Developing & Implementing an Intergenerational Classroom

PEDAGOGICAL TOOLKIT

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TRENT UNIVERSITY

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ETHICS APPROVAL INFORMATION

The research was approved by the Trent University Research Ethics Board (file number 28785).

As Trent University researchers, we respectfully acknowledge that this project was undertaken on the treaty and traditional territory of the Mississauga Anishnaabeg. We offer our gratitude to the First Nations for their care for, and teachings about, our earth and our relations. May we honour those teachings.

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Background

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Based out of Trent University's Department of Psychology and the Trent Centre for Aging & Society in Peterborough, Ontario, Dr. Elizabeth Russell has been working to identify ways that university classrooms can strengthen societal views on aging through both lecture-based and intergenerational classrooms. The funders of the ongoing Experiential Learning in Aging project include the RTOERO Foundation, Trent's Centre for Teaching & Learning, and Trent University's Office of Research & Innovation.

To assess the outcomes of a Trent University-based intergenerational classroom, Dr. Elizabeth Russell and Tabytha Wells developed, implemented, and evaluated an intergenerational Psychology of Aging course at Trent University in Winter, 2024.

This third-year course included and intentionally connected 60 university students and 13 older participants from the community (aged 65+). The classroom aimed to encourage a diverse view of aging while fostering meaningful intergenerational connections through formal lectures and informal intergenerational group activities.

Through interviews with both community participants and students, we found that the intergenerational classroom (1) facilitated the development of age-consciousness (i.e., a deeper understanding of the aging process, a reduction in and increased awareness of ageism, and an enhanced personal connection with aging), (2) reduced perceived generational divides, and (3) humanized people of all ages.

About This Toolkit
This toolkit provides an overview of key considerations to make when creating a university-based intergenerational classroom. This toolkit is recommended for educators who wish to implement an intergenerational classroom model within their own university classrooms, regardless of specific course topic.

Planning & Logistics

Implementing an intergenerational classroom amplifies all elements of course planning and logistics. Careful and thoughtful preparation prior to beginning participant recruitment is necessary to ensure that the course can comfortably and effectively accommodate students and community members.

Physical Classroom Design

The classroom space is crucial for creating a welcoming, comfortable, and vibrant classroom environment. The room should allow for dynamic movement to facilitate small intergenerational group activities while minimizing barriers to engagement, such as accessibility concerns. Consider the following:

Size

Ensure that the classroom is large enough to safely and comfortably accommodate all students and community participants, including movement during class. Consider course cap vs. room capacity.

Adaptability

Moveable tables and chairs create a dynamic environment that facilitates group activities and discussions. This may mean requesting a special classroom ahead of time.

Accessibility

Consider the availability and proximity of accessible washrooms, elevators, and nearby parking lots.

Additional Space

Nearby space (e.g., outdoor space, hallway seating, breakout rooms) can be useful for managing noise during small group activities.

Recruiting Community Participants

Thoughtful recruitment of older community participants is key to the success of an intergenerational classroom. Participants of a wide range of ages, backgrounds, and abilities promote a balanced, realistic, and diverse view of aging.

Timing

Begin recruitment early to account for any challenges you may encounter along the way.

Recruitment Methods

Incorporate a variety of recruitment methods, including posters, in-person announcements, social media posts, and emails. Consider connecting directly with organizations that work with older adults.

Participant Selection

Consider the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and Indigeneity throughout recruitment and selection. Ensure that there are enough participants to allow for small intergenerational groups (ratios of approximately 1 community participant to 5 students work well).

Campus Navigation & Parking

University campuses can be challenging to navigate and intimidating to visit. Providing community participants with clear navigation instructions and parking information can make the campus and classroom environments feel more inviting and familiar.

→ Navigation

Providing community participants with clear instructions for navigating the university campus (e.g., campus maps, detailed written instructions, and/or annotated photos) reduces uncertainty and ensures a smooth arrival to the classroom. This is especially important the first time that participants are visiting campus; stationing student volunteers in parking areas to help can go a long way.

→ Parking

Consider reserving weekly parking spots in nearby lots for community participants, to assist with campus navigation and mitigate accessibility concerns.

Classroom Orientation

An initial orientation session is a fun and effective way for students and community participants to meet course teaching staff, familiarize themselves with the campus and classroom space, review course logistics, and get to know their peers.

We suggest hosting two orientation sessions before beginning the first intergenerational class: one for students and one for community participants. Each orientation session should clearly outline the course format, goals of the intergenerational component, any expectations of the students/community participants, and expectations for classroom conduct.

The First Class

The first intergenerational class plays a key role in shaping the course atmosphere. Building rapport between teaching staff, students, and community participants from day one is essential to fostering a dynamic and engaging classroom environment. Consider the following:

→ **Introductions & Ice Breakers**

Fun, informal, conversation-based activities (e.g., speed interviewing) allow students and community participants to get to know each other as equals. Providing name tags early on can also be beneficial.

→ **Catering**

Beginning the first class with light, catered treats can create a welcoming, relaxed, and inviting environment for participants as they get to know each other.

Student & Community Participant Check–Ins

Conversational and/or written mid-point check-ins with both students and community participants provide insight into classroom dynamics, including benefits and challenges that people may be experiencing. Adapting the course format and activities based on the feedback provided can improve the learning environment and enhance intergenerational connection-building opportunities.

Intergenerational Group Activities

Small, intergenerational group activities are foundational to the success of the intergenerational classroom. Ensure that there is time set aside for frequent and fun activities that minimize power dynamics, provide knowledge sharing opportunities, and foster meaningful connections between students and participants. A combination of community-building and academic activities is recommended. Some examples include:

Community–Building

- Speed interviewing
- Scavenger hunt
- Show-and-tell
- Arts and crafts

Academic

- Brainstorming course assignments
- Discussing projects
- Critiquing media

Concluding the Course

A celebration event at the end of the course allows students and community members to reflect on their experiences in the intergenerational classroom. Sharing student projects through an in-class event with catering and open discussions provides a sense of closure to the course while allowing participants to facilitate further intergenerational and/or peer connections.

Knowledge Mobilization

Capturing the experience of the course through professional photography and videography is invaluable in telling the story of the intergenerational classroom. Do consider your university's policies and individual participants' preferences on in-class photography.

Uses of the professional photos for knowledge mobilization are limitless, and they can be included in reports and toolkits, presentation slides, and promotional materials. Brief videos are perfect for showcasing classroom dynamics and sharing the voices of participants in an engaging and shareable format.

Research & Evaluation

If you choose to conduct research within the intergenerational classroom, think about ethical considerations associated with scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) research. Reflect on potential conflicts of interest between teaching and research, and consider how your dual role as course teaching staff and researcher may impact your research.
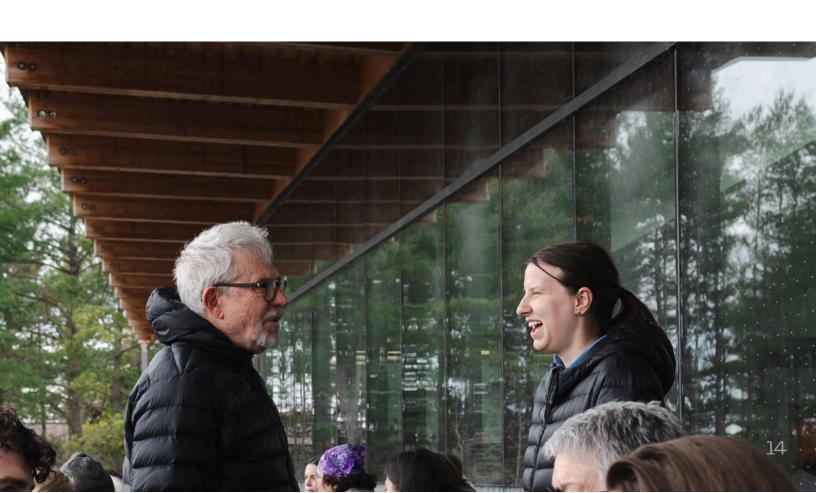
Budget Considerations

An intergenerational classroom can be implemented on a wide range of budgets. Based on the suggestions outlined in this toolkit, we suggest the following budget considerations:

- **Parking**
- **Supplies for teaching & activities**
- **Catering**

- **Honorariums**
- **Photography & videography**
- **Human resources**

Final Thoughts

An intergenerational classroom can be a transformational way to reduce ageism, break down perceived generational divides, and humanize people of all ages. With some careful planning, collaboration, and flexibility and openness to change in real time, an intergenerational classroom can reduce stereotypes on aging and facilitate meaningful and enduring intergenerational connections.

For more information

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