OER: The Role of Intergenerational Learning in Adult Education

Video transcript

Q1. There is a lot of media misrepresentation about older people and their place in society. Such ageism attitudes can be difficult to change. How can adult education providers begin to combat these negative attitudes?

A good place to start would be to embed generational learning and training as part of your work ensuring staff have a good, sound knowledge around what intergenerational learning is. Providing initial specialised training and ongoing professional development will give individuals the opportunity to create specific teaching strategies as well as subject matter, which will not only assist. assist in breaking down ageist barriers and challenge myths about older people and care homes. There are many advantages to intergenerational work which engages students, such as improving communication skills, reducing myths, stereotypes and ageism and also increasing opportunities to consider different careers. For example, young people are entering the workplace later and a generally healthier older population is blurring the barrier between retirement and working life. We need to appreciate the change of needs around communities and the fulfilling of people's lives as well as the blurring between age and ability.

Q2. Relationship building seems to be a key area in planning intergenerational activities. What steps do you consider as key to begin relationship building?

Plan your introduction carefully to encourage those connections between different generations at the beginning of an activity, workshop or project; it is key to building trusting and long-lasting relationships. There is training available on how to do this, showing how to prepare each generation for their first meeting together. The planning stage is so important, and it go if it goes wrong at the early stages it can be detrimental for your course or project. The groups often need to be prepared to meet each other and it is encouraged that work is done separately with each generation before they meet the other. That way you can iron out any challenges or barriers. If the generations come together at the same time for a course, then you need to create ways of breaking the ice gently and building trust between the different age groups.

Q3. During the current Covid-19 pandemic, many of the activities and courses in Adult Education moved online to varying degrees in different countries. In you experience how did the Intergenerational Learning activities move online, and what were the challenges involved?

At the start of the pandemic many groups and organisations closed their doors to all type of face-to-face interaction. However, as time passed organisations were able to develop more online resource and training opportunities. Generations Working Together, the National Centre for intergenerational work in Scotland, spoke with colleagues from across the globe and were able to start planning and facilitating different levels of online training and integrational practice and learning. Short courses were adapted for individual volunteering during the pandemic, introducing them to intergenerational work, and what it was and how people benefited. Other courses have been developed including a one-day course for trainers and practitioners and an accredited seven-week diploma. It is important to note that there are many collaborations taking place at this time
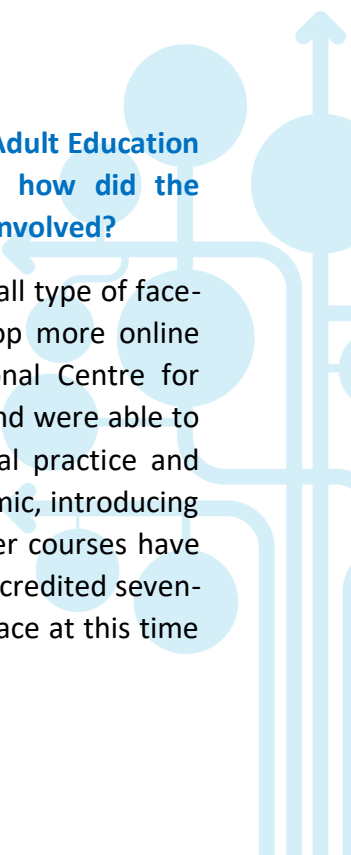
and we would encourage people to look around in their community for collaboration and resources which are already being shared.

We also have to be open to helping people get to grips with digital technology by helping them to connect with organisations who can provide training and further support. It is worth considering older methods of communication such as paper, radio, telephone and TV along with the use of new technologies and open educational resources. Connecting online can be challenging and many different forms of communication is being offered including Microsoft Teams, ZOOM, Cisco and Webex, plus we have the added difficulty of local authorities limiting which system staff are able to use.

Although getting adult learners digital skills improved can be a challenge, we believe that intergenerational work can enhance the (reduction of) the digital skills gap, with older adults and younger adults sharing skills online. We posted out a course resource guide and activities to be used in the one-day training, which is activity based and we utilised open educational resources, such as YouTube, and encourage learners to take plenty of working breaks.

Although we are aware that adult learners need better digital literacy and we know of the digital divide between older and younger people, intergenerational work may assist to breakdown that exclusion. We are also working on blogging and encouraging learners to learn more about open educational resource and online learning. Digital and social exclusion is an increasing issue for many people; many services are moving online and older people are missing out on opportunities to participate, and also to connect with friends and family through digital technology. Improving older people's digital skills, whereby older adults are paired with younger mentors is an example of reverse mentoring, and younger people mentoring older people. This could decrease social isolation for older people, increase their self and digital confidence and develop leadership skills through interactions with younger people, with the younger people gaining in confidence through the process. This calls for lifelong education and training that can help all generations to adapt to it

Q4. From your own experience what type of training do you think is the most effective for adult education trainers to have in order for them to prepare intergenerational experiences in their communities?

We think that this is important to look at specialism in intergenerational training. It is like anything else and it is a subject. For adult education trainers, Intergenerational training should be part of their own education journey. It should be at the centre of all that we do in adult education as it evolves over the life course and is a journey which can be shared from the age of 16 to 106. Learning is something that is processed over the lifespan and we believe that adult education trainers should realise the potential for intergenerational volunteering in local communities, and for people of all ages to learn together.

Pedagogy is changing and open pedagogy is something that evolves learners in saying what they think about how the course or training could be better or received differently. This could illustrate how adult learning can provide opportunities for older and younger students to co-create

experiences together, enriching their lives. Active communities have a key role to play in meeting these generational challenges. Communities, and a strong sense of place, strengthen intergenerational bonds by bringing generations together and sustaining shared loyalties. Communities may also help to directly tackle skills, care and housing shortages through innovative local initiatives.

Q5. Is intergenerational education adequately funded? How can adult education providers begin to seek funding for their activities in this area?

Intergenerational education seems now to sit as more of an add on, a small part of what can be done in a project. As such it is not part of mainstream funding in education. We believe the issue of equity in the funding of intergenerational education needs to be addressed. The relationship between older and younger generations is still defined by mutual support and affection. Much more investment is needed both in vocational education and lifelong learning to prepare younger and older generations for a 100-year life. Adult education providers could start by letting their own establishment know that this is needed. Intergenerational projects can fit in within the curriculum and cost very little. In fact, many may not cost at all and be cost effective with more people taking up the education due to a more balanced provision for everyone. We think that the main aim would be to get it funded mainstream as much of the other funding available for projects is a once-off piece that last for six months or a year.