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Reciprocal Learning: An Intergenerational Computer Training Model for Young Adults Working with Elders Follow-Up Evaluation: Summer 2006 - Report Series # 15

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Report Series - # 15

***Reciprocal Learning: An Intergenerational
Computer Training Model for Young Adults
Working with Elders
Follow-Up Evaluation: Summer 2006***

Project Team

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Central Michigan University

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Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC)

About SERC (Sheridan Elder Research Centre)

Through applied research the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) will identify, develop, test and support implementation of innovative strategies that improve the quality of life for older adults and their families.

1. Wherever possible, older adults participate in the identification of research questions and contribute to the development of research projects at SERC.
2. We conduct applied research from a psychosocial perspective which builds on the strengths of older adults.
3. Our research is intended to directly benefit older adults and their families in their everyday lives. The process of knowledge translation takes our research findings from lab to life.
4. SERC affiliated researchers disseminate research findings to a range of stakeholders through the SERC Research Report Series, research forums, educational events and other means.
5. A multigenerational approach is implicit, and frequently explicit, in our research.
6. To the extent possible our research is linked to and complements academic programs at the Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.

EXAMPLES OF SERC RESEARCH

The Built Environment - Indoor/Outdoor Design - Graphic Design	Information & Communication Technology (ICT) - Accessible computing - Age appropriate games	Human Communication - Hearing/low vision - Vision - Language	Public Policy - Elder Abuse - Ageism	Other research interests - Self image/self esteem - Care-giver support
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The goal of this evaluation, conducted in the summer of 2006, was to capture the experiences of young adults who participated as ‘senior tech tutors’ for elders in the computer training program¹. The training was piloted in the Internet Café at the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC) in the fall of 2005. Twelve young adults participated in the training to become ‘senior tech tutors. An additional three participated in tutoring without having attended the training but were provided with instructional hand-outs. These three tech tutors had prior education and experience in the field of gerontology. Feedback interviews were conducted over the telephone. These interviews took place over an eight-week period. The relationships that tech tutors formed with their ‘student’ elders had an impact on tech tutors’ goals, their views about aging and their career aspirations.

1. Purpose

This evaluation study explored the effectiveness of training for young adult tech tutors who would then teach elders who had been identified as computer nonusers. The outcomes of this project went beyond its original focus. The development of meaningful relationships with the elders they trained had an impact on tutors’ views about aging, their perceptions about the capabilities and capacities of elders and, in some cases, influenced their career aspirations at the completion of this project. The primary goal of this pilot project was to build confidence and understanding of basic computer applications for elders. The tech tutor training was designed to provide the skills and understanding to work effectively with elders and to provide computer instruction to that group.

The goal of the current evaluation study was twofold:

1. To evaluate the usefulness of the tech tutor training.
2. To document the impact the project had on the young adults’ views, goals and relationship to elders.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The qualitative orientation of this follow up evaluation reflects the psychosocial focus of the Sheridan Elder Research Centre (SERC). This approach recognizes the individual variability in experience as well as the unique life experiences of each young adult who participated in the tech tutor training program. The qualitative design incorporated a telephone interview process with a flexible structure of questions that could easily be modified to incorporate the participant’s unique experiences and insights about the value of the training and the impact the project had on them as individuals.

¹For further information about the computer training refer to Pratten, S. (2006). SERC Report #14. Older Adults Embracing Technology: Leave No One Behind

2.2 Respondent Sampling

Participants for the computer study were recruited from all faculties at Sheridan College. Outreach efforts were also made through the Mississauga campus of the University of Toronto and McMaster University, Shalom Village Long Term Care in Hamilton and Sunrise Senior Living in Oakville. All of the participants had either attended the nine (3 x 3 hours each) hours of training or received the written handouts for trainers and had participated in a post secondary school gerontology program. All tech tutors were able to access supervision and support from the SERC research team throughout the process of training and facilitation of the project.

At the end of each student training session, all participants filled out an evaluation. These items will be recorded verbatim later in the report. At the end of each teaching session with the elders, tech tutors were asked to complete a journal documentation sheet outlining any anecdotes from the session and materials covered.

2.3 Method

To encourage participation in this evaluation, a SERC researcher emailed all tech tutors to notify them of the evaluation study and ask for their support in its completion. Follow-up phone calls were made over an eight week period. Two of the tutors' phones were no longer in service. Two were unable to complete the interview due to a hectic work schedule and requested completing the interview through email. Neither of them completed the survey. Of the fifteen potential respondents, eight completed the follow up evaluation (three male and five female). Evaluation sessions lasted between 15 minutes and a half hour. One SERC researcher, who was not involved in any aspect of the tech tutor training or elder computer training, conducted all the interviews which allowed for greater reliability and objectivity.

Interviews were documented with hand written notes and then transcribed to Word documents. Following the conclusion of the interview, a summary report and thank you emails were sent to all participants from the study.

2.4 Data Collection Measures

The interviewer completed a log sheet that outlined all the survey questions. The interview responses were recorded including the date of the interview, length of time spent in the interview, general comments and suggestions beyond the survey questions.

2.5 Data Analysis Process

The data were analyzed based upon the aforementioned research goals. The researchers' interview notes were summarized organizing the information into themes. The identification of common themes would guide future training and recruitment strategies. In addition, it would provide information about outcomes that had been experienced by student participants in the tech tutor program.

3. Results

3.1 Data Analysis Findings

In order to retain the authenticity of the interviews with the student tech tutors, their direct quotes are recorded throughout this report. They have been simply organized according to related themes.

Preparedness to work with elders:

Ninety percent of the tech tutors felt that either the training or the handouts provided had prepared them to work with elders. One respondent felt that, if they had not been in the Social Service Worker - Gerontology Program, the information provided would not have been enough to provide them adequate insights about how to work effectively with seniors.

SERC support for tech tutors:

All tech tutors felt that they were well supported throughout the process. Clear, consistent communication and the availability of SERC researchers during and after training sessions were repeatedly voiced by respondents as important. Positive feedback was also cited as being an important feature of the support they experienced.

"This was the first time I had been included in something where the organizers were full participants in the process."

"When we would get frustrated and impatient because we were worried that the seniors would never move on from this first lesson, she would explain to us that it was a process and to always be mindful that some (elders) would have more difficulty than others. Their support made all the difference."

"They've been amazing. I'm still in touch with them sending emails and attachments with ideas about how to keep it interesting for the residents."

"They would always ask how we are getting along and if we understood. She gave us feedback and would tell us how well we've done. They also thanked us every day when we finished."

"They did a wonderful job by explaining things to us. They would keep in touch with us online. Asking us what we needed to prepare ourselves. Letting us know ahead of time, what we needed to do. And making sure we were comfortable and that we had time to think about it."

"I felt they did a great job in keeping us all together. They kept in touch with all of us with the different partners. Even though we were way out here (offsite in Hamilton) we still felt a part of things through the communication."

"Susan has a really welcoming personality. When you'd bring up ideas she was great at incorporating them and even staying after the session, if we needed it."

"Even though our group was a bit different (offsite) they included us in all email; it was helpful to be a part of the distribution list. It made us feel a part of everything."

"SERC's support was amazing. Susan was there whenever we had an issue."

Training content:

"I definitely thought it was presented well. She gave us a lot of articles and terminology to be aware of. Things like having a short temper, when people might be confused. I was kept that in the back of my mind while I was working with them."

"The content was very very helpful! I had no idea before of how to deal with the situation in real-time. Someone with motor disabilities and stroke I had no idea. But they had everything there (at the Internet Café) different types of mice, ergonomic keyboards. They had all the resources there. It was excellent."

Suggested changes:

"I think they should make it a bit more scientific. Perhaps having a script that all of us follow that's the same message that everyone gets. Being rigorous around the script for what is consent. That could've been done better. "

"One thing that I think would be very important in terms of training for the tech tutors is the issue of confidentiality. When it would be important for them to share information, to whom and under what circumstances."

"I thought it (the documentation for the research) should have been a bit more structured. Perhaps having a timeline for the different tasks. Having a chart format to tick off the lessons and the key times that things needed to be done, so we could keep track. So we didn't have to keep going back to check."

"I think the training should have been one or two days rather than have so many sessions. Do it in bigger chunks."

"We should have done more mock classes, role-plays, to prepare us more for teaching the lessons."

"We had six students and two of us (tech tutors). We needed a lot more (tech tutors). We needed one for each one of them (the elder student)."

"There should be more emphasis on getting the tutors together, may be up bi-weekly meeting a check-in time, regrouping all of the tutors. A be a pizza lunch. I want to learn

from the other tutors experiences and see what everybody else was doing each tutor had such different groupings. It would be great to compare.”

“These booklets (training sessions for the elders) were a bit too wordy, had too many words, and it wasn’t step-by-step enough. Because of the individuals we had in our classes. We did one on one. We did develop some step-by-step processes, like how to open the Internet. Because it was one-on-one, we made it individualized. One of the tutors made printout pages from Hotmail.”

Change in perspective:

Seventy percent of respondents noted a change in their perspective while participating in the project.

“It was like nothing I had ever done before. It was a totally different type of friendship; their lives, their stories. They (the elders) put everything in perspective. They weren’t telling me about the exam they didn’t study for. I got what was important.”

“It really helped me put a lot of life situations in perspective. Having them share their experiences hearing about their families.”

“At times it was easier than I ever thought. And at times it was more difficult than I ever thought. How they (the elders) learned and adapted in different environments isn’t always easy. If you’re not comfortable with the information, you can get lost and frustrated at times. I had to slow down a lot and go over it and go over it and go over it. It was frustrating for me at times too.”

“I learned from them and they learned from me. We were all students, and all teachers.”

“I think it helped to build me as a person. It was more like a mentor not a teacher or student.”

Expectations of the experience:

“It exceeded my expectations in the amount of thought that was put in to the follow-up surveys. They were very thoughtful and planned out well. Collaboration between us (a long term care home offsite in Hamilton) and SERC went really well.”

“I was very encouraged that all participants purchased a computer after taking the program. I could see they were really making use of what we had taught them. It wasn’t something that they had ever tried before.”

Relationship with elders:

“The person I was paired up with had a family that was really supportive and sent a lot

of e-mails. It gave us something to talk about. His son was in Afghanistan, and we are able to talk about what was happening there. We had great conversations.”

”I found it more rewarding than I expected. Some (students/elders) just came to the class and then left. But others kept in touch. It was like a role reversal. They respected us as teachers. It was great.”

“What was interesting was that he (the student) was worried about looking dumb in front of me. I hadn't expected that. Now, what's remarkable is, he comes to me every other day, telling me about the new things that he's been learning. He actually knows how to burn DVDs and I haven't figured that out yet. So now he's going to show me how to do it. It's like our roles have been reversed a bit.”

“I thought there would be nothing to talk about. But it was easier to talk to them than to some people my own age. They bragged about us a lot .About us not doing this (training with them) for money. It made me feel really good.”

Transferable skills:

“I learned the fundamentals of learning. That learning is a process. I liked the program, because it was student centered. This was new for me.”

“Learning about teaching with older adults, with the skills from social service work, was amazing. I understood then why best practices are best practice.”

“It was great to see how Profs would approach how to train. It was kind of like ‘monkey see, monkey do’. We would watch them and then try it with our own little twist.”

“You definitely can put this experience to use later on. Research is in everything and every single field. All the bylaws have an enormous amount of research that gets put into it. It's not just good to put on your résumé, but it puts you ahead of everyone else when you have this kind of experience.”

“I thought all I would get out of it was about teaching and delivering a message. I got a lot more out of it. Teaching takes a lot of background information. I had to be knowledgeable and accurate. You couldn't just give them a piece of information without the background. Not only what it's used for, but how it (the technical application) got there. I had to fully learn it myself first.”

“Teaching is a new task that I never tried before. It's a skill I can apply later on.”

Views and attitudes of aging:

“If anything I became more sympathetic. It made me realize that you can't generalize about seniors. There are many different people in many different levels. I became

aware of the different individual needs.

“What I noticed is I saw a lot more similarities between myself and the older adults.”

“They were not like the stereotype of; ‘you can’t teach old dogs new tricks’. They were very perceptive to knowledge.”

“This program drastically changed my attitudes toward seniors.”

Career direction and plans:

“After going through this project it helped me to get the internship that I have right now, which is using universal design for people with disabilities, which includes elders. SERC affected me greatly. Instead of doing what everyone else was doing with web site design it diverted my interests. And I found what I really wanted to do.”

“I actually want to do ergonomic design. This program put everything together for me. It showed me how important inclusion is to keep people involved. I mean the thing of getting into designing curriculum for training or do a mobile service for seniors.”

“I have now thought about starting my own business, helping seniors with what they need to use a computer. Or do training in their own homes and helping them set up the programs they need.”

“This program changed my outlook on education and my goals in life. I intended to go to U of T, and then work. When I went to SERC and then went to some of the seniors’ homes to help them. It was great. I want to do more of that (working with seniors) now.”

Outreach and student recruitment strategy suggestions:

“I’d tell them (prospective tech tutors) that it’s great on their résumé. Everyone likes that. And it’s an experience; you can’t get in the classroom environment.”

“I think the best way is to go through the professors. They’re the ones that students take most seriously.”

3.2 Limitations

3.2.1. Availability of Tech Tutors

Due to job schedules and summer vacations making phone contact was challenging. However, all interviewees were eager to share their experiences when we did find a ‘good time’ to talk.

3.2.2 Notes Taken

Although the researcher is accustomed to writing short form and creating written

summaries, having the conversations taped would lend itself to more reliability.

3.2.3 Time Lapse since Training

One recommendation suggested by two of the participants is that an evaluation of the training should have been done a lot sooner following the training as they found it difficult to recall specifics about the training after a three month break. However, one other participant felt the time away from the project allowed her time to reflect on the impact the overall program had on her life. A written evaluation of the program had been completed by tech tutors at the end of the project.

4. Implications for Policy and Research

- Intergenerational computer training models have a benefit to young adults. Seventy percent of respondents noted a change in perspective. All tech tutors noted the project had provided an opportunity for relationship building with an older adult.
- A more in-depth study on the impact that such opportunities could have been possible if the training was conducted over a longer period of time.
- All tech tutors appreciated the written handouts but several suggested changing the format to make it more user friendly. Check lists and on line options for feedback were ideas presented.
- Limitations and frustrations experienced by tech tutors could be avoided by having class sizes reduced or implementing one-on-one training sessions with elders.
- Highlighting the transferable skills to professors, who can promote this learning opportunity for students would be of benefit.
- Creating opportunities for more role-playing and changing the format of the training to longer sessions was noted by respondents to be helpful in terms of their time management.
- Several respondents noted that they were unsure of what the training sessions with the seniors would look like or what it would be like to have a relationship with an older adult. One respondent suggested having a short video presentation with interviews with past tutors and the elder students. This idea may be an effective tool in addressing concerns and questions about the program for both tech tutors and elders.
- Promoting participation in this project, across all disciplines at the college would be beneficial in terms of career exploration and development for students. Several students who participated in this program, who were not in gerontology programs shifted their focus and career aspirations as a result of this experience.
- The time and attention paid by SERC staff to the tech tutors was seen as an important element to the project's success. It was not only the communication that bridged different sites, and working tech tutor teams it was also the positive reinforcement regarding skills building, teaching and relationship forming with the elders that was noted by respondents.
- Future computer training projects should incorporate suggestions by respondents to have more time to get to know their students, and be able to practice the skills they were teaching through more role plays in the training.

- Future research should include a more in-depth examination of how and why attitudes and perspectives towards older adults changed for these young adults who participated in this project.
- Future research should also focus on the relational development between young adults and the older adults.
- Future directions for research on the impact of this type of project on career aspirations and direction for young adults in the area of Gerontology.
- Greater emphasis on recruitment of tech tutors is needed to increase the number of participating in the project in order to have a one to one ratio with students.

Within the parameters of the computer training project, the intergenerational relationships that developed, and the impact on students were unintended benefits, and not the primary goal of the original study

This evaluation suggests that future studies' involving young adults and elders are needed. The benefits of the training and relationships developed between elders and young adults needs to be explored in greater detail.

5. Conclusions

The identification of common themes from the tech tutors' evaluation provides clear direction for a future research focus on intergenerational relationship building, transfer of skills and career aspirations in the field of aging.

This evaluation clearly defined some curriculum development changes for tech tutors training. Outreach efforts need to focus on getting the 'by in' of professors from various disciplines in order to reach a wider audience of potential tech tutors.

The development of innovative training for tutors with simple step by step lesson plans to use with elders has potential to be translated into national programs in both universities and colleges across Canada. The social benefits for both the young adult and the elder require further exploration but this evaluation suggests positive outcomes for both groups.

Finally, practical research must be built into the curriculum design and implementation phases with ways of tracking changes in attitude, career aspiration and relational formation.

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7. Appendix

SERC Tech Tutor Interview Questions

Interviewer: Nellie Sheppard

Date: phone #:

Question 1

How helpful was the content of the tech tutor training in preparing you to work with elders?

Question 2

Were the topics presented relevant, clear?
Was there enough time spent on each area?

Was it presented well?

Did it prepare you well to work with elders?

Was there enough time on each of the areas covered?

Question 3

In terms of the research documentation: Was it clear what the expectations were in terms of documenting anecdotes, stories and learning processes?

If not, what would you suggest doing differently to improve this area?

Question 4

Did your attitudes or views of aging change as a result of your participation in this project?

Have your plans for future in terms of career direction changed as a result of working on this project?

What was it like to establish a relationship with an elder?

Are there ways that we could improve the training or the program for the future for?

Question 5

Is there anything else you would like to say that we haven't already covered?