Telling Stories Across the Generation Gap

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Organizational Background

The Institute on Aging (IOA) is a non-profit that serves seniors in San Francisco, Marin and the Peninsula without regard to race, religion, income or sexual orientation. Its mission is “to enhance the quality of life for adults as they age by enabling them to maintain their health, well being, independence and participation in the community” (Institute on Aging, 2011). IOA supports seniors, adults with disabilities and their caregivers to make it possible for them to live in their own homes and participate in the community as long as possible. IOA supports the inclusion of seniors in the community for the benefit of society as a whole, as their site states, “with you in our community, we are all richer” (Institute on Aging, 2011).

With over 25 years working in the Bay Area and an annual budget over $30 million (Werdegar, 2011), IOA has become a core support provider for the local elder population. IOA also provides critical connections between elders, other care providers and the rest of the community with about $3 million a year dedicated to community programs.

To keep elders comfortable and safe in their own homes, IOA offers in-home care, counseling, memory assessment, and care management. Through this last program IOA links clients with other services by sending Nurses or Care Managers to clients' homes free of charge to discuss clients needs and wants, introduce services that may be helpful and develop an overall Care Plan.

IOA provides opportunities for seniors to socialize with other seniors through two day care centers and has demonstrated its support for crossgenerational projects through the creation in 1996 of the Center for Elders and Youth in the Arts (CEYA). CEYA provides professional artists to lead weekly art classes for seniors for periods of 12 to 46 weeks. CEYA also ties in with IOA's overall goal of independent living for seniors: “through creative expression, CEYA helps
elders remain connected to the community with the goal of helping them experience improved physical and emotional well-being” (CEYA, 2010).

The programs encompass a wide variety of visual and performing arts and often involve collaboration with youth programs. In fact, CEYA encourages youth programs to get involved by waiving its annual $4700-7400 fee for the first two years of any project begun at their request. In its 15 years of existence, thousands of seniors and hundreds of youth from 24 schools and organizations have participated in CEYA’s programs. The collections of artwork generated are leased to corporations to raise funds for the program and are exhibited to over 4000 viewers each year.

CEYA currently employs 13 professional artists specializing in painting, poetry, dance, theater, sculpture, textile arts etc. Founder and Executive Director, Jeffrey Chapline, is a sculptor, painter and glass artist with a Master of Fine Arts degree from UCLA. He is currently working on a study that evaluates the effects of community-based arts and culture programs on seniors’ health. He lectures nationwide on the CEYA model of community arts programming which has gained fame being “cited by the United Nations, the National Council on Aging and the California Arts Council for its pioneering approach” (CEYA, 2010).

IOA's focus on inclusion of seniors with the rest of society and CEYA's experience bringing youth and seniors together through art make them ideal partners to tackle the growing generational divide that separates and isolates youth from their elders.

**Problem Statement**

American society today provides significantly less opportunities for interaction between youth and seniors than in the past. Over the past 150 years, families in the U.S. have undergone a radical shift away from extended family living arrangements. In 1850 nearly 70% of persons over age 65 lived with their adult children, however by 2000 less than 15% did (Ruggles, 2007).
Opportunities for interaction inside and outside the home have disappeared as extended families have moved apart geographically (Bales, Eklund & Siffon, 2000) and societal support organizations, from schools to nursing homes, have organized into age-based groups (Doll & Bolander, 2010). This laissez faire age segregation has deprived our society of the intergenerational exchange that supports positive intergenerational relations, cultural transmission and sharing of diverse points of view.

Intergenerational programs have been shown to promote positive attitudes toward elders among children who otherwise felt uncomfortable around the very old (Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000). Today's children will be the caregivers of tomorrow's elders and with the percentage of the population over age 65 expected to nearly double to 20% by 2050 (Settles et al., 2009) it is particularly important for children to become comfortable dealing with their elders.

Children benefit from the wisdom of elders who bring life learning and experience. However due to a lack of contact we now have “a generation of young unlike any before it, a generation that is growing to maturity without the guiding hand of elders and elderhood” (Doll & Bolander, 2010, p. 328). We risk losing touch with traditions and cultural knowledge built up through generations of life experience. To ignore the rich stock of memory and experience stored in our nation's elders is to waste precious resources. It denies wisdom to the youth and self-actualization to the elderly.

Failing to create access to their grandparents' generation also denies our children access to truly culturally diverse perspectives. While not as obvious as ethnicity or country of origin, age is a key variable that helps define culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Hufford, Hunt, & Zeitlin, 2006). As a generation, elders bring diverse points of view due to their different set of personal and historical experiences. Exposure to these points of view offers children alternate reference points from which to reconsider modern assumptions. In fact “the memories of old people are not
simply access to a lost past but a promise of new ways of thinking about the present or creating a better world in the future,” (Moody, 1988, p. 16). A study of Northern Cheyenne women by Ward, Hinckley, and Sawyer points to the positive results possible by sharing the insight of different generations. They found that the dynamic exchange between elders, who were seen as the keepers of traditional culture, and youth, who were seen as being strongly influenced by modern Anglo society, had led to the “creation of new customs which combine the best of both societies,” (Wiscott & Kopera-Frye, 2000, p. 203).

Because of the lack of opportunities for intergenerational exchange in day to day life, intergenerational programs in schools become an important platform for the exchange of ideas. Well-designed intergenerational programs use “the strengths of one generation to meet the needs of another,” with elders bringing experience and wisdom and children contributing energy and enthusiasm (Kaplan, 2002, p. 307). An intergenerational oral history program in New York found that through gathering stories from families, neighbors, and other people, students “increase their awareness of their own traditions, cultures and communities,” (Zablotny, 2006, p. 57). The benefit was not one-sided. For the elders involved “telling stories, and repeating those that hold particular significance, is a part of the creative process of achieving psychological integration, a process rooted in the discovery and passing on of one's legacy,” (Zablotny, 2006, pp. 57-58).

A storytelling program matching local elementary school children with local elders will provide an intergenerational forum focused on communication and discovery. It will benefit both children and elders by providing opportunities for relationship building, cultural transmission, and sharing of diverse points of view to better understand the present and build a better future.

Work Plan

Goal and Objectives

The goal of Telling Stories Across the Gap is to develop intergenerational
communication, understanding and positive perceptions between children and elders through the art of storytelling. To meet this goal we focus on the objective of working with intergenerational groups to develop stories for performance and print in three areas: (1) autobiography, (2) fiction, and (3) autobiographical-fiction.

Methods

A group of 30 elders aged 65 or older and 30 children in 3rd-5th grade will meet at the Institute on Aging's new Senior Campus on Geary Avenue for storytelling activities two hours each week during the academic year. Children will be transported to and from their after school program by bus. Elders may use their own transportation or Institute on Aging's shuttle service.

A core team of two professional storytellers, an English teacher and a counselor will lead the storytelling activities each week. They will start each session with an icebreaker activity with all participants together in one large group. Next a storyteller or English teacher will introduce techniques that make stories particularly interesting such as vivid descriptions, exciting plots, and complex, relatable characters to the group as a whole.

For the main storytelling activity, participants will break off into small groups of two elders and two children each and take turns telling each other stories. Staff members will give prompts progressing through four focuses: (1) autobiography, (2) fiction, (3) autobiographical fiction, and (4) publication and performance.

After telling stories in their small groups, all participants will reconvene to reflect on the activity and the stories they have heard and told. Each session will end with a story for the whole group from one of the professional storytellers and from any participants who would like to share. A preview of the next week's topic will give participants time to think about what story they would like to tell at the next meeting.

The first two months of the program will focus on autobiographical prompts so that
participants can get acquainted and learn the personalities and interests of the other members in their group. Prompts will encourage positive perspectives of life by focusing on inspirational stories and positive character traits with prompts such as “The bravest thing I ever did was...,” “The happiest day of my life was...,” “The kindest thing I ever saw was...” etc.

During the third and fourth month we will focus on fictional stories. We will start with each participant telling the traditional myths, folk tales, and fairy tales that they know. Sharing these stories in a multigenerational group will lead to a wider body of collective archetypes based in various cultures and times for all participants. In later weeks participants will make up their own fictional stories to tell.

In the fifth and sixth month we will blend autobiography with fiction. Participants can embellish the truth, tell tall tales, and explore the intersection of fact and fiction. Autobiographical fiction mixes the creativity of fiction with the ownership and engagement of autobiography. Such stories allow participants to fix past regrets and imagine new roles and adventures for themselves.

During the seventh and eighth month participants will choose their favorite stories to polish for performance and print. The participants will perform their stories for family, friends, school, retirement home residents and community members at Institute on Aging, the children's after school program, and other public sites arranged by the program administrator. At performances the group accept donations or charge admission to fund the next year's program. The program administrator will also contract a printer to print the collection of stories chosen for print by the participants. A copy of this anthology will be given to each participant and to each of the participating organizations. Additional copies will be sold through local bookstores and online as a fund raiser for the next year's program. The performances and printed anthology will function as a capstone for the project, a fund raiser for the program, and as a way to include a
Population

Telling Stories Across the Gap will recruit children in 3rd through 5th grade from an elementary school after school program and elders living alone or in retirement homes to participate in the program. Both groups are likely to spend much of their time with their own age group. Children will be recruited from the McKinley Elementary School After School Enrichment Program by offering Telling Stories Across the Gap as an elective. Elders will be recruited through flyers and word of mouth at the Institute on Aging. We will aim for 30 elders and 30 children for the first year.

Elders should be healthy enough to participate regularly and, due to the nature of the activities, should not suffer from dementia. They will be asked to sign a consent form describing the purpose of the program, their rights and responsibilities, and how the information gathered will be used. Children should be interested in the program and provide their assent to participate. Their parent or guardian's support is also critical. They will be provided a consent form similar to the one given to the elders.

Snacks will be provided for the participants at each weekly meeting. Participants who complete the program will also receive a complimentary copy of the story anthology created by the group. The enthusiasm and buy-in of all participants will be critical to relationship building. The administrative coordinator and counselor on staff will be available to help participants work through any problems and make reasonable accommodations to retain participants, but there will be no consequences for dropping out of the program.

The benefits of participating in this program include opportunities to listen to and tell many stories, exposure to diverse points of view, an opportunity to build relationships in a diverse group, increased awareness of different age groups, and support in developing
STORIES ACROSS THE GAP

storytelling and communication skills.

Potential risks for children include fright from sudden awareness of the aging process and exposure to mature story themes. Both potential risks will be addressed through preparation activities before the program. Telling Stories Across the Gap will hire a counselor as a part of the core teaching team. This counselor will meet with children before their participation in the program to describe and answer questions about aging, death and the developmental stage of the elders they will meet. The counselor will also meet with the elders before the program starts to describe the children's developmental level and discuss the types of themes they will be able to understand and cope with. Because the counselor will be one of the four main teaching staff, they will also be available at each meeting to help children and elders work through these issues.

Potential risks for elders, particularly those with few social contacts, include isolation and depression when the program ends. To combat this risk, we will work with the Institute on Aging throughout the year to develop a portfolio of similar social programs in the community. At the end of the year we can recommend these other programs to elders based on their interests and ability to attend. We will also make every effort to ensure the program is self-sustaining and encourage deeper connections built over the long term by giving registration priority to participants from the previous year.

Staffing and Administration

Telling Stories Across the Gap will employ a core team of four professionals develop the specifics of the curriculum and to lead group activities each week. This team will be made up of two professional storytellers, one English teacher, and one counselor. Over the summer this team will develop an outline of topics for discussion and the specific storytelling prompts to be used throughout the year. They will also be responsible for updating and adjusting the curriculum throughout the year to meet the needs and interests of the group. The core team will be scheduled
for about eight hours a week to cover the time needed to lead the two hour sessions, train interns, develop and adjust the curriculum, and meet with participants, coworkers and the board of directors.

The two storytellers must have at least five years of professional story performance experience. Priority will be given to storytellers with teaching experience and education in Gerontology or Child Development. The English teacher must have five years experience teaching elementary school aged children with preference given to those who also have experience writing, editing and publishing short works of fiction or non-fiction. The counselor must have a masters degree in Psychology or Counseling and experience working with children and with elders. Preference will be given to those who have knowledge in both gerontology and child development and have an interest in storytelling. The counselor will need to work additional hours, especially at the beginning and end of the program, to prepare participants for the program, help them adjust at the end and deal with problems that arise during the program.

Four paid internships will be available for students of English, Theater Arts, Gerontology or Child Development. Interns will act as assistants to the core group and help to facilitate all participant activities throughout the year. Interns should be interested and highly motivated to work with a mixed age group.

An administrative coordinator will manage the logistics of the program including recruiting staff members, scheduling, buying supplies, handling payroll, arranging performance venues and anthology printing at the end of the program and communicating with partner programs and participants. The administrative coordinator will work full time and should be an excellent communicator with good organization and experience working with diverse age groups.

A board of directors including key stakeholders will meet monthly to guide the program.
The board will include the core teaching team as well as representatives from Institute on Aging and McKinley's After School Enrichment Program whose time will be bought out from their respective employers. These meetings will be open to program participants and family members with advance notice.

**Evaluation**

**Goal and Objectives**

The goal of Telling Stories Across the Gap is to develop intergenerational communication, understanding and positive perceptions between children and elders through the art of storytelling. To meet this goal we focus on the objective of working with intergenerational groups to develop stories for performance and print in three areas: (1) autobiography, (2) fiction, and (3) autobiographical-fiction.

**Outcome Evaluation**

**Evaluation design.**

We will use a static group comparison to evaluate the degree to which Telling Stories Across the Gap meets its goal and objective. The static group comparison uses post-treatment tests to compare a control group and a treatment group that are not random, but are matched as closely as possible to one another. Because it includes a control group, this design helps to determine which results are due to the treatment and eliminates the effects of historical changes during the course of the treatment and by maturational changes in participants which, given the ages of our participants, could be a substantial factor. While randomized selection can be a powerful tool for ensuring the validity of an experiment, it is inappropriate for this program. Instead we will rely on self-selection, advertising the program and accepting those who sign up. Because of the focus on building relationships, a positive environment with enthusiastic participants will be critical to the program's success. To minimize self-selection bias we will
Both the treatment and control groups will be recruited from students in the McKinley Elementary After School Enrichment Program (ASEP) and clients of the Institute on Aging (IOA). We will recruit 30 children and 30 elders for the treatment group and the same number for the control group. Treatment group children will be recruited by offering Telling Stories Across the Gap as an elective in the ASEP program. The children's control group will be selected from the other elective groups at ASEP. The elders for both the treatment and control groups will be recruited through flyers and by word of mouth at the IOA. The main incentive for participants will be the right to participate in interesting program activities. The control group will be paid for their time. All participants and control group members, plus the parents of minors, will need to sign consent forms describing their rights and responsibilities, how their information will be used and the purpose of the study.

**Evaluation method.**

Our analysts on staff will interview participants one-on-one after each of the four quarters of the program: (1) Autobiography, (2) Fiction, (3) Auto-biographical Fiction and (4) Performance and Print. In the interview we will ask participants about their perceptions of intergenerational communication within their small group, their interactions with people from other generations outside the program, their level of interest in the stories and topics presented, any perceived changes in their ability to formulate and tell stories, and how the format of the program could be improved to meet their needs. Interviews will be flexible to allow interviewers and interviewees to explore issues that come up during the course of the interview. The control group will be interviewed at the same intervals and with the same questions except that references to the program will be replaced with other interactions that the control group identifies where they experience intergenerational communication.
The results of these interviews will be coded thematically, compiled and compared qualitatively by our staff of analysts. A qualitative analysis is most appropriate because of our small group size and because we intend a broad approach that will uncover a range of ways in which intergenerational communication and relationships can be successfully encouraged. Analysts will identify themes in intergenerational communication, understanding and positive perceptions between children and elders. Next analysts will look for changes for individuals and the group over the course of the program. Finally analysts will compare these themes and changes to those of the control group to see if there are significant differences. If significantly better results are found for program participants, then the program may have had a positive impact. The themes uncovered from both groups will help us develop a more comprehensive picture of conditions that can support or impede positive intergenerational communication and relationship building. This new knowledge will inform more specific focuses for future programming and research.

**Process Evaluation**

To ensure we are meeting the program goal and objective and to identify improvements that we can make during the course of the program, we will gather feedback from participants and staff throughout the program. Participant feedback will be gathered from the same set of interviews used for the outcome evaluation focusing on questions about how the format of the program is working. The coded and compiled results will be analyzed and discussed in the monthly board meetings as a starting point to fine-tune the program to meet participants' interest and expectations. The monthly board meeting will also be the formal opportunity for staff members to give their feedback on the program. Staff members will share their perceptions of how the program is meeting or failing to meet the stated goal and objective and how the format of the program seems to work for themselves and for participants. After considering and
discussing staff and participant feedback we will determine which aspects of the program are working and which need to be changed.

**Sustainability**

The program will aim for sustainability primarily through income generated by sales of the story compilation books created in the program each year. We will work with our partner organizations and local bookstores to sell copies of the books. Participants will each be given a copy of the book, but families will be encouraged to buy additional copies to support the program. Additional funding will come from performances where participants recite their favorite stories. We will work our partner organizations, the public library, art cafés and community organizations to find venues where program participants can perform and, depending on the venue, either charge admission fees, or encourage the audience to donate money to keep the program going. If the funding from these two sources proves insufficient we will consider charging future participants the minimum amount that will cover program costs.

We will also work to decrease the costs of the program in future years. Retention of staff through appropriate pay levels and raises, retention bonuses, and accessible, flexible management will be key. Staff with program-specific experience will provide greater expertise and require less training. Modifying the curriculum from year to year, rather than creating a brand new one each year will also reduce the time requirements and therefore costs. Finally, we hope to grow the program in future years and reduce costs through the increased efficiency possible with a larger group.
References


## BUDGET: YEAR 1

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<tr>
<td>Storytellers (2)</td>
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| English Teacher | $75,000/year * 0.2FTE * 2 people 
| Counselor | $75,000/year * 0.2FTE * 1 person 
| Interviewers/ analysts | $75,000/year * 0.2FTE * 2 people 
| Interns | $15/hour * 4hrs/wk * 36 weeks * 4 people 
| Coordinator | $60,000 * FTE * 1 person |

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| Grand Total for Year 1 | $254,305 |
### Timeline

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### Phase 1: Planning
- a. Hire staff
- b. Recruit participants
- c. Contracts (bus, book etc.)
- d. Develop curriculum
- e. Recruit/train interns
- f. Adjust program as needed

### Phase 2: Implementation
- a. Weekly storytelling: Autobiography
- b. Weekly storytelling: Fiction
- c. Weekly storytelling: Autobiographical Fiction
- d. Weekly storytelling: Performance/Publication practice
- e. Performances
- f. Publish and distribute book

### Phase 3: Evaluation
- a. Develop interview questions
- b. 1st Set of interviews
- c. 2nd Set of interviews
- d. 3rd Set of interviews
- e. 4th Set of interviews
- f. Code, compile interviews

### Phase 4: Reporting
- a. Analyze interviews
- b. Analyze viability of program
- c. Compile results
- d. Report and recommendations