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Culturally Oriented Intergenerational Learning Programs Between Older Adults and Young Children: A Review Study

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Abstract. The integration of culture into intergenerational learning programs between older adults and young children holds immense potential for fostering cultural transmission, intergenerational interaction, and enhancing cultural awareness and respect between them. In addition, this culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs between older adults and young children can foster emotional and social connections for older adults and young children, and supporting multiculturalism while providing participants with profound learning experiences. This article reviews this culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs between older adults and young children, including key aspects of their relationship between culture and intergenerational learning programs, programs goals, program format and content, and potential benefits in this intergenerational learning programs. It is hoped that such discussion can enhance preschool teachers' understanding for this culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs, and improve the quality of intergenerational learning programs.

Keywords: Culture, Intergenerational Learning, Older Adults, Well-Being, Young Children.

1. INTRODUCTION

This aging population is associated with new social issues, such as the increase in cases of elderly people suffering from isolation and loneliness, for whom social and interpersonal relationships could be beneficial. In this scenario, "intergenerational relations" could constitute an opportunity for an exchange of experiences, knowledge and values between generations, as well as improvement in the quality of life of older adults. Therefore, intergenerational learning programs are gaining much attention in different countries around the world (Shih, 2024a; Teresa Martins et al, 2019).

This article reviews this culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs between older adults and young children. Culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs foster mutual understanding and interaction between generations and promote cultural transmission and innovation between older adults and young children. Through cultural expressions (e.g., arts and music) and activities (e.g., crafting and storytelling), these learning programs bring older adults and young children together and nurture meaningful emotional connections between these age groups. The following section presents some ideas and key points for implementing culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs. First, the meaning of culture is discussed by the researcher. Second, this article reviews this culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs between older adults and young children, including key aspects of their relationship between culture and intergenerational programs, programs goals, program format and content, and potential benefits in intergenerational learning programs.

2. WHAT IS CULTURE?

We must start by defining "culture". This presents a challenge since culture is a notoriously ambiguous term. Culture has been defined as the spiritual creation of human beings, the material civilization created by human beings, or some combination of the two. Culture refers to a group of people's way of life, including their religion, food, clothing, language, rites of passage, and music. In addition, since culture is both universal and personal, there is more than one accurate definition of culture. Culture is conceptual; it's a collective set of beliefs, behaviors, ideas, philosophies, and practices shared by groups of people. Different groups of people have different cultures but all social groups have a set of activities and values that they share and that is their culture (Mansouri & Taylor, 2024; Pier, 2024; Taylor, 1871). However, culture has also been defined as a system of ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge, and customs shared by a group and passed on over generations within that group in the international context (Shih, 2020a, 2022a). In this intergenerational learning program, culture can pass on over generations. Older adults and young children can learn about and explore cultural heritage in our lifeworld.

3. REVIEW THIS CULTURALLY ORIENTED INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS BETWEEN OLDER ADULTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

3.1. Key Aspects of their Relationship between Culture and Intergenerational Programs

The relationship between culture and intergenerational learning programs for older adults and young children is deeply interconnected, as these programs not only facilitate exchanges between different generations but also contribute to the preservation and innovation of culture. Key aspects of their relationship:

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3.1.1. Cultural Heritage

Older adults also appear to have acquired the dispositions and skills to benefit from social exchanges with others and handle interpersonal conflicts more effectively than do younger people. Consequently, older individuals can be a good source of advice for younger people, particularly in the areas of relationships and in cases of uncertainty, thereby providing a valuable contribution to society that is qualitatively different than that offered by any other age group (Parisi et al, 2009).

Older adults possess rich cultural experiences and knowledge, such as folktales, traditional arts, festivals, and life wisdom. In intergenerational learning programs, older adults can pass on these cultural legacies to younger generations, and helping them understand their cultural roots and enhancing their sense of cultural identity Figure 1.



Figure 1: Spring Festival Couplets (Chunlian) Activity for Lunar New Year.

The intergenerational learning course is "Spring Festival Couplets (Chunlian) Activity for Lunar New Year" Figure 1. Older adults and young children create a beneficial learning experience for our cultural heritage. In

addition, older adults can also teach young children traditional crafts or how to cook traditional foods. Older adults can share their childhood stories or songs to help young children understand the history and societal changes of our society.

3.1.2. Cultural Innovation

Cultural innovation does not question the role of science in knowledge production, but rather what knowledge means for individuals, and how it influences the system of beliefs and norms under which they operate as part of society. In the last two decades, the specificity of scientific culture and its role in society have become a theme much discussed at all levels of public discourse. The creativity of younger generations, combined with their use of modern technology, can present traditional culture in new ways. In intergenerational learning programs, older adults and young children can collaboratively create art that blends modern and traditional elements, such as music or dance (Riccardo Pozzo, Andrea Filippetti, Mario Paolucci, & Vania Virgili, 2020; Shih, 2024a).

3.1.3. Cross-Cultural Learning

One of the goals of multicultural education is to bridge individuals who have become like isolated islands. Multicultural education views the main function of education not as a ladder for individual social mobility, but as a 'bridge' to encounter and connect with the world. This perspective on education as a bridge enables individuals to experience growth over performance. When we view multicultural education as a bridge between 'oneself' and 'others', we can, in essence, become beings of understanding rather than mere opportunities to each other. It is only then that we become connected, and the horizons of our awareness expand (Lee, 2024). If the intergenerational learning program incorporates multicultural backgrounds, especially in a diverse society like Taiwan, it can help generations understand and respect other cultures. For example: Immigrant older adults sharing their stories or traditional activities from their original culture. Younger generations interpreting these cultural elements through drama or art, and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

3.1.4. Promoting Intergenerational Interaction and Emotional Bonds

Cultural activities are developed in intergenerational learning programs to build bridges, facilitate emotional exchanges, and strengthen social cohesion. For example: In music co-creation activities, older adults teach young children to play traditional instruments and share the historical stories behind the music. Through cultural experiences (e.g., festival celebrations or crafts), older adults and young children participate together and develop deep emotional connections (Brady, 2018; Costa, 2024; Shih, 2024a).

3.1.5. Integration of Culture and Life Education

Life education for young children is an important element of education. This kind of education is centered on life care and allows young children to understand the meaning of life and to respect and cherish life. Life education for young children also cultivates kindness and teaches compassion. Young children must develop kindness and be sympathetic to living things around them. However, culture as a medium in intergenerational learning programs to explore values and the meaning of life. Older adults can share life experiences and cultural values while young children reflect and express their feelings through artistic creation. Exploring the spiritual essence of traditional culture (e.g., unity, sharing, and gratitude) to help young children develop good character and values in their daily life (Lin & Shih, 2024; Shih, 2020).

3.1.6. Practical Impact of Culture on Intergenerational Learning Programs

The implementation of intergenerational learning programs can revitalize and preserve culture while fostering young children's interest and pride in it. It also allows older adults to feel the value of their cultural contributions being passed on. For example: Developing local cultural heritage programs, such as intergenerational collaboration focused on indigenous traditional dance. Encouraging children to actively interview older adults. Record, and share their cultural stories for young children. These learning programs are not just bridges for culture but also platforms for mutual learning between generations, playing a profound role in promoting the coexistence and development of diverse cultures.

3.2. Programs Goals

3.2.1. Cultural Transmission and Innovation

The interest in intergenerational learning programs is widely accepted for both practitioners and researchers, as they appear to have positive benefits for both young and older adults (Teresa Martins et al, 2019). Culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs can help younger generations appreciate local or foreign cultures and encourage them to creatively express and reinterpret these cultures.

3.2.2. Intergenerational Understanding

Strong intergenerational relationships were the norm for most of human evolution, both within and between families, and essential for human survival and socialization. The last 50 years, however, have seen a growing

trend towards age segregation in various facets of life, including school education, the workplace and within the extended family and broader social life. Increased age segregation over the human life course has led to more entrenched ageist stereotyping and reduced opportunities for different generations to learn from one another, and may contribute to social isolation, poorer health and a lower quality of life for some older people (editorial, 2021). These intergenerational learning programs can support cross-generational exchanges, facilitating mutual learning and bridging generational gaps.

3.2.3. Social and Emotional Bonds

These learning programs foster a sense of belonging and mutual care between older adults and young children, and strengthening community cohesion (Brady, 2018; Costa, 2024).

3.2.4. Aesthetic Literacy and Cultural Identity

'Identity' refers to the qualities of a person or a group and how these make them different from others. The features might include ethnic background, tradition, occupation or other aspects of social identity. Through cultural activities, these learning programs can enhance children's creative skills and respect for cultural diversity. Especially, preschool local culture curriculum with a focus on local culture-centered topics, such as Taiwan's folklore, arts, ethnic groups, politics, economics, transportation, and ecology, can guide young children to understand their own land and culture and to appreciate and respect other local cultures, thus cultivating the children's cultural identities (PUI, Heyi, Ming, & Cai, 2020; Siraj-Blatchford, 1996; Shih, 2022).

3.3. Program Format and Content

3.3.1. Music and Dance

3.3.1.1. Traditional Music Performance and Learning

Given emerging evidence that learning to play a musical instrument may lead to a number of cognitive benefits for older adults. Older adults play traditional instruments or sing songs, and young children imitate them and learn; such collaboration culminates in a simple performance (MacRitchie, Breaden, Milne, McIntyre, 2020).

3.3.1.2. Cross-Cultural Music Experiences

Musical behaviours are universal across human populations and, at the same time, highly diverse in their structures, roles and cultural interpretations. Although laboratory studies of isolated listeners and music-makers have yielded important insights into sensorimotor and cognitive skills and their neural underpinnings, they have revealed little about the broader significance of music for individuals, peer groups and communities. In this culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs, participants are exposed to music from various cultures—for example, Vietnamese, Indigenous, and Western traditional music; this promotes cultural diversity (Trehub, Becker & Morley, 2015).

3.3.1.3. Dance Teaching and Choreography

Growing at what is deemed an unprecedented rate, the world's older adult population today numbers 617 million men and women; by 2050, almost 17% of people worldwide will be age 65 and older. By fostering a moving community that honors individual abilities, memories, and innate creativity, dance/movement therapists working with the older adult client provide the essentials for resilience and revitalization. In addition, older adults can teach traditional dance movements for children, and they can creative physical activity combined with cognitive, social, and emotional expression in a safe and supportive environment (Capello, 2018).

3.3.2. Crafts and Arts

3.3.2.1. Traditional Crafts

Crafts can be therapeutic to people of all ages, promoting well-being and relaxation while providing opportunities to connect with yourself and others. Creating art also offers seniors multiple health benefits, making it particularly worth considering as a new hobby. Older adults can teach young children crafts such as weaving, paper-cutting, and pottery as well as their cultural significance (The Hebrew SeniorLife Blog Team, 2024).

3.3.2.2. Storybook Creation

Picture books have a graphic form, so the readers can imagine the development of the story, which inspires the imagination. A picture book provides knowledge and can be used to transfer concepts and to give emotional guidance. Teaching using picture books stimulates compassion for other people in young children (Shih, 2020c). Older adults can tell their childhood stories or cultural tales, and young children illustrate such stories in picture books. Storytelling methods can privilege older adults and young children's voices in a learning program (Rieger et al, 2023).

3.3.2.3. Cultural Symbol Art Workshops

Within the discipline of visual design, indigenous icons and regional motifs are integral, acting as vital conduits for graphical communication while encapsulating rich cultural connotations. Amidst the rapid pace of global interconnectedness, it becomes imperative for designers to navigate the challenge of presenting the heart of local heritage on a global stage (Xiong, 2024). Participants design artworks featuring local cultural symbols, such as embroidery patterns and totems, to showcase cultural characteristics.

3.3.3. Storytelling and History-Sharing

3.3.3.1. Oral History

Oral history is a research methodology embraced by a wide range of practitioners from students and academics to journalists, documentary-makers and podcasters and community-based historians and family historians. It involves extended, recorded interviews undertaken for a particular purpose and often with a view to eventual archiving for preservation and public access. The oral history interview is a collaboration of both interviewer and interviewee and is based on ethical standards and informed consent. In the intergenerational learning programs, older adults narrate previous life experiences, folklore, or community history, and children record or re-enact them (Oral History Australia, 2024; Shih, 2024a).

3.3.3.2. Multicultural Story Time

Stories from local and foreign cultures enable children to understand diverse cultural backgrounds, and enhancing young children's cross-cultural understanding. Multiculturalism, as a concept, embraces the coexistence of diverse cultural groups within a society. It recognizes and values the richness and contributions of different cultural backgrounds. Story, with its ability to transcend language and communicate universal emotions, plays a significant role in understanding and appreciating multiculturalism (Al-Zadjali, 2024; Shih, 2020).

3.3.3.3. Story-Based Drama Adaptation

Storytelling might be used productively to reframe an understanding of theatrical retellings, in performance practice and in adaptation studies. Adaptations in the theatre need not, of course, be narrative-led: its makers might prioritize the formal challenges inherent in the chosen source material, or may be motivated by another agenda—cultural, political, economic—to which "story" becomes subordinate. In this culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs between older adults and young children, older adults' stories are adapted into dramas and performed (Frances Babbage, 2024; Shih, 2024a).

3.3.4. Culinary Activities

3.3.4.1. Traditional Cuisine Preparation

Older adults teach young children's traditional recipes and help them prepare culturally significant dishes.

3.3.4.2. Food Tasting and Storytelling

Participants enjoy traditional food while listening to stories associated with the dishes.

3.3.5. Integration of Nature and Culture

3.3.5.1. Cultural Landscape Exploration

Participants visit local cultural heritage sites, temples, or natural landscapes; older adults provide young children with historical and cultural insights. In Taiwan, Tiângthian (朝天宮), which locals call má tsóo king (馬祖宮), is the most famous landmark in Beigang Township Figure 2. Established in 1694 AD during the Kangxi period of the Qing dynasty (Shih, 2024b).



Figure 2: Cultural Landscape Exploration: Tiângthian (朝天宮) in Taiwan.

Tiângthian Figure 2 is the most famous landmark in Beigang Township in Taiwan. This is a cultural landscape exploration in the intergenerational learning programs. Older adults and young children can create a beneficial learning experience for cultural heritage.

3.3.5.2. Cultural Plant Cultivation

Participants grow culturally significant plants (e.g., medicinal herbs and flowers) together while gaining relevant knowledge and hearing legends.

3.4. Potential Benefits

The health and well-being of older adults have become more important because the older adult population is growing rapidly (Seo, Sungkajun, Garcia, 2021). Culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs confer

several benefits. For older adults, it enhances self-worth, provides opportunities for social engagement, and reduces loneliness. For young children, it enriches cultural knowledge, fosters aesthetic appreciation and creativity, and cultivates respect and empathy. For the community, it promotes intergenerational interactions, deepens cultural heritage, and strengthens cultural identity.

4. REFLECTIONS

With an increasing population of older adults and longer life expectancy, people interact across generations more than ever before. However, the technological innovations and shifting social norms have resulted in increased segregation between generations. Engagement in intergenerational programs exhibits significant potential in bridging intergenerational divide and fostering cohesive communities. Promoting relationships and interactions between the young and old generations have been considered as an integral component of social policy. Correspondingly, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposed "respect and social inclusion" as one of the eight important domains to the well-being and participation of older people in the Global Age-friendly Cities Guide (Lai, Zhou, Bai, Lam & Li, 2023; World Health Organization, 2024).

Imagine a lively park where children and older adults play with bubbles - chasing, running, and catching them before they pop. The children's laughter mixes with the seniors' happy shouts, creating a symphony of connection between generations. This kind of intergenerational play benefits everyone - the children learn important skills like reading social cues, cause and effect, sharing and cooperation, older adults build important social connections, improve their capability, and share joy in the moment (Play Matters, 2024). This is such a beautiful image of intergenerational learning between older adults and young children.

This article reviews this culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs between older adults and young children, and showcases the power of cross-generational communication and collaboration. This article effectively highlights the benefits of culturally oriented intergenerational learning programs. Through music, storytelling, or other forms of co-creation, it fosters emotional connections and mutual understanding. Such interactions not only make older adults feel needed and respected but also allow young children to gain profound wisdom and emotional experiences, thereby building richer social relationships and cultural identities. This type of intergenerational learning programs not only enhances creativity and empathy but also promotes social cohesion and inclusivity in the broader community.

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