

Intergenerativity: Imaging Between To Imagine Beyond

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There is a proverb that goes “You think that because you understand one you understand two, because one and one make two. But you must understand AND.” -- Sufi proverb.

Prologue exercise- May I invite the reader to relax for a moment and think of the oldest and wisest teacher who has mentored them during their life and then imagine the youngest and most energetic student they have guided during their career. Now join them in your mind anticipating a three way conversation and think of your life in the vast temporal planes that life and our species have inhabited.

It is said that “In the beginning was the word”, and that the universe is not made up of atoms, but of stories. Chinese sages warn to be careful in naming something because of the power that nominalization gives. The words we use and the stories we construct around them are essential to our very humanity. Who we are as individual learners, members of community and in fact members of the same species depends on the stories that we tell each other through time.

In this chapter we introduce a word that almost does not exist: Intergenerativity. A Wikipedia and a Google search revealed that the word has been used in some limited contexts, but does not seem to have been fully explored as we intend to do in this essay. Generativity is, of course, the theme of this entire volume. Generativity relates creating new ideas, particularly in relationship to guiding the next generation as in the work of Eric Erickson. Ken Gergan argues that generative theory is one that challenges the status quo and opens new repertoires for thought and action. In the very beginning of Appreciative Inquiry, David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastya explore generativity in relationship to dialogue, metaphor, and inquiry.

Generativity is hence closely tied to creativity, but it is a creativity directed towards a sustainable future, a contribution to other generations. Thus generativity might well involve combining ideas from different fields of knowledge and human activity. It points already to a conversation between one generation and another. We are living in a world of ideas or subjectivity. The emergence of a generative idea into the world reifies it and perhaps makes it objective. Generativity allows an intersubjective process to become “real” as an emergent phenomenon and hence relates to an process of objectification.

In this essay we add the word “inter” as a prefix to “generativity.” The root “inter” signifies “between and among”. It emphasizes drawing the connections among the different domains of generativity. It points to a higher level of interaction if you will without trying to privilege intergenerativity as a process. Hence generativity involves conversations between two or more people about an idea with long-term implications, whereas intergenerativity implies a cultural conversation between generations distributed though time (and potentially space). History informs how groups of people converse through time and anthropology through geographic

extent. But surely intergenerativity is a difficult and vague concept to describe and perhaps of no use. We must make it more concrete.

Our particular focus will be on intergenerational learning, and we will use the example The Intergenerational School founded by my wife and me in Cleveland, Ohio. Thus, in the context of the school, intergenerativity will come alive in a community of learners of all ages committed to experiential learning in relationship to each other and to their social and natural communities.

Inter as a prefix plans into other critical words relevant to finding the connections in this essay. We are globally interconnected most fundamentally by our shared global ecosystems, international planetary health, and now by information technology, the internet. Also my academic approaches have been fundamentally interdisciplinary; however that is now changing. Many people claim to be such but few really are truly able to engage more than one or two areas of scholarship. Too many academic rewards depend on “doing the discipline” and many who profess to “doing the between” move toward interdisciplinary if a discipline is changing or some visionary academic leader promises funds. Most of those visionary academic leaders have a hard time walking their talk, however when traditions in universities resist real change.

My evolution as a scholar and clinician (healer) is far more radical. I am becoming transdisciplinary moving out from between or among disciplines to beyond them. Eventually universities will be transformed by such words. Disciplines limit thought and action in the world too much. One day I predict there will be a paper written about transgenerativity. Once learners of different ages respond with generativity with each other and the celebration becomes one of the generativity of all life and age becomes a part of the temporal cause of life then we will begin to move beyond our existing categories towards a more enlightened state. To use another spatial metaphor being interdisciplinary is about broadening the scope of scholarship. “Trans” means doing deeper into the core that underlies not knowledge but wisdom – the balanced blend on thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Words, of course, do not stand in isolation. They are elaborated and given meaning in the stories that people tell of their own lives. Hence, a major focus of this chapter will also be on narrative, the use of words particularly intergenerativity, in the context of education. We believe that exploring the between and among creates a sense of wholeness, a sense of interconnectivity. In fact, we celebrate also the word integer, a whole number; something that is indivisible; something that provides a unity and a connectedness through a relationship with other human beings in the natural environment.

We believe that the collective wisdom that can emerge from this intergenerational learning based on stories will be essential to creating a sustainable planet. Collective wisdom emphasizes not the isolated, allegedly rare, wisdom of individuals in the past, but rather the notion that each one of us has a degree of wisdom and that it is up to us to foster that collective wisdom in each other. Being in an educational community that celebrates joint accomplishment and service to each other allows each individual to realize their fuller potential. Like a sports team individual efforts inspire others to higher levels of performance. And in that process the individual selves become more able to see bigger pictures of the extent of human activities through time and space.

A particularly important domain of concern for intergenerativity relates to the broad concept of health. Health can be viewed not just as the absence of disease, but as a comprehensive psychosocial and even spiritual well being. Essential to health of an individual or a community or a species is its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Clearly this kind of healthy collective wisdom is essential at this time on our planet when six billion people are stretching the resources as well as damaging the legacy of our species.

Intergenerativity and Learning

As Francis Bacon, famously asserted knowledge is power. But as a dynamic process, learning is more potent. It is an empowering force that is fundamental to life itself. All creatures learn even in the absence of sentience. They survive as a function of how quickly and well they learn about the environment around them. Since living or dying depends on adaptation, gaining new knowledge about the environment is essential to making needed behavioral responses to environmental change. Natural and social environments may change too quickly for biological evolution to occur without major disruptions, such as threats to the species. Cultural revolution, in contrast, can adapt more quickly as individuals transmit cultural memes such as words, images, or stories. Hence learning is nature's way to help organisms respond to rapid change. Human educational activities and organizations may represent the most important way for humans to promote our own survival, as well as to discharge our moral responsibility to the planet

Human beings have never faced challenges of the scope such as exist today. Powerful weapons still offer the possibility for our species to destroy itself along with others. Global warming and the resulting changes in weather patterns threaten to cause more destruction and death in the decades to come. Each year millions of children die for lack of clean water. As the world population grows, the threats to human populations will magnify. Differences between the economic haves and have-nots will increase, as global capitalism fails to arrest its irresponsible use of natural resources.

We are learning, albeit slowly and perhaps even too late, about the consequences of irresponsible environmental exploitation and social injustice. How can we learn more deeply about ways to change our behaviors in order that future generations will survive? Our success will depend on how we organize learning, integrate knowledge, and promote collective wisdom. Fortunately, there is vast potential for new educational approaches, based in part on information technologies like the World Wide Web. Human beings learn best with and from each other, so our most important mission should be to create learning communities that connect and collectively empower the individuals, of any age, who participate. In the remainder of this paper, we will describe what we believe are the ideal features of such a community and how we are trying to create such a community in Cleveland called The Intergenerational School (TIS, www.tisonline.org).

Learning is enhanced by social relationships of mutual appreciation and trust. Learning together needs to be viewed as much more than the passive transfer of information, but rather as a passionate, interactive, and constructive activity that can transform individuals and societies. Education must focus on creating citizens who can and will contribute to a viable democratic society, one in which duties and responsibilities are as important as rights and opportunities.

While we celebrate individual autonomy and independence, we must recognize our fundamental social connectedness and interdependence.

A learning community should be based on real life experiential learning and grounded in practical knowledge. Studies of living systems should teach that human beings are a part of and dependent upon other living forms in shared ecosystems. Cultivation of a deep respect for diversity must be based, not on political correctness, but on an appreciation that differences are to be celebrated as essential to life itself. Recognizing that human beings continue to develop over their entire lifespan makes developmentally appropriate learning opportunities critical—at all stages of life. In an ideal learning community, students of all ages help each other and share experiences that allow the creation of collective wisdom. Sharing stories is an essential aspect of creating community solidarity based on respect for the dignity of each learner. Schools should not be institutions of age-segregation, but places of age-integration where rich lessons from our elders' past combine with youthful imaginings about the future. In such a school, older adults can see children as their legacy; children can learn from elders the importance of knowing their own and others' origins. An empowering learning environment must appreciate its place in the larger social and natural communities. Hence service learning, in which the goal of learning is intimately linked to providing assistance to others in the community, ought to be an essential part of the values and pedagogy of such an organization.

TIS is an internationally recognized, national award-winning, and regionally leading public community school located in Cleveland, Ohio. The students in the school include over 140 urban children who are predominantly poor and minority, as well as students from undergraduate, graduate and professional schools, primarily at Case Western Reserve University (Case) , and elders from the community. Located in a building which also houses gerontological research, geriatric clinics and other community based programs for the elderly, the school's mission is to foster an educational community of excellence that provides skills and experiences for lifelong learning and spirited citizenship for learners of all ages. Many of the younger students face learning challenges that are typical of children who live in poverty (stemming from such factors as poor prenatal care, unhealthy living environments including exposure to lead, and lack of early learning experiences). Some of the elder volunteers struggle with aging associated cognitive challenges, like dementia. Each participant plays an essential role in furthering the collective wisdom of the school.

Children and their teachers are at the heart of our forward thinking school. Young students teach each other and participate in activities with other learners of all ages. College students have explored the nature of wisdom through service learning projects. Management school students have participated in the schools sustainability efforts. Graduate students in the social sciences are measuring the impact of the school on elders. Nursing and medical students have co-developed public education initiatives concerning lead poisoning. Elders share their joy of reading, computers, gardening, and life itself with their younger colleagues through programs at TIS and in local residential facilities.

Why is our school considered excellent by state and national governments and international foundations? Standardized state test scores of the children are one measure of its high performance. Seniors find a sense of purpose and community in contributing to the lives of children. Participation in the school may keep elders cognitively vital and prevent cognitive decline. Education and research programs conducted with Case Western Reserve University are

expanding our horizons about what empowering learning communities can be. International linkages in Japan, Finland and elsewhere are contributing to a global dialogue about the importance of education for creating generational solidarity and fostering a deeper global bioethics. TIS is producing learners who can lead the world into a better, more sustainable future.

The most powerful learning is experiential learning, and particularly learning in service of others in the broader community. The Intergenerational School celebrates such a model of learning for the past ten years. Founded by two psychologists, Peter Whitehouse, a geriatric neurologist and cognitive scientist, and Catherine Whitehouse, a pediatric and developmental psychologist, the school has demonstrated success at educating both children and older adults. The heart of the school is a public charter school that has been successful in providing education to almost two hundred urban city children. These children come from challenged families often in poverty, and would otherwise be served by the Cleveland Municipal School District. Test scores have demonstrated that children in this environment can learn. This achievement in relationship to the education of children has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, the Ohio Department of Education, and nationally by the organization of high performing schools called Schools that Can. The concept of intergenerational implies elders, but not necessarily entirely bimodal distribution of young and old. The school has emphasized service learning at Case Western Reserve University and engaged undergraduates, nursing students, medical students, and others in the process of exploring lifelong learning. A major emphasis of this work with the university has been on concepts such as wisdom and public health issues such as lead poisoning.

Perhaps the most key aspect of The Intergenerational School's model is the engagement of elders, even elders who have memory challenges and may have been labeled as having dementia. It is the elders that give the school a sense of decorum and create behaviors in the children that make them receptive to learning. It is the elders who can share stories to give the children a sense of their community in the past, and in return the children can give the elders a sense of legacy as they imagine the world after they themselves have passed on. Recently the school was recognized by Alzheimer's Disease International as being the most innovative psychosocial research that they could identify in the world as a result of programs that take people with mild to moderate dementia and help them improve their quality of life and sense of meaning by engaging with children in the school. Although these elders may have impairments in short term memory, they can still tell stories from their own lives and engage in children's literature.

Thus The Intergenerational School represents a degree of intergenerativity in which the between and among represent learners of all kinds of different abilities who have committed to helping each other and their community become more sustainable.

Intergenerativity and Health

Integrative health is a redundant expression. The single word health should be holistic without the modifier. The two word phrase is used only because we have made health unhealthy and health care systems disintegrated non-systems. Integrative health is said to be a blend of western scientific allopathic medicine with complementary and alternative medicine. Yet there are historical accidents and political issues that have allowed health to become disintegrated. Western scientific allopathic medicine separates the disciplines from each other so that narrow

specialists do not see the patient as a whole human being. Other healthcare traditions from the east and elsewhere have been denigrated to a lower position because of the lack of scientific evidence. Yet it is increasingly recognized that health care systems in the United States are fragmented and not sustainable. Fresh new models of health are necessary that taken intergenerative perspective. This perspective includes the notion that health is a lifelong process, and that aging itself does not begin when one is old but begins when one is a child (or better yet a developing embryo). Hence, lifespan perspectives to health complement lifespan perspectives to education in creating healthy communities and societies.

The academic medical center is based on the division of learning and the provision of service into separate specialties or disciplines. The academy is recognizing the flaws in such a model that divides knowledge into finer and finer pieces. PhDs, theoretically lovers of wisdom, in fact become narrow specialists with limited abilities to integrate their field into other domains. The word “transdisciplinary” captures this sense of frustration that we must move beyond the narrow boundaries of disciplines into a unity of knowledge that E.O. Wilson has called concilience. If a healthcare system is to provide a sense of wholeness to its individual patients and communities that it serves, it itself must be whole and healthy.

As a member of the faculty of the Weatherhead School of Management and their Department of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University and a friend and colleague of David Cooperrider, I have learned the techniques and culture of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) for two decades. I also was fortunate to know Suresh Srivasta for a few years including when he was chair of department. So AI is in my toll box even though I have never obtained any formal certificate or other training. Because of AI, I've been fortunate enough to experience wonderful groups of people around the world who share a common vision of positive dialogue and organizational development.

When we started The Intergenerational School, for a change David was a participant and I was more on stage. We initiated an inquiry into two of my favorite topics, intergenerational learning and health. In fact this AI was conducted during the very first years of The Intergenerational School (TIS; www.tisonline.org), a public community school founded by my wife and me in Cleveland Ohio and located at Fairhill Center. We engaged youngsters and adults of various ages in a conversation about health. TIS emerged 10 years later as a national award-winning and internationally recognized innovator in education. In another article in this issue my wife and I discuss TIS. Part of the conceptual work creating the school was also conducted during the time that I was a Professional Fellow at the Weatherhead School of Management that houses the birthplace of AI. Hence AI is imbued in the history and culture of our school.

The opportunity to conduct an AI was prompted by a national initiative to create a better vision for healthcare in the United States, called Valeo. The word valeo in Latin means “to be able; to have power; to be well, fit and healthy.” A group of people with initial funding from the Fetzer Institute gathered in 1999 to create in the words of Jonas Salk, “an epidemic of health.” I joined the initiative and attended planning meetings in San Diego California. Little is left of my own records of the so-titled “Living Dialogue on Health and Care” which was conducted with an interview guide produced by the group whose names I can barely remember (but include Rob Kolodner, Tom Munnecke, Paul Andrews, Tony Suchman and Wynne Grossman (with apologies to those missing)). Valeo members from 11 communities hosted pilot workshops. Between June 2001 and January 2002 approximately 230 people participated. These participants included: all

age groups—from teenagers to seniors, health professionals and care consumers, and the chronically ill in addition to a generally well population. TIS was amongst them.

All I have left from Valeo are some photos and some memories – and actually a blue umbrella with the name of it. Someone was into marketing. Valeo is no more, but its spirit lives. The school continues to work on health issues. For example, we reported at two international medical meetings about an interprofessional (nursing, law, and medicine) project to enhance community knowledge and concern about lead poisoning in Cleveland. We remain committed to lifelong learning and health by prompting social engagement, cognitive activity, dietary moderation, and physical exercise. The power of narrative is very much alive at TIS as we believe we can create collective wisdom through story sharing.

New stories of brain aging are emerging. Some of them are shared in a book that emerged in the spirit of AI and TIS entitled, “The Myth of Alzheimer’s: what you aren’t being told about today’s most dreaded diagnosis” (www.themythofalzheimers.com). Needless to say these stories promote a more positive and empowering story of cognitive aging. Aging and learning are certainly best viewed as life span activities.

Postscript:

Since writing this article David and I participated (with Lindsey Godwin) and the Houston Independent School District in an AI event called “Healthy Kids Healthy Schools.” This event in February 2009 brought together several hundred members of the school staff, students, vendors, and community members to discuss obesity and fitness in the Houston schools. David Satcher was the keynote speaker and inspired us to action. We hope now to bring the energy for change to Cleveland and work with the Cleveland Municipal School District. The lessons learned remain to focus on health and not disease and attend to aging as a lifelong activity, not something you do after you get old. END

Intergenerativity and Ethics

Never in the history of our planet has its future seemed so challenged. The large number of older human beings on the planet is reducing biodiversity, and is desperately trying to survive in many countries where children particularly are short of water. Global warming, a clear consequence of human behavior, is contributing to major changes in the distribution of illness and contributing to social injustice.

If we are to survive on this planet that has so many human beings and increasingly fewer numbers of other species, we must develop more sustainable values. Ethics must come to the fore as we explore the true purpose of our humanity both as individuals and as a species. What is our interconnectedness to nature? How can we as individual human beings see personal mortality as part of a big picture that allows life to survive and thrive on the planet?

In my own work on intergenerativity as it relates to ethics, I have been inspired by a number of older mentors. Van Renssalaer Potter invented the term “bioethics” and Arnie Ness, the Norwegian philosopher, described *Deep Ecology*. Both these individuals founded their work on the scholarship of Rachel Carson in *The Silent Spring*, and Aldo Leopold *The Development of Land Ethics*. All these people were well aware of the need for an ethics that was expressed in the

language of metaphor. Perhaps the most widely used expression is the notion from Arnie Ness and Aldo Leopold that we need to learn to think like a mountain. Our intergenerational ethics as Al Gore calls it, must be based on appreciation for our responsibilities for each other and for future generations, as well as other species.

Stories can create powerful teachable moments that change lives. Metaphors are central players in our cognition as we learn to create collective wisdom and sustainable values. Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher, mountaineer, and creator of the concept of deep ecology died in this the 100 year anniversary Aldo Leopold's journey to the Southwest of the United States. Leopold coined and my friend Arne adopted the expression that human beings must learn "to think like a mountain." Van Potter, the inventor of the word "bioethics" and a fellow faculty member with Leopold at the University of Wisconsin, devoted his second book entitled *Global Bioethics* to Leopold. Inspired by land ethics and deep ecology Potter and I coined the term deep bioethics. Recognizing the emotions are as important to thoughts in ethics I coined the expression that we must all "learn to feel like water." Water, like emotions, flows and changes from frozen to steamy.

To this use of the expression "We must learn to think like a mountain", inspired by Leopold's view that only a mountain could understand his killing of a wolf so as to appreciate that the elimination of predators would allow deer populations to expand unhealthily. Arnie Ness saw *Thinking like a mountain* as thinking in the long term and with humility and perhaps with a broad base and attention to aspirational thoughts. But thought is not what just defines our species. We also need to develop metaphors for feeling. I have suggested that we not only think like a mountain, but feel like bodies of water. Water is essential to life and increasingly shortages are affecting human and other living creatures. Water exists in different states from solid, rigid ice to expansive gases, and in between the flowing of liquids. Water, again metaphorically, captures the changeable nature of human emotions, and that metaphor can be used to complement our cognitive thinking abilities to think like a mountain.

In The Intergenerational School we extend these metaphors into language of education and recognize at some deep level that learning itself can be viewed as a spiritual force. Being effective learners characterizes our human species and gives us our prime competitive advantage. In the depths of that life-affirming learning, there ought to be the opportunity to nature that can be seen as essentially spiritual.

Intergenerativity and Organizational Life

Almost all organizations are in some limited sense intergenerational because they involve individuals of sufficient difference in age that they would be considered from different generations. Yet very few organizations take advantage of the presence of learners of different ages. The AI process is generative and intergenerative by its very nature when it brings into the space participants of different ages. In our work at TIS and with our partners in other activities, we have specifically explored the learning and organizational advantages of having voices of different ages. For example, in AI processes in Houston, Texas, and Cleveland, Ohio, we are engaging young students in the work and play of creating new models for innovative and enjoyable education.

In TIS we share stories to create common organizational and community culture. Part of our heritage is a school with predominantly African American students. Hence we find opportunities to examine issues of racism, ethnicity, and racial harmony. During Black History Month we organize various narrative events. Here is a story from this year (2009):

The elderly African American gentleman spoke quietly and the children, aged 5 to 14, sat in rapt attention. He told them about his experience being the first African American to be hired by the phone company in Cleveland. On his first day on the job, he walked into his new office and the 40 other employees, all white, walked out the door. He stayed and did the job he was hired to do. On his second day, he walked in and 40 employees walked out. And so it continued throughout his first week. Finally, he explained, his fellow employees figured out that he was not going to give up, and so they stayed.

The children responded with incredulity. "How did you feel? Were you angry," they asked. And so he gently explained that there was little to be gained by anger, that the others did not know better, that he knew his experience was part of the change that those in the civil rights movement worked to achieve.

On "Through the Eyes of Our Elders" day at The Intergenerational School, this was just one of many intergenerational conversations that took place. Speakers told about not being allowed to go to school with white children, two women (one white and Jewish, one black) spoke together about their participation in the civil rights movement, one lady sang a spiritual she remembered from her childhood. Over and over the speakers told stories about family strength, refusing to succumb to hatred, and building self-esteem. All participants, which included children, teachers, administrators, and family members, were moved and inspired. History was truly brought alive and embodied in these stories.

This is just one example of the power of the intergenerational learning model that has been developed and implemented at The Intergenerational School (TIS). TIS is a public charter school located in Cleveland, one of the poorest cities in the United States. TIS opened in August 2000 with 30 students, and has grown to 176 children in grade equivalents K-8. Most of the students are African American or biracial and approximately 65% live in poverty.

TIS was founded on the principles that learning is a lifelong developmental process and that knowledge is socially constructed. These principles are translated into a developmental curriculum that is based on 5 stages of learning rather than age-based, arbitrary grade levels. Progress through the stages is based on demonstrated mastery of learning objectives. Student success is the constant, and the time needed to accomplish that success is the variable.

TIS believes that learning is enhanced when people of varying ages learn together. This concept begins within each classroom, where students group in multi-age classes with a three to four year age span. Intergenerational programming complements this structure, and brings adults and older adults into the learning activities and conversations on a regular basis. Programs include collaborations with area colleges and universities, classroom partnerships with long term care facilities, on-site reading mentoring, and intergenerational activities and classes (such as gardening, dance, and computer classes taught for elders by TIS students).

The benefits of intergenerational dialogue within a public school setting are many. In a time when public schools are places of violence, the regular presence of many adults and older adults within the hallways of TIS helps create a palpable atmosphere of calm and respectful behavior. Child who live in poverty may lack stable, supportive home environments but at TIS they experience the caring and influence of many adults, in addition to the classroom teacher, in their daily school experience. Reading mentors actively share a love of books with children and have powerful conversations that emphasize their connections to the stories they read and discuss together. These mentoring experiences contribute to the remarkable reading achievement scores that TIS students have achieved (see www.tisonline.org for details of our achievement scores).

The benefits to our participating elders are also more than anecdotal. Some volunteers have been coming to TIS on a weekly basis for 8 years now. They are part of our TIS “family” and are equally important to children and staff alike. Recent research by Danny George with Peter’s help has provided evidence of real benefits in memory and well-being for adult volunteers, including those in the early stages of dementia. Both quantitative (a randomized controlled trial) and qualitative (interviews and ethnography) show that quality of life is improved and stress reduced by participating in activities with the children.

An intergenerational learning model yields powerful benefits to all participants. TIS students are joyful, curious, energetic, respectful, and take learning seriously. TIS volunteers are dedicated, caring, and young at heart. Most importantly, as the “Through the Eyes of our Elders” experiences show, the volunteers are inspiring another generation, a generation that is enthralled and enriched by the opportunity to participate with them in creating the future and preserving the legacy of those who have gone before.

Conclusion

We have suggested that the word “intergenerativity” can bring focus to the interconnectedness among generative spirits in society. We have highlighted this new concept by looking at it specifically in relationship to intergenerational learning. Such learning, we believe, can be grounded in experiential learning and appreciative inquiry models that highlight the importance of acting in the world and reflecting deeply on such experience. Through this process we can develop models of human and social behavior that can create a healthy future. It is through the development of intergenerational learning and intergenerational values that we can create and foster an ethics that allows our species to survive.

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