

## INCREASING THE INTERGENERATIONAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE ELDER AND THE CHILD - TAKING LIFE EXPERIENCE AS EXAMPLE

You-Zhen Lu <sup>\*a</sup>, Prof. Min-Yuan Ma<sup>a</sup> and Prof. Chun-Heng Ho<sup>b</sup>

<sup>\*a</sup> *Department of Industrial Design, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan  
(R.O.C.), ruby83626@gmail.com*

<sup>a</sup> *Department of Industrial Design, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan  
(R.O.C.), mamy@mail.ncku.edu.tw*

<sup>b</sup> *Department of Industrial Design, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan  
(R.O.C.), hoch@mail.ncku.edu.tw*

### ABSTRACT

With the changing population structure, “aging” and “declining birth rate” have become hot topics in recent years. Much attention has been paid to the interactions between the old generation and the young generation. In order to bridge the gap between them, the idea of intergenerational learning is applied in activities to realize the goal. With an in-depth study on the relationship between a group of elder and a group of the child, this paper finds out their satisfaction on the intergenerational learning activities and feelings about each other based on Likert Scale. Moreover, the paper determines interview outlines with semi-structured interview method, and in-depth interviews are made to understand opinions and feelings of participants. Next, the results are analyzed. The nonverbal behaviors and actions of the elder and the child are observed, recorded and analyzed, which is integrated into a form. In addition, verbal data are collected and analyzed to discuss the feasibility of intergenerational activities, and how the elder and the child feel about each other.

This study has four results. First, intergenerational activities help shorten the distance of the elder and the child. Second, the child can change their views on the elder and they become friends. Third, such intergenerational learning activities can bridge the gap between two generations. Fourth, the fact that the child learns from life experiences of their elder gives the latter a sense of accomplishment. The results of this study can be used as a reference for intergenerational interaction in industrial planning, and point out effects of intergenerational learning activities.

**Keywords:** *Aging, Intergenerational learning, Interaction, Life experience activities*

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\* Corresponding author.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

With the progress of science, technology, and medical treatment, the average life expectancy of the human being has been gradually extended, and the fertility rate has been decreasing year by year. Thus, much attention has been paid to declining birthrate and aging in recent years. Since 1993, Taiwan has officially become an “aged society”. According to the investigation from Taiwanese Ministry of Interior, there have been 3,139,397 people aged 65 or above by the end of February 2017, 13.33% of the total population. As a result, due to changes in the population structure and the family structure, there are fewer interactions between the elder and the child, who may become farther away from each other. With limited interactions between them, the child fails to learn from life experiences and wisdom of the elder and the latter will miss the vitality of the former and opportunities of contributing to the society (Schwalbach & Kiernan, 2002). To make the two generations closer, intergenerational activities provide a platform for them to learn and change views from each other and increase their self-worth.

“Intergenerational learning” means the child and the elder are equal partners who share experience, learn from each other and change their views on each other (Granville, 2002). Huang Fushun (2004) defines that Intergenerational learning means the elder and the child take part in learning activities, during which they communicate and interact with each other, share their ideas and feelings, and improve their relationship and complete meaningful tasks so that both of them learn and grow together. “Intergenerational learning” is an interaction between the elder and the child, including sharing knowledge, teaching skills and face-to-face contacts, all of which are of special value for both the elder and the child (Wang & Yang, 2009). Specifically, there are several forms, such as teaching-style learning, digital experience, learning by doing, and social learning. In the “learning by doing”, the elder and the child take part in activities together, during which the former guide the latter with their rich social experience in such four stages as experience, reflection, induction, and application, so as to grow together. The famous philosopher John Dewey (1938) raised the concept of “learning by doing”, stressing that learning is a process where experience is constantly accumulated and improved, point out the meaning of learning by doing. Therefore, this research adopts the style of learning by doing as a platform, where the child participate in the life experience of the elder, so as to create more common topics between them, shorten their distance and show more care to each other.

There are five types and application of intergenerational learning: recreation, education, public service, personal development and health promotion (Figure 1). In this study, education was applied for the experiments. Originally, the child was the target of the education system. However due to the aged society, the elder is now becoming the target of the education as well. During educational courses and activities, the elder can impart social experience and skills to the child, while the latter can share their experience and creation with the former, such as how to use 3C products. In this way, the two generations can communicate with, learn from and know more about each other, so as to present diverse and rich results.



Figure 1: Ames & Youatt (1994). Model for selecting appropriate intergenerational education and service activities, p.760.

Based on intergenerational learning, the paper studies how the elder and the child shorten the distance, feel the care from each other and find common topics between them during the activities.

Specific objectives:

- (1) How to design one-day life experience activity to explore the feasibility of interactions between the elder and the child.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

Based on the method of intergeneration learning to design a "life experience" activity for the elder and the child. In order to understand the satisfaction and interactive experience of elder and the child, questionnaires by using Likert scale were conducted in this study. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview method was applied to understand the feeling and thought of the participants.

### 2.1. Participants

An intergenerational learning study was conducted on a group of the elder over 65 and primary school student aged between 7 and 12. Through life experience activities, it is possible to discuss interactions between the two generations, who are expected to provide the most assistance and data to the study.

### 2.2. Method of collecting data

The data collecting methods used in this study were semi-structured interview and questionnaires, which are described below:

#### 2.2.1. Questionnaire survey

In order to measure the satisfaction and feelings of participants, the elder and the child give scores with the Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree".

### **2.2.2. Semi-structured interview method**

This study is conducted with the semi-structured interview, with outlines previously determined so that interviews are more effective and focused on the topic. Here are interview outlines for the elder and for the child. The structure of Interviews for the elder and the child are as follow below:

#### **(1) Interview outline for the elder**

What are their preferred conditions when they like to have activities?

What are their views on interactions with the child during intergenerational learning? What are their feelings about talking with the child?

What are their views on intergenerational learning?

What are their views on taking part in activities with the child?

What are their feedbacks on and suggestions about activities?

What are their willingness of being involved in another activity?

#### **(2) Interview outline for the child**

What are their reasons for loving such activities?

What are their views on taking part in activities with the elder?

What are their views before and after intergenerational activities?

What are their differences between before they take part in activities with the elder and after?

What are their feelings of talking with the elder?

What are their willingness of being involved in another activity?

## **3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

Interview data is collected as the basis of the study. The whole interview is recorded and all verbal data are transmitted into text. For nonverbal messages like facial expressions and body movements that cannot be recorded, images can make up and help further data analysis.

### **3.1. Basic information of participants**

A group of the elder and the child are selected for the study, with their basic information as follows.

### 3.1.1. Basic information for the elder

It is of necessity to understand, from related literature, the age of the elder, family status, recreational activities and participation in similar activities. The study is conducted on an elder person, aged over 70, living with the spouse, with farming as recreation and not yet involved in intergenerational activities (Table 1).

Table 1: Basic information of the elder

Object of study	Gender	Age	Family Structure	Recreation	Participating in related activities or not
The Elder	F	Over 70	Living with spouse	Planting Crops	No

### 3.1.2. Basic information of the child

It is essential to learn about the age of the child, siblings, whether they live with grandparents and frequency of visiting grandparents. The study is conducted on the child, aged between 7 and 10, having a sister, not living with grandparents, and visiting them at least once a month (Table 2).

Table 2: Basic data of the child

Object of study	Gender	Age	With siblings or not	Living with grandparents or not	Frequency of visiting grandparents
The Child	M	7-10	Yes	No	At least once a month

## 3.2. Design intergenerational activities

This study focuses on intergenerational learning activities between the elder and the child as well as benefits from their interactions. According to Ames and Youatt (1994), there are five types including recreation, education, health promotion, public service and personal development, first with education as the theme to design activities, during which the child learn professional skills from the elder. This is not only inheritance, but they can learn from each other.

### 3.2.1. Activities

Related literature is referred to conduct educational activities. Based on daily activities of the elder, it is feasible to have activities like picking, washing, cooking and eating vegetables, in which the elder and the child take part together. The main purpose is to shorten their distance, help the child know about and eat vegetables and understand the importance of a balanced diet to the body. Through the activity, the child joins the elder in their daily activities, which will not only enable the child to understand new knowledge but also give the elder a sense of achievement because of the child's participation. The activity lasts two hours (Table 3).



Table 3: Activities

Type	Name of activity	Details	Purpose	Time
Education	Best Cooperation	1. Picking vegetables. 2. Washing vegetables. 3. Stir-frying vegetables. 4. Eating vegetables.	1. Shorten their distance. 2. Develop a balanced diet. 3. Know about vegetables of the season. 4. Understand the importance of a balanced diet to body.	120

### 3.2.2. Analysis of questionnaire

Based on the questionnaire of intergenerational activities, both the elder and the child are quite satisfied and enjoy the company of each other, willing to take part in similar activities again. Through these activities, they will know about each other and improve their relationship. After activities, they will discuss what happened in the process, which increases common topics between them.

#### (1) Analysis of questionnaire for the elder

The elder is quite satisfied with the activities in the study because it is their first time to take part in such activities with the child and they can build a strong relationship from strangers to friends. As the elder teach the child professional skills, they begin to have common topics. During the activities, the elder can feel care and warmth from the child. In the end, the former will ask the latter about the activities and time of other ones. For the elder, intergenerational learning is a great platform where they can have a sense of achievement from teaching professional skills and feel the vitality of the child (Table 4).

Table 4: Analysis of questionnaire for the elder

No.	Question	Purpose	Score
1	Do you like today's activity?	To understand about satisfaction.	5
2	Do you have fun with the child?	To understand about the feeling of participating in activities with the child.	4
3	Do you feel closer to the child through the activity?	To understand about whether intergenerational learning has improved their relationship.	5
4	Are you willing to take part in similar activities?	To understand about the feasibility of intergenerational learning.	5
5	Are you going to discuss what happened today after the activity?	To increase common topics.	4
6	Do you care about each other in the activity?	To shorten their distance.	5

#### (2) Analysis of questionnaire for the child

The child has great satisfaction with activities in the study. The child usually plays with peers, with little time spent with the elder. Therefore, they are satisfied and impressed when they complete many tasks with the elder for the first time. During the activities, the child thought the elder was slow moving, but are surprised by their fast speed in picking and cutting vegetables, which changes the child's views on the elder. Generally speaking, the child has positive comments and are much impressed by the activities, what happened in the process and dialogues with the elder after activities (Table 5).

Table 5: Analysis of questionnaire for the child

No.	Question	Purpose	Score
1	Do you like today's activities?	To understand about satisfaction.	4
2	Do you have fun with the elder?	To understand about the feeling of participating in activities with the elder.	5
3	Do you change views on the elder?	To understand about their views on the elder.	5
4	Do you feel closer to the child through the activity?	To understand about whether intergenerational learning has improved their relationship.	5
5	Are you willing to take part in similar activities?	To understand about the feasibility of intergenerational learning.	5
6	Are you going to discuss what happened today after the activity?	To increase common topics.	4
7	Do you care about each other in the activity?	To shorten their distance.	4

### 3.3. Activity record

According to the record, the elder is delightful, energetic, and flexible in communicating with the child or teaching them skills, without limits of old age and they keep positive and share their own experience. Besides, the child is also in a good mood, curious about behaviors of the elder and in much joy when finding what they are interested in.

In terms of feedbacks and advice, participants are highly satisfied with the processes and arrangements for the activities, and willing to participate in similar activities. As for language expression, the elder speaks Hakka. Though they can speak Mandarin, Hakka can shorten the distance between the two generations and realize effective communication. The reason why there are many positive feedbacks is that the elder actively shares their skills with the child and the former are infected by the latter's vitality. Therefore, the activities help share experience and promote interactions between each other (Table 6).

Table 6: Details of observation record

Aspect	Detail	Record Description
Emotions	Happy	1. The elder are happy when the child are surprised by their fastness and skillfulness in throwing away old leaves of cabbage. 2. The elder have a sense of achievement from showing the child beautiful farmland. 3. The child are happy pulling up radish with the elder. 4. The child come back loaded with eight kinds of vegetables. 5. The child can eat what is cooked by the elder and them together.
	Excited	1. The child cannot wait to go into farmland. 2. The child can feel much water when washing vegetables.
	Strange	1. The child go into farmland for the first time. 2. The child use a turning shovel for the first time.
	Confident	1. The elder teach the child how to trim vegetables for cooking. 2. The elder tell the child what needs attention when washing vegetables. 3. The elder put washed vegetables into the pot.
	Fond	1. The child see cabbageworm on vegetables. 2. The elder discuss cabbageworm with the child.
	Expecting	1. The elder help the child know about vegetables of the season next time they meet each other. 2. The child will be assistants to the elder next time they meet each other.
Social Interaction	Good Interaction	1. The elder will pass washed vegetables to the child and let them put into the basket. 2. The elder use tools to pick bottle gourd and the child push aside leaves to pick vegetables together. 3. The elder and the child pull up radish together. 4. The child turn down the tap when there is much water. 5. The child listen to the elder to add salt when stir-frying Chinese cabbage.
	Sharing Experience	1. The elder teach different skills for picking different vegetables. 2. The elder tell the child the differences between vegetables that are ripe and not. 3. The elder tell the child skills of choosing radish. 4. The elder tell the child steps of stir-frying Chinese cabbage.
Attention	Concentration	1. The elder are careful in saying every sentence. 2. The child are focused on picking vegetables and stir-frying Chinese cabbage. 3. Both the elder and the child are focused on activities.
Performance	Imitation	1. The child will imitate the elder to pick vegetables with tools.
	Highly Involved	1. The child will want to pick crown daisy chrysanthemum when they master the skill. 2. The elder are enthusiastic in taking part in these activities and willing to try with the child next time.

### **3.4. Analysis of interactions between the elder and the child**

Through intergenerational interactions based on life experience, the study has detailed analyses from three aspects, including shortening the distance between each other, increasing common topics and caring for each other.

#### **3.4.1. Shortening the distance between each other**

During the process, the elder will pass the selected vegetables to the child, making them closer to each other. When pulling up radish, the child can not only know more about vegetables but also unite with the elder to experience the strength of unity. In the process of picking, washing, cooking to eating vegetables, everyone accompanies each other with talking and laughing (Table 7).

#### **3.4.2. Increasing common topics**

As the activity is to go into farmland, it is necessary to change shoes. The elder tells the child they have to wear suitable shoes in farmland, which is the start of their dialogues. During the activity, the elder teaches the child to know about vegetables and how to pick them. While picking vegetables, they will see many tiny cabbageworms, which will also become their common topic. In the process of stir-frying vegetables, the elder will teach the child related skills and methods, and the child will ask many questions out of curiosity. Such a question-and-answer step gradually increase interactions and common topics. After the dish is done, they will talk about the activity while eating vegetables stir-fried by them together. Throughout the process, the elder plays the role of a teacher, imparting experience to the child, and the child learns a lot of knowledge and skills in growing, picking, cleaning and cooking vegetables. Therefore, both sides have increased not only many interactions and but also common topics (Table 7).

#### **3.4.3. Caring for each other**

Dangerous tools are used in selecting vegetables, so the elder will exhort the child to be careful. Before going into farmland, they need to take the stairs because of horizontal differences, and they will tell each other to walk carefully. Besides, as stove and turning shovels are used in cooking, they will remind each other to be cautious. Throughout the process, the elder is concerned about the child, and the child is concerned about the elder walking in farmland. Thus, it is found that both sides care about each other and can feel warmth in their heart (Table 7).



**Table 7:** Details of shortening distance, increasing common topics and caring about each other

Shortening distance	Increasing common topics	Caring about each other
Go to the vegetable garden hand in hand.	Prepare before going into farmland-change shoes.	Use tools.
Pick vegetables and pass them to each other.	Know about vegetables.	Take the stairs.
Pull up radish together.	How to pick vegetables.	Walk in farmland.
Wash vegetables together.	Cabbageworms on vegetables.	Don't get wet when washing vegetables.
Stir-fry vegetables together.	Steps of stir-frying vegetables.	Use the turning shovel.
Eat vegetables together.	Feelings after cooking and eating vegetables.	Be careful with the high temperature when cooking.
		Be careful with the high temperature when eating.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Due to changes in family structure, the elder and the child have fewer chances to interact with each other, creating estrangement between them. Through intergenerational learning, they can get to know each other once again and change their fixed views on each other, so as to build a friendly relationship.

In this study, intergenerational learning activities provide chances for the elder to interact with the child and for the child to change fixed views on the elder, in order to establish the friendship. Besides, the child can learn from the elder, not only how to communicate with the elder but also professional skills. During intergenerational learning activities, interactions are both verbal and nonverbal. As the elder speak Hakka dialect in the process, they can teach the child how to say different vegetables in Hakka, which is language learning. For nonverbal communication, there are facial expressions and movements in which people can feel their attitudes towards each other. Overall, intergenerational learning is a good platform that can increase interactions between each other.

In order to increase the emotional relationship between elder and child, three principal emphases was generated through the “life experience” activity: shorten the distance between each other, increasing common topics, and increasing common topics. Elder and child behave emotions, social interaction, attention, and performance to each other through this activity. For example, the first time of child contact with crop and experience the feeling of farming which makes them feel both strange and excited (emotional). Under the leadership of elder and child hand in hand (social activity), make child full of security, be brave to experience the feeling of walking in the fields (performance). The child is very attentive to each of the harvesting skill conveyed by the elder (attention).

At the end of the study, the two generations become closer, care about each other, have smooth communication and enjoy a harmonious relationship. These activities not only help the elder to find new roles, get a sense of achievement and review the whole life but also satisfy their emotional needs as they age.

The study has the following four results:

- (1) Intergenerational activities in this study help shorten the distance between the elder and the child.
- (2) The child can change views on the elder and become close friends.
- (3) Intergenerational learning activities can bridge the gap between the two generations.
- (4) The child learns from the elder's life experience, giving the elder a sense of accomplishment.

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