



### **Intergenerational Learning**

By Jan Wilton, Preschool, Homeschool, and Public School Representative

Here is an idea for you to consider using in your lesson plans for the next school year.

We are reminded in the Word of God of the benefits of the elderly interacting and teaching children and mentoring younger adults. Senior adults have much knowledge and experience to share with children and teachers in our classrooms.

### **Intergenerational Learning**

What could an intergenerational learning experience look like? What would an intergenerational classroom involve? How old is too old? These and many other questions may come to mind as a teacher considers involving a variety of ages in the classroom. Unfortunately, we have become a society that sits the elderly on the sidelines and discounts their value to the community.

1 Timothy 5:1-2 (ESV) says: “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

When you utilize all ages in the classroom, everyone—old and young—begins to realize his or her strengths while learning from and appreciating each other. Just how can this be accomplished?

When is a person too old and too fragile? How old is too old? At what point is a senior adult not able to be as active as earlier days? Even that very senior adult can listen to children practice reading, assist a child with a project, or be a part of the classroom by just being present for a caring conversation.

In the classroom, plan for one day a week or one day a month when the “Grandmas and Grandpas” come. During these days, include such activities as a lunch, review games, a field trip, a historical re-enactment day, etc. Students could conduct an interview and learn about each of their grandparents’ life as a child. Activities might include art and crafts or interactive discussions about science, social studies, or history. For example, when children hear from someone who actually lived during the Great Depression, that period of history comes to life. Children can feel compassion for those who had so little clothing, food, and necessities. Events such as the Cold War or the Space Race with Russia could be other topics.

### **Adopt a Grandparent**

Consider an “adopt-a-grandparent” project with a nearby elder care center. Many in these centers do not have visitors. Children bring life into the center, and they can make a difference in the life of someone who needs hope. As a sixth-grade teacher, I began such a program. It was very rewarding to see my students interact with their adopted grandparent. During visits, encourage each student to take something to share: a class work, an art project, a picture, or even a grade report.

Yes, it does come with a risk of loss. One of my students had an adopted grandma who passed away. It was a time to grieve and remember the joy and friendship with the “grandma.” One of the students chose a “grandpa” who refused to talk to anyone. The nurses said he had never spoken to any of them. During one visit, the “grandpa” began to participate in the conversation! The student had prayed for his “grandpa” to talk, and God answered his prayer. Needless to say, my students were changed forever. They grew in faith, compassion, and love for others.

As with any program, it takes time to develop, train, and implement. How and when you include intergenerational interaction into your classroom is up to you. It can be as simple or complex as you want. I personally have found that the benefits outweigh the time and effort spent in planning.

### **Pandemic Considerations**

Because of the pandemic, special considerations may need to be taken. If necessary, these interactions may need to take place through Zoom meetings or other such methods. Where it can be done safely, this activity can be rewarding to everyone involved.

Children need friends of all ages. The classroom can provide a safe place for children and older adults to interact as they learn and grow together.

**Jan Wilton** has taught in preschool, Christian-school, and public school settings. She is a coach for her daughter, who is homeschooling her son. Currently, she is serving as an instructional reading tutor for grades 4-6 in a charter school. You may contact Jan at [revjan2008@gmail.com](mailto:revjan2008@gmail.com).