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IMPACT OF AN INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAM ON BLACK ADOLESCENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ELDERLY

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This study examines changes in black adolescents’ perceptions of the elderly following participation in an eight-week intergenerational project. The project matched 19 teenagers with 19 elderly subjects from a large senior citizens center. Using an experimental design, students were matched by age with a control group (n = 20). A 20-item semantic differential scale and the Children’s Perceptions of Aging and Elderly (CPAE) inventory were used to measure attitude change. Post-test results from a matched pair t-test found significant attitude change in the experimental group: semantic differential (t = 2.8, p < .01); CPAE (t = 4.2, p < .01). Qualitative comments from the youth and elderly participants further indicate positive qualities of the partners program.

Programs that bring young and old together in organized ways can be found nationwide. Intergenerational events are now an accepted norm, although activities and programs vary widely. Intergenerational programming has proved successful in bridging the gap between the young and the old for a number of reasons. Intergenerational activities can serve to: overcome the drift toward an age-graded society; relieve possible future tension between the generations; provide a historical awareness of the past, present, and future; and provide a sharing of multicultural diversity of values and life-styles (Peacock & Talley, 1984; Tice, 1985). Intergenerational programs give both the old and young a sense of being a part of a larger society and facilitate a healthy awareness of progress in one’s own life.

It has been suggested that intergenerational programming has the potential for counteracting common stereotypes and negative evaluations youth have of older people. It is proposed that youth’s negative attitudes are, in part, a function of a lack of personal contact with older

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people (Carstensen, Mason, & Caldwell, 1982; Murphy-Russell, Die, & Walker, 1986; Seefeldt, 1987). The belief that direct contact with the elderly reduces perceptual ambiguity and thereby lessens the psychological distance felt by younger persons toward the old has been suggested by a number of studies (Brubaker & Powers, 1976; Carstensen, Mason, & Caldwell, 1982; Corbin, Kagan, & Metil-Corbin, 1987; Dunkle & Mikethun, 1983; Knox, Gekoski, & Johnson, 1986; Peacock & Talley, 1984).

More specifically, gerontologists have proposed that a number of conditions must be present for contact between groups to result in positive attitude development (Aday, Sims, & Evans, 1991; Caspi, 1984; Chapman & Neal, 1990; Couper, Sheehan, & Thomas, 1991). Contact is most likely to lead to positive attitude change when the two groups are of equal socioeconomic status, when the contact is intimate rather than causal, when the contact is rewarding for both groups, and when functional interaction takes place, with both groups involved in goal-setting and participating in important activities (Seefeldt, 1987).

In addition, Glass and Knott (1982) and Triandis (1971) have proposed three primary ways in which attitudes can be changed: (a) through discussions with peers, (b) through direct experience with attitude objects, and (c) through increased information or knowledge. Most programs incorporating a variety of these techniques have had some success in changing attitudes about the elderly. For example, in previous studies on attitude change in adolescents (Couper, Sheehan, & Thomas, 1991; Glass & Trent, 1980; Ivester & King, 1977; Trent, Glass, & Crockett, 1977), researchers obtained positive attitude change when adolescents were afforded the opportunity for discussion of the aged with peers, direct contact with elderly persons, and increased knowledge about the aged. However, it has been suggested that direct experience with older adults in controlled settings appears to be more effective in changing attitudes than information or discussions on attitudes and facts about aging (Cherry, Benest, Gates, & White, 1985; Couper, Sheehan, & Thomas, 1991; McGuire, 1986; Murphy-Russell, Die, & Walker, 1986).

The literature has identified numerous attempts to modify adolescent attitudes through some type of increased interaction across generations. Glass and Trent (1980) report a group of ninth graders improved their attitudes toward the elderly as an outcome of 4-H Club activities involving older people. Chapman and Neal (1990) indicate that adolescents participating in a program aimed at helping older people showed more enjoyment in being with older people as well as decreased social distance. Sparling and Rogers (1985) and Cherry et al. (1985) further report that adolescents in their samples experienced a
positive attitude change toward the elderly when engaging in a variety of service delivery programs. Finally, Olejnik and LaRue (1981) indicate that adolescents' attitudes toward older people became less negative following two months of daily contact with elderly persons. No studies focusing specifically on changing the attitudes of black adolescents toward the elderly were found.

The present investigation was designed to examine youth attitudes toward old people after participation in an eight-week Intergenerational Partners Project. The implementation of the program provided the opportunity to measure the degree of attitude change toward the elderly by a group of black teenagers after exposure to a group of senior volunteers. The program is presented as one alternative that may prove useful in reducing misconceptions adolescent children may have concerning the older generation.

METHOD

Using a two-group experimental research design, this study examines changes in black adolescents' perceptions of the elderly following participation in an eight-week intergenerational project.

Program Participants

The experimental sample (4 males and 15 females) consisted of 11th- and 12th-grade students. A control group (n = 20) comprised other Upward Bound students participating in the summer program. Both groups were surveyed as to the amount of contact they had with elders prior to the project. There were no major differences in the amount of reported contact with elders between the groups.

Elderly participants were solicited from the Boynton Senior Citizens Center, one of several satellite locations coordinated by Senior Neighbors of Chattanooga, Inc. No restrictions such as sex, race, age, or disabilities were placed on potential participants. The resulting sample consisted of 10 women and 9 men volunteers. Nine of participants were black, and the remaining seniors were white. The mean age of the group was 71, ranging from 60 to 80 years.

Measures

For this study the authors used as one outcome measure the Children's Perceptions of Aging and Elderly (CPAE) inventory developed by Rich, Myrick, & Campbell, 1983. Respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement with each item. The CPAE instrument contained 20 items and stressed the social, physical, and behavioral factors associated with
the aging process. Items are simply stated and illustrated by such statements as: “Old people are friendly,” “I like visiting old people,” and “Old people are not very smart.” Each point on the scale was weighted 1–5, with 5 being high, and a summation score was used for statistical analysis purposes. Possible attitude scores ranged from 20 to 100.

Rich et al. (1983) had previously reported the calculation \( r = .73 \) of a Pearson product moment correlation in a test-retest procedure. In our study, we evaluated reliability using Cronbach’s alpha procedure; the resulting coefficient was 0.87, which indicates a high degree of internal consistency for the overall scale.

A 20-item semantic differential scale was also developed to assess the attitudes of the upward bound students toward the elderly. The items of the scale are bipolar adjectives that reflect a continuum between extremes. The items selected for use in the scale were deemed particularly relevant to elderly populations. The items used in this scale were selected from previous research using semantic differential scales measuring attitudes toward the elderly (Sanders, Montgomery, Pittman, & Balkwell, 1984; Jantz, Seefeld, Galper, & Serock, 1977). Attitude scores were coded so that higher scores indicated a more positive view of the elderly. It was possible for scores to range from a low of 20 (most negative) to a high of 140 (most positive). Youth were asked to “circle the number on a seven-point scale that best describes the average older (age 60 or older) person.”

Research by Sanders, Montgomery, Pittman, and Balkwell (1984) supports the reliability and validity of semantic differential scales. In the present study, reliability was again evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha procedure. The reported coefficient for the procedure was 0.91, which indicates a high degree of internal consistency for the semantic differential scale.

The questionnaire also included a number of questions concerning the topic of aging and growing old, for example, “I think old people are…” and “How do you feel about growing old?” In addition, the experimental group was asked three evaluative questions to demonstrate the impact of the Intergenerational Partners Project and previous stereotypical views held by this group of adolescents. These items include: “From this project, I learned…” “Do you see older people differently than you did before?” and “Overall, how has this project changed you?” Since these items are used for illustrative purposes only, a detailed content analysis was not carried out.

**Program Goals**

The Intergenerational Partners Project was conducted during the summer of 1990. The project was a joint effort between the Senior Neigh-
bors of Chattanooga, Inc., and the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga as an enrichment activity for a group of "at risk" students participating in the Upward Bound Program. The major goals of the project included the following: (a) to develop intergenerational contacts for teens who show college potential but who may be academically "at risk" because of economic and societal factors; (b) to provide experiential learning opportunities through intergenerational contacts that may decrease negative attitudes and stereotypes about older adults; (c) to provide opportunities for youth to learn more about the human aging process, late-life development, and the problems and opportunities experienced by older adults; and (d) to provide, through shared activities and social interactions, opportunities for youthful and older intergenerational participants to develop friendships with each other.

Program Procedures

In early summer, the directors of the Upward Bound project and senior center advisor met to work out details of the project. Plans were made for location of meetings and activities for the project. The intergenerational pairs were chosen based on interests the teens expressed in a pre-program information sheet. The students' lists of their favorite food, hobby, pasttime, reading material, and pet were provided to the seniors. The seniors then matched themselves with their preferred partner. This procedure accelerated the selection process as well as the development of the relationship.

The project involved a number of shared activities between the two groups. The following provides a brief description of the planned activities conducted during the months of June and July. Each session lasted about an hour and a half.

Session One: Introduction of Partners

The first session consisted of initial introductions of the partners to each other. The two age groups shared reactions to multi-age, multi-activity photographs as an "ice-breaker." Two sub-groups were then formed to brainstorm ideas for a puppet show to be developed during the project. One sub-group chose to develop the puppets; the other sub-group would develop the plot and script.

Session Two: Informal Sharing

This session focused on the sharing of personal photographs and other mementos that both teen and elderly participants had brought. Sub-groups worked on artistic development (drawing, painting, and cutting out figures) of puppets, and on development of the plot.
Session Three: Adventures in Research
A guest speaker provided a motivational talk regarding the importance of research and the excitement in the learning process. Intergenerational pairs visited informally.

Session Four: Reminiscing Groups
Historical artifacts of daily life were used as a basis for reminiscences. Teens were exposed to daily life in past times, and comparisons were made to the present. Both generations shared their notions about the "then and now."

Session Five: Puppet Show Preparation
One small group of pairs worked under the direction of the center's art director and painted scenery on cardboard "theatre" for the puppet show. Another small group of pairs worked on the script and acting.

Session Six: Making Baskets
For this session, a guest artist presented a demonstration on basket-making. Members from both age groups were involved in the basket-making process. A group discussion was held on the utility of baskets, especially in times past.

Session Seven: Painting to Music
This session again involved the center's art director. The intergenerational pairs painted while listening to various types of music (classical, big band, and rock). At the conclusion of this session, the pairs talked about each other's painting and shared various points of view from each generation.

Session Eight: Production Day
This session was used to establish closure of the project. It included an indoor picnic and a talent show. The show included singing groups from several talented Upward Bound students, a skit presented by two seniors, and the puppet show presented by the intergenerational cast. Certificates of Participation were awarded to all intergenerational pairs.

RESULTS
The purpose of this investigation was to determine the effects of the Intergenerational Partners Project on a group of Upward Bound students. The following null-hypothesis was tested: There is no significant
difference between experimental and control groups on attitudes toward the elderly and aging process, as measured by the Children's Perceptions of Aging and Elderly (CPAE) inventory and a semantic differential attitude scale.

At the beginning of the Intergenerational Partners Project, the questionnaire was administered to the experimental and control groups participating in the study. Mean scores for both groups of subjects were computed on the CPAE. In reviewing the results from the CPAE inventory, the mean scores for the pretest inventory revealed a similar mean score (control mean = 74.05; experimental mean = 73.75). However, as Table 1 displays, when experimental and control group post-test scores were compared using a matched pair t-test, a significant difference existed between the two groups (control mean = 76.70; experimental mean = 80.90; t = 4.02; p < .01). It should be mentioned that the mean scores and differences between the experimental and control groups reported here are similar to the previous research reported by Aday, Sims, and Evans (1991) and Rich et al. (1983), who previously used the CPAE as the dependent variable measuring attitude change.

Table 2 presents the results on the semantic differential scale. A comparison of pretest and post-test scores for the experimental group and control group, respectively, indicate a significant difference between the two groups (t = 2.8; p < .01). These findings tend to provide additional statistical support for the impact of the Intergenerational Partners program on the perceptions black adolescents hold toward the elderly.

In addition to the statistical significance the project appeared to have on the experimental group, qualitative statements by both the teens and seniors also illustrate additional and important information regarding program impact. At the conclusion of the project, students were asked to complete several open-ended statements such as "I think

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1 Comparison of Pretest and Post-test for Experimental Group and Control Group on CPAE Attitude Inventory</th>
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<td>Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Experimental Group</strong></td>
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<td>Pretest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Control Group</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
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</table>
that old people are . . .” Comments were extremely positive and seemed to stem from the experiences gained during involvement with their intergenerational partners. For example, answers like “very good to talk to about problems” or “fun and interesting, and they are always willing to talk” or “the best thing that any young generation could ever have” or “very interesting and informing, and they teach us something new everyday” were typical. When asked to complete the statement “When I grow old . . .” responses included “I want to be a role model for the young people,” “I want to be as charming and loving as my partner,” and “I want to be just as active and fun as my 80-year-old partner.”

Other qualitative statements by the seniors and teens also illustrate program success. Three additional questions were used in evaluating the impact of the intergenerational project. When asked, “What have you learned from the Intergenerational Project?” typical replies from teens included: “that there is really not a gap in our abilities,” “Older people have similar problems like ours,” “Old people are human too,” and “There are more friends for you other than just teenagers.” Typical replies to this question from the seniors included: “not to class all teenagers as rowdy kids,” “If you take an interest in the younger generation, they will take an interest in you,” “All young people don’t think alike,” and “Senior citizens and Upward Bound students can cooperate, get along, and have a wonderful relationship.”

Question two was “Do you see older (younger) people differently than you did before this project?” Common responses from the teens included: “I never thought older people were so friendly,” “I think older people are more outgoing than I thought,” “that older people are a lot more intelligent than I thought,” and “that old people are not mean and selfish as some people say.”

Common responses from the senior participants included: “I think they seem smarter and more active in their work than kids used to be,”

### TABLE 2 Comparison of Pretest and Post-test for Experimental Group and Control Groups on Semantic Differential

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>91.02</td>
<td>18.71</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>&lt;.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100.15</td>
<td>17.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>98.45</td>
<td>19.20</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>&gt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>98.80</td>
<td>18.53</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
"I saw change in the young people's attitudes, and they became more friendly," and "They seemed to know how to get where they wanted to go without putting older people down."

Question three was stated, "How has this project changed you?" The following examples were provided by the students: "I want to be around older people more than I used to," "I learned to be less nervous around older people," "It let me know that they are people too," "I can be more open to older people now," and "It has taught me to have respect for the elderly and to help them when they are in need."

The following examples were provided by the seniors: "I'm more tolerant of teenagers than I was before," "I had classed all teenagers alike," "I am more positive, when I see them doing negative stuff, I am more likely to try to help them—talk to them," "I realized that whenever I'm with young people, I feel younger—have more get up and go."

CONCLUSIONS

The statistical results of this study show that intergenerational programming in a summer Upward Bound program can have a significant effect on how adolescents perceive the elderly and the aging process. It appears that through their observations and involvement over the course of this project, the experimental group members were influenced by the humor and high level of activity found among their senior partners.

New insights were demonstrated by both generations as a result of this Upward Bound project. Although the attitudes of the older adult participants in this project were not quantitatively assessed, it appeared that their attitudes toward this group of young people were generally very positive.

In retrospect, it appears the goals of this project were accomplished. Through a number of shared activities, an intimate relationship emerged that was pleasant for the young and old alike. In addition, comments from the teens and seniors support the value of establishing goals in intergenerational programming. The activity most frequently mentioned by both groups as their favorite involved the activities directly related to the puppet show. It appears that activities with structure and a definite purpose provide the bonding that is so important to the overall success of intergenerational programming.

REFERENCES


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