

Promoting Intergenerational Solidarity through service learning: A mixed method approach

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ABSTRACT

As population aging is a worldwide trend, it can pose challenges and great social burden to the society. Many service program targeting elders, with good intention also posit the elders as passive recipients of service provided by young people and professionals. As a result, it tends to reinforce and perpetuate the image and view that elders are a burden to the society and the younger generation. Nevertheless, realizing that many elders can still actively participate in the society and models of successful aging also has emphasized sustained social involvement, the time has come to employ a more age-integrated perspective in constructing programs. Instead of using old paradigm – providing service for the isolated elders by the young people, it is more appropriate to develop programs based on an intergenerational perspective, which promote an integration and interdependence among generations and recognize the importance and benefit of multigenerational contributions to society.

This paper is to showcase a local project in Hong Kong which aims to facilitate the intergenerational (IG) exchange and solidarity through students' community service learning. The major component of this service learning project is a mentoring program in which students need to work as a team (of 2 people) and partner with an elderly volunteer to provide support, such as home visits, and provision of home care services to the more marginalized elders (total of 8 sessions / 16 hours). Furthermore, students need to work out a creative task so as to enhance the health and well-being of the service recipients in the community, in negotiation with the service organization.

Combining both survey data and qualitative analyses of students' reflection report, our results appear to support the IG service learning mitigates the tendency of young in-group identity, which will contribute towards ageism. Furthermore, the IG service learning provides the students with opportunities to know more about the aging issue in the society, the elderly and their virtue and challenge, and their own self and bias when interacting with the elderly. More importantly, the IG experience enhances a deeper understanding of intergenerational relationships. The potential and viability of such a social innovation in maintaining the mutual support structure in the society will be discussed.

Key Words: Intergenerational Solidarity, Aging, Service Learning, Mixed-method

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