

Relational-Cultural Theory and Intergenerational Programming: A Model for Fostering Relationships between the Elderly and Youth.

By
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Who Am I?

- Board member and state representative of National Grandparents Day Council.
- Social Service Director at Aspen Siesta
- Prior experience as an Activity Consultant for a long-term care corporation.
- Consulted and assisted with the development and implementation of intergenerational programs for skilled nursing facilities.

Intergenerational Programs- Why Did They Fail?

- A weak structural base
- Poor recruitment strategies,
- Lacking a solid framework based on an effect theory .
- Ineffective at addressing the issues that the elderly face in a long-term care setting,

Intergenerational Programs-How Do We Change That Failure into Success?

- Address the inability to develop programming from current theories that addresses the needs of the elderly in a long-term care setting.

Develop an effective and comprehensible theory that fosters relationships between the elderly and youth that addresses the psychosocial needs of the elderly in a long-term care setting. .

Goal of Presentation

• To present a brief summation of the issues of risk that the elderly face in the United States, as well as a concise history of intergenerational programming .

• How the psychological, multicultural, and feminist based theory of Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) can be utilized as the basis and framework for the creation of a successful intergenerational program that fosters relationships amongst the elderly and youth.

• Share personal success stories from a program created from the tenets of Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT).

Issues facing the elderly in the United States.

- The eldest of the American population constitute more than 37 million and are projected to increase by more than 70 million by 2030 .
- The minority population, (Latino, Asian, African-American, etc.) which is growing at an exponential rate and will eventually increase by 500% towards mid-century.

Source: Administration on Aging, (2007), U.S. Census 2000), Scharlach, Fuller-Thomson, & Kramer (1999)

Issues facing the elderly in the United States (Cont)

The elderly face a myriad of social and multicultural issues:

- Retirement and lack of employment opportunities.
- Vulnerability and abuse.
- Suicide
- Health concerns,.
- Parenting of grandchildren.
- Social Isolation

Retirement and Employment Opportunities

- Not financially prepared to retire .
- Sparse work histories or underemployment.
- Lack of education.
- Low wage and discriminatory hiring patterns, especially amongst minority populations.

Ageism and Stereotypes in Workplace

- More vulnerable to the negative stereotypes that constitute ageism.
- Difficulty interacting with the evolving culture of the new workplace.
- The negative perceptions of “old age” by a youth oriented culture place these workers in a potentially oppressive situation with younger, more powerful professionals.

Source: Dixon (2003)

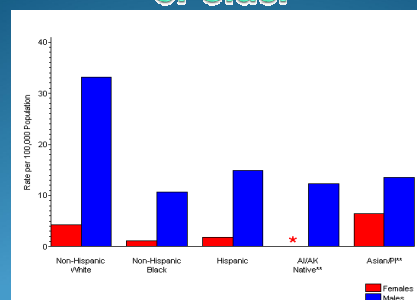
Vulnerability and Abuse

- “Nuclear family” and role strain.
- The elderly are susceptible to familial strain and vulnerability to possible abuse situations that may manifest from that strain.

Elder Abuse

- Elder abuse can take many forms including physical, sexual, psychological, financial, neglect, and abandonment.
- Women are more commonly victims of almost every type of abuse than are men, and people over 80 or older are at greatest risk for neglect.
- There is a greater risk of abuse in families with a history of conflict, especially if an adult is taking care of an elderly parent who was abusive to him as a child.
- Various stressors in the caregiver’s life, such as marital, financial, or work-related problems, increase the risk of abuse.

Suicide among persons 65 or older



Source: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, (2009).

Overall Improved Health

- America are much healthier and living much longer then in the past.
- The negative result of this increase in technology is that the elderly are more susceptible to disease, disability, depression, and dementia.
- 75% of caregivers for older adults are women and the typical caregiver.

Source: (OWL, 2001)

Parenting of grandchildren

- Grandparents raising children has become the norm in American society.
- Decrease in the stability of the familial structure due to economic, social and personal reasons.
- According to the 1990 census, almost 4.1% of white children, 6.5 %, and 13.5 % of African American children were living with grandparents or other; we would see an increase of almost 44% over the preceding decade in the number of children living with their grandparents or other relatives.

Source: Sautler (1992)

Social Isolation

- Socially isolation due to physical disabilities, abandonment by their families, and the dilapidation and lack of services in their neighborhoods.
- Social isolation creates a vulnerability to depression and self-destructive behaviors.
- Due to declining health and financial vulnerability, the elderly are also at risk for placement in a long-term care setting, either for a short-term or long-term period of time.

Intergenerational Programming and Milestones

- “Intergenerational programs are vehicles for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations.”
- The history of intergenerational programs can be divided into three distinct stages:
 - The First Stage-1960 to 1970
 - The Second Stage-1980 to1990
 - The Third Stage-1990 to Present
- Source: UNESCO (1999)

Relational-Cultural Theory

- Relational-Cultural theory (RCT) was conceived the publication of *Towards a New Psychology of Women* by Jean Baker Miller.
- Miller suggested that the a lack of understanding of the contextual and relational experiences of women, people of color, and marginalized men led many health professionals to pathologize these individuals by misunderstanding and devaluing how these important factors contribute to the psychological well-being of all people.
- Relational-Cultural Theory is a model that has its roots in psychotherapy and sociology and emphasizes health, growth, and courage, and points to a new understanding of human and individual strength; strength in relationship, not strength in isolation.

Source: Comstock et al.,(2008), as cited in Robb, (2006)

Core Tenets of Relational Cultural Theory

- People grow through and toward relationship throughout the life span.
- Movement toward mutuality rather than separation characterizes mature functioning.
- The ability to participate in increasingly complex and diversified relational networks characterizes psychological growth.
- Mutual empathy and mutual empowerment are at the core of growth-fostering relationships.
- Authenticity is necessary for real engagement in growth-fostering relationships.
- When people contribute to the development of growth-fostering relationships, they grow as a result of their participation in such relationships.
- The goal of development is the realization of increased relational competence over the life span.

Source: Jordan (2000)

RCT Central Relational Paradox

- This paradox is a result of the individual seeking a connection, which creates a sense of extreme vulnerability, and that vulnerability may result in disconnection and isolation.
- This paradox recognizes that an individual may yearn for connection but, out of a sense of fear, simultaneously employ strategies that restrict or limit the desired connection.
- Disconnections are particularly painful for the more vulnerable person in the relationship (e.g., clients) and particularly for those clients who come from marginalized and devalued racial/cultural groups in contemporary society.
- An attempt to avoid real risks of hurt and rejection, further disconnection and isolation; feelings of vulnerability, fear, shame, mistrust hinder the process of connection.

(Comstock et. al., 2006).

Benefits of an Intergenerational Programming Framework (based on Relational-Cultural Theory)

- The elderly continue to require relational support systems throughout their lives to maintain positive mental health and to socially engage with other individuals in an inclusive manner and develop relationships that have a positive growth fostering effect.
- Social Isolation and disconnection is a result of reduced relational support systems and social interaction, minimizing opportunities for elders to experience relationships that are growth-fostering; they are at risk for depression and loneliness.
- Enhancing the elderly's social relational support system with authentic and empathetic relationships with youth will reduce the impact of social isolation and loneliness.
- Authentic and empathetic relationships benefit both the elderly and the youth in a positive manner, instilling in the youth self-esteem, respect for others, socialization skills, and developing empathy, whereas the elderly will receive companionship, intellectual stimulation, and socialization.
- A fulfilling symbiosis between the elderly and the youth manifests from an authentic and empathetic relationship.

Implementing an Intergenerational Programming Framework in Long-Term Care (Based on Relational-Cultural Theory)

- 1) Mission Development- The goal of intergenerational programming is to reduce social isolation and loneliness through encouraging interaction and developing growth-fostering relationships between the elderly and youth.
- 2) Collaboration/Agency Involvement- Network with a youth organization, namely one that serves an isolated, at-risk, or institutionalized population that will benefit from fostering relationships with the elderly in a long-term care facility. Initiate an informal interview process with the appropriate representatives and staff of each organization to determine
- 3) Program Design: One-to-One Visitation- The program design is based on one-to-one interaction between youth and the elderly in long-term care settings.
- 4) Volunteer Orientation Program- Identify a partner agency, preferably a community mental health organization or other local governmental organization that will be able to provide you with the consultation services of a Licensed Social Worker and/or Licensed Professional Counselor in designing and assisting with maintaining an intergenerational volunteer orientation program that encourages and trains youth how to communicate, interact, and use empathetic listening skills on a one-to-one basis with the elderly in a long-term care setting.

Implementing an Intergenerational Programming Framework (Cont.)

- 5) Maintenance- Provide ongoing and informal training experiences. Hold administrative and staff meetings to review the status of the program and make recommendations for its future. Schedule events that involve members of the community.
- 6) Evaluation- Used effectively, the evaluation can help to improve the program, determine the impact of the program, identify ideas for its expansion and garner support from the community. Can be collected from surveys, questionnaires, oral interviews or standardized attitude inventories, and anecdotal reports.

Starlight Program

- Created in 2006- designed for a small, locked Alzheimer facility located in Lakewood, Colorado.
- Conducted informal interviews and held meetings with staff and families of the residents who resided at the facility as to what they felt were the most eminent issues facing the elderly in that small community.
- Interviews findings: Concerns regarding fear of abuse and neglect, social isolation, loneliness, and suicide; surprisingly social isolation seemed to be the most prevalent.

Starlight Program (Cont)

- Contacted the local community mental health center and solicited the assistance of its program manager.
- With his assistance we designed a volunteer program intended for a sizable group of at-risk youth, under their mental health care, to be paired with the Residents of the Alzheimer facility.
- The youth were oriented and trained, instilled with empathetic listening skills and how to interact with the elderly with an Alzheimer's diagnosis.
- The youth visited with the Alzheimer residents on a one- to-one basis at least once a week.

Starlight Program:

Effectiveness of the program

Findings according to the evaluations of the effectiveness of the program:

- Utilizing data gathered from internal behavioral monitoring methods used by both organizations. Staff for both the community mental health center and the Alzheimer facility reported an overall improvement in general behavior.
- Many of the youth found that their focus improved, were in a better mood, and that their anger had decreased greatly.
- Use of PRN medication to control behaviors in both facilities decreased.

Starlight Program Action Plan (2006)

Conclusion

- It is paramount that a successful intergenerational program have a strong and practical framework based on the tenets of Relational Cultural Theory (RCT).
- It is imperative that intergenerational programming is focused on engaging both the elderly and youth from an optimistic manner and encourage relationships that have a growth fostering effect.
- With an intergenerational programming framework based on Relational Cultural Theory, we can transform lives and make the world a much better place for our elders!-