

Bringing Generations Together



Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Photo Credit: Columbia Jewish Congregation

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Pretty

Intergenerational knowledge transfer can foster healthy and dynamic lifelong relationships.

Intergenerational knowledge transfer comes in many forms, and can be sought after for different reasons. Some reasons include, the reduction of social isolation, skill and trade building, and the development of social and emotional skills. Knowledge transfer can occur in a variety of settings, such as within formal institutions like the work place and educational facilities, or it can be found within less formal environments such as community and friendship centres. Regardless of how the knowledge transfer is achieved, the definition on the act remains the same. Plainly put, it is the “systematic transfer of knowledge, skills, competencies, norms and values between generations”(p.31).³ Although these are all very different settings, the goal is to obtain a relationship between generations that is mutually beneficial.

Social isolation among older adults can have negative impacts on health, it “can lead to lower self-rated physical health, reduced responsiveness to stress, increased risk of coronary heart disease, increased risk of dementia, and mortality”(p. 224).⁴ Intergenerational relations can give older people a sense of purpose and help to “maintain independence and remain in community settings longer than older adults who are socially isolated”(p. 873).¹

Skill and trade building between generations is advantageous for both groups. There are skills that older workers have accumulated through years of experience that can’t always be taught in the classroom. Some companies have implemented training programs within their company that build off intergenerational knowledge transferring. These programs focus on building the skill sets of the younger generation through the knowledge of the older generation, this of course has economic benefits for the company, as “knowledge has become recognized as the most strategically significant resource for organizations” (p.1)². There is also a social element to this type of training program. This knowledge transferring typically takes place through a face to face interaction.

Social and emotional growth occurs within intergenerational knowledge transfer, as it can “involve interactions that promote social growth and learning between the young and the old”(p. 32)³.



Photo Credit: Choi Ho

Figure # 1: Pamphlets advertising community programs for both older adults and youth.



Figure #2: Intergenerational Workplace Training



Figure #3: Intergenerational program at a University

Professional Workplace Setting for Knowledge Transfer

A big site for intergenerational knowledge transfer is within a professional setting. With high rates of older people leaving the workforce, there is a need for their knowledge to be transferred to the younger generation of workers. **An “unprecedented loss of human capital will occur between now and 2020 unless steps are taken to proactively transfer knowledge from valued longtime employees”(p.7).** ⁴ However, many of the professions suffering this loss of knowledge come from `isolating professions. To combat this problem, some engineers within the aerospace industry have proposed social building activities to create an easier transition in knowledge transferring. These include informal meeting places, apprenticeships and mentorships, and work shadowing. These programs build social relationships between older and younger employees, making both parties more comfortable to share knowledge and work experience between each other.

Classroom Setting for Knowledge Transfer

Classrooms are a great environment for intergenerational knowledge transferring. Many universities are offering programs called the Grandparents programs. These provide older adults and young children the opportunity to attend classes together on a variety of subjects. Although this program is called “Grandparents University”, you do not need to be a grandparent, or have a grandchild to participate. Winona State University is just one school that offers this program. They feature six different majors that seniors and youth can select from. They include, composite materials engineering, english, geoscience, global studies, mass communications, and recreation and tourism. This program includes four classes in two days taught by professors from the University. This environment gives older adults and young children the chance to learn from one another within a formal learning, while building long lasting relationships.

Community Centres for Knowledge Transfer

Community centres are a great place for intergenerational knowledge transfer. These spaces offer a variety of ways to transfer knowledge and



Figure #4: Intergenerational activities at a community centre



Figure #5: Grandparent's University Program

Figure #6: Community space for potential intergenerational programs



Figure #7: Intergenerational Community Programs



build relationships between generations. Community centres are typically a less formal environment, which gives more freedom to the ways people choose to transfer their knowledge. Ma-Mow-We-Tak friendship centre is a great example of an informal setting transferring knowledge between older and younger people. Elders within this Indigenous community teach the younger generation traditional practices such as beeding, knitting, and make moccasins. The friendship centre sold the items made, and the money raised was then put back into the centre for future projects.

There are many benefits to having programs such as this, such as connecting with traditional culture, and giving youth and older people a place to develop relationships and skills. A friendship centre can enrich communities that are challenged by high rates of youth misdemeanors.

Final Thoughts

Intergenerational knowledge transfer and relation building is an important aspect of society. It benefits both the older population and the young. With the benefits ranging from social, to emotional, to economical, it is time that more of these programs become regularly implemented in to society. The programs listed in this section acknowledge the importance of intergenerational programs within the aging process, however, there needs to be more options for this type of interaction.



Figure #8: Intergenerational Activities at Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre

Sources:

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Images:

1. Photo taken by classmate Choi Ho. Picutre of pamphlet offerings at Brandon TownCentre.
2. Photo taken from Mindtools.com. Picture of a intergenerational workplace. <https://www.mindtools.com>
- 3 & 5. Photo taken from Winona State University website. Picture of the Grandparent's program. <https://www.winona.edu/grandparents/past-programs.as>
4. Photo taken from iGen. Picture of intergenerational activites. <http://www.sherbrookecommunitycentre.ca>
6. Photo taken by classmate Choi Ho. Picture of Brandon Art Gallery
7. Photo taken from CNN article. Picture of intergenerational programs. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/16/health/longevity-intergenerational-care-elderly-children-intl/index.html>
8. Photo taken from Thompson Citizen website. Photo of an intergenerational program, <https://www.thompsoncitizen.net/news/thompson/knitting-brings-elders-and-youth-together-1.1750806>