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# RESEARCH PROJECT OUTLINE

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Office of the Dean ♦ College of Agricultural Sciences  
The Pennsylvania State University ♦ University Park, Pennsylvania

Project 3933

**Title:** Intergenerational Strategies for Supporting Children, Youth, Older Adults, Families, and Communities

**Justification:**

Nations across the globe are experiencing what has been termed a “longevity revolution,” a dramatic increase in the size of the older population. In the U.S., in 1900, 4 percent of the population, three million people, were age 65 or older. In 2000, nearly 13 percent of the population, 35 million people, reached this milestone. By 2030, it is estimated that 20 percent of the population, over 70 million people, will be over age 65 (Federal Interagency Forum, 2000). This population aging trend is most frequently viewed in negative terms; e.g., Peterson (1999) describes it as a “demographic time bomb.”

The core argument is that there are growing social and fiscal costs associated with providing additional health services and expanding the pension system to accommodate a growing older adult population. Yet, there is another perspective, one that emphasizes a view of older adults as societal assets. Freedman (1999), for example, describes the population aging trend as an “opportunity to be seized.”

Various “catch words” and phrases have been used to invoke positive visions and actions for aging societies. One such phrase, “productive aging,” first coined by the American Pulitzer Prize winner Robert Butler, M.D., refers to:

“... the capacity of an individual or a population to serve in the paid work force, to serve in volunteer activities, to assist in the family, and to maintain himself or herself as independently as possible” (Productive Aging News 1994, February, p.1).

The productive aging concept underscores the importance of active roles for seniors which are deemed meaningful in the context of everyday life. Within modern gerontology, the physical and psychological health of senior adults is viewed in relational terms; social connectedness and active community engagement are of paramount importance. And this is consistent with how most adults define successful aging, i.e., primarily in terms of relationships, specifically caring about and getting along with others (Ryff, 1989).

There are other benefits that accrue when senior adults’ time, talent, and experience are focused on addressing society’s most pressing needs. Having older adults present and playing constructive roles in the lives of children and youth, for example, can be of pivotal importance in providing needed social and emotional support and promoting healthy development (Taylor et al., 1999).

Fortunately, there are efforts to programmatically bring children and youth together with older adults. Such programs are found in settings including schools, community organizations, hospitals, and places of worship. They mobilize the talents, skills, energy and resources of older adults (as well as young people) in service to people of other generations (Henkin and Kingson, 1998/99). Moreover, they have been found to be a practical, effective means for diminishing ageist stereotypes, improving services for children, youth and older adults, and strengthening community support systems.

Despite the recent growth in intergenerational programs, understanding of the processes of program implementation and impact on young and elderly participants, families, and communities is limited. The proposed research will help

to identify key principles for effective intergenerational program development, implementation, and impact with an emphasis on identifying “best practice” approaches for bringing intergenerational strategies to bear on some of the vital problems in the state of PA.

The intent is to provide empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of specific intergenerational models and approaches for meeting a range of human and community development objectives. This includes the evaluation of intergenerational programs aimed at enhancing the education and social development of children and youth, promoting social integration of older adults, strengthening families, and improving community life.

### **Previous Work and Present Outlook:**

Intergenerational programming goes beyond an amalgamation of “programs.” It also represents a distinct perspective with implications for how we address social issues, formulate public policy, and construct our basic institutions. Intergenerational programming is even referred to as a field in and of itself, with a finite domain of inquiry and a clear set of approaches, questions, and skills that practitioners need to function effectively (Newman et al., 1997).

The intergenerational studies field has roots in many disciplines (especially human development, education, and social gerontology) and includes a wide range of program and policy development topics. Despite the growing number and variety of intergenerational programs across North America, well-designed studies of implementation process and program effects are rare. More attention needs to be paid to program structure, activity selection, facilitation strategies, and a host of other factors that are likely to affect program success. Answers are also needed to more refined questions regarding how intergenerational programs can best be developed to address specific issues affecting children, youth, older adults, families, and communities. The lack of such evidence makes it difficult to make recommendations to practitioners, other researchers, and policy makers (Kuehne, 1998/99; Kuehne & Kaplan, 2001).

Nevertheless, as the intergenerational field continues to develop, progress is being made in terms of learning more about how intergenerational programming methodologies can address issues affecting older adults, children, youth, families, and communities.

### *Older Adults*

Intergenerational programs have been found to affect senior adults’ views of young people. Senior adults are most likely to adopt positive views about young people when they have a chance to see youth behaving in competent ways, when contact is prolonged, and when they have opportunities for discussion and reflection with the youth participants (Zeldin et al., 2000).

Intergenerational programs have a desirable affect on senior adult participants’ health and activity level as illustrated in the following four items.

- As a function of their involvement in a school volunteer program in Pennsylvania, senior adult mentors reported improved self-esteem, better health and the satisfaction of feeling productive (Newman and Larimer, 1995).
- Older adults in an adult day care program who participated in an intergenerational program displayed higher levels of pro-social behavior and less solitary behavior (Short-DeGraff & Diamond, 1996).
- Seniors who participated in a school-based intergenerational program displayed some evidence of increased memory function (Newman, Karip, and Faux, 1995).
- After four months of involvement in a school-based intergenerational program in the South Bronx (New York), senior adult volunteers displayed a slight reduction of depressive symptoms, reported watching less television, and displayed enhanced problem solving skills and enhanced physical mobility (as measured by speed to stand from chair) (Fried et al., 2000).

One area of needed research would involve the further examination of how the act of mentoring young people seems to have a particularly strong impact on how senior volunteers view themselves and their lives (Taylor et al., 1999).

Additional research is also needed to determine the extent to which various living arrangements for older adults contribute to (or detract from) opportunities to establish social ties and productive activities with members of other age groups.

### *Children and Youth*

Various studies have been conducted which demonstrate the efficacy of intergenerational program experiences to promote more positive attitudes toward older persons and the aging process. Several of these studies incorporate pre- and post-testing of the participants, include control group comparisons, and demonstrate a statistically significant impact on student attitudes toward older adults (Davis and Westbrook, 1981; Corbin, Kagan, and Metal-Corbin, 1987; and Ward and Balavage, 1996).

Intergenerational program experiences have been found to contribute significantly to the development of youth participants' academic skills, learning motivation, and academic performance (Brabazon, 1998; Community Service Society 2000; and Friedman, 1999). Young participants also often report improved feelings of self-esteem and self-worth.

Additional research is needed to determine (1) the extent to which learning and attitudinal changes derived from intergenerational program experiences at community settings (e.g., community centers, 4-H clubs, etc.) generalize to enhanced performance at school; (2) the extent to which young participants' new intergenerational relationships carry over to their relationships with other children/youth, adults, and family members; and (3) if/how intergenerational program experiences influence the recreational and career development decisions made by young project participants in subsequent years.

### *Families*

An intergenerational lense has been used to examine and develop intervention strategies to address problems experienced at the family level such as the challenges faced by families with grandparents raising grandchildren. The number of children being raised by their grandparents is on the rise across the country. In the year 1998, there were 1.4 million children and 888,000 households in which the children were being raised solely by their grandparents without the presence of either birth parent. This number is up a dramatic 53% since 1990. With this growth has come an increasing awareness of the many issues that these families face, and the ever present need for support. Difficulties faced by grandparent raising grandchildren (GRG) families include financial hardship. While not a definitive characteristic of GRG families, poverty rates have been shown to be 60% higher among grandparents raising grandchildren than among other grandparents. There are also challenges associated with child care, health services, housing, legal issues, and education (Beltran, 2000).

Although there are some efforts to help GRG families, including support groups, supportive public policies, alternative public housing facilities, and resource centers, relative to the numbers of these families these services still only exist on a small scale. Additional research in this area can help inform efforts to expand services, advocate for a broader adoption of supportive legislation, and promote a greater level of public awareness of the situation facing so many families today.

Healthy lines of intergenerational communication within families may contribute to the economic as well as psychological well being of family members. This is particularly true in the case of family-run businesses. Evidence is accruing that suggests communication difficulties within families that own and operate farms is one of the most neglected topics in farm management. Such neglect often results in family conflict, particularly in the realm of succession planning, and, unfortunately, prolonged legal battles that could have been avoided. More research on how farm family members' make farm succession decisions, particularly how they seek to take into account the diverse needs and perceptions of all family members as well as how they manage interpersonal conflict, should have implications for facilitating more effective modes of farm ownership transfer. With over 90% of Pennsylvania's farms owned by families, the degree to which these families engage in effective modes of farm succession planning is likely to have an impact on the sustainability of the agriculture industry.

### *Communities*

Intergenerational programs often contribute to community level outcomes. Several program models have been found to contribute to the development of an informed, active, and engaged citizenry. As participants study the local community and work to develop action plans for improving the community, they learn about local government structures, gain a greater appreciation for the democratic process, develop a stronger sense of community, and

become more interested in participating in community affairs (Generations United, 2002; Kaplan, 1997). Depending on the way intergenerational dialogue and community exploration experiences are structured, participants can develop enriched conceptions of community life and insightful ideas for improvement.

Kaplan (1997) reports how participants of an intergenerational community education program gained a greater awareness of how the generations are interdependent and that young and old have many shared concerns about the quality of life in their communities.

The community benefits associated with intergenerational programs are not always evident. Take, for example, a service learning initiative in which participating high school students are visiting the homes of frail elders, helping them with light home maintenance tasks, and socializing with them. Beyond the tangible benefits for the senior adults, there is a broader impact associated with enabling local senior adults to stay at home and forego entering long-term care institutions. This has an economic impact on the local community; by keeping these older adults in the community, they continue to support local businesses. In connection with improvements in the senior adults' health and independence, they possess more "social capital;" they become better able to assist other community residents who may be in need.

There is a need for more experimentation regarding intergenerational approaches for enhancing people's sense of, and involvement in, community. This includes developing strategies for instilling a community focus into existing intergenerational program models that tend to focus on interpersonal sharing and skills development.

### **Objectives:**

To identify intergenerational program development and implementation processes and their relationship to program outcomes for participants, organizations, and communities. This work will be done within the context of new and existing programs designed to:

1. create "productive aging" opportunities for older adults, defined as activities which promote sense of purpose, involvement in paid and volunteer activities, and that contribute to independent living outcomes;
2. create positive developmental outcomes for children and youth, such as reduced anti-social activity, enhanced academic performance, and increased civic engagement;
3. improve intergenerational communication within families, leading to enhanced understanding about the experiences, relationships, roles, and responsibilities of people in other generations; and
4. increase the level of civic vitality in the communities in which programs are established.

Program development and implementation factors include: clarity of goals and objectives, strategies for selecting and training staff and for recruiting and orienting participants, level of involvement of participants and front-line staff in program planning, and characteristics of activity selection, e.g., the extent to which activities are developmentally and culturally appropriate.

### **Procedures:**

A series of evaluation studies will be conducted of intergenerational programs implemented in a variety of community settings, and designed to assess the above four outcomes. For each study, pre- and post-project interviews/questionnaires will be conducted with administrators, staff, program participants, and, if appropriate, family members, and observations will be conducted focused on delineating the intergenerational interaction dynamics. In analyzing interview and observation results across program interventions, emphasis will be placed on identifying core principles, that intergenerational practitioners across disciplines and sectors hold in common, regarding program planning processes, program operation, and "best practice" activities and activity facilitation strategies.

Emphasis will be placed on studying those intergenerational program models which represent innovative strategies for enhancing the quality of life for older adults and young people, promoting community participation, and strengthening families. Each of the following procedures correspond to the four objectives identified above:

- (1) Procedure 1 – Outcomes for older adults: To create "productive aging" opportunities for older adults, an evaluation study of the "Generation Station" model, an intergenerational initiative now being developed and field-tested at Foxdale Village, a continuous care/retirement community in State College, Pennsylvania, will be expanded. The pilot phase of this research, entitled, "Generation Station: Promoting Intergenerational Engagement in Retirement Communities," aims to pilot and assess a new strategy for stimulating

intergenerational program activity in retirement communities/ continuous care facilities. This strategy, called “intergenerational options mapping,” involves a three-step process: (1) spatial identification (find geographic location) of all local children and youth programs, (2) collection of information about their objectives and activities/ curricula, and (3) establishment of inter-agency dialogue aimed at exploring potential intergenerational programmatic links based on complementary objectives and curricula. It is proposed that the “intergenerational options mapping” strategy will yield intergenerational program activities at Foxdale Village (the targeted retirement community facility) that are sustainable (or ongoing) and multi-faceted (more than just one type of activity and activity partner). To measure breadth, depth, and quality of the intergenerational activity resulting from this multi-faceted intervention, interviews will be conducted with program staff and participants, and observations will be conducted of intergenerational program activity.

At the end of the project demonstration phase at Foxdale (September, 2002), the Generation Station model will be revised according to program impact data collected from older adults, young participants, staff, and family members of the participants. Subsequently, a multi-site applied research initiative will be planned and carried out. The follow-up study will involve implementing the “Generation Station” program framework in three sites and assessing the degree to which this intervention builds institutional capacity to establish sustainable partnerships with children and youth organizations and, from the perspective of the residents of the senior facilities who are interviewed, improves senior adults’ quality of life.

- (2) Procedure 2 – Outcomes for children and youth: After reviewing a range of intergenerational models that can be implemented from within a 4-H/child and youth development framework, a series of program evaluation studies will be conducted to identify effective intergenerational approaches for creating positive developmental outcomes for children and youth.

The first study, implemented at Penn State University’s two early childhood education centers (the Bennett Family Center and the Child Development Lab), will examine different strategies for establishing intergenerational programs in early childhood education sites. (Title: “A Tale of Two Strategies: A Comparison of an Organic Versus an Explicit Intervention Approach for Instituting an Intergenerational Program in an Early Childhood Education Setting.”) This research project will be conducted at the two University early childhood education centers, both of which instituted intergenerational programs in November 2001. Though starting with the same general goals, presented with the same invitation for collaboration, and operating with the same set of partners and resources with which to establish intergenerational programs in their respective centers, these centers developed what appears to be diametrically opposed strategies for implementing their intergenerational programs. Whereas one center approached the program development task by developing a clear timeline and set of steps and procedures to plan and implement intergenerational activities, the other center handled the challenge not as an “explicit intervention” task but rather as an “organic” process, one which would unfold based on the interests of prospective senior adult volunteers and the relationships they establish with staff and students.

The proposed research is a small study aimed at comparing these two very different strategies for operationalizing intergenerational engagement ideology. Short interviews will be conducted with center directors, lead teachers (one per center), and the head of each center’s parent-teacher association to determine underlying assumptions and perspectives about the significance and preferred functioning of the intergenerational programs. Semi-structured observations will be conducted for two activity periods for each center (ideally during unstructured time such as free play), with each period lasting 45-60 minutes. These observations will be conducted on different days of the week but during the same time of day. Observers will be trained to record many aspects of the intergenerational interaction including the content of exchanges, who approached whom, facial expressions, body language, tempo of dialogue, etc. Another data set involves analysis of written documents (e.g., newsletters sent out, minutes from meetings, philosophical statements, and background information on programs) which will provide ancillary information on how the intergenerational programs are viewed and how they have been planned. Results will have implications for informing efforts to establish effective intergenerational programs in early childhood education settings.

- (3) Procedure 3 – Outcomes for intergenerational communication dynamics within families: To investigate the role that communication plays in the process of transferring family-owned and operated farms from one generation to the next, a study, entitled “The Role of Communication Dynamics in Family-Owned Farm Continuity Planning,” will be planned and conducted with Pennsylvania families that own and operate small farms. The primary goal

of this study is to discover how farm families communicate about transferring the farm in ways that lead to desirable outcomes for the farm business and enhance the lives of family members. The following is a description of the preliminary study, conducted with the involvement of faculty members from the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology and the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences.

Intensive interviews will be conducted with members of 16 multi-generational farm families. Criteria for family selection include: diversity in geographical location (S.E., N.E., Central, S.W.), level of development pressure in the surrounding area (high versus low), and farm type (dairy versus vegetable). Interviews will incorporate questions to ascertain the following: how individual family members perceive the risks and opportunities associated with the family farm enterprise, their level of awareness of how other family members perceive risks and opportunities, the degree to which individual family members see their decisions (career-related and otherwise) as being interdependent with those made by other family members, and how they address and manage conflict among family members. Special attention will be paid to issues related to farm succession planning, including the level of attention paid to such issues, expectations regarding roles and responsibilities of individual family members, considerations of family relationships (e.g., treating children “fairly”), and legal considerations (e.g., awareness and understanding of laws related to death taxes, transfer options, long term care needs and so on).

- (4) Procedure 4 – Outcomes for community participation: To increase the level of civic vitality in communities, two novel intergenerational program models will be developed and evaluated.
- a. The “Futures Festival” special events program model will be piloted and evaluated in three sites in Pennsylvania. The “Futures Festival” model is an approach which aims to mobilize communities and community assets through the use of intergenerational communication activities and locally initiated festivals. The rationale that guides this intervention strategy is as follows: People of different age groups have limited opportunities to communicate with each other; furthermore, the viewpoints of youth and seniors are frequently overlooked in the community planning process. The *Futures Festival* program draws upon the arts, photography, theatrical presentations and other forms of expression to promote interaction and cooperation between these two groups and to provide them with opportunities to express their community ideas and concerns. This research will be qualitative in nature and include a range of methods, including ethnographic observations, narrative analysis of dialogue occurring during the event organizing process and the event itself, and analysis of archival materials. The research orientation fits into a “participatory action research” framework, with primary attention placed on assessing the effectiveness of efforts aimed at reaching out to local residents of all generations, obtaining information on their visions for how to improve their communities, and engaging them in intergenerational dialogue about local development issues. Results will have implications for informing community-based efforts to broaden local participation in community development decision-making processes.
  - b. Another research project will be conducted as part of the “Shaver’s Creek Intergenerational Outdoor School” initiative, a joint program of Shaver’s Creek Environmental Center, Penn State Cooperative Extension, and the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education. The primary purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of structured intergenerational engagement experiences on the environmental knowledge and attitudes held by young participants of an outdoor school environmental education program. The secondary purpose of the research is to determine the extent to which children’s attitudes toward senior adults -- and senior volunteers’ attitudes toward children -- change as a function of participating in an intergenerational outdoor school program. The tertiary purpose of this research is to assess the viability of inserting an intergenerational component into existing environmental education programs. Research methods include interviews conducted with senior adult volunteers (individual and in focus groups), questionnaires delivered to participating children and staff, and structured observation of the intergenerational interaction taking place during the outdoor school program. Results will help inform efforts to broaden citizen involvement in environmental education and environmental improvement/service programs.

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**Probable Duration:** 59 months (November 1, 2002 through September 30, 2007)

**Financial Support:** Estimated Annual Budget, Hatch and General Funds:

Salaries	\$6,500
Maintenance	\$3,500

**Personnel:** Matthew S. Kaplan

**Institutional Units Involved:** Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

**Cooperation:** Foxdale Village Continuing Care Retirement in State College, Pennsylvania