became instilled. Perseverance and power of a positive mind can surmount most problems. Strong support systems were imperative. Personal wellness affects disposition and I identified – but did not always practice – the importance of balance, sleep and exercise. State of mind influenced my success.

I learned not all things are within my control. Inconsistencies, program and timeline changes, and a general lack of communication within the university structure were frustrating. This forced flexibility and a mindset to expect the unexpected. Support came through family, friends and those in the master's cohort. Putting my effort into

what I could control – which was my work ethic and desire to learn – became a necessary coping mechanism. Life is full of obstacles and resiliency helps with adjustments and completion of goals.

Creating the final project was energizing and it was effortful. Submitting, responding to edit suggestions, and continuously improving drafts were of value to me. It is not very often we get the chance to improve our submitted work. This process increased my accountability and clarity with the topic; I was challenged to extend my thinking. Receiving constructive feedback was inspiring and it elevated the quality of the final product.

Coursework was eye opening but it was the ideological that resonated with me. I was privileged to observe and benefit from adept teaching. The influence of masters at work inspires me to implement many examples of best practise.

Dr. Ruthanne Tobin demonstrated how students flourish when they feel valued. Dr. Tobin made time for personal contact and checked on the wellness of everyone in her class daily. She demonstrated responsive teaching, true inclusion, and genuine kindness. It was fascinating to witness the positive effects to individuals and the class as a unit; learning benefits and risk taking was evident within this supportive atmosphere. I strive to embody these principals into my own pedagogy.

Dr. Christopher Filler taught me the importance of taking children outside into the natural world. I embarked upon a kindergarten nature journey in a minimal way; the eco-literacy course encouraged me to take a deep look into why I recognized value in this. Through Dr. Filler's assigned readings and coursework I was able to expand my thinking and my program. I am currently looking for additional support to increase class time in

nature. The more time I spend outside with my students – the more benefits I observe firsthand – and the more incentive I have to increase nature-based opportunities for my class. Seeing children fully engaged in learning, using their imagination, taking assessed risks, self-regulating behaviour, and developing a sense of place legitimizes expanding outdoor education.

Dr. Jennifer Thom was one of my first and most significant influences because she expanded my thinking. System's thinking astounded me. Reflecting on this became my moment of "eureka". I came to realize authentic education encompasses learning "what you didn't know you needed to know". Combined with the notion of "effortful learning" – gleaned from the readings – I recognized profound learning is not always easy. We add value when we accept effortful challenges by practicing perseverance.

Paralleling knowledge gained in eco-literacy, Dr. Thom held our classes in the garden. The resulting "sense of place" and "freedom to learn" further solidified the advantages of learning outside. This was one of the many examples of interconnectedness evident throughout the program.

These are all lessons to take back to the classroom, wherever it might be. I can relate to, and have increased empathy for children having difficulty at school as a result of my personal struggles within this program. Raising children's self-esteem and giving them individual support improves their mindset to try new things and open up to learning. Learning outside of the regular classroom: decreases stress; improves behaviour and self-regulation; encourages us to "be in the moment"; creates multiple opportunities for creativity and imagination; and elevates our awareness and receptivity to learning new things. It enhances learning as it connects us to special places such as assisted living

facilities and natural areas within our local community. Resiliency – the ability to experience setbacks without becoming defeated – is a valuable internal resource. The first draft need not be the only draft. Constructive feedback extends thinking. An open mind and continuous learning provoke new ways of being, resulting in a richer life. Learning can take many forms and can be done in any place. The nugget is to instill within children the desire to learn, anywhere and everywhere, as a continuous adventure. That is magical.

Future Considerations

Delving into the benefits of intergenerational learning has strengthened my commitment to providing intergenerational learning as a component of my kindergarten program. Having experienced intergenerational learning for the past three years, I know how much value it adds. I now have solid research and documentation to back my observations.

Continuing to improve my intergenerational learning program energizes me. I am interested in bridging this program during school vacations and will implement the magic box project this next school year; discussions with Mountain View staff have already begun. Mindfully provoking increased oral language between the young and old is another aspiration. Discussing conversation prompts with the children – and directly teaching how to stimulate conversation – will further positive relationships with our older friends. Bringing nature in through sensory experiences seems to bolster memory and conversation. As I observe the residents playing in the sand, dirt and snow, I recognize the importance of tactile stimulation and connections to the earth. Developing and

implementing new activities energizes all who participate in the program. I look forward to receiving additional suggestions and ideas via the blog.

As well as sustaining this program for my class and Mountain View residents, I hope to inspire others to develop similar programs. Mentorship and collaboration within my school and our zone is possible; we are a group closely connected by size and proximity. Meetings focussed on intergenerational learning programs already exist within our school district. Potential to open these meetings to diverse intergenerational programs – and to others interested but without experience – should be exploited.

The collaborative blog developed is an accessible tool that promotes intergenerational learning throughout the district but also reaches out to other learning communities. The intention is for health care and support workers to participate alongside educators, provoking perspectives and collaboration from diverse participants. The benefit of an online forum is universal access uninhibited by scheduling and distance.

This project has increased my comfort and skill with technology. I will be branching out and communicating with kindergarten families via a classroom blog. I am also considering digital reporting. With the backing of my school administrator, I will review this method of reporting on our next professional development day. I have a plan to fully implement digital reporting in kindergarten in the 2016-2017 school year. The 2015-2016 school year will be a test year to research, practice and collaborate with teachers already using this method. Increased technical knowledge has opened the door for multiple applications.

This professional learning experience has taught me the value of reading professional journals. I have enjoyed and gained knowledge from all of the required readings. Continued professional reading keeps one current and provokes new ideas. With this new perspective and more expendable time, I will join our district “book club” this next school year. I also intend to delve through the many recommended readings accumulated throughout this course.

Taking a more comprehensive view, this course has taught me there is much to learn and multiples ways to improve one’s teaching practice. I take pride in the learning experiences I provide for my students. It amazes me when I look back five years; I was implementing a totally different learning experience for my students. Although many of my core values have not changed – the importance of play, inclusion, consequences, and a warm and welcoming learning space – my method of delivery has. Possibly the provision of full day kindergarten has allowed for the time we spend at our intergenerational program and out in nature.

Education must always evolve if it is to keep pace with the learners and the culture in which they are being raised. As their teachers, there is an onus on us to keep learning, growing, and responding if we are to provide children with optimal learning opportunities. These opportunities should never be generic and teaching should never be “cookie-cutter”. The enthusiasm teachers bring to the classroom should be sparked by individual passions and unique experiences and knowledge. Children benefit from a range of experiences that – if provided by enthusiastic teachers – inspires a desire to learn.

Recommendations

My three recommendations for educators interested in intergenerational learning projects are to:

- Read and engage in the blog at:

<http://intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/>

- Find someone who implements a successful intergenerational program and visit his or her program. Find a mentor or group to collaborate with.
- Visit potential sites – giving consideration to: staff level of commitment, resident's interest, proximity to school, availability of common area to meet in, and finances – then pick one and begin!

But, if this is not your passion take the time to find out what is, learn about it, then implement it. Find the magic and create the program. You will never regret it.

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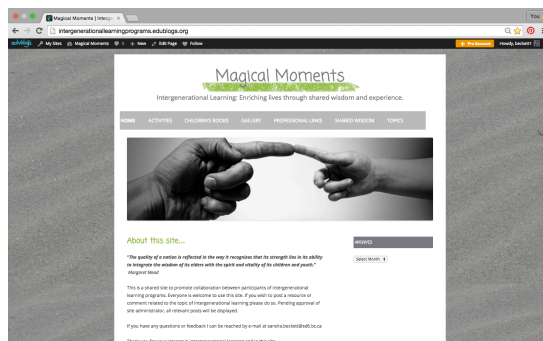
Appendix

The quality of a nation is reflected in the way it recognizes that its strength lies in its ability to integrate the wisdom of its elders with the spirit and vitality of its children and youth.

-Margaret Mead, *Coming of age in Samoa*, 1971

Intergenerational learning programs benefit all ages. All three zones within Rocky Mountain School District have active intergenerational learning programs. Program providers take part in collaborative meetings thanks to initiatives of Barb Carriere who inspired the inception of our programs and successfully applied for continued grant funding from “Growing Innovation in Rural Sites of Learning”.

I have witnessed the magic of intergenerational learning firsthand when taking my class to an assisted living facility each week. In an effort to further Barb’s work – and increase participation in intergenerational learning programs – I have developed an intergenerational learning program blog. I invite any interested persons to use and contribute to this site.



To view go to: <http://intergenerationallearningprograms.edublogs.org/>

If you are considering or already implementing an intergenerational learning program for your students, this is the site for you! Please share this blog address with health care workers and others interested intergenerational learning programs.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at Sandra.Beckett@sd6.bc.ca