Integrating Intergenerational Service-Learning into the Family Science Curriculum

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ABSTRACT. Schools can be instruments of social change when they adopt a curriculum that intimately joins didactic instruction and experiential learning, otherwise known as service-learning (Boyer, 1997; Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Myers-Lipton, 1996). As a type of "scholarship of engagement" (Boyer, 1997), service-learning is a methodology which enables family educators to incorporate community service opportunities into established family science curriculum. Having received support from an intergenerational service-learning grant from the Association of Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) and the University of Pittsburgh's Generation's Together (GT), we will describe the way in which service-learning was integrated into an existing aging course. This class helps our students to meet the human development content area requirement for the National Council on Family Relation's (NCFR) Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) program. More specifically, we will provide a description of the Elder Service Partnership Project, delineate the educational objectives of the experience, and offer a critique of the partnership based on feedback provided by both undergraduates and elders. Benefits of the experience to both students and elders will be highlighted, as well as suggestions for improving the overall experience.

KEY WORDS. Service-learning, intergenerational, family science curriculum

Ernest Boyer's vision of the New American College has made a tremendous impact on the academic world, particularly as interest in service-learning continues to grow. Boyer's (1994, 1997) vision of the New American College places a high value on service and aims to promote institutions that are deliberately dedicated to improving the human condition. Schools can be instruments of social change when they adopt a curriculum that intimately joins didactic instruction and experiential learning, otherwise known as service-learning (Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Myers-Lipton, 1996). Boyer calls professionals to rededicate their academies to serve the surrounding community and to solve real civic, social, economic and moral problems. This demand has lead to a resurgence of service-learning in countless disciplines and academic institutions across the nation (Fisher & Finkelstein, 1999; Zlotkowski, 1996).

Traditionally, institutions have accomplished Boyer's (1994, 1997) goal of engaging the academy and the community in many ways. Departments frequently incorporate practica, internships, volunteer work, research projects, field trips, open houses, and lectures open to the public in order to foster connections between students and the community. Another method educators can utilize to connect their institution to their community, which has gained increasing attention over the last several years, is service-learning.

Service-learning is a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and which actively engages students in reflection in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Brown & Roodin, 2001). While service-learning can take place in multiple contexts, a course such as Sociology of Aging clearly lends itself to intergenerational social-learning, with the main distinction being the extended contact between generations on opposite ends of the lifespan.

While Boyer was largely interested in the mutual benefits of the scholarship on engagement for both the academy and community, others have recognized the positive impact that the scholarship of engagement has on students. Besides strengthening students' sense of civic responsibility, service-learning positively affects attitudes and stereotypes (Zlotkowski, 1996). When service-learning is implemented in an intergenerational setting, both children and young adults significantly improve their attitudes about the elderly when the program design is well planned (Aday, McDuffie & Sims, 1993; Brabazon & Disch, 1997; Bringle & Kremer, 1993; Cartenson, Mason & Caldwell, 1982; Chapman & Neal, 1990; Corbin, Metal-Corbin & Barg, 1989; Couper, Sheehan & Thomas, 1991; Krystal, 1998; Myers-Lipton, 1996). In fact, if an intergenerational service-learning program is poorly constructed, negative attitudes can easily be perpetuated (Brabazon & Disch, 1997; Long, Larsen, Hussey, & Travis, 2001). Eyler and Giles (1999) found that in order to accomplish certain learning goals, "programs have to be very thoughtfully designed to create opportunities for sustained community involvement and intellectual challenge" (p. 167).

A few basic components of service-learning have been highlighted throughout the literature. Couper et al. (1991) contend that a high quantity of an intergenerational interaction will not necessarily lead to an increase in positive attitudes about elders. Instead, the nature and quality of the interaction are crucial elements for service-learning to be successful in achieving this objective (Brabazon & Disch, 1997; Couper et al., 1991; Fisher & Finkelstein, 1999). Applying contact theory, developed by Allport and Amir (as cited in Couper et al., 1991), Seefeldt (1987) lists four conditions necessary for the intergenerational interaction to improve attitudes of group members. First, all groups involved in the interaction must have equal status. Second, contact between group members is intimate instead of casual in nature. Third, the interaction must be pleasant and both groups must feel that they are benefiting from it. And fourth, the interaction must have a functional purpose in which all participants set goals and join in important activities together.

Thoughtful reflection and critical analysis are essential for learning to occur. Myers-Lipton (1996) points out that according to critical education theorists, attitude change takes place when students interact with others and then reflect on the meaning of this interaction. When students engage in reflection, they play a major role in their education (Myers-Lipton, 1996). Active reflection can be done via writing assignments (e.g., journals, reflection papers), readings, small group discussions, and classroom presentations which enhance student understanding of the course content, the discipline they are studying, their personal values, and the meaning of civic

responsibility and community (Brown & Roodin, 2001). Describing the service experience alone is not enough; students must also analyze the work they have done. This element of service-learning distinguishes it from volunteerism and is a primary means of applying course content to the students' service experience (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2001). This reflective component has even been referred to as the "hyphen in service-learning...the link that ties student experience in the community to academic learning" (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 171).

A final component of service-learning which is necessary to ensure mutual benefit to all participants is reciprocity. Greene (1998) states that "if mutual benefit to self and other is not recognized, then service-learning has fallen short as an educational tool. Failure of the recipient to perceive what has been given as service invalidates the experience for all" (pp. 411-412). Greene's (1998) study of reciprocity in two service-learning projects found that the benefit to self is more readily recognized than the benefit to the other. Therefore, care must be taken to emphasize equal give and take in the relationship. This can take place through a reception at the close of the program, a gift in writing given to the elder participant, mutual sharing, verbal expressions, free advertising for a partner agency in school publications, and invitation of agency staff members to school functions and presentations.

In this article, we will provide an overview of students and elders engaged in intergenerational service-learning in a Sociology of Aging course offered during the spring of 2000. As a method of connecting the academy to the community, service-learning is a time intensive and relatively new instructional technique. We will provide an overview of our particular project, educational objectives for the activity, and evaluative feedback from both students and their Elder Service Partners. In the process, we hope to prompt additional ideas as to how service-learning might be incorporated into other areas of the family science curriculum.

THE CASE OF "SOCIOLOGY OF AGING"

An intergenerational service-learning grant from the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) and the University of Pittsburgh's Generation's Together (GT) enhanced our capacity to develop pedagogical strategies which implement intergenerational service-learning into an existing course, Sociology of Aging (SOC231). This course is one of two "aging" options that students take in a series of life span courses for the Human Growth and Development Content Area required for the National Council on Family Relations' CFLE program. When registering for the class, most students are fairly confident that they have no desire or intention to work with the older population. Historically, however, this course has been successful in helping students to think differently, and in most cases more positively, about aging and career possibilities with older persons. During previous offerings of this course, an Elder Mentor Relationship was an effective experiential learning tool in facilitating growth among students by having them interact with an older person for the duration of the semester (Hamon & Koch, 1993). Adding a service directive to this intergenerational relationship was thought to provide students an opportunity to share a common goal with an elder, while connecting cognitive knowledge with experiential knowledge in a meaningful way.

Intergenerational service-learning was integrated into the Sociology of Aging course by linking each undergraduate student to an older person, an Elder Service Partner (ESP), with whom they engage in service opportunities for the duration of the semester. Students chose their ESP from

a comprehensive list of elders who agreed to participate in the project. The list, generated by the professor in advance of the first day of class, included each elder's name, age, sex, residence, and volunteer activities. Elder Service Partners: a) were older than 60 years of age, b) belonged to the Brethren in Christ Church or had an historical relationship with the students' college, c) had already made voluntary service commitments to the community, and, d) were willing to have a student partner in service with them for the duration of the semester. Students were then encouraged to contact their ESP by phone to set up an initial meeting to become acquainted with one another and to schedule dates for community service and interviewing.

Students engaged in two types of service with their Elder Service Partners during the semester. First, undergraduates paired with an Elder Service Partner in completing ten hours of community service during the twelve weeks of spring semester. Rather than dictate where the pairs should perform their service activities, the professor encouraged students to join their elders in fulfilling the obligations their Elder Service Partners had already made relative to their communities. As long-time residents of their respective communities, the Elders had identified community needs to be addressed in this service-learning project.

Second, service was also integrated by having students conduct life history interviews with their Elder Service Partner. (See Pelaez & Rothman, 1994, for sample life story interview materials. See Hoopes, 1979, for a primer on oral history). These interviews occurred during at least five meetings and were audio taped (assuming permission was granted by the Elder Partner). All interviews were outlined or transcribed by the student and then used to compose a life history. Students presented the Life Story document to their elder at a reception held at the conclusion of the semester. The oral history activity represents significant service by "giving voice" to older citizens and by providing an opportunity for meaningful life review for the Elder Service Partner. The Life Story document served as a gift to the older participants for their willingness to spend time with their undergraduate counterparts, as well as a valuable expression of reciprocity in the relationship. Given that these documents contained important historical records and personal wisdom for future generations, Elder Service Partners were given the opportunity to have their life story catalogued in the institution's archives section of the library.

Educational Objectives

Clearly delineated educational objectives are crucial for the success of any experiential assignment in that they create a legitimate purpose for the activity and guide students in their reflection on the experience. There are numerous educational objectives for the intergenerational service-learning component of Sociology of Aging. The experience enables students to interact directly with older adults in meeting their mutual commitments to enhance the lives of others through service. Such an experience enriches classroom knowledge and textual readings by helping students to apply gerontological information and process class content and experience via journaling and group discussion; develop a sense of civic and social responsibility; challenge stereotypes or misconceptions about the old and the aging process; test theories; critique interventions, programs and policies designed to improve the condition of older people; exhibit sensitivity to the diversity of aging experiences; demonstrate awareness of social issues related to aging; foster communication skills; and gain an appreciation for relationships with older persons.

The life history interview portion of the assignment was thought to assist students in learning how to effectively dialogue with someone much older than themselves; foster interviewing skills; expose students to transcribing and data analysis; and provide an opportunity for creative expression in compiling a Life Story Album for their Elder Service Partners. Life history interviews are also likely to benefit students by promoting self-disclosure and fostering more meaningful personal relationships with the Elder Service Partner; helping students to learn more about the Brethren in Christ, the founding denomination of their academic institution; allowing students to share in the life wisdom gleaned by their Elder Service Partner; and providing students a glimpse of historical events as lived and experienced by an older generation.

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

A total of 39 traditional-aged undergraduate students enrolled in the Sociology of Aging class during Spring 2000. The class consisted of 3 males (8%) and 36 females (92%) and 38 family studies majors and one biology major; 4 students were juniors, and 35 students were seniors. For 82.5% of the students, this course was their first in gerontology. While 97.5% of the students had volunteered at some point in their lives, only 35% had previously participated in service-learning.

Elder Service Partners ranged in age between 64 years old and 86 years old, with an average of 75 years. Twelve were male (31.5%) and twenty-six were female (68.5%) and all were members of the Brethren in Christ Church. Sixteen lived at a local continuing care retirement community, all but one in independent cottages or apartments; nineteen ESPs resided in the community, most in independently owned homes which they shared with their spouse. Given the nature of the program, it was imperative that elders were actively volunteering on a regular basis. Elder Service Partners maintained a wide range of service commitments including: transporting and visiting residents in the retirement community, reading to children and volunteering in children's nursery and a day care, quilting for charity, sorting and delivering mail, cataloguing material in the library, volunteering at 10,000 Villages (a self help store), providing various services for their church (e.g., Eat 'n Run program for families, Sunday School, cleaning), visiting refugee families, constructing houses for House Against Hunger, gardening, and working in local food pantries.

METHOD OF COURSE EVALUATION

Three sources of data were used to assess the attainment of educational objectives and to evaluate the overall impact of the experience for students: pre- and post-tests which were designed by University of Pittsburgh's Generations Together (GT); standard student course evaluations which were administered at the conclusion of the semester; and student journal entries, which were completed once every other week for the duration of the semester. Student journals were one-page, single-spaced entries that included the date, time, place, and duration of each service assignment; a brief summary of the visit; integration of gerontological information; and personal reflections, impressions and meanings. With student consent, journals were copied and evaluated for the degree to which intergenerational service-learning assisted in helping students to meet course objectives, as well as reviewed for positive outcomes and challenges of the experience. With the exception of one student who ultimately failed the course, all students enrolled in the course completed evaluation forms and handed in at least six journal entries.

Feedback from Elder Service Partners was collected twice during the semester, once mid-way through the course, and the other at the end of the semester. The initial evaluation form consisted of open ended questions such as "What is going well?" and "What are the challenges of being involved with a student for this experience?" A total of 36 elders returned the survey yielding a 95% response rate. The final evaluation form consisted both of closed- and open- ended questions. Respondents rated their agreement with a series of statements on a Likert scale with five points ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Open ended questions in the end-of-the-semester evaluation form included "How would you rate your overall experience as an ESP?," "What was the biggest reward of this experience for you?," "What was the biggest challenge of this experience for you?," and "What suggestions do you have to improve this experience?" A total of 35 elders returned the final evaluation form yielding a 92% response rate.

STUDENT RESULTS

Student journals were analyzed for themes that reflected their experience and learning, based on previously stated course objectives. In addition to the journals, student responses to the question, "What did you gain from this class?" from the GT post-test also offered additional qualitative insights as to course outcomes (for quantitative results, see Table 1).

Concerns

As might be expected, early journal entries revealed concerns, inhibitions, and the challenges of initiating a relationship with a stranger. Not knowing what exactly to expect, most students were very anxious about the initial contact, whether there would be discomfort and awkward silences, whether they would have anything in common with their Elder Service-Partner, and whether they would meet their Partners' expectations. There were also worries about balancing time demands of this class with other course work. Students discovered that their ESPs were also very busy people and they needed to be very intentional about planning ahead and scheduling time for service and interviews. As the semester progressed another major concern centered around the magnitude of the Life Story project. One male student related this common sense of inadequacy in the following: "Needless to say, it is a daunting task to have to write the life history of a person who was alive 65 years before I was born. He was retiring when I was born!" Another female student reflected the strain of expectations: "I feel significant pressure to make his life story complete, interesting, accurate, thorough, and aesthetically pleasing. I just hope my expectations aren't too high, because realistically, a life story written after five interviews (about six hours) cannot be the whole story of 72 years of life."

Table 1. Student Responses to: "What did you gain from this class?" (N=36)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
First hand understanding of older people	0	1	2	15	18
More respect for older people	1	1	2	18	14
An older friend	2	0	1	14	19
A mentor	1	3	9	12	11
Career skills	1	2	13	16	4
Information about the aging process	0	2	6	19	9
Communication skills with older adults	0	1	2	19	14
College credit	0	1	2	13	20
Knowledge of theories about aging	1	1	6	21	7
Understanding the diversity among older people	0	4	2	18	12
Understanding the social issues related to aging	0	1	4	20	11
The good feelings that come from serving others	1	1	7	12	15
Problem solving skills	1	6	14	12	3
Link between academia and the real world	0	1	5	18	12
Leadership skills (only 35 responses on this item)	1	7	15	9	3
Preparation for my own aging	1	2	6	16	11

Application of Gerontological Information

Beyond personal reflection and evaluation of the project, each journal entry also included integration of gerontological course material. Students typically applied course material recently covered in lectures, reading, and discussion so that by the end of the semester, every topic covered in class was also covered in student journal entries. Topics integrated within the journals included the following: stereotypes of elderly, theories of aging/social gerontology, retirement, intimacy and sexuality, friendship, sibling relations, housing and relocation issues, physical constraints, filial responsibility, crimes/fraud against the elderly, death and loss, religion, marital status, diversity of aging experiences, caregiver roles, grandparents, age discrimination, social security income, political involvement, leisure, and the like. For instance, a male student who co-volunteered with his ESP in the mailroom of a retirement community commented on the reality of death:

I think it is interesting that there is a mailbox labeled "deceased." To them, it's just a
normal part of life to have your peers around you dying left and right. However, in
my social crowd, the story is thankfully different, so it has been an odd experience
for me, a sort of "stepping out of my world" type of experience.

Certainly this student was able to reflect upon the subject of death and loss in a very different way. So, too, a female student who, with her ESP, filled water pitchers for residents in a local nursing home observed:

Being in a nursing home, I thought about what I read in the book about living
arrangements. This made me look at the place differently. I looked around for
evidence that showed that the nursing home was up to the standards we read about. I
also looked at the residents differently. Each one I saw, I wondered whether they
were forced to come to Messiah Village or not.

Incorporating gerontological information with their experience was also evident in quantitative results from the GT post-test, with 78% of the students indicating that they agreed or strongly agreed that they gained information about the aging process. In addition, 83% of the students reported that this service-learning course provided a link between academia and the real world. Students were able to relate their cognitive knowledge to their experiential knowledge in meaningful and concrete ways.

Stereotypes and Misconceptions. Clearly one of the major benefits of this experience was the way in which direct interaction with older people challenged negative stereotypes, a finding reflected in both end-of-semester evaluations and student journals. At least thirty of the students mentioned ways in which their misconceptions of elders as self-absorbed, asexual, inactive, physically ill, fragile, quiet, lonely, isolated, cranky, poor drivers, sober, forgetful, bitter, and child-like were displaced by conflicting experiences. Like her peers, a female student's negative stereotypes were impacted and changed by working alongside her Elder Service Partner.

Mr. D has been breaking a lot of the stereotypes that I had about elderly people and I
am so thankful for that. . . . He has shown me that it really isn't the age of the person
that reflects who they are, but instead it is their attitude. . . . I was surprised at how

well Mr. D got along with the children and played with them. I mean, he is 80-years-
old, but he got down on the floor and played with them.

Another student said, "I realized how false so many of the myths about the elderly are. I know that previous to this experience, I was guilty of believing many of those myths. However, now I've come to learn that older people have so much to offer the younger generation if we'd only take the time out, we'd discover how valuable they are to us." Quantitative results suggest that, as a result of the class, 89% of the students have more respect for older adults.

Test Theories. About twenty students used theoretical assertions to describe their experiences with their Elder Service Partners. While many saw evidence for activity theory in the lives of their ESPs, one student thought continuity theory was particularly applicable: "The roles she has played in the past have not changed much...This brings me to believe a lot in the continuity theory. The things that excite her and fulfill her today are all because of her past experiences and background." Another female student was able to make a connection between the phenomenological perspective and the life history interview process:

> This model of interviewing, which is better described as a directed discussion, typifies the phenomenological perspective we studied in class. The whole point of this type of research is to let our elder service partners tell their own stories and perceptions of aging without putting words into their mouths. I see the importance of this type of research because it is highly qualitative in nature, and because of the design of the project, we are showing a great deal of respect for our elder service partners by letting them tell the story.

According to the GT post-test, a total of 78% of students agreed or strongly agreed that this service-learning course helped them to gain knowledge of theories about aging.

Awareness of Social Issues Related to Aging and Challenges Posed by an Aging Population. Based on quantitative data from the GT post-test, 86% of students believed that they understood the social issues related to aging due to their participation in this service-learning project. Several students also made insightful observations about pertinent social issues for older people in their journals. Comments about Social Security, adequacy of financial resources and issues of poverty, being old in a youth-oriented culture, intimacy in interpersonal relationships, age discrimination in the job market, and the demands of caregiving were interspersed throughout the journals. Concerns about the availability and affordability of quality healthcare, the need for housing and services for a graying population, vulnerability to neglect or abuse, and the reality of loss were all mentioned.

Sensitivity to Diversity of Aging Experiences. Students quickly learned that "aging is a very individualized process," with 83% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing on the GT post-test that the service-learning course gave them an understanding of the diversity among older people. Students observed differences between older people and acknowledged that "elderly do not fit all the age norms that society placed upon them." Students were frequently struck by the "variation in functioning among elders of the same age." They often noted the implications of differences in sex, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, marital status, and health status on the experience of later stages of life. Students frequently noticed that older women significantly outnumber older men and made comparisons between their grandparents and their Elder Service Partners.

Critique Interventions, Programs, and Policies. As a result of the interactions they had in these retirement community and senior center contexts, several students made notable observations about effective and less desirable practices and policies. For instance, one student noted that "the staff did not let the residents choose their own cookies because it takes them too long to pick out what they want." Another student related an upsetting incident while serving with her ESP:

> One event this morning particularly disturbed me. We knock before entering the rooms to deliver water, and in one room the aid that was in there said I could come in, however, one of the women was receiving a shot or something and was partly naked. The violation of this woman's privacy upset me. I don't know if she knew I was there or not, but people in nursing homes still deserve to maintain dignity.

Another student lamented about the hardships associated with roommate changes, especially in those cases where spouses can no longer be in the same room. Overall, these comments suggested a growing attentiveness to the needs and feelings of older persons with whom they came into contact and ways in which practices and policies can facilitate respect and the maintenance of personal dignity.

Enhance Communication Skills

As mentioned earlier, students were very fearful about initiating a new relationship and less than confident in knowing how to maintain meaningful conversations with an older person. In light of this anxiety, the professor spent some class time helping students to generate useful strategies for beginning conversations and discussing possible topics of engagement. While many acknowledged their own need to be more assertive or to be more comfortable, most students were pleasantly surprised at how much easier communicating with an older person was from what they had imagined. Positive reactions from ESPs and successful interactions helped to build student confidence. One female noted,

> I think I mentioned my previous beliefs about how I would never be able to really talk to an older adult or relate to them in a meaningful way to me, but interacting with [my ESP] over this semester has definitely proven that belief false. I can connect to him on many levels and I enjoy the difference in audience he brings to me.

Other students were stretched relative to the types of topics they discussed. For instance, one female student wrote:

> In the past I have felt uncomfortable when people have talked to me about someone they loved who has passed away... She is helping me to overcome this discomfort by talking about her late husband frequently. Each time I meet with her I become more comfortable because I know talking about him is how she copes with this loss and readjustment period in her life. It has also helped me open up and talk to friends about the losses I have experienced recently.

The following simple, yet profound, discovery seemed relatively common: "She said that I seemed to communicate well with older people, which surprised me. In the beginning I thought that I might have trouble because I wouldn't know what to talk to them about, but I have found that they like to talk about the same things that I do: our families, the events that happen every day, our dreams, current events." GT post-test survey results support this finding; 92% of the students agreed or strongly agreed that this intergenerational service-learning project equipped them with the skills necessary to communicate with older adults.

Interviewing Skills

Students received instruction in interviewing techniques, the ethics of working with human participants, and the importance of respect. Within the class context, students were provided an opportunity to practice their first interviewing session with their peers. Consent forms and sample life history interviews were provided. Students were encouraged to present a copy of the questionnaires to their ESPs in advance so that they could familiarize themselves with the questions and take greater control of the topics to be examined. With permission, students taped the interviews so that they had a record of the exact dialogue. Many students shared strategies that they employed which made the interviewing process manageable and successful. They reflected upon the need for flexibility, to monitor nonverbal and verbal feedback, to conduct the interviews in a quiet place, to be familiar with the tape recording equipment, to allow ESPs to have greater control of the conversation so that the
stories shared are the ones that are most significant to them, and to be prepared themselves with knowledge of what has already been covered and how to use the equipment.

Civic Responsibility

Elder Service Partners served as excellent models of civil servants. By working with their ESPs, students gained a great deal of satisfaction from knowing that they, too, were of help to others. Students experienced a variety of personal revelations on this topic. One said, "That morning I learned a great valuable lesson: I have to stop waiting for others to do things that I see need to be done." Another also acknowledged her social obligations, particularly with regard to assisting with aging persons with needs:

> Their needs are so great, and I know I have a responsibility as a Christian to do what
> I can to take care of them. Obviously, there is much that I cannot do, but there are
> some things which I can do. The challenge is now considering how I can help.
> Maybe this means visiting nursing homes regularly, volunteering to deliver Meals-
> on-Wheels once a week, just making more of an effort to care for and visit my
> grandparents.

A female student involved in friendly visiting in a nursing facility reported, "I realized that service work does not have to be hard labor. It can also be giving your time as a companion to someone else. Truthfully, I can say this was my favorite volunteer job. One thing I learned was that when humans are thankful for something, they will want to do it again." Similarly, personal religious commitments inform and strengthen service commitments. One woman summed it up in the following: "To care as he cares is probably God's greatest goal for us on earth, and that is no simple thing to learn... or to do." Another concluded, "Those experiences [delivering water to nursing home residents] touched me and brightened my mornings."

For at least two students, civic responsibility translated into career shifts and new occupational goals. A female senior reported,

> I have really appreciated this elder service partnership project, not because it
> dispelled a lot of negative stereotypes I had about older people, but because of the
> relationship I was able to create with an older person and because of the way my
> eyes were opened to the great needs of the aging community. . . . For the first time, I
> am seriously considering gerontological work after graduation, and because of that, I
> wish I had taken more relevant courses during my time here!

Another male student said,

> Before this class, I was unsure of my ability to effectively work with elderly people. After the project and volunteering at Messiah Village, I realize that I really want to work with elderly people in some way. I regret not having a geriatric study of some kind but I believe in myself to know that I can do the jobs. I've recently applied to a job in Maryland working with the elderly and their daily living needs and I am confident that if I get the job I will do well.

A few students discovered new passions and identified new career paths as a result of their interaction with Elder Service Partners while engaging in service.

Appreciation of Intergenerational Relationships

Almost all of the student journals were replete with entries expressing appreciation for their growing relationships with their ESPs. Comments like "I never thought I would be able to build such a close relationship with someone 50 years older than me" were quite common. "Appreciat[ing] the opportunity to be taken out of [their] comfort zone," students wrote about "strong connections" which were forged with ESPs, "feel[ing] privileged to have been able to spend time with [the ESP]," "growing respect" for older people, "continually learning from [the ESP]," and the "sense of reciprocity" that emerged from the relationship. Many students felt very comfortable with their ESP; one male student wrote about how "it was fun to be able to confide in him" about his engagement plans. Several others described their relationships in profound ways. One female related: "That night as I was driving home, I realized the internal wealth this experience would give me and how I would carry this experience with me for the rest of my life." Another concluded that "this truly was an experience that I will never forget." Yet another wrote, "I was once one of those kids who rolled her eyes at the thought of spending time with an old person. My opinion has changed though." Results from the post-test designed by Generations Together, too, indicated that 94.5% of students were either very satisfied or satisfied with their intergenerational service-learning experience.

Elders as Role Models. Students explicitly mentioned ways in which their Elder Service Partners were role models for them, providing them with excellent examples of positive aging. Many deliberated about what their own aging experience would be like and mentioned that they "would like to be like" their ESP when they are older. They perceived of their Partners as having strong spiritual convictions; generous spirits; contentment; satisfying marriages; fulfilling lives; positive, optimistic and grateful attitudes; an admirable level of confidence in relating to people, and kindness. A female student who was paired with a male ESP concluded, "If we, in this country, really have no respect for the older people of our country, it is because we do not know them and do not care to listen. Because, if we did, we'd hear a lot."

Several students perceived their ESPs to be wise, recording tidbits of wisdom gleaned from their exchanges. They included: "Just trust in God; He is always faithful," "Save what you can. Face life as it comes without complaining, whining, bitterness, self-pity, or grumbling," "Change can be very good because it challenges you to move to the next level and strive to do bigger and better things," "Choose to see the cup half full instead of half empty," "Don't let things bog you down. You can enjoy life to the fullest and just allow the trials to strengthen you," "The most important thing that you can do in this life is to establish relationships; make friends wherever you go," "It's important not to deny what obviously will happen," "Be thankful for all that I have and never take it for granted," and "Communication is essential for marriage." In the GT post-test, 64% of students

reported that they gained a mentor and 92% suggested that they gained an older friend from the experience.

Elders as Lived History. Particularly as a result of the life history interviews, students were able to experience historical events as lived by others. One student reflected, "Probably one of the greatest things I am learning through this experience is how interested I am in hearing about history through this individual's eyes." Students heard stories about farm life, the depression, wars and alternative service for conscientious objectors, one-room school houses, differential treatment between boys and girls, courtship and marriage, missionary service, race relations, and houses without plumbing. Students were also able to hear stories about their college during its early years, as well as the founding denomination of their institution. At the same time students were able to wonder about how their lives would be different without technology or many of the "luxuries" which they, up to this point, had taken for granted.

ELDER SERVICE PARTNER RESULTS

In responding to a series of statements, using a Likert Scale with responses ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1), Elder Service Partners indicated strongest support of: My student was respectful of me; I enjoyed volunteering with my student partner; I gained an appreciation for interacting with younger people; Elders can teach students about aging and older adults; Our relationship was more like a friendship; and My student was good at keeping appointments and showing up on time. See Table 2 for additional assessments.

Positive Experiences

Responses on both mid- and end-of-semester surveys indicate that Elder Service Partners were overwhelmingly satisfied with the experience and particularly pleased about having the opportunity to develop a relationship with a young person. Most were encouraged by the bond that quickly developed with their student and the enthusiasm, respect and genuine interest that their students exhibited toward them. ESPs used words like "excellent," "rewarding," "enriching," "satisfying," "mutually beneficial," "enjoyable," and "positive" when asked to rate their overall experience.

When asked to reflect on what they felt the greatest reward from the experience was, many reported that the quality of the relationship established with their student partner. An Elder Service Partner said, "Most of my life I was involved with children and young people. Now to think at this age (86) I could help a college student. I came to love and appreciate her. I will miss her. I feel I did help her. She surely did much for me." Another ESP commented, "It was good to develop a friendship with a young person other than family." Elders also recognized the rarity of intergenerational relationships and appreciated the opportunity that intergenerational service-learning provided. An Elder Service Partner reported,

> I enjoyed knowing and working with a person young enough to be my great-grand child. We often do not have this opportunity. It was also good to see that character and faith are still a part of our youth. I appreciate that she was interested in and enjoyed my life story. I guess I particularly enjoyed our friendship.

Table 2. Elder Service Partners' Assessment of Intergenerational Service-Learning Experience

Question	Mean Score
My student was respectful of me.	4.89
I enjoyed volunteering with my student partner.	4.80
I gained an appreciation for interacting with younger people.	4.67
Elders can teach students about aging and older adults.	4.60
Our relationship was more like a friendship.	4.49
My student was good at keeping appointments and showing up on time.	4.49
I regularly volunteer.	4.43
The Life History interviews were conducted professionally.	4.37
I benefited from the companionship my student provided.	4.37
There is value in older people teaching younger people.	4.29
I taught my student partner about the older generation.	4.26
I experienced equal amounts of give and take with my student.	4.23
Our relationship was the most valuable part of this project for my student.	4.23
My student gained appreciation for relationships with older individuals.	4.14
The service we provided positively impacted the community.	4.14
I want to participate in this project again.	4.06
My student benefited from the companionship I provided.	4.06
My student partner taught me about the younger generation.	4.00
My student developed a sense of civic responsibility.	3.80
The classroom knowledge/readings were enhanced through our interaction.	3.74
Now it's easier for my student to interact with elders.	3.71
The most valuable outcome of this project is my life story.	3.69
My student challenged his/her stereotypes about aging.	3.51
I was a mentor for my student partner.	3.46
My relationship with my student was business-like.	3.43
I am unable to volunteer as much as I'd like to due to physical limitations.	2.80
My student considered his/her grade to be most important.	2.03

Scoring key: Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1

In addition to the friendship, elders reported that the greatest reward was having the opportunity to tell their story and have it documented for them and given to them as a gift. One elder partner said, "The coming together at the end and receiving such a beautifully presented life story

was very exciting. However it was the richness of the one-to-one relationship that preceded this time which made it all worthwhile." Another Elder Service Partner recounted, "As I read my story through her interpretation I was moved to tears. . . . This was one of the greatest gifts I have received. My story will be placed with my most valuable treasures." Most elders were willing to have their life stories placed in the College Archives and requested additional copies to send to their children.

Most elders expressed genuine appreciation for being included in the project. A female Elder Service Partner reported:

> It was a very positive experience--one I will always be grateful for. I rather reluctantly signed up. Through the years I have had interviews with various students. Some were rather boring and difficult to schedule. This one was a pleasure. I feel that she went beyond the call of duty. I think she put more than the required hours into work projects as well as the interviewing.

Another concluded, "I thank you for the privilege of having [my student partner] as a partner." Yet another wrote, "If you plan to continue this program in further years, I would be delighted to be invited again."

Elders were tremendously supportive of the intergenerational service-learning program. The instructor received many commendations on the planning, organization, and orchestration of the semester's activities related to the intergenerational service-learning program. One elder said, "I applaud this project in your Sociology of Aging class. Sometimes it looks as if no one sees much value in the experience of the past, yet our future is built on the past history of the world's people." Another said, "I commend you for sponsoring this worthwhile project. I believe the benefits will be felt both ways--to senior and student, at least from my side. I am glad for the opportunity to be part of it." Another rated the experience as "Excellent, well planned and stimulating. I have a deepened respect for the scholarship and caliber of students at Messiah College." One elder commented: "As I told you personally, I think this is an excellent program. The program puts the responsibility on the students for their own education. I also believe that these research efforts will accomplish something more effective than either reading research articles or listening to lectures." Finally, more than one said, "Please continue the program."

Challenges of the Experience

The most common challenges cited by elders were coordinating schedules and the time commitment required to engage in volunteer work and to complete life history interviews. For instance, one elder wrote, "One of our challenges has been her class schedule and the time of most of our volunteer work. Friday is a busy day for her and that is when I do most of my volunteer work. We can work some way to get other volunteer things to do other days." Because both students and elders had full schedules, students were encouraged to bring their calendar to the first meeting and set up as many dates to meet in advance as was possible. However, extenuating circumstances (e.g., illness, hospitalizations and surgeries, travel, broken wrist) sometimes interfered with the best made plans.

The other challenges cited by a couple elders had to do with organizing their memories and recollecting and selecting the stories they wanted to relay. One elder participant commented, "Organizing my 'memories' in some intelligible sequence is challenging. I feel sorry for her in this assignment, while feeling grateful that she is thus helping me with an assignment I have neglected for years!" Another elder partner reported,

> To my surprise, there were times when I found the interviews draining. This may be due, in part, to my tendency to pack too many things in a day. I found myself repeating or groping for ways to give expression to my thoughts. Part of the aging process--no doubt. However, the whole experience has been a growing time for me-- and a very pleasant one.

Some elders also said their biggest challenge was fitting their life history into the time available to tell it. A female Elder Service Partner said her biggest challenge was "sorting the common experiences to the significant one in the time allotted was sometimes difficult. I needed to think through the questions she would be asking me." For one participant, the biggest challenge was "probably compressing 74 years into one semester." Clearly, from both the elders' and the students' perspective, issues dealing with time were the biggest challenge and required flexibility and planning ahead.

Suggestions for Improvement

Elder Service Partners were also asked to provide any suggestions on how to improve the experience. One elder participant said, "It was very well planned and executed. For a first time, almost unbelievable. I do not know what to change, if anything. If it is possible to get started a little earlier, it might be helpful." The amount of time available to finish the assignment and the need for steady work on the project were expressed a second time by another elder. He said, "Strongly encourage students to get their earliest start on so large an assignment. I suppose you did but we were into April 'til we had our first meeting." While students had approximately three months available during the spring semester to complete the project requirements and were encouraged on the first day of class, after picking their Elder Service Partner, to contact him or her within a couple days, some students waited to start their assignment for various reasons. Thus, students should be strongly advised to begin earlier.

Beyond comments on the amount of time available for the project, elders provided suggestions for the life history aspect of the project. One elder participant said, "I would hope that the life story would be done again. For those people who would be doing it a second (or third) time, it would allow taking a specific area and doing it more thoroughly." Many elders and students agreed that focusing on one aspect of the elder's life would make this portion of the project more manageable, given the time restraints of a single semester. A male Elder Service Partner expressed,

> Although I believe the experience was a very valuable one for the students, I do not think a life story of any depth can be developed in the time frame that the students had for conducting interviews, sifting, sorting, and writing. Perhaps a sharper focus on one aspect of a person's life would be more significant.

Instead of instructing students to do a comprehensive life history as part of their intergenerational

service-learning, students would choose one topic or time period from their elders' lives to explore in greater depth.

While all were grateful for the reception held in honor of the Elder Service Partners at the conclusion of the semester, one elder offered an excellent idea: "I felt that the reception time, especially the presentation of certificates and gifts, could have been enlivened if opportunity had been provided for those who wished to do so to make a not more than one sentence statement about their partner."

DISCUSSION

Intergenerational service-learning was an effective means of integrating the "scholarship of engagement" (Boyer, 1997) into Sociology of Aging. Data suggest that it is quite possible to attain the educational objectives delineated for the course with this pedagogical strategy which links curricular instruction with engagement and service with elders. As suggested in the literature, students engaged in service-learning in this course clearly were able to apply gerontological information to their experience, displacing their negative stereotypes with a greater awareness of the social issues related to aging and the diversity of aging experiences. First-hand interaction with an Elder Service Partner brought the textbook information to life, while at the same time building appreciation for intergenerational relationships. Like Hanks and Icenogle (2001) who acknowledged the value of active older adults as role models for students in business, we too, learned that our Elder Service Partners exemplified adaptive and positive approaches to living, including service to community. Perhaps Newman and colleagues' (1997) research on complimentary needs best explains the growth of such rich intergenerational relationships. Based on theories of human development, they classified older adults' needs as follows: to teach, to have a successful life review, to share cultural mores, to communicate positive values, and to leave a legacy. Adolescent needs include the following: to be taught, to learn from and about the past, to have a cultural identity, to have positive role models, and to be connected to preceding generations (Newman et al., 1997, p. 18, table 2). These complimentary developmental needs help explain why two groups of people on opposite ends of the lifespan are readily able to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

While our students' initial negative reactions and inhibitions to service with an Elder Service Partner were similar to those described by Brown and Roodin (2001), engagement with their elders soon overshadowed most apprehensions. Equipping students with a clear understanding of the purpose of the program and the value of service-learning, as well as the necessary skills and information (e.g., interviewing skills, background on the Brethren in Christ) for their experience also helped. Although it takes time away from covering gerontological information, training students for service participation enhances their sense of preparedness and competence, increasing the likelihood of a successful service-learning experience (Astin et al., 2000).

Careful planning and attention to organizational details were crucial for success (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Clear, consistent, and ongoing communication with students and their community partners (Elder Service Partners) was essential. Remaining abreast of how things are going was imperative. By reading bi-weekly student journals in a timely fashion, allotting 10-15 minutes at the beginning of each class period for "processing" experiences with students, and sending out mid-semester evaluation surveys to Elder Service Partners, we were able to identify and address challenges or difficulties being encountered by participants as they arose. For instance, originally students were required to transcribe all of their interview tapes prior to writing the life history.

Recognizing the magnitude of this task (approximately eight hours of transcribing for each hour of interviewing), professor and students compromised in deciding to merely outline the contents of the tapes. Thus, students were able to devote more time and energy to the actual creation of a Life Story, a project which they wanted to do very well. Modification to the life history project itself will also be made next time this course is offered, as the project was overwhelming to students and elders. The professor will redesign the life history element to focus on one aspect of the elder's life, which can be selected by the elder and/or student. A sharper focus will permit students to more thoroughly learn about a topic of interest and also make the project more manageable in the time available to complete it.

As noted throughout the literature, critical reflection is another essential component of effective service-learning (Brown & Roodin, 2001; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Like Astin et al. (2001), we also discovered that positive effects of service-learning were enhanced when students had opportunities to *process* their experiences with each other in class discussions. During the first fifteen minutes of each class period, we were able to discuss unique challenges and highlight the relationship between experience and academic material, particularly relative to the topic of the day. Journals also provided students with a powerful forum for reflection and helped the professor to remain abreast of the overall experience as well.

Service-learning is an effective means for institutions of higher education to reconnect with surrounding communities for the mutual benefit of students and community partners alike. It offers a suitable pedagogical strategy for a variety of courses within the family science curriculum. Whether tutoring children in an after-school program as part of Child Development, providing parenting education programs at a local community center in conjunction with a Family Life Education course, or offering a variety of services to family agencies while taking a class on Community Services For Individuals and Families, service-learning can enliven course material while meeting real needs in our communities.

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