INTERGENERATIONAL EDUCATION AND SERVICE PROGRAMMING: A MODEL FOR SELECTION AND EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES

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doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
The intergenerational approach is a proven method for education and service programming with older adults, children, and youth. However, the broad scope of intergenerational programming inherently makes it difficult to create general decision-making processes or models for the selection of appropriate activities for diverse participants. We present a model for decision making in intergenerational programs that is adaptable to a wide variety of participant groups, sponsoring agencies, and program goals. The model emerged as we developed and conducted an intergenerational training program for caregivers of children and the frail elderly. It stresses the importance of involving all constituent groups in planning, delineates five program categories, and establishes four criterion levels for decision-making regarding appropriate activities. The model will be useful to those planning and implementing intergenerational programs in a variety of settings.
range from infants to college students, and the older group may range from the very vital 55- to 65-year-olds to the frail 85- to 90-year-olds. Each group also has unique needs, resources and capabilities. Participants may be at-risk, gifted, or simply average individuals who may benefit from participating in and contributing to a given program.

Just as the participants in intergenerational programming are diverse and unique, so too are the goals, settings, and sponsoring agencies, and ultimate outcomes of programs. Program goals may range from simple fun and recreation to such critical needs as the prevention of child abuse, and sponsoring agencies include a wide range of service and community organizations, religious and educational institutions, government agencies, and unique coalitions. Settings vary with the participants and sponsoring agencies but include formal and informal, private and public environments. In sum, intergenerational programming is a broad term applied to a wide range of activities.

This broad scope of intergenerational programming makes it inherently difficult to create general decision-making processes or models for the selection of activities that fit the goals of any given program. Coupled with the issue of scope of programs is the lack of specific intergenerational training on the part of personnel, many of whom are quite well prepared and experienced in their own disciplines. Vander Ven (1989) emphasized the significance of preparation for intergenerational practice and expressed concern about the inconsistency and fragmentation in training.

In this article, we suggest a model for decision making in intergenerational programs that is adaptable to a wide variety of participant groups, sponsoring agencies, and program goals. The model emerged as we developed and conducted an intergenerational training program for caregivers of children and the frail elderly and is an integral part of training for intergenerational practice. In the first section of this article, we emphasize the importance of involving all constituent groups in program planning and delineate five program categories to be considered. We then present a decision-making process for evaluating which activities fit specific programs.

THE MIDDLE GENERATION

Prior work by the first author (Ames, 1982) highlighted the importance of the middle generation in the initiation, implementation, and final outcome of intergenerational programs. Although the roles of direct participants are very important, two roles emerge for the middle generation in general. The first is that of mediator. Members of the middle generation may serve as catalysts or initiators of intergenerational
programs. In families, the middle generation often is an important mediator between the young and old, and the quality of intergenerational relationships is highly influenced by this mediator role. The actual participation of young or older family members in intergenerational settings often depends on facilitation by the middle generation. Staff members in intergenerational programs serve similar roles in facilitating interaction and meaningful activities.

The second role played by the middle generation is that of recipient, either directly or indirectly, of the benefits of intergenerational programs. Persons in the middle generation may experience these benefits in their roles as parents, adult children of aging parents, community members, teachers, or even taxpayers.

Recognition of the importance of all three groups who participate in and influence the intergenerational experience and the reciprocity among them is the first step in the decision-making process in intergenerational programming.

**PROGRAM CATEGORIES**

A second step in considering intergenerational programming is choosing the means through which interaction will occur. Although there is value in intergenerational interaction in and of itself, meaningful activities that provide outcomes beyond interaction enrich programs and often facilitate desired outcomes. In our model, potential intergenerational activities are clustered in five categories: (a) recreation/leisure, (b) education, (c) health promotion, (d) public service, and (e) personal development. These categories are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they may build on one another in an integrative fashion. Considering intergenerational activities in terms of groups, however, enhances the planning process by providing a balance in type of activity. This balance may assist some planners in moving their programs toward less traditional activities and rethinking conventional attitudes about the interests and capabilities of children and older persons.

**Recreation/leisure.** Recreation/leisure is a very important and legitimate outcome and is often a precursor to other types of intergenerational activities. Having fun together helps groups of people of any age break down age-based stereotypes and establish rapport. The concern is that recreation/leisure not be overused, thereby eliminating opportunities for other enriching activities. The tendency to underestimate both children's and older participants' capabilities and interests, in the belief that they want only to be entertained, shortchanges both the individuals and the program.

**Education.** Education also has been used extensively in intergen-
erational programs. Interestingly, education has traditionally been a goal for children but has only recently become a priority for older adults. The most common model in intergenerational programming has been that of older persons teaching skills or sharing their knowledge of history, occupations, and a variety of other content areas with young participants. Some programs have emphasized the important principle of reciprocity and provided opportunities for the children to teach older participants such things as computer skills. Although important outcomes can be achieved using these methods, increased emphasis on lifelong learning suggests a move toward less traditional approaches, in which old and young learn together. The educational experience in these less traditional approaches is enriched by the range of experiences and perspectives represented.

Health promotion. Health promotion has not been a traditional component of most intergenerational programs, but we include it in our model to reflect the increasing emphasis on health and wellness in schools, worksites, and society in general. Health promotion programs have been described as programs designed to improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities by providing people with the information, skill, services, and support they need to undertake and maintain positive life-style changes (Fallcreek & Mettler, 1984). Certainly, health promotion has different meanings as well as practical implications for different age groups, but these activities may have particularly positive and enduring results. Recent research stresses incentive programs and team building in health promotion activities (Stachnik et al., 1990), and intergenerational team support would add another dimension to this strategy.

Public service. Public service is an excellent means for younger and older persons to work together toward a common goal. Unlike the early programs, in which younger persons would "help" the old, many current programs combine the complementary strengths of young and old to provide support to communities or individuals with special needs. Public service is a good example of the importance of the middle generation to programming. Those in the middle, be they family members, community leaders, or intergenerational program staff, may be particularly instrumental in project development. They also may be recipients of assistance in a given project.

Personal development. Personal development certainly is integrative in that the fellowship and sense of accomplishment that may come from any intergenerational activity would contribute to personal development. It also is an important need that all human beings, regardless of age, have in common. For this reason, intergenerational activities in which the primary purpose is personal development are an
important component of a balanced program. For example, a V.I.P. project may feature a program participant in a pictoral, oral, or written history, allowing families to become involved in honoring the individual and providing an opportunity for children to see older people when they were children, parents of young children, or workers. Similarly, children enjoy being the featured V.I.P. and sharing their shorter but equally rich and unique histories with older participants.

Summary. Activities that fall within the preceding five categories are being used to varying degrees in current intergenerational programs. Recognizing and using the categories may help planners create program balance and achieve desired outcomes. Balance is facilitated when less traditional approaches are taken and stereotypes about interests and abilities are avoided. Participants in intergenerational programs are either children learning new roles or older adults adapting to changing roles. Appropriately selected activities can facilitate role learning or adaptation. “For roles to be meaningful, they must revolve around activities that are real, not created, activities that are goal directed and conducive to learning and forming close, personal relationships” (Mack & Wilson, 1989, p. 9).

In this section, we have addressed the general importance of including the middle group in the planning and implementation of programs, if appropriate, and suggested five categories of potential intergenerational activities. Every program is unique, however. In the next section, we delineate four levels of criteria for selecting and evaluating activities based on specific program characteristics.

Figure 1 illustrates the interaction among the developmental levels of program participants, the five categories of activities, and the four criteria on which activity selection may be based.

**SELECTION CRITERIA**

A model for expanding the range of potential intergenerational activities is useful because it increases program planners’ options. It does not, however, guide program planners in making decisions regarding the selection of appropriate activities. These evaluative decisions must be made in the context of a particular program serving a particular population of clients and their families. Decisions about the selection of program activities may be viewed within a four-stage, hierarchical model. The activity must meet the criteria within the first stage of screening in order to proceed to subsequent levels of screening. In other words, if the activity meets first-level criteria, it is then measured against second-level criteria, and so on through the four distinct
FIGURE 1. Model for selecting appropriate intergenerational education and service activities.

levels. Activities that meet the criteria at all four levels are likely to be best suited to the program for which they are being considered.

Level 1 criteria. Level 1 criteria address the congruence of the activity to program goals. This includes not only the overall goals of intergenerational programs, but the particular philosophy and goals of individual programs. For example, an intergenerational program in a community health center may have a strong philosophical and practical emphasis on health promotion and wellness. Activities that would conflict with this philosophy (e.g., taking a smoking break during a meeting) might be rejected on the basis of philosophical conflict. Any activity under consideration would need to be congruent with this philosophy or emphasis. Activities that fail to complement this philosophy or, worse, conflict with it would be eliminated from further consideration.

Level 2 criterion. Activities that match the philosophical or goal orientation of a program are next evaluated for their appropriateness for the client group. In intergenerational programs, the activities must be developmentally appropriate and have some appeal for both adults and children. Educational research has reinforced that the activities that are most successful are those that are appropriate for partici-
pants' developmental level and relevant characteristics (Williams, 1986). Activities planned for adults should allow adults self-direction and be relevant or useful (Bee, 1987). Children tend to enjoy being able to explore and to persist in self-chosen tasks (Bredenkamp, 1987). Younger children tend to prefer small, informal groups, while adults may be more flexible, depending on the social situation. Adult participation is highly influenced by both the social situation and the enthusiasm of the facilitator. Children's mental and physical needs create a strong need for activity, whereas adults may have developed some verbal and physical inhibitions that limit their need for activity. The activity under consideration must simultaneously meet some of the needs of both adults and children. If the activity meets this criterion, it is next measured against the specific expectations and limitations of the particular client group.

Level 3 criteria. Although making generic decisions about developmentally appropriate intergenerational activities may appear to be straightforward, the third level of screening requires consideration of the specific clients participating in a program. For example, one program may serve older clients with severe physical limitations, whereas another program may serve a highly educated, physically healthy older population. As another example, the circumstances of the children participating in a program may vary widely from both a socioeconomic and an academic perspective. The point is that there is great diversity both within and between generations. Even if the activity initially looks appropriate for both youth and adults, is it right for this group of youth and adults? Is there reason to believe this activity would be of interest to these program participants? Cooking projects, recycling projects, dramatic productions, and holiday parties all have the potential to engage children and older adults but may or may not be successful, depending on the unique characteristics of the children and adult. Are the clients capable of participating in the activity? Factors that may influence individual participation in activities include the motivation of the individual participants, the level of interaction between the participants and the facilitator that is required or desired, the need for persistence at the activity, and the level of participant interaction required by the activity. Only program staff who know and understand the interests, abilities, and limitations of their clients can measure an activity against level 3 criteria.

Level 4 criteria. The last level or dimension of evaluation relates to practical considerations. This is the last level of screening because the practical questions need only be asked if the activity passes the previous three screening levels—that is, found to be suitable for use within the program, for adults and youth, and in the context of a
particular client group. The practical considerations are no less important, however, because they determine in part whether the activity can be successfully implemented.

There are a number of resource considerations. Resources to implement the activity, such as materials, equipment, space, and time, are necessary. Available garden space, a room with space to exercise, or an auditorium or stage are examples of space or equipment that might be required for a particular program activity. The length of time needed to conduct an activity, the season of the year, and the duration of the program are time considerations. Other considerations involve human resources: Are sufficient staff, volunteers, and clients available?

Whether the resources being assessed are physical or human, two key questions need to be asked: Are adequate resources for the activity or project available? Are the required resources reasonable given the anticipated benefits or outcomes of the project or activity?

The length of time required for a potential activity should be carefully considered in terms of adequacy and efficiency. Adequacy of time simply means having enough time to successfully implement the activity or project. Efficiency of time requires an analysis of whether the time invested in the activity or project is congruent with the intended outcomes of the project. Activities that are extremely time intensive need to be considered in light of what clients are expected to gain from the activity. Simply having enough time may be less important than determining whether the time required for the activity is reasonable and appropriate. Do the benefits and outcomes of the activity truly justify the time required? A gardening project, for example, may require a great deal of time but yield a variety of important and interesting outcomes. Other one-time activities that require a great deal of preparation and planning but provide short-term outcomes may not be a good investment of time resources.

Human resources also need to be considered. Most intergenerational projects or activities require some level of planning, organization, facilitation, and follow-up. Some activities may require persons with very specialized skills (e.g., musical abilities, handicraft skills, specialized knowledge, or previous experience). These processes may involve both staff and program volunteers. Are there adequate and appropriate persons to plan and facilitate the project or activity?

The clients themselves are resources in the planning and implementation of activities. Individually they may bring a variety of talents or abilities to the activity. The size of the client group also should be considered. A group may be too large or too small to handle a particular project or activity. Group size also influences clients’ level of participation in activities. Groups that are too large may prohibit full partic-
ipation, but a group that is too small may lack the resources or diversity needed to successfully implement the activity. Large-scale community projects, for example, require a number of participants with a variety of skills, while an intergenerational exercise class could be held with a very small group of interested persons.

Does the program have access to the materials, space, and equipment needed to implement the project? Projects that involve travel, new equipment, disposable materials, or other physical resources may be unaffordable. Again, some thought needs to the given to whether the benefits and outcomes merit the investment of resources.

CONCLUSION

Selecting and evaluating intergenerational activities involve several levels of consideration. Activities must have value and meaning to the participants. Good programs include activities that not only meet the desired outcomes of the program, but also provide balance and diversity to participants. Consideration of the five categories of intergenerational activities may help planners generate ideas for possible activities or projects. Consideration also should be given to the roles played by older, middle, and younger generations in potential activities. Specific activities should be congruent with the goals and philosophy of the program, meet the needs and interests of the intergenerational population being served, and match the resources of the program. By using a four-step screening process for evaluating individual activities or projects, planners may determine whether a good intergenerational activity is the right intergenerational activity.

REFERENCES


