

Fostering Intergenerational Relationships and Well-Being Through Reminiscence

A Capstone Submitted to the Faculty of  
Rudolf Steiner College  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

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Alyssum Barber

2015

Approved By:

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Edmund Knighton, PhD  
Committee chairperson

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Patrick Wakeford-Evans, MA  
Committee member

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Thank you to my students, who each agreed to participate fully and without reservation. They are the most amazing people I've ever met and I look forward to being their life-long friends.

Dedication

This is dedicated to my grandfather, Ben Kirk, who lived the sort of life worthy of an audience.

### **Abstract**

Providing adolescents and elders access to each other through a structured and carefully planned biography project allows educators to facilitate a unique opportunity for their students to gain an understanding of the several life transitions that are universal in the human experience while simultaneously enabling the elders in a community to share their wisdom and life lessons in order to further serve human kind. Adolescent students worked with well-elderly at a neighboring retirement community over a two-year period. During that time, relationships were formed while the elders were invited to reminisce about important life themes with the goal of the production of a student-generated biography derived from several planned and structured interview sessions. Data in the form of student journal responses, surveys and interviews were collected and supported the body of research surrounding the reported benefits of intergenerational relationships.

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## **Chapter 1: Nature of the Study**

### **Background**

After my daughter was born, I experienced an intense longing to know about my still-living grandfather's life. At the time, he had moved into a planned retirement community about four hours away from where we were living and at 90 had begun to slow his pace. I started a project where I planned to send a journal with a couple of questions about his childhood and hoped that he would write down the things he remembered about those questions and send the journal back to me. Instead, he expressed that he was too tired to remember and write his memories down and when he died three years later, I mourned the lack of opportunity to spend time with him understanding his story which was the beginning of my own story.

The busy nature of the early childhood and young adult years do not allow for much examination of the respect and reverence we have for our elders. As we age and experience the transitions that come with adult life, we begin to look to our elders for advice and as a result of this change, begin to reevaluate the importance of our older generations (Brubaker, 1999). Unfortunately, the pace of modern culture and age segregation as well as geographic dispersal of families is changing the quality of important intergenerational relationships (Peacock and Talley, 1984). In primitive societies, elders were considered wise and their life experiences and lessons were shared through narratives. For many reasons, this important process of elder-remiscing, while deemed developmentally healthy by psychologists, (Bohlmeijer E., Roemer M., Cuijpers P. Smit, F, 2007) has lost its place and purpose in modern culture.

After age fifty, a natural process of reminiscing begins. These “change over years” are marked with the conjuring of forgotten memories that come forward so that we may repent and in that repentance find forgiveness and also begin to form new motives for creating balance where our mistakes and limitations have been realized. Because elders are no longer perceived as holding superior knowledge and wisdom by the media and technologically saturated cultures of today, their stories that connect our pasts and our futures are no longer considered important (Broderson, 2012). Age segregation created by compulsory education and the culture of retirement communities widens the gap between these two generations alienating them from each other further. The potentially devastating effects of a once revered and important generation being separated from their audience and thus their process of reminiscing are not fully understood.

The presence of intergenerational relationships has been defined as a common factor in resilient children (Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2010) and the elderly who tell autobiographical stories show better physical and psychological health than those who do not (Frattaroli, 2006 as cited in Fivush et al., 2011). Working with youth in an intergenerational project contributes to the well-being of both generations because it meets the developmental needs of both groups as defined by Erik Erikson in his theories of ego identity while fostering resilience and supporting improved health.

### **Problem Statement**

Teachers who want to implement opportunities for the elderly to reminisce with their students will not find specific curriculum or guidelines to help them rationalize the time spent away from core curriculum. This capstone project summarizes the benefits of intergenerational relationships and the process of reminiscing for both the elder and the adolescent and provides educators with a rationale for implementing such a program within their school. Additionally, several resources created for the purpose of facilitating productive reminiscence processes have been synthesized into a student manual that teachers will find useful when implementing the biography element of this project within their curriculum.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The rationale for conducting an intergenerational activity may require the presentation of defined and beneficial elements of such activities. This project provides a review of the importance and benefits of facilitating intergenerational relationships while supplying the educator with guidelines for orchestrating the intergenerational experience as well as a reproducible student manual outlining the collective themes and questions most likely to elicit positive experiences for elders and students alike. Participant responses and teacher observations were collected and these items demonstrated field experiences that were congruent with the beneficial outcomes discovered in the review of literature concerning the benefits of intergenerational experiences.

Seventeen Caucasian 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders from Madrone Trail Public Charter School in Central Point, Oregon were bussed to Pioneer Village, a retirement community in nearby Jacksonville. The activity director was able to enlist elders who were interested in speaking with the students on a monthly schedule. For two years, students and elders met and engaged in a variety of activities almost exclusively centered on the process of reminiscence. After a year of monthly visits, elders who were interested in meeting with an 8<sup>th</sup> grader weekly for six weeks in order to be interviewed about their life were solicited by the activity director of Pioneer Village. The students were paired with an elder and worked with that elder for the duration of the project. In general, the elders who agreed to meet with the students for the six week duration for the biography project were consistent in their participation. After each weekly interview, the students used their notes to create a chapter for the biography about the elder they were serving and each chapter was reviewed at the beginning of the next visit with the purpose of checking and clarifying biography details that the student had written. Photographs of photographs and artifacts were taken and added to the biography documents the students were producing.

### **Research Questions**

The overall question guiding this of work was: What are the benefits of intergenerational programs and why should they be done? The work was further grounded by two sub questions:

1. What are the developmental needs of the adolescent and the elder and how do intergenerational programs and the process of reminiscence meet those needs?

2. What are the characteristics of an effective process of reminiscence and how should these be implemented for optimal benefits to the students and their elders?

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The research reviewed concerning the benefits of intergenerational relationships, the meeting of developmental needs for both elders and adolescents who participate in such activities and the best practices in supporting the process for reminiscence guided the formation and facilitation of this intergenerational project. Participants were observed during the time that they spent together within the parameters of the project. In order to understand each of the participants' experiences and their conclusions about the benefits of this project, the students were asked to journal about their experiences at the end of three sessions. A formal survey with items formed around the questions of this research and aimed at developmental issues specific to the age group responding was also given at the end of the project. Five elder participants were interviewed in order to ascertain their experiences and feelings from participating in this activity. The interview results were compared with the general outcomes of previous research done concerning the benefits of intergenerational relationships and the benefits of reminiscing for the elderly. This participatory action based research seeks to determine whether or not the participants found the experience beneficial to them and to evaluate if their developmental needs were met by participating.

### **Scope of the Study**

Overcoming the negative stereotypes of the aging was an initial concern in introducing the students to this project. Many of the students reported that their previous experiences with the elderly were negative for a variety of reasons. Over time, consistency in the attendance of the elders created a need for a more formal agreement between the residents of Pioneer Village and the activity director so that the students could gather a complete picture of their interviewee's life experiences. Additionally, students who had been paired with elders who were beginning to experience varying degrees of dementia found the process of attempting to provide an accurate biography for their elder very challenging. Since the goal for the outcome of this intergenerational project is mutually beneficial to both the youth and the elderly, enlisting the well-elderly became imperative when implementing the curricular component fulfilled by writing and producing the elder's biography.

The activity director from Pioneer Village in Jacksonville, OR agreed that the elders living in her facility would enjoy and benefit from a monthly visit from the students from Madrone Trail. Before meeting with the elders on site, students practiced interviewing an assigned classmate using empathetic listening skills, attentive body language and careful language selection. The class role played effective and contrarily less effective conversation strategies and then discussed their personal experiences so that they might have a greater understanding of what an elder might also feel in the same situations we had practiced.

Students were bussed to Pioneer Village for monthly activities with the elders who were present each month for the duration of their 7<sup>th</sup> grade year and for the first semester of their 8<sup>th</sup> grade year. Each forty-five minute meeting began with the students sharing the poems and

songs we had been working with and then with the students met with the elders that had established a relationship with during the year's previous visits. There were several planned seasonal activities to begin with, but each of these meetings resulted in the elder reminiscing with their paired student. For the first few hours following each visit, the students were observed discussing what their elder had shared with them with intense interest and enthusiasm and so the idea of producing a biography for the elders began to form. Several resources for facilitating biography and memoir groups were utilized in order to organize the elder stories around several different themes.

Initially, students reported feeling stressed and afraid of working with the elders, but these fears were alleviated within a few minutes of working with such warm and welcoming elders. As the year continued, most of the intergenerational relationships were characterized by open and warm communication between the participants. A few students found that their elders were expressing symptoms of dementia and while they were able to maintain respect and warmth during their ongoing visits with their partner, the solicitation of well-elders became imperative to the student's experience of benefit from the biography activity.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Contact Hypothesis** productive contact situations between groups that are characterized by four key conditions: equal status, intergroup cooperation, common goals, and support by social and institutional authorities (Allport, 1954).

**Ego Identity-Adolescence** certain comprehensive gains which the individual, at the end of adolescence, must have derived from all of his pre-adult experience in order to be prepared emotionally and socially for the tasks of adulthood (Erikson, 1997).

**Emotional Regulation** An ability to analyze and integrate conflicting emotions in order to better cognitively reframe events in order to control emotional responses to those events (Compas, Campbell, Robinson, & Rodriguez as cited by Fivush et al., 2010) and (Gross, 2002).

**Gerotransendence** A developmental stage of aging that is characterized by a redefinition of the self and of relationships to others. A shift from a materialistic and rational life view to a more cosmic and transcendent one that is accompanied by an increase in life satisfaction for an individual. A changed perception of time that allows for several stages of life to be visited simultaneously and allows for new observations and evaluations of events to be made and through that process, reconciliation and new understandings are formed by an individual (Tornstam, 2011).

**Intergenerational Learning Program** “A vehicle for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generation” (Yeo, H. & Ohsako, 2000 as cited by Corrigan, T. , McNamara, G & O’Hara, J, 2013, p. 119). “Planned, ongoing interactions between younger and older adults that are mutually worthwhile to both” (Newman & Smith, 1997 as cited in Knapp, Stubblefield, 2000, p. 611).

**Reminiscence Therapy** The process of remembering past events, thoughts, and feelings that is considered “a therapeutic nursing intervention for older adults” (Gallager, P. & Carey, K., 2012). ‘Reminiscence therapy increases socialization, self-esteem, life satisfaction, and social adjustment while preventing and reducing social isolation and depression in the elderly’(Bulecheck, Butcher, & Dochterman, 2008 as sited by Gallager & Carey, 2012).

**Well-elderly** Elders who are still well and contributing to society and not acutely ill (Gallagher & Carey, 2012).

### **Significance of the Study**

Technology affords us new luxuries by the day and has globalized our culture so that distances are overcome with a tap of a button. Despite these advancements, our culture is age-segregated and geographically dispersed to the point that isolation and loneliness are common human experiences. The population of citizens over age 65 will have increased by 30% by 2020 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1995). We are living longer, yet the quality of those years afforded by the advancements in health and technology is not as robust as it could be.

Society once revered the elderly as wise and important. This wisdom that was passed down in family narratives through an elder’s process of reminiscence and served all of the generations in a family or community is no longer shared. This process of reminiscence is

described by Erik Erikson as an important function of human development that leads to an intact and peaceful death experience for the elderly. Without reminiscence, the continuum where wisdom emerges from both the good and bad experiences of a life is terminated and the function of that process is lost. Access to our precious genesis stories is denied when an elder passes without having told their stories.

Educators who are interested in facilitating healthy social and emotional integration of their adolescent students should facilitate intergenerational relationships between their adolescent students and the well-elderly. Intergenerational relationships create a space for important transformative and developmental work to take place (Corrigan & O'Hara, 2013). The adolescent becomes an audience to a life well-lived and gleans important details about the potentials in their own life as they listen to an elder reminisce. They experience satisfaction through serving as the audience for an elder's story. The elder also serves the adolescent by acting as a living connection to a stream of consciousness and understanding of the events that have shaped the culture they are currently finding their identity within. In the elder, the adolescent beholds a person who has loved and lost in the most triumphant and excruciating ways and still sits before them with a calm and steady gaze affirming to the child that the same richness awaits them as they age.

Through reminiscence, the elder recapitulates their life and through that review is able to view their life somewhat objectively. There they may realize apologies that need to be made or accepted, themes and patterns that have repeated and perhaps enjoy a long ago memory as if it were happening all over again. The elder prepares for their passing through this process of reminiscence that our modern culture has begun to deny through the active age-segregation of

our society and the rapid advancement of technology and knowledge that further separates the elderly and retired from the rest of society.

Implementing an intergenerational program facilitates a healthy and realistic understanding of the aging process across generations and reinstates the eldest members of our culture to their previous pinnacle of respect and reverence. From this vantage, the elderly grant younger generations access to their life experiences so that we all may learn about what it means to walk the earth during a time that has brought us to the present. It promotes understanding and respect among generations and ensures that, despite the advancements of technology, the fundamental instinct to reminisce may be revered and understood as a necessary element of the intact and healthy life process.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Research Strategy**

My initial search of Ebsco using the terms “Intergenerational” and “Relationship” provided several beginning articles that I was able to use in beginning my literature review. Including the terms “Narrative” and “Adolescent” provided me with a primary resource by Fivush, Bohanek and Zaman. The process of remembering is often referred to as “Reminiscence” and “Reminiscence Therapy” and it was these terms that refereed me back to Erik Erikson’s theory of ego development. These initial searches resulted in nine solid articles that I was able to form a basic theme for the work I was planning to continue with my students and the residents from Pioneer Village. Using Erikson’s term “Theory of Ego Development,” I began to find connections that would rationalize the use of intergenerational relationships to meet the developmental needs of the adolescent and elderly in general. I began to search for articles that demonstrated the negative effects of age-segregation that might contribute to the lack of realization of the identity goal for the adolescent and the elder. I also found four books written for the purpose of facilitating the process of reminiscence through memoirs and autobiographies and synthesized the questions, activities and recommendations for working with elders into a manual for student to refer to when working with an elder to write their biography.

## **Introduction**

*Irrespective of where we are in the world, the quality of the contact and connectivity of the young and old says much about the quality of all of our lives” (UNESCO, 2000, pg 21.)*

Amid this mass information age and the busyness it causes, the individual characteristics and gifts that make each of us unique can be overlooked or even forgotten by those around us, and even ourselves. This review outlines the reasons for and benefits of orchestrating a relationship between adolescents and elders who have volunteered to tell their life history to an adolescent with the purpose of having their biography recorded and presented to them and summarizes the supportive elements of an effective intergenerational program.

## **Review of Literature**

Because of the advancements made in medicine, by 2020, there will be at least 55 million Americans aged 65 or older, a 36% increase in population for the decade beginning in 2011 (AoA, 2011). Even though children have access to healthier grandparents for longer, they are less likely to know their grandparents well, due to geographic dispersal (Spence, 2007). When present, these intergenerational relationships have been cited as a “common factor among resilient children, who achieve success despite growing up in disadvantaged and stressful circumstances” (Freedman, 1988 p. iii). The extended family of times past where elders were included and revered as wise and important to their families and communities has been altered because of the age segregation created by modern school culture and the placement of older people in retirement-aged communities. This geographic dispersal and age segregation that

characterizes modern culture promotes the formation of intergenerational negative beliefs and stereotypes (Blechman, A., 2008).

Though the world is experiencing the shrinking distances provided by the process of globalization during this Technological and Informational Age, people “feel isolated.” Mother Teresa said that Americans are lonely and that that loneliness is the most painful form of poverty (Birren, 2001). This loneliness, “isolation and lack of connectedness have been recognized as predictors of morbidity and mortality” (Durkheim, 1951 as cited in Rowe & Kahn, 1997 p 433). Facilitating intergenerational programs bring youth and elders together for planned and ongoing activities that are mutually beneficial for the generations involved (Spence, L. and Radunovich, H., 2007, 2012) can alleviate these experiences of isolation and improve the mental and physical quality of life of those who participate.

Reminiscence activities create the time and space for people to gain clarity around their past and help people locate their own personal identity and how it shapes and has shaped our world. In adolescence, identity and emotional regulation are a central developmental focus and the narratives of people known and unknown to the child can form a framework for “understanding self and emotion” (Fivush, 2010, p. 47). This reminiscence process can be therapeutic for both the elder and the adolescent. Adolescents who tell intergenerational narratives show higher levels of well-being (Fivush 2010). Research shows that “autobiographical memory allows us to cope with aversive experiences, resolve negative affect and draw on past emotions in the service of understanding the present and future,”(Bluck & Alea 2002; Bluck & Abermas, 200; Pillemer, 1998 as sited in Fivus, 2011) for the elder. Frattaroli, 2006, found that elders who were able to “narrate the emotional events of their lives in more self-

reflective ways show better physical and psychological health” (Frattaroli, 2006; Pennebaker and Chung, 2007; as cited in Fivush, 2011, p. 46).

### **Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships**

Intergenerational programs have “grown exponentially in North America” (Kuehne & Collins, 1997, p. 183 as cited in Heydon & Daly, 2008). Providing opportunities for intergenerational relationships to form can be advantageous to the youth and elders. These relationships:

- Provide an opportunity for both to learn new skills
- Give the child and the elder a sense of purpose
- Help children understand and accept their own aging
- Invigorate and energize older adults
- Help reduce the isolation and likelihood of depression in the elderly

(Spence & Radunovich, 2012, p. 1)

There were three general themes of intergenerational projects discovered in this review of literature: positive shifts in stereotypes and attitudes about aging; healthy facilitation of life transition periods; enhancement of health and feelings of well-being. Within these outcomes were recommendations towards forming a positive intergenerational relationship that are considered here.

### **Affecting Positive Shifts in Stereotypes and Attitudes about Aging**

In the study “Connecting with the Well-Elderly through Reminiscence: Analysis of Lived Experience,” (Gallagher & Carey, 2012) young students were paired with volunteer elders for the purpose of engaging the well-elderly in a conversation about their past life events. The younger members of the pair had expressed stereotypical impressions of aging and of the elderly: that the elderly were frail, dependent and lonely. Once the interview took place, however, there were four generalizations made about the intergenerational project:

1. Discovery of the value of Intergenerational Interactions

Both the elders and the youth reported positive interactions and that these social interactions facilitate communication between two generations. Just from one interview, participants in the study reported having connected and even that they had plans to meet again after the experience (Gallagher & Carey, 2012).

2. Rejection of Stereotypes

The study allowed for members of both groups to realize the diversity of individuals in the other. They were surprised to have enjoyed the experience and reported that previously held stereotypes of the elderly all being confused or all are lonely were dispelled. One elder said, “....The interview was good for both of us...she learned from me, and I learned from her” (Gallagher & Carey, 2012, p. 579).

3. Willingness to Overcome Painful Aspects of Reminiscence

The elderly reported being willing to speak about painful experiences because it was “Good for students to get the perspective-I am still here-they would still be here. I share because I know the way I handled the situations might help the students” (Gallagher 2012, p 579). Because the elders felt safe, they were willing to share painful experiences. Kunz and Soltys (2007) found that “remembering and sharing painful life experiences promoted emotional healing and acceptance of distressful life events” (as sited in Gallagher & Carey, 2012, p 581.)

#### 4. Gerotranscendence: Elders Display Wisdom and Peace

One elder reported that her student interviewer had told her that she was wise. Another student reported that her elder was very calm and told her to plan for retirement. Another stated that her elder lives day by day and that she was in in good spirits and had hope.

Erikson’s work determined that when an elderly person achieves this wisdom about their life they will not fear death because they have determined that their life was significant. (Lin, Dai & Hwang, 2008, p. 298). Research shows that this self-examination through the biography process can create “transcendenceand“decreases depression and increases psychological and physical well-being” for the elderly (Stinson & Kirk, 2006 as sited in Gallagher and Carey, 2012). Through encouraging reminiscence of the elderly, students will promote the process of healthy aging (Gallagher & Carey, 2012) both for the elder and themselves.

Children who have little contact with the older generations in their families because of geographic dispersal, divorce or other family changes experience a renewed sense of continuity when participating in an intergenerational program (Heydon & Daly, 2008).

## **Facilitating Life Transitions**

According to Erik Erikson's theories of ego, the ego develops as it resolves social crisis encountered within eight specific stages during human development. Erikson's work defined adolescence, "the age mediating between childhood and adulthood" (Erikson, E. & Erikson, J. 2007, p. 53) as a significant time of personal identity development. It is during this period that the child begins to examine their environment and identity with the purpose of fitting in. During this stage, a person is examining and reexamining the roles they will play as an adult. Success here renews a capacity to trust. The virtue of fidelity is formed through an increased ability to value others despite ideological differences (Erikson. & Erikson, 2007). Because pressuring an adolescent into a role may cause identity issues in later stages of development which may in turn cause unhappiness, it is best to allow the adolescent to experiment with and be exposed to the different avenues that may best help them create a healthy personal identity (Cherry, K.A., 2005). Important relationships during this time are peers and role models and the driving questions of this stage are *Who am I? and What can I be?*

Through a long-term intergenerational relationship where the reminiscence of the elder is the focus of their time together, the adolescent is working with a role model of sorts (Freedman, 1988). As an audience to a well-lived life, the youth will encounter a being whose experiences

they may personally integrate as an actual personal experience of experimentation into the adolescent's forming identity. The stories they listen to and actively record and reproduce for their elder may help them answer the critical questions of their ego identity developmental stage- *Who am I?* (or *Who am I not?*) and *What can I be?* This may assist the child in forming their own personal concept of identity (Fivush et al., 2001).

Most members of our culture retire around the age of sixty-five. The "exile" from the employed outer world can cause feelings of shame, remorse and guilt as well as loneliness and loss of friends and stimulation (Osborne, J., 2009) (Corrigan & O'Hara, 2013). During this phase of human development, a person will reflect upon their life asking *Was what I did enough?* (River, 2013). If this reflection is answered with shame or guilt, then the person may fall into despair and depression. "For the elderly, the principle task is to achieve ego-integrity and avoid despair" (Chen, 2012, p. 1). If an elder adult's life experience is perceived as successful by that adult during this stage of development, then the virtue of wisdom is experienced (Cherry, K.A., 2005). Through that wisdom, a person during this stage feels a sense of completion, and according to Erikson, will approach death without fear. "Transcending earlier issues while progressing toward increased life satisfaction and maturity is an integral part of this final developmental stage of aging" (Tornstam, 2005 as sited in Gallagher & Carey, 2012, p 581).

### **Enhancing Health and Well-Being**

In 1960, Dr. Robert N. Butler was one of the first individuals to define the act of reminiscing an "important, essential and normal part of growing old" (Tyrrell, M. 2012 p. 10).

Pennebaker, J.W. & Chung (2007) revealed that the adults who were able to narrate emotional events in their lives demonstrated better physical and psychological health. Fivush (2010) supports the idea that in listening to other peoples' stories, adolescents are able to integrate those peoples' perspectives of the past into their present and future. In other words, hard life lessons may not need be personally experienced by an adolescent after hearing about the event from an elder who had lived that lesson and they adolescent is able to "engage in sophisticated perspective taking, which allows them to understand and integrate the perspective of others into their own" (Habernas & Paha, 2001 as cited in Fivush et al., 2011, p. 47).

People who participate in a life review process report these results:

- Increased self-esteem and a greater sense of personal power and significance
- Greater awareness of past adaptive strategies and ways in which these might be applied to current problems and conditions
- Resolution of past resentments, pain and negative feelings and a sense of reconciliation
- Renewed interest in past activities and hobbies
- Ability to differentiate between the roles of enduring internal motivations and external societal motivations in making life choices
- An increased sense of meaning in life
- Appreciation for the developmental work one faces at each stage of life
- A greater sense of accomplishment and fulfillment
- A stronger, more positive view of the future

(Birren, J.E. & Cochran, K.N., 2001 p. 15-16)

Through the intergenerational relationships in their home, and in the world, adolescents become more cognizant about how their own biography may form. In this, they “become more capable of analyzing and integrating conflicting emotions and are better able to cognitively reframe events in ways that allow for emotional regulation” (Fivush, et al., 2011, p. 47). This emotional regulation can help children navigate their own experiences during times that are emotionally intense or otherwise confusing experiences. This may be especially important during the period of life where warm and open relationships with adults who may serve as role models will facilitate the youth’s formation of identity (Ramkumar, 2002).

Children look to the adults in their lives as potential role models. Adolescents from a gifted class in Madison, Wisconsin were asked how adults could improve the communication with teenagers and their response was that they wanted to hear the stories about the human parts of the adults in their lives. They wanted to hear about the mistakes and joys, embarrassments and triumphs in order that they might understand themselves better (Birren, 2001). When adults share their experiences candidly, they support the healthy identity development of the adolescent.

The six-year longitudinal study of Successful Aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1997) found that social and productive activities for the elderly were “positively related to happiness as well as mortality” (Menec, 2003, p. 579). The act of assisting an adolescent in this project is also an act of service for that elder where they are given an important reason to visualize the events of their lives. Successful Aging has several components; among them is an “engagement with life” which is defined as activity that creates societal value (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). This process of reminiscing through intergenerational relationship allows elders to engage in a healthy function of aging that includes the intimate opportunity to “pass on skills developed over a lifetime....and

play the somewhat idealized role of mentor.” (Freedman, 1988, p. iii). In playing the role of mentor through this intergenerational project, the elder is engaging in life as well as reducing their sense of loneliness and isolation thus experiencing success in aging.

### **Suggestions for Facilitating the Project**

Longevity and consistency in the intergenerational relationship are key factors in improving youth attitudes towards aging in general and towards their own aging (Heydon & Daly, 2008). Page, Olivas, Driver and Driver (1981) found that 2/3’s of the children they interviewed in their work “expressed negative feelings about their own aging.”

It is generally known that intergenerational contact elicits positive shifts in the participants attitudes towards each other, but the article *Intergenerational Contact, Attitudes and Stereotypes of Adolescents and Older People* (Meshel, 2004) makes clear that without the four conditions declared in the “Contact Hypothesis,” (Allport, 1954) the positive effects of an intergenerational project will not be affected. The Contact Hypothesis, which is a basis for cooperative education or transformational environments, defines the subjects Equal Status, Common Goals, Cooperative Interaction and Institutional Support.

In order to support more positive attitudes towards the elderly and ensure that this intergenerational project increases the overall feeling of life satisfaction for the elder, a chief consideration in facilitating the project is the establishment of Equal Status. McGowan and Blankenship (1994) created a project where students met weekly with the same elder over a

semester with the purpose of obtaining the life history of the older person. “Equal status” between the youth and elder was created through the common goal of completing the biography project which also serves a curricular component (Meshel & McGlynn, 2004; Heydon, 2008). Inherent in obtaining the life history is a common goal shared by both parties as well as cooperative interaction (Allport, 1954). Because the elements of the contact hypothesis were considered and included in this intergenerational project, a majority of the students in Meshel’s study found the intergenerational biography experience valuable (Meshel & McGlynn, 2004).

It is important for the elder volunteers participating in this project to be relatively well so that “equal status” is established and maintained during the biography process. Students of this age and experience will need to be relating to a person who is not experiencing acute dementia or other health problems that might impact the elder’s ability to impart their life story in a meaningful way for both the adolescent and the elder. Careful consideration of a learning project’s purpose and ability to establish equal status and institutional support were reported in Knapp’s intergenerational service project measuring attitudinal shifts of the younger members participating in a biography project when they had been prepared for the project through their coursework, thus establishing equal status (Knapp & Stubblefield, 2000). One qualitative response supporting the importance of forming a positive purpose for this sort of project was given by a younger participant:

“I have always dreaded nursing home visits. This time it was different. I looked forward to our visits since we had a positive purpose. The reaction from the staff and residents only strengthened our desire to make this project successful,” (Knapp, J.L. & Stubblefield, 2000 p. 619).

From the same article, an elder wrote:

“...If this harmonious working together of young and old can continue in the world, we are going to have some kind of wonderful place to live” (Knapp, J.L., & Stubblefield, 2000 p. 619).

### **Summary and Transition**

Younger communities and families are separated from the elderly community for a variety of reasons. These gaps create negative stereotypes about aging and the aged. Intergenerational activities that are structured and establish an equal status through some sort of goal deemed meaningful by both the young and the old foster the understanding and access between the members of multiple generations. Reminiscence is a healthy function of aging and without its presence in an elder's life; Erikson warns that an elderly person may slip into despair. With opportunities to meet their developmental needs through reminiscence, the elder experiences the virtue of wisdom. The growing elderly community needs to reminisce or become unhappy and unhealthy. The adolescent needs open and warm communication and is looking out into the world for worthy and real role models. Bringing these two communities together meets both generations' developmental needs. This project attempts to connect widely understood ideas with a working framework for facilitating intergenerational relationships.

## Chapter 3

### Rationale

The rationale for conducting an intergenerational activity requires the presentation of defined and beneficial elements of such activities. This project provides a review of the importance and benefits of facilitating intergenerational relationships while supplying the educator with guidelines for orchestrating the intergenerational experience and a student manual outlining the collective themes and questions most likely to elicit positive experiences for elders and students alike. Participant responses were collected and demonstrated field experiences congruent with the themes discovered in the review of literature concerning the effects of intergenerational experiences.

Seventeen 7th and 8th graders from Madrone Trail Public Charter School in Central Point, Oregon were bussed to Pioneer Village, a retirement community in nearby Jacksonville. For two years, students and elders met and engaged in a variety of activities almost exclusively centered on the process of reminiscence. After a year of monthly visits, elders who were interested in meeting with an 8th grader weekly for six weeks in order to be interviewed about their life were solicited by the activity director of Pioneer Village. After each weekly interview, the students used their notes to create a chapter for biography about the elder they were serving.

## **Research Design**

The fairly brief history of orchestrated intergenerational relationships coupled with life review processes does not provide depth of research for educators interested in implementing such a project. The research supports the findings about the benefits of intergenerational relationships and Erikson's work around the stages of identity development are even more widely accepted the fields of education and sociology. This project seeks to prove these widely accepted but unconnected generalizations about the perceived benefits of participating in an intergenerational relationship projects centered on a life review process. Because the students' and elders' life experiences form out of a complex set of factors including genetics, environment and life experiences, a quantitative approach to measuring the perceived benefit of this project was rejected in favor of a design that would include all responses concerning beliefs and perceptions as valid. The answers to the research questions:

What are the benefits of intergenerational programs and why should they be done?

and

1. How are the developmental needs of the adolescent and the elder met through intergenerational relationships through use of a reminiscence process?
2. What are the characteristics of an effective process of reminiscence?

are based on human perception of the qualitative elements of perceived benefits of a relationship whose characteristics are too wide and varied to establish a subjective measure for. Instead, journal and survey responses and interview notes will be examined for the themes observed

during the literature review process proving the presence or absence of such findings in the parameters of this project.

### **Population and Sample**

There are seventeen general education students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Madrone Trail ranging in ages 13-15 years of age. The group has five males and twelve females. All of the students are Caucasian. Only one student lives within proximity of a grandparent and so the class's experience with intergenerational relationships has been limited by the geographic dispersal of a vast majority of these students. All of the students were granted written parent permission to participate in this project.

Fourteen well-elders, two men and twelve women, were recruited by the activity director at Pioneer Village retirement facility. They were all Caucasian. The activity director used a flyer to communicate the goals of the program as it is outlined here. The flyer asked for residents who were interested in meeting with an adolescent once a week for six weeks with the purpose of being interviewed by an adolescent about their lives. The flyer outlined that biography would be written for them as a final product of the program.

Because there were three fewer elders than students, there were three elders who were interviewed by teams of two adolescents. Students who were more challenged by the prospect of conducting an interview, taking notes and producing a biography, self-selected to work with a partner for this project.

## Procedures

The first step in beginning an intergenerational project is contacting the social or activity director in a retirement facility. We contacted Pioneer Village and began monthly visits with any residents who were interested in spending time with students from our school. The activity director and teacher established a communication plan that involved emails for scheduling, planning and confirming visit dates.

The first year's visit dates were planned in advanced and this allowed for transportation requests to be made once at the beginning of the year. The activity director at Pioneer Village also printed the visits on the facility's activity calendar that was dispersed throughout the residences as well as on a master calendar displayed near the cafeteria. Partnerships between residents and students were formed and recorded after the third month. The visits were well attended by a consistent group of elders with a few new faces joining us throughout the school year. Each of the sessions began after the facility's lunch with a musical and speech offering from the students and continued with the students meeting with the elders they had established relationships with. The first three meetings were planned by the activity director with the elders in mind and included opportunities for the partners to get better acquainted with each other. [See Appendix A]

1. Utilizing the books Becoming a Memoirist for Elders, Telling the Stories of Live Through Guided Autobiography Groups, Transformational Reminiscence Life Story Work, and Writing Your Memoirs for Descendants create a list of eight life themes to organize questions and prompts that structures the interview sessions. [See Appendix B]

2. Recreate a Life Graph (Birren, 2001) and teach the process of organizing their own life graph familiarizing the students with this primary step in making sure that the elder's interviews and resulting biographies include what they perceive as their most important memories. [See Appendix C]

3. In order to facilitate a positive experience of reminiscence the students need to practice conversation skills that will be consistent with the preferences of older adults. Generate several scenarios for role playing good listening and interview skills. Provide students with multiple experiences of being listened to and understood as well as experiences of not being listened to and understood. In order to create equal status, generate a list of culturally correct language that adolescents utilize that may confuse elders and provide alternatives the students might incorporate into their conversations with their elders. Discuss the students' experiences and outline the practices that seemed most effective to them based on their feelings and perceptions.

4. Four weeks in advance, prepare a recruitment flyer that outlines the project outcomes, provides the dates, times and location of the interview sessions and send a copy to the activity director for approval. Upon approval, print out flyers for dispersal by the activity director. Schedule an appointment with the activity director to share and communicate the possible themes and questions that will be utilized by the students. Confirm that the residents recruited will most benefit from the process if they are relatively well and schedule an appointment to match students with elders and also ascertain the special needs or considerations that the elders may need from the students they are meeting with. [See Appendix D]

5. Prepare an information sheet and permission form that communicates the project's goals and parameters with parents.

6. In order to create an understanding of the process of preparing a biography using the life graph and themes and questions that have been provided as a framework for this project, assign student partners to interview their classmates using the themes and questions in the manual that correlate with each student's life graph. Provide several forty-five minute class sessions where students will practice asking questions and taking notes while maintaining personal interest in their subject. End each session with the students using the notes they've taken about their partner and producing a rough draft of their partner's biography. It is important that the students check with each other about their desires of having a story included in their biography or not. It is equally important that these responses are considered seriously and are not met with any judgement or questions.

Writing their classmate's biography will prepare the students for the potential difficulty they will encounter when beginning to organize their thoughts and notes into their elder's biography and will demonstrate the need for them to be flexible when using the manual to guide their conversations with their elders. Discuss the Life Themes Manual and the student's experiences and feelings they encounter during each portion of the process they are engaged in in order to help them anticipate what their elder may be experiencing at each stage of the project.

7. Before the first meeting with their elders, discuss the themes and questions that might elicit the most emotional stories for their elders. Help them realize that any question might bring an emotional response and encourage the students to recognize the characteristics of a conversation that may be too emotional to continue. Encourage the students to ask their elders if they need anything should they become emotional and for the students to be careful in asking if

the elder wants to continue with the story and if so, whether or not they would like to include these memories in their biographies. Remind the students that any request to continue or not and then to include or exclude stories from the biography must be met with total respect.

8. Check in with any students who will be working with elders who require anything extraordinary from their student partner. Some examples may be that their elder has trouble hearing, reads lips or has a significant tremor. Making sure that the students are fully aware of the needs and characteristics of their elder will help both of them feel more at ease when they are working with together.

9. Provide class time the next day for the students to compile their interview notes into a rough draft for that interview. Collect the drafts the next day.

10. Review the students' drafts and return to the students for revision. Corrected drafts are presented to the elder at the beginning of the next session in order to check detail accuracy and ask any clarifying questions.

11. Provide time for the students to journal about their experience with their elders following each visit. These entries should reflect any new insights, experiences or other potential shifts in thinking that the students feel is important enough to express.

12. Observe elder/adolescent pairs during each session and take notes on any comments or observations pertinent to the project's research question or sub questions.

13. After completing the biography process, administer final survey to students. Evaluate each survey item to confirm or deny any common themes that the research discusses.

[See Appendix E]

12. Schedule interviews with elders and activity director in order to assess the overall experience of the project and whether the developmental needs of the elders were met through their participation. [See Appendix F]

### **Ethical Assurances**

Parents will be advised of the project during a class meeting. The items to be discussed include a basic summary of the benefits of the project to their students. Parents will review the questions that the students will be asking and will be advised of the potential emotional response their child may encounter while listening to their elder reminisce. Parents will sign a permission slip acknowledging their understanding of the project's purpose and guidelines as well as granting additional permission for their child's work to be shared as part of the presentation of this project's benefits. Additional permission will be given to use photographs taken over the duration of the project. These photographs will be used to demonstrate the active participation of the elders and adolescents observed during the project. [See Appendix G]

Elders will be recruited by the activity director of the facility. A flyer, outlining the project's objectives and details such as time and place will be provided in order to recruit well-elders who the activity director feels will be a good fit for the project. Similar releases will be given to the elders who are participating in the project allowing for the release of their biography and use of photographs taken during the sessions for the purpose of communicating the benefit

of the project. Permission slips and release forms concerning all participants will be collected and noted before beginning the project.

All sessions will take place in a large space where students and elders may be observed by the classroom teacher and at least one member of the facility's personnel who is familiar with each of the resident's specific needs.

Students will be instructed to ask their elders if the stories they are listening to should be included in the final biography. Notes will be kept in a notebook also containing the interview framework provided to each pair. These notes will be stored in each student's desk and will be used to produce a weekly chapter of each session the day following the interview. These chapters will be typed or handwritten and turned into the classroom teacher the next day for correction. These stories will be corrected and stored in a file folder to remain with the classroom teacher until the next session. These copies will be dispersed to each student with the purpose of reviewing the accuracy of the biography's details. Clarifying questions will be asked at this time as well.

Student responses will be reported anonymously. Biographies that have been released will contain the names and the personal information they have included and approved of in their narrative.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

The findings for this research show that both the students and elders who participated in this intergenerational activity benefited. The long-term intergenerational project as implemented here supported the findings of changed perceptions of aging (Knapp, J. & Stubblefield, P. 2000). Surveys for the students, elders and staff of the retirement facility were written with the research questions in mind.

#### Research Questions

What are the benefits of intergenerational programs and why should they be done? The work was further grounded by two sub questions:

1. How are the developmental needs of the adolescent and the elder met through intergenerational relationships through use of a reminiscence process?
2. What are the characteristics of an effective process of reminiscence?

Elders participating in the project answered six questions targeting the specific research questions for this project. They were asked to describe their experience of reminiscing, their perceived personal benefits of participating in the project, and how they felt they had served the student by participating in the project. They also were asked if they felt they had taught their student anything and if so, what, and whether or not their perceptions or stereotypes of young

people had been affected by participating in this project. The elders were observed to be engaged and enlivened by the process and spoke about how much they enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to work with the students.

The social director of the facility was also interviewed during each visit and completed a post activity survey that asked about her observations of the project. These questions were directed towards eliciting this staff member's observations of the project for both the elders and the students who were participating.

### **Student Results**

Excerpts from the student's journal writing about this project demonstrated their perceived benefits of completing this sort of intergenerational project that have been previously outlined by the work previously conducted in this field as noted in the literature review.

One student wrote:

“My first thought when going to do this biography was that it would be stressful and would be a drag to go. Now I love and always look forward to go meet because the lady I am interviewing is funny and has great stories. She talks about her mistakes in life that happened to her and tells my partner and I how to prevent those types of situations. I feel like I have more respect for elders and the feeling I get from G makes me want to have a closer relationship with my grandma and grandpa.”

Her partner wrote:

“I have been pleasantly surprised by how much of her life she remembered and in such detail. G. has been sweet, funny and wise throughout the entire process. She has several stories to share and says that by sharing her stories, she hopes to enlighten A and I about what is right and wrong and hopes that she teaches us not to make the same mistakes she did. G is not ignorant to the modern world-like I assumed about older folks-and she says things in ways that are easy for new generations to understand. So

far this experience in working with old people has been one of my favorites in school.”

Another student wrote:

“...if I were an elder, I would love this project, as many of the sweet elders do. The first time I met with my mentor, I realized that this was a whole new experience that I had never tried before and I realized that she is a very kind person to be working with and I am lucky to be working with her. She has been so sweet and helpful to me in trying to get this project done. Today when we met, she was just as sweet as always. She did teach me something important, she taught me to enjoy life in the moment and this made me realize that 13 years have gone by without me enjoying life in the moment. So from now on, I will enjoy life in the moment, I will think positive, be positive and feel positive towards others. Sometimes, when you become older, it is difficult to hear, see smell or move, but I am so proud of people who live their life well and make it this far. It has been such a pleasure working with V. and I think this experience has changed my life in the best way possible.”

Another student wrote:

“Older people have always been iffy for me, but that’s just because of how my grandmother on my dad’s side and my grandfather on my mom’s side seem to me. But working with other older people makes me see that there are some okay and also some great older people.”

The students were asked specifically if they felt that their elder had acted as a role model to them and if their elder’s stories had affected the way they had been thinking about their future. This addressed whether or not the project had met their developmental needs as defined by Erikson in helping answer the questions *Who am I* and *Who can I be?* All of the students wrote, in one way or another, about how their elder had acted as a role model to them and that by doing so, had affected their thinking about their own choices and plans for the future.

One journal entry excerpt reads:

“Doing this hasn’t really changed my view (on old people), but it has on how I want my life to play out. Hearing about the things she remembers has made me want to do something bigger- more than ever.”

M. wrote:

“...so we can learn from their mistakes and hear what their opinion is about things. It opens another path for me to have some perspective from someone who has done what I want to, or never thought about doing.”

B. wrote:

“She has told us the benefits of being educated and that doing that enabled her to travel around the world. She has really inspired me to travel and get to know the world.”

From another student:

“It is important for all young people to listen to the stories of elders so that they may be shown a new way to view life and possibly avoid mishaps that would otherwise cause them trouble.”

Another student wrote:

“It makes me wonder where I will be in 70 years. How many marriages will I have? How many children will I have? How many jobs?”

A student moving to a new city after our graduation wrote this in her journal:

“Before we started talking, I was skeptical about moving to a new place, but ever since she told me about all the places she’s been and how she always made friends, I’m not scared now.”

Student perceptions about aging and the aged shifted as the project proceeded. Many of the students were surprised by how many details their elders remembered about their life. The students were also encouraged by the quality of life their elders were enjoying during this stage of their life:

“My mentor still seems to live to her fullest and I feel I could do the same.”

“I feel that I shouldn’t be scared because G. was able to live a full life and said her friends and family were there for her.”

“I feel more passionate about doing things and trying my best so that I’ll have a ton of interesting stories to tell my grandchildren.”

“It (the project) has changed them (my attitudes about aging) seeing how young C. still acts and how healthy she has stayed.”

Finally, the students overwhelmingly wrote about the perceived value of listening to their elders and of producing these biographies for them and for their children and future generations and wrote:

“I feel like I am servicing G., her family and myself by completing this biography because it will enrich future generations with G.’s amazing life. And I feel I will help her to relive her best days before her days are over.”

“I feel proud of what I’ve created with Y. because I have told the story of someone’s life.”

“When we see the elders, it benefits both of us because we learn from them and they remember from us.”

“It’s good to make them want to remember, it brings them into more of a state of childhood.”

T. summed it up:

“Communicating with younger generations probably helps elders reflect on their life and could be considered a kind of pre-death therapy. This therapy may also help elders feel like they had fulfilled their purpose in life and die-or live-the remains of their lives happily.”

One student who had been working with an elder whose memory began a rapid decline as the project continued expressed a lot of frustration in her journal entries. She did not feel that she had served her elder or had met her needs on any level. She found that her elder was often confused and seemed depressed and that she told the same stories again and again. She reported that the process had been good for her classmates because they had learned so much from their elders, but that her elder did not seem to care about her or the completion of her project. The

student did say that being with her elder encouraged her to not take time for granted and to try harder to reach her goals.

### **Elder Results**

Several of the elders would speak with me about how much they enjoyed participating in the project because the students were so respectful and interested in the stories they were telling. The post-interview items directly correlated with the research questions and supported the findings of other reminiscence projects reviewed in this paper's literature review. First, the elders were asked how the process of remembering made them feel and about their personal benefits felt as the project continued. Many spoke about how they had remembered and relived events they had forgotten.

Specifically, V. stated that it felt really good to reminisce and that she enjoyed thinking about things she had forgotten. H. felt that the project had forced her to think about her past in details that she would not have thought about otherwise. M. was reminded about the tragic death of her sister when that sister was 16. After one of the interview sessions, she looked for and found a portrait of that sister and put it on her wall to remember. She said she was glad that this project had helped her remember things.

Next the elders were encouraged to think about how their participation in the project had served the student they were working with on their biography. All of the elders had specific lessons or ideas they felt that they had imparted to their student through their biography project. Specifically, they felt that they had served their student(s) by giving them new insights to the

world by sharing what their life was like when they were the same age and that history is important and has many different versions. A few of the elders felt that they had imparted more practical advice to their students:

M. stated:

“I believe that I’ve helped them learn a lot of life lessons; about boys, traveling and just doing what you love or sticking it out for other people.”

J. felt that she had taught her student:

“No matter what a person is like, whether they have something mentally or physically wrong, that I should still be kind and not have their disability affect her views.”

Finally the elders were asked if their perceptions and/or stereotypes about the youth of today had been altered by their experience with the students they were working with. Most of the elders who chose to participate in this project had had very positive experiences with youth in their lives. Many of the elders had worked with young people during their careers and so did not express any negative or stereotypical ideas about young people. Those who had worked with youth all expressed that they were very impressed with their students’ kindness and intelligence. One elder, who had been a teacher in the regular public education system, asked that she be able to visit the classroom sometime so that she could see what was happening, because “whatever it is, it’s working.”

Three of the elders did express that they felt better about the future of the world because of participating in this project.

“These students are more interested than I expected, and more articulate, and interesting.”

“Young people can be nice, fun, open and understanding! There is hope for humanity!”

“It (the project) made me feel better about young people today because I can see how they can be nice. You hear the bad things, but never the good things and this is an example of how good things can happen with young people.”

Kacie Garner, the contact person and social director for the retirement facility we worked with, outlined her observations with a post-project email where she was asked to share her observations of the project. She observed that the elders benefitted from the project in many ways:

“I’ve seen them just light up and full of joy over this opportunity to share their life histories. It has given them a project to look forward to and I can tell they feel very validated from the students as they share. It has also been a great mental stimulation. To recall memories and dates and stories on a regular basis has been a wonderful positive way to exercise their minds!”

When referring to which of the elders’ needs this biography project met, she answered that the elders had experienced meaningful interactions with their interviewers and through this project had formed new friendships where they felt validated. She also reported that some of the elders had been expressing a desire to have their biographies written by somebody else because they could no longer write or see well enough to do it themselves.

She felt that the students had become more and more comfortable with their elders as they gained experience in interviewing their elder as the project progressed and that the students

had listened intently as the elders spoke of their life experiences and that they had taken note of the mistakes and regrets that their elders had shared. She also felt that the students had grown closer to their elder as the project progressed and had formed meaningful relationships with their elders.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusions

*I like that my person's hands are sparkly and everything she touches is too.*

--8<sup>th</sup> grade Student Journal Response

The student responses expressed in this paper are only a small sample of the sorts of ideas and feelings the students experienced through this process. While educators strive to impart objective learning strategies in math and reading in order to support their student's future success in school and adulthood, they also hope to inspire their students to become life-long learners, active and contributing members of society and hope that each of their students will live happy and fulfilled lives that involve loving others, forming families and communities and acting in service for the greater good. In the journal entries and interview responses collected as this project progressed, there is proof of the developmental needs of each generation being met, there is proof of wisdom being imparted from the elders to the students, health and well-being for both the students and the elders was enhanced as well as stereotypes being dispelled—all of which is what the project sought to objectively support. Between the lines were several intangible shifts in attitudes about self, *Who am I*, and the role a student might play in their own destiny *Who can*

*I be?* that were not expected or reported in the previous research summarized in the literature review for this project.

My own observations of what happened as the students and elders worked together completing this biography project can only be described as magical. I was moved to tears during each session while I watched these generations actually create something beyond the biography. In their eyes, mutual respect and fondness between each individual could not only be seen, but felt. Warmth, compassion, mutual understanding and respect for each person's role in the world were captured on film and in the biographies that each student lovingly prepared each week. The students wrote about loving their elder and this experience and I could sense that appreciation breathing in the room as student and elder leaned forward to share themselves for the purpose of serving the other.

Students reported that the project had affected their attitude towards the world and their future positively and that they found the relationship and time spent with their elders as very valuable. The students reported that they found the narratives they were listening to and writing about engaging and interesting and acknowledged that their elder's words had changed their minds about their commonly held beliefs, or stereotypes, of the elderly and the process of aging. Students also reported that their elders had given them advice about the mistakes the elders had made in their own lives and that this advice had changed the way they had thought about what they wanted for their own lives. The students also wrote about a new understanding of how a lifetime passes more quickly than they had thought previously.

Only one of the students participating in this project had a grandparent living nearby. Of the elders participating in the project, only three had family living close enough to visit them regularly. The rest had experienced the loss of the spouses and had adopted the retirement facility as their main community. This project was mutually beneficial to both of the generations involved because it provided time and space for them to serve each other's needs. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade student is transitioning into high school and is constantly seeking to define themselves by answering Erikson's Ego Identity questions: *Who am I* and *Who do I want to be?* The elders seek to process the memories that reveal themselves more and more as they have aged. By participating in this project, the elders were able to act as role models to the students, imparting the wisdom they had gained through their life and in this service, examine their developmental questions *Who was I* and *Was what I did enough?*

The students' journal responses revealed many congruencies with the reported and widely accepted benefits of participating in an intergenerational relationship. Specifically, they wrote about how their attitudes towards their own aging had become more positive because of the time they had spent with their elders. The students felt that the commonly held stereotypes of aging like being forgetful, having failing health and of being hard of hearing were changed for them because of the work they had done during this biography project. The elders that the students interviewed were more healthy, active and alert than the students had expected which gave them hope for their own aging process. The interviews with the elders also revealed that the project had given them hope for humanity and for the future of the world which supported Gallagher & Carey's 2012 findings.

All of the elders felt they had imparted some sort of wisdom to their student through completing their life review with them. This observation was supported through both the informal journal entries the students completed as well as in the final survey responses. Interestingly, when comparing the experiences reported by two students who had interviewed the same person, it became clear that one student may speak about being inspired by their elder's stories to travel the world while their partner learned that history has many different versions that are affected by omissions and misunderstanding. This displaying of wisdom and peace for the elder, a characteristic of gerotranscendent experience, was expressed by the elders in their interview responses and through informal conversations that occurred repeatedly as the project continued. Common themes reported by the students that were passed to them by their interviewee were: preparing for their life through education, being responsible with their money, staying away from drugs and alcohol, making safe choices, having gratitude for their families and what has been provided, and the importance of being prepared and on time.

The participating elders were observed by the staff of their facility to be "enlivened" by the project. Through this project, the students were supporting their elder's and their own healthy aging processes.

This project allowed the students to actively observe the life history of an elder and through that observation examine and reexamine their own environment and their role within it. The student's writings demonstrated more and more contemplation and feelings of confidence in their futures because of the stories their elders had shared with them. This quality of contemplation about their futures was a new element in their attitudes and journal writing. Their

reflections in literature while reading To Kill a Mockingbird became more contemplative as well and discussions about themes that were previously too abstract became passionate and enlivened as the book and the biography project were completed over the same six weeks. The students became more accepting of the human condition of imperfection and wrote about being more patient and accepting of others despite their initial judgements based on first impressions alone. Where total unacceptance of a person who had displayed moral corruptness once ruled the students' thinking, there was a softening and understanding of how the process of living requires mistakes and suffering. The students expressed understanding that from those mistakes and those episodes of suffering arise the possibility for new understanding, relationships and love that had not been possible before.

Following the first few weeks of this biography project, several of the students began to speak about high school with renewed interest and purpose and began to express an inspiration to see the world more positively, to take their life more seriously and to travel in order to understand the world more clearly. All of the students felt that this project benefitted both them and their elders and a few said that the process was not only important to them, but should be something that all middle school students have the opportunity to participate in.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

There are many powerful reasons to begin an intergenerational project focusing on reminiscence. The pace of today's world has separated the once prominent role of grandparents and other intergenerational relationships within a child's life and removed the healthy process of

reminiscing through the telling of intergenerational narratives from our culture. The effects of these shifts are not defined nor widely understood.

The students and the elder participants of this project were actively age segregated by virtue of the current organization of society that is typical for Western civilization. The children are engaged in compulsory education that is very focused on each student's ability to contribute to the economic viability of our culture as measured by their progress on standardized tests. The elders have either elected or been placed in a retirement community that does not allow the presence of much younger generations. This separation of these two groups who are developmentally essential to the other is easily remedied by providing this sort of intergenerational program where Allport's Contact Hypothesis elements of longevity, establishment of equal status, action towards common goals and institutional support are understood and constructed by the teacher and the staff of any willing retirement facility before beginning the project.

### **Benefits of Intergenerational Relationships**

The benefits of intergenerational relationships as outlined by The University of Florida in 2014 were expressed in one way or another by both the elders and the students (Spence, L. & Radunovich, H.L. (2007, 2012). Journal entries and interview responses indicated that the project:

- Provided opportunities for both to learn new skills
- Gave the child and the elder a sense of purpose

- Helped children understand and accept their own aging
- Invigorated and energized the older adults
- Helped reduce feelings of isolation for the elderly

### **Affecting Positive Shifts in Stereotypes and Attitudes about Aging and Facilitating Life Transitions**

While the elders didn't always want the more painful and difficult memories to be included in their biographies, they were willing to share these experiences with their students for the purpose of helping their adolescent understand how their choices had affected their lives so that their student might be spared the difficulty of overcoming those events in their future. The willingness to speak about their lives openly allowed the students to review a life that was well-lived. Through this process, the students wrote about newly formed feelings about their own aging and about their desire to use their time wisely. They also found that the relationships that they had formed with their elders were meaningful to them and to their elder and expressed that their conceptions around aging and the aged had become more realistic and positive (Gallagher, 2012).

The interview with the elders found that the elders felt that they had imparted wisdom to their students through this process. In this way, the elders may have felt that their life had significance and could face their death fearlessly (Lin, Dai & Hwang, 2008). Additionally, the staff reported that the intergenerational reminiscing project had increased the vitality of the

residents who were participating (Stinson & Kirk, 2006 as cited in Gallagher and Carey 2012; Tornstam, 2015).

Many of the students wrote about how this project had affected their thinking about their transition from childhood to adulthood. This transition can often be a trying and difficult time for an adolescent looking into their immediate future where they will be separated from the familiar routines of family and school to embark on a new path that will prepare them further for life as an independent adult. The students who participated in this project expressed hope and enthusiasm for the opportunities they may encounter as they begin their journey into high school and beyond after listening to and producing the biographies of their elders. Their perspective about high school as a potentially insurmountable challenge shifted to a more realistic understanding of high school and college being a beginning and a potential opportunity to seek new interests and adventures.

Each student understood that their elder, and the elders that had worked with their classmates all experienced love, marriage, birth, death and family in different, but also in similar and predictable ways. The manual created for use during the project outlined the few themes that defined the life transitions for virtually all of the elders at one time or another over their lifetime. The important virtue of fidelity and trust in the process of living was born-replacing the fear and anticipation that had been consuming the students as their 8<sup>th</sup> grade year began to close and their transition to high school approached.

### **Enhancing Health and Well-Being**

Each student found that the elder they were working with was friendly and willing to tell their story in a clear and honest way. Because time and space are not allowed for students to listen to the intergenerational stories of elders in their life, children are not exposed to people who are willing or able to reminisce and through that process, help them form their own identity. Several student journal entries explained that the students had been able to integrate the stories of their elders in a way that added to their own concept of self and how their own biography may form (Habernas & Paha, 2001 as cited in Fivush, 2011 et. al). This opportunity to examine and “reframe events” will support the adolescent’s need to achieve emotional regulation (Fivush, R. 2011 et. al) that will help them navigate their own emotionally intense or otherwise confusing experiences.

The following positive results were expressed in the journals, surveys and interviews of the participants:

- Increased self-esteem and a greater sense of personal power and significance
- Greater awareness of past adaptive strategies and ways in which these might be applied to current problems and conditions
- Resolution of past resentments, pain and negative feelings and a sense of reconciliation
- Renewed interest in past activities and hobbies
- An increased sense of meaning in life
- Appreciation for the developmental work one faces at each stage of life

- A stronger more positive view of the future

(Birren, J.E. & Cochran, K.N. 2001, p 15-16)

## **Recommendations**

Both the students and elders found that the interview manual was well-organized and effective in scaffolding the recording of the biographies. The manual is important to this project because it allows the students and elders to work from a specifically organized program created for the purpose of completing a common goal. While just visiting the facility once a month was a positive experience for both the students and the elders, the organized and planned conversations focused on the reminiscing of the elders offered the students access to their elder's life history, good and bad. It was through this process that the intergenerational relationship began to take form and gain importance for both the elders and the students.

Of chief concern in beginning the life review process between generations is establishing the definition of well-elder with the facility a class is working with. It is especially important for the student, if one hopes to elicit a positive experience with elders and aging and assist the student in evaluating their own identity and their role within the world, that he or she is paired with an elder who is able to participate fully in a life-review process. It is especially important that the elder not be expressing any symptoms of dementia and if they are, but are still wanting to complete their biography, that a member of their family be available during the interview sessions as well as during the preparation of the biography so that any questions for expansion of details might be answered. Well-elders who are hard of hearing, have trouble seeing or are

experiencing any other physical needs will need to be supported with whatever accommodations are required in order to facilitate a positive experience for both the student and the elder.

It is also important for the student and supervising teacher to be made aware of any issues an elder may be dealing with so that they will be prepared to accommodate those needs. For instance, J. was very lucid and willing to participate in this process because she has wanted her biography written for a long time, and because her husband was preparing his biography. J. has developed a tremor that makes it impossible for her to write or word process independently. The tremor was significant and J. and the student she was paired with handled it well with candor and understanding. It would have been more ideal if the student and I had been made aware of the tremor so that S. would have been more prepared and understood the condition before meeting J.

The timing of the interview sessions is important. Initially we scheduled six two-hour sessions which were too long for many of the residents many of whom were asked to be excused after about an hour. Scheduling the first fifteen minutes for a review of the biography and then about an hour for the session itself over ten weeks would be a more productive use of time for both the elder and student participants.

## **Conclusion**

As the population of the elderly continues to increase and the pace and process of technology further age-segregate our culture, the psychologically healthy process of reminiscence through intergenerational relationships is removed. With this removal, a previously common opportunity for adolescents to listen and integrate the important life lessons

of the elders in their environment is also lost. By providing adolescents and elders access to each other through a structured and carefully planned biography project, educators are able to provide a unique opportunity for their students to gain an understanding of the several life transitions that are universal in the human experience while simultaneously enabling the elders in a community to share their wisdom and life lessons in order to further serve human kind.

The results of this project support the research that describes the benefits of the process of elder reminiscence and participating in intergenerational relationships. Additionally, students who participated in this project expressed confidence and trust in their own futures as a result of listening to and recording their elder's life story.

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## **Appendix A**

### Teacher Manual

#### First Steps

##### **Build Trust**

In order to establish trust and relationships with the elders and the staff at the facility you are working with, it is important to visit the facility several times before bringing the biography project. We went once a month for half of the year and shared the music and poetry we had been working on for that month. Each month, the students were encouraged to visit with an elder for about twenty minutes and were given tasks that encouraged dialogue between the students and their elders. Icebreaker activities were planned in advanced with the help of the activity director of the facility and often included general questions about an upcoming holiday or a request to bring artifacts from the elders' lives that they wanted to talk about. The class also presented our play, "Alice in Wonderland" to the residents on site which was enjoyed by the residents we had been meeting with as well as others who were also present for the presentation.

##### **Elicit the Help of the Facility's Staff**

In order for the biography project to be mutually beneficial, it is important to recruit relatively well residents who are able to contribute to the biography process with clarity. When the students encounter an elder who has trouble remembering the stories they are asking about, the relationship becomes stilted and perhaps difficult for the adolescent. It is imperative that the staff of the facility you are working with assist in pairing adolescents with elders who will likely benefit from and enjoy participating in this biography process. The staff will be essential in helping determine:

- *Whether the narrator's language skills are sufficient to be understood*
- *The narrator's hearing is sufficient to hear the interviewer's questions*
- *The narrator can tolerate being interviewed for more than a few minutes at a time.*
- *Whether or not the narrator has suffered a recent death or other significant loss.*

Prepare a flyer for the use of the facility's staff in helping attract residents who may be interested in participating in the biography process.

With the help of the staff, determine an onsite location for the interviews to take place. The location must be comfortable for the elders and be free from too many

noises or other distractions. It is also good if the same location is able to be reserved for the duration of each interview session. The flyer should include the purpose of the project, the time and location that the students and residents are meeting as well as the contact information for the social director for the facility should there be any questions or requests for rescheduling a session.

Request pictures or artifacts that may be scanned or photographed at that session will support the elders and their student-biographers in establishing the purpose for their next conversation. Instruct your students to ask with their elders for these items at the end of each session for use during the next session. Choose themes for each session that will help the elders gain new perspectives on the events of their lives.

### **Practice Listening and Communication Skills**

In order to increase the efficiency of the onsite interview, use the themes and questions from the manual as a framework for practicing the interview process with each other in the classroom. Each pair works with the same classmate completing the biography process while learning and practicing empathetic listening, active note taking, paraphrasing and summarizing. A secondary effect of the practice interview is an increase in each student's sense of belonging within

the class. As Erikson's work suggests, adolescents are experiencing a shift of their self-perceptions for the purpose of determining whether or not they belong within their group. The practice interviews grow beyond their initial purpose of preparing the students for their elder interviews. Within that process, each student's own experience of being intimately seen and appreciated by their peer group supports their ability to be fully present and active with their elder during their onsite interviews.

There are several opportunities to role play different interview behaviors that would or would not support a trusting and mutually beneficial outcome during the interview process:

1. Practicing non-judgmental and open body languages or alternately displaying judgmental and closed and uninterested body language. This would include addressing generationally appropriate gestures that might be misinterpreted because of normal intergenerational cultural incongruities.
2. Displaying respectful interest and paraphrasing or alternately disrespectful interest and lack of paraphrasing within a conversation.

3. Good timing within a conversation or alternately interruptive or less productive timing such as changing subjects too quickly.

4. Using correct grammar and language or alternately using slang terms.

Providing improvisational situations where examples addressing suggestions above are listed on slips of paper for students to act out in front of the class is an effective and fun way for students to learn and practice good etiquette both within this projects parameters and in their everyday life.

### **Prepare for Emotions and the Need for Flexibility**

Let your students know that their elder may experience an emotional response during their interviews. Encourage them to offer tissue and any other gesture they feel might help their elder feel safe and understood. Encourage the students to use their own judgment about whether or not to continue within a line of questions or theme if the topic becomes too difficult for the narrator or if there is a loss or absence within a theme that may depress or even offend their narrator. Offering flexibility in the script to both the elder and the student will elicit genuine responses and will support the purpose of the project more positively. Encourage the students to preface each theme with a phrase like “Would you like

to talk about...?” The elder must feel that their response to this question is heard and understood and that they will not be pressed further around that theme.

### **Be Organized-Set Goals**

The first session’s topic should include the completion of a family tree including at least three generations. Additionally, a general time line or a graph like the one below briefly outlining the general life transitions for the elder could be completed. The tree and the graph are for use as tools for the student during the interview process. Understanding the general theme of an elder’s life with a generalized survey is a good way to navigate personal questions whose response might generate a great sense of loss or anger. For instance, if a person wasn’t able to bear children, this sensitive information would be gleaned from the generic form that all participants had completed and could provide a framework for an elder’s sense of safety and trust during the remaining interview sessions.

*On the graph, place a dot at your age for each major event in your life.*

*Judge how negative or positive you feel about the event on a scale of 0-100.*

Below are some general life transition times. The field titles for each graph would be determined by the elder and their interviewer.

1. Health Issue	5. Career or Lifework	9. New Career
2. Moving	6. Marriage	10. Life Accomplishment
3. Starting School	7. Family	
4. Completing School	8. Retirement	

Several themes that may or may not meet the needs of your students and their elders have been gathered and are given in the student handbook. The vastness of the topics and questions are suggestions to help each partner group work through particular life themes. (See Appendix D)

Any of these questions might tap a rich story or stories that will bring the elder to life and that may or may not fall under the theme for that session. Because the interview may take a direction of its own, make sure your students are aware of the themes you've prepared for the entire project. The students will be able to organize the stories elicited regardless of the current session's theme while they craft the final biography in class. This allows the elder to reminisce fluidly and more beneficially.

**Appendix B:**

The Life Themes Student Manual

**(I) Early Childhood**

1. What is your first memory?

*What are you feeling? Where were you? Describe the scene as best you can.*

2. Who were your role models and why?

3. What is your given name? What does it mean? Were you named after anyone? Who?

3. Did you look up to any celebrities? Who were they and why did you look up to them?

**Your Hometown**

1. Where and when were you born?

2. Are there any stories about your birth that you remember?

3. Were there any special events held in the town that were important to you?

4. What was your address? Did you move a lot or stay in the same home?

5. How did you feel about moving?

6. Describe your yard?
7. Did you have any neighbors you liked to spend time? Do you have any stories about them you'd like to share?
8. Describe your house.
9. Describe your bedroom.
10. What were the surroundings of your home? Was it rural? Were there any mountains or rivers or other landmarks?
11. Did you have a favorite piece of furniture? Why did you like it? Do you still have it?
12. When did you learn to ride a bike? What do you remember about this process?

### Your Health

1. Were you well or sickly as a child? How did this affect you?
2. Were you ever seriously ill or suffer any injuries as a child? What were they?
3. How did these affect the way you have lived your life?

### Family

1. Which family members were important in shaping the direction your life took?
2. Which family members do you feel most close to? Distant from?
3. Did your family have a philosophy for living life? What kinds of rules did you have to follow?
4. Did you have any chores? What were they?
5. How were you disciplined if you were punished? How do you feel about that now?

#### Your Mother

1. What was your mother's name?
2. What was her birthday?
3. Where did she come from?
4. What were her hobbies?
5. What was your mother's career or life work?
6. Was she a good cook? Do you have a favorite meal or memory about her cooking?
7. What songs did your mother sing to you as a child?
8. What was her personality like?

9. What did your mother teach you to do?
10. Do you remember any stories she told you about her childhood?
11. How do you remember her physical appearance when you were a child?
12. Do you have any fond memories about your mother you'd like to share?

#### Your Father

1. What was your father's name?
2. What was his birthday?
3. Where did he come from?
4. What were his hobbies?
5. What was your father's career or life work?
6. Was he a good cook? Do you have a favorite meal or memory about his cooking?
7. What songs did your father sing to you as a child?
8. What was his personality like?
9. What did your father teach you to do?
10. Do you remember any stories he told you about his childhood?

11. How do you remember her physical appearance when you were a child?
12. Do you have any fond memories about your father you'd like to about your dad you'd like to share?

### Their Relationship

1. How would you describe their relationship?
2. How did they spend time together?

### Grandparents

1. Describe your grandmothers and grandfathers.
2. What were their names?
3. Where were they from?
4. Do you remember their birthdays?
5. What physical traits do you remember?
6. What were their personalities like?
7. What were their careers or life work?
8. What did they teach you how to do?
9. Do you have any fond memories of them you'd like to share?
10. Do you have any stories about your family they told you?

## Siblings

1. Did you have brothers and sisters?
2. What are their names?
3. What are their birthdays? What is your birth order?
4. What did you have to share with your siblings?
5. Where were they born?
6. What was their physical appearance as a child?
- 3.What were their personality traits?
- 4.Did you get along?
- 5.What kinds of things did you do together?
- 6.What is a favorite memory with your siblings?
- 6.Do you have other siblings you would like to discuss? (If yes, then continue on another piece of paper and follow the general questions above.)
- 7.Is there anything you would change between you and your family if you could?
- 8.Would you like to talk about that?

## Only Child?

1. What was it like being the only child?

2. Did you like being the only child or did you want to have siblings? Why or why not?

## Holidays

1. What were your holiday traditions in the winter?
2. If you celebrated Christmas what were the traditions?

Did you have stockings?

Did you go to a church service? What was it called?

When did you open gifts?

Were there special meals or dishes?

What relatives would celebrate with you?

Did your family have any favorite carols?

3. Do you have any Easter memories or family traditions?
4. What was Thanksgiving like for your family?

Were there any special meals or dishes?

Were there any special traditions?

5. Did you dress up for Halloween?

Do you have a favorite costume?

Did you trick-or-treat?

6. How did your family celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?
7. How did your family celebrate birthdays?
8. Were there any birthdays that were especially important or memorable to you? What were they?

### Childhood Myths

1. Did the tooth fairy come to your house? What did she exchange for your tooth?
2. Did you believe in Santa Claus
3. Did you believe in the Easter Bunny
4. How old were you when you found out these were myths?
5. Do you have any memories about how you found out? How did you feel about it?

### Pets

1. Did you have any favorite pets when you were a child?
2. How did you get the pet?
3. Who took care of the pet?

4. Do you have any stories about your pets you would like to share?
5. Did you teach them any tricks?
6. What was the best thing about having a pet?
7. Do you have any other pets you'd like to talk about?
8. Did your children have any pets?
9. How did their death impact you or your family?

### Hobbies

1. What did you like to do?
2. Did your family require that you take lessons in anything that later became a hobby for you?
2. As an adult, what do you like to do?
3. What is most important for you to do every day? Why?

### **(II) School Years**

- What were you like?
- Were you the social butterfly or did you stick to a few friends?
- Were you a good student? Why or why not?

### Elementary School

1. Where did you go to elementary school? What was it called?

2. Did you have a best friend? If yes, do you have any special memories about that friend?
3. Who were your favorite teachers and why? Do you have any memories you'd like to include?
4. What were your favorite subjects? Why?
5. Were you ever in trouble? Is there a memory you'd like to include?

### Junior High School

1. Where did you go to junior high school? What was it called?
2. Who were your best friends?
3. Did you belong to any clubs or participate in any sports?
4. What was the best thing that happened during junior high school?
5. What was the worst thing that happened during junior high school?
6. Who were your best friends? Do you have any memories you'd like to include?

### High School

1. Where did you go to high school? What was it called?
2. What was the mascot of your high school?
3. What were your favorite subjects?

4. Did you have any favorite teachers? What did you like about them?
5. What was popular when you were in high school? Did you have a favorite song/singer?
6. What kinds of clothes did you wear?
7. Who were your friends? Are you still in touch with them?
8. What was your first after-school job?
  - a. How much did you get paid?
  - b. What were your responsibilities?
  - c. Did you like it?
9. Did you belong to any clubs or sports? Do you have any special memories you'd like to include?
10. Is there anything you would change about your high school or other school experiences?

### College Years

1. How old were you when you left your parents' home?
2. Why did you leave?
3. How did you feel during this time?

4. Did you go to college?
5. Where did you go to college?
6. How old were you?
7. How did you choose that college?
8. How much did it cost?
9. What was the mascot of your college?
10. Did you live in the dormitories? Do you have any memories of this time in the dorms you'd like to share?
11. What did you study? How did you choose your major?
12. Did you finish college? When?
13. What is your degree in?
14. Did you use your degree in your career or life work?
15. Who were your friends?
16. What did you do together?
17. Did you stay in touch with them?
18. Did you belong to any groups or clubs or did you participate in any sports?
19. Did you develop any new interests while you were in college?

20. Is there anything you might change about this time in your life? Why or why not?

### Driving

1. When did you learn to drive?
2. How old were you?
3. Who taught you?
4. What kind of car did you learn to drive?
5. Do you have any special memories of this time you'd like to share?

### Spiritual Life

1. Do you remember an early spiritual experience that gave you a feeling of belonging in the universe? What was it like?
2. Who has had a great influence on your spiritual life? Could you talk about this?
3. Did or do you belong to any organized church or spiritual organization? What role has that played in your life?
4. Are there any books that have affected you spiritually? What are they and what role have they played in your life?

5. Do you have any deep spiritual experiences that have shaped the way you've lived your life?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your spirituality?

### **(III) Dating and Relationships**

1. Who was your first boyfriend or girlfriend?
2. How old were you?
3. Where did you meet?
4. Did your parents approve?
5. What kinds of things did you like to do together?
6. Was there a special song that you enjoyed together?
7. Do any other relationships come to mind?
8. Do you want to include this information in your biography?

### **Marriage**

1. Did you get married?
1. Who did you marry?
2. How did you meet them?

3. Where were you?
4. What kinds of things did you like to do together?
5. Did your parents approve?
6. What are some memories of your courtship?
7. How long did you date before you knew you were going to be married?
8. Please describe the proposal:
9. What kind of wedding did you have?
10. Where was it?
11. Who made the arrangements?
12. Were there any arguments about the plans?
13. Were there any special guests?
14. Who were your witnesses?

### Your Honeymoon

1. What do you remember about the honeymoon?
2. Where did you go?
3. How did you choose that place?
4. Did you ever return to that place?

*It will be important to remember that many people marry and remarry for various reasons. If your narrator has another spouse they would like to share memories, ask the same questions about married life for each of the relationships they would like to share.*

### Married Life

1. How long have you been or were you married?
2. Are there any memories about your spouse you'd like to share?
3. What is most important in a successful marriage?

### Divorce

1. Did you experience divorce either personally or peripherally in your life?
2. What emotions did you experience?
3. Do you feel that the divorce was a good decision in the long run or not?

Why or why not?

### Your Children

1. Did you have any children?
2. What are their birth days?
3. Do you have any memories of their birth or infancy you'd like to include or talk about?

4. How old were you when they were born?
5. How did you feel as you were waiting for your children to be born?
6. What did you feel when your first child was born? How did your spouse feel?
7. Where were your children born?
8. Do you remember the first few days after the baby (ies) were born?
9. What were the best parts of being a parent?
10. What were the hardest parts of being a parent?
11. As your children were growing up, what are some of your warmest memories?
12. When have you felt most proud of your children?  
*Refer back to the suggestions for the theme of Family under Childhood and ask if any of the traditions, discipline, chores or aspects of their family life as a child were the same for their own family. Were there any new traditions they'd like to share?*
13. Is there anything that you would change about this time of your life?
14. What advice would you give to new parents today?

**(IV) Inventions**

1. What inventions do you most remember over the course of your lifetime?
2. Were you impressed?
3. What did the invention(s) replace?
4. Do you think that these inventions have been beneficial or detrimental?  
Why?
5. How old were you when you used the invention(s) you remember?
6. What happened?
7. When did you first use a telephone?
8. When did you first fly?
9. Do you remember your parents getting a new invention or machine? Do you have any memories about this event or events?
10. Do you have any early memories about the television and radio? Did you remember hearing or watching any special or important events on these?

**(V) Historical Events**

1. What are some specific historical moments or people that left impressions on you?
2. Did you see any of these events personally?

3. How did you feel?
4. What did you see?
5. What do you think it meant to our country?
6. Have you seen anything like this since?
7. Where were you during World War II
8. Did you or any friends or family fight in the war? Where did they serve?
9. What changes took place in your life or in your family as a result of this war?
10. What were you doing during the war?
11. What were your feelings at the time?
12. Do you remember the first time man set foot on the moon?
13. What were you feeling? What do you remember about this time?
14. Where were you during the Korean War?
15. Did you or anyone you know fight in the war?
16. How did this change your life or your family's life?
17. How did this war affect the country?
18. Ask the same questions about Vietnam.

19. Were you alive during the Great Depression? What do you remember about it?

**(VI) Career or Life Work**

1. How did you discover your life work?
2. Who influenced your decision to work in this field the most?
3. What role did being a man or woman have to do with the work that you chose?
4. What did you like most about your job? What did you like least?
5. How much were you paid? Did you advance into leadership positions?
6. What was your boss like?
7. How did you get along with co-workers?
8. What was your favorite part about your job?
9. Are you satisfied with the work that you did? Is there anything you would change?
10. What personal strengths were assets to your ability to do your job? Did you have any shortcomings you had to overcome?
11. If you had to do it again, would you choose the same life work or would you choose something different? If yes, what would you do differently?

12. What advice would you give to a young person setting out to choose their life's work?

13. When did you retire from your career or life work?

14. How did you feel about retiring?

15. What did you do when you retired? Did you begin any new hobbies or revisit hobbies from your earlier life?

16. Did you volunteer or serve your community in any new ways?

17. Did you return to the job force and if so what did you do and for how long?

### **(VIII) Death**

1. What were your feelings about death when you were a child?

2. How was death handled by your family during your childhood?

3. What are your memories about the memorial services or funerals you attended?

4. Did any wartime deaths affect you?

5. Have you experienced any accidents or illnesses that affected the way you felt about life and death?

6. What was the most significant death you experienced?

7. Did the death of a well-known person affect you? How?

### **(IX) Your Health as an Adult**

1. What have you done in your life to affect the wellness of your body?
2. How have you negatively affected your health?
3. Were there any illnesses in your life that have affected the way you have lived?
4. What role did exercise play in your life?
5. How does your body react to stress?
6. Is there anything else about your health or the health of a loved one you'd like to talk about?

### **Ideals about Life**

Is there a legacy you hope to leave? What would make a good symbol for your life?

**Appendix C**  
**Life Graph**

10									
9									
8									
7									
6									
5									
4									
3									
2									
1									

## Life Event and Age

Write your elder's important life events and their age at that time and record them on the life graph, ranking their importance on a scale of 1-10. Use the themes from your manual to help guide your interview. Use this graph to direct your interview and the creation of your elder's biography.

In each square write the life event and the age of your elder. When you've filled the table, work with your elder to rate the events in order of the importance. Focus your interview time on these events.


**Appendix D**

**Leave your legacy for Family Members**

**Add Your Story to History**

**Be a Role Model**

**Have Your Biography Written**

**Every Tuesday from 10:00-12:00**

**March 3-April 21**

**Upstairs from the Bistro**

**8<sup>th</sup> grade students from Madrone Trail will work weekly with you to  
create your biography to be presented Friday May, 29.**

**Let Kacie know that you are interested.**

**Appendix E**  
**Post Student Survey**

Has your mentor acted as a role model? How?

Has this experience changed your view of growing older? How?

Has this experience taught you something new about life or given you a new perspective about your future that you hadn't had before? Please explain.

Did you learn anything new from your elder? Please tell me more.

How do you feel about completing the biography for your elder. Please explain.

How do you think this project might affect your relationship with the elders in your family?

How do you think this project will affect your relationships with people from other generations?

How has this project benefited you or your classmates?

How do you think your life has been affected by this project?

How do you think this project benefitted the elder you worked with?

What elements of the project helped you communicate with your elder effectively?

What elements of the project helped you complete the biography?

What part of this project worked well?

What would have helped you complete this project more effectively?

**Appendix F**

**Staff Post Interview**

What have you observed about your residents who participated in this program?

What have you observed about students participating in the program?

What resident needs were met by participating in this life review process?

How could this project be improved?

Please summarize any other of your observations of this project.

## Appendix G

### Release and Permission to Participate

#### Facilitating Intergenerational Relations and Well-Being Through Biography

- Elders will be asked to share their life story. Students will conduct interviews, take notes and write a biography for one elder and present it to them as an act of service.
  - Elders agree to meet their 8<sup>th</sup> grade biographer once a week for six weeks from 10:30-12:30.
- 
- Students will be bussed to Pioneer Village in Jacksonville, OR to meet with their elder once a week for six weeks.
  - Students will use an interview script and take notes in order to record the details that their elder is sharing with them. They will prepare a draft each week to be reviewed and possibly edited by their elder.
  - Students will prepare their elder's biography to be presented to their elder on May 29. They will have class time to do this.

*I am facilitating this project as part of my studies with Rudolf Steiner College for my Waldorf Teacher's Certificate and Master's Degree. During this project, the students will be listening to the life story of an elder volunteer and then preparing their biography for them and for their families. The biographies will include pictures of the elder and their families should the elder choose to include these photographs in their biography.*

*The biographies your student produces may be used as examples during my presentation to teachers and professors this summer, 2015.*

*Additionally, photographs of the students and elders will be taken for the purpose of sharing the biography project with teachers and faculty at Rudolf Steiner College and inspiring the implementation of this important work between generations.*

Parent Release:

\_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to participate in this project as it is presented here.

\_\_\_\_\_’s work may be shared during the presentation and as a sample of the project’s work.

\_\_\_\_\_’s photograph may be used during the presentation of this project at Rudolf Steiner College, summer 2015.

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**Parent/Guardian Signature**

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**Date**

Appendix H

**Anthroposophical Indications**

In Karmic Relationships: Esoteric Studies Volume VII, Lecture Two, Steiner

presents the somewhat linear explanation of the human soul progression between death and life. Immediately after death, the deeds that could “not be tolerated” by further spiritual worlds or by the being itself are excised from the human in the Moon sphere. The Moon sphere also reigns during the first seven years of earthly life with the presence of the Archangeli. Next, the being enters the Mercury sphere which offers healing of the physical infirmities of that the body encountered on earth. This sphere is marked by health and vitality and reigns during the seventh to fourteenth year period of the young human life.

From Mercury, the being passes to the Venus sphere where love predominates. This period of life spans from puberty to age twenty-one. The being moves into the Sun sphere where they will spend the largest amount of time being prepared in the presence of the Exousiai, the Dynamis and the Kyriotetes along with human souls they have been connected with karmically. This is a period of extraordinary spiritual accomplishment where the physical organization for the next earthly body is prepared primarily and then the moral qualities that will be required for the next earthly existences. This is a spiritual existence of pure love that coincides with the adult years from twenty-one to forty-two, a longer period of life marked by introspection, and self-knowledge. From the Sun sphere the being moves into Mars, Jupiter and Saturn spheres where specific gifts and talents are forged. If a person’s life on Earth remains intact from age forty-two and on, they are able to look into these years for the secrets of these spheres. The years

following age fifty-six afford the human being's ability to "speak out of their own inner knowledge" by reflecting upon the entirety of their life's experiences. (Occult Science...page number unknown-will add later)

The process of surveying our life experiences may be presented as if removing layers of a veil. Like a veil, the image beneath the fabric is blurred by its layers but as they are lifted the image in its entirety is beheld. Our life experiences are like a tableau that we may believe has been set by our actions as we've passed through each of our life periods. If a person is able to reflect upon the tableau as a complete image and then penetrate past the image to the intention behind the event that was established before they were born, the insights and purpose may enhance or take over the tableau altogether. This is to know oneself and the Universe, according to Steiner.

Steiner goes on to warn against the insincere, and thus insignificant, production of a -person's biography. Instead, the process of reminiscing should be a careful and deliberate rendering of each of the aspects of the spheres in a human being's life. The process of reviewing a life should be done in a way that reveals the authorship behind each and every life so that each person's purpose and the love and that it was crafted with are realized and celebrated. The preparation of the biography by the adolescent has the capacity of a great act of service. It should be completed with the goal of helping each elder gaze with wonder and awe upon the vista of their life, their Self and their place within the script of the Universe.