Reaching out to the Elderly Group

1
Name: Vanessa Tanti

Age: 20

Occupation: Childcare Worker

Growing up I was always very close to my grandparents, and noticed how their stories would always have some underlying message or advice. I believe while doing our project we will be able to collect this advice and improve communication between the elderly and the young. Also being a Literature major is a big part of why this project interests me, as we will be collecting the stories and advice of people rich with experience and history.
Name: Marita Grafe-Tschur

Occupation: Voluntary Tutor for AMES

Age: 44

I am from Germany and moved to Australia in 2004. I decided to do my Bachelor of Arts to improve my English skills. My majors are Literature and History. Especially in history I have learnt to understand various primary documents, which sometimes give an important message to the society and so I relate this knowledge to the project. Working for AMES teaches me to understand different cultures and their stories are sometimes very interesting. Especially the life experiences from elderly migrants and their way of coping to live in Australia and giving advice to their children. Furthermore, I have heard many stories from older members of the German church and how to describe their life in Australia. I think at elderly can give important advice to the younger generations and therefore should be included in our daily lives.
Name: Kristina Lauretta

Age: 21

Occupation: Part Time at a Retail Store

As I have been brought up with an Italian influenced lifestyle, I often have two languages constantly around me: English and Italian. My language at home is English, but this language will change to Italian when surrounded by my grandparents, although I am not very fluent in Italian. This assignment will be great for me to do as both at home and at work I am continuously finding ways to make communication between myself and elderly people easier. I believe that by monitoring the conversations I have with the elderly I will be able to find an angle to focus on when contributing to this group assessment.
Name: Dena Elrabbat

Age: 19

Occupation: Sales Assistant at Tony Bianco Shoes

My name is Dena and I am currently in the process of completing my third and final year of my Bachelor of Arts degree. My majors include both Gender Studies and Communication Studies. In my opinion, being a communication studies major will assist me in successfully completing this project as I have the vital skills in understanding and exploring different types of communication methods as well as how to improve and promote effective communication between the elderly and their children/grandchildren. Lastly, working as a casual sales assistant has also contributed to my high level of team work skills which I believe will increase our chances of achieving our set goal.
Name: Joash Amosa

Age: 20

Occupation: Full Time University Student

As a Polynesian growing up in Australia, family has always been the first priority and especially our elders; our grandparents. At home we speak English though my heritage is of Samoan and Cook Island decent. The main concern I feel needs to be addressed is the fact that elderly people are often forgotten. I believe all elderly citizens deserve to have more respect and attention to be given for they have been through nearly everything a human being experiences in life. I find that some of my friends think of their parents or elderly family members as people from the past and refuse to have a close connection with them. From this assignment, I believe it will be an eye-opener for younger generations to realise how important and special our elderly friends and family are. By recording and listening to their stories and their opinions on life itself, their quotes is something we should all consider and hopefully find that special connection with that elderly person/s.
Reaching Out To The Elderly.

Abstract

This research report examines the ways in which age, language, technology and other social barriers affect communication practices between youth and the elderly. It describes research on how younger people talk to older people, and vice versa. Research for this report included a review of current literature on various intervention programs as well as a diverse range of reports which significantly relate to our discussion.

Through in depth research and analysis of the topic, we aim to provide a clear understanding of:

- The generation and communication gap.
- What channels different generations use to communicate?
- How communication relates to each generation and the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- Importance of listening.
- Barriers which affect communication.
- How to make better use of technology.
- Develop a clear understanding of what is meant, rather than just what is said.

Intergenerational communication is an important aspect of many, if not all, relationships, especially for grandparents raising their grandchildren. According to research, the
communication that takes place between two or more people may help to define their relationship.

In grandparents raising grandchildren families, there is often uncertainty and tension accompanying changing family circumstances. Communication is important as a means for making family members aware of each other’s changing needs and helping them support one another. Communication is also key for helping family members learn how they can better function as a cohesive family.

One factor that differentiates grandparent-grandchild relationships from parent-child relationships is the greater difference in age. The "number" that makes up a person's age is not necessarily the issue; it's the experiences of the person throughout their lifetime. Without knowing about a grandparent’s experiences during past times of personal or national financial crisis, for example, a grandchild may not understand the family finance choices the grandparent makes today.

Intergenerational understanding goes both ways – older adults need to learn about the experiences to which grandchildren are exposed on a daily basis such as drugs, violence and sexual relations. Without understanding each other’s life experiences, it becomes all too easy to attribute differences of opinion to age-related stereotypes. Age related stereotypes can have a very negative impact on intergenerational communications and relationships.
Nowadays technology plays a major role in our society. Globalisation and technology brought with them many different ways of electronic communication. In 2011 the ageing population (65 years and over) in Australia according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) was 14.5 per cent and by 2046 it will be 25.2 per cent of the total population. Considering this significant and unprecedented increase in elderly citizens in a technologically savvy society, it is important to encourage them to use new technologies. Unfortunately, technology is often a barrier for the elderly and they are reluctant to incorporate it into their daily lives. Reasons are lack of interest and lack of confidence to adapt to new technologies as well as financial and medical obstacles. Furthermore the lack of training opportunities discourages the elderly from using technology.

Modern life incorporates the usage of mobile phones and internet and sometimes older generations do not want to adapt to new technologies as a result of lacking interest and familiarity. The phenomenal increase in the use of mobile phones in the last decade requires that the elderly not only use the mobile to ring but all the functions of mobile phones. According to Manual Castells from the Annenberg Research Network on International Communication shows that ‘middle-aged and elderly users are still using mobile voice telephony more frequently than the young generations’ (Castells, M 2004). This highlights that the elderly still use the mobile phone in the same way they use their landline. The elderly are sometimes not willing to learn how to use short message service (SMS) even though it has benefits such as confirming a doctor’s appointment or even contacting
relatives at unusual times. As Castells highlights, this contrasts with the reality that ‘across
the globe, adolescents and young adults are emerging to play a very active role in adopting
and appropriating mobile services such as SMS’ (Castells, M 2004, p. 41). Also in the area of
computers it is proven that the elderly are less likely to use this technology. The elderly have
retired from the workforce and therefore have been out of the constantly changing
computer world for some time. Research by Neil Charness and Walter R. Boot from the
Florida State University shows that the older generation do not use the computer as much
as the young generation. In 2006, computer usage is below forty per cent for the age group
sixty-five plus compared to over ninety per cent for the age group eighteen to twenty-nine.
Another reason for the elderly not using technology may be influenced by medical
conditions. Compared to younger generations, the elderly sometimes suffer from poor
eyesight, have difficulty hearing or even suffer from arthritis, which makes the handling or
usage of technology difficult. As Castells points out ‘due to the physical features of mobile
handsets, elderly people could have added problems to manage the device’ (Castells, M
2004, p. 156). Some elderly may encounter problems in relation to the dimensions of the
screen or the managing of the small keys, especially on mobile phones. In regard to the
physical features of mobile phones the Japanese Manufacturer Docomo ‘released the raku-
raku (or “easyeasy”) handset in September 2001, which has a bigger keypad and an easier-
to-read screen specially designed for the elderly’ (Castells, M 2004, p. 42). This could be the
breakthrough to encourage the elderly to use mobile phones, especially for those with poor
eyesight and health issues such as arthritis.
A further obstacle for the elderly is the financial aspect, which stops pensioners with low income using technology because they simply cannot afford it. The communication industry does not ignore this fact and makes their mobile services increasingly affordable by lowering the price to various age groups. Beneficial for the elderly are prepaid services which allow them to budget according to what they can afford each month. Income is a determinant in the way mobile phones are used across all ages. This is evident in Castells’ research which found that together with education levels, income influenced ‘which type of service would become popular as shown in the cases of prepaid mobile phone cards and SMS, which are widely adopted among those with limited budgets throughout the world’ (Castells, M 2004, p. 60). The potential for lower costs makes the mobile phone attractive to the elderly. On the other hand, computer usage incurs a higher financial burden for seniors. To set up an internet compatible computer costs a larger sum of money and therefore the elderly may not only be uninterested in using this technology but also crippled by the financial hurdle. However, the rapidly growing computer market and the ever-increasing demand for new computers as a result of an expanding population have brought the prices down. So computers are more affordable and might become even cheaper in the coming years. This would benefit seniors and more prepaid services will allow those on a budget to start using the internet.

There are some training opportunities for the elderly. In Australia seniors can undertake computer training at various community centres. For example, the Shire of Melton offers informal short computer classes at Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres. Unfortunately, these classes are not especially designed for elderly citizen, who may need
specially created programs. In May - June 2004 the American Library Association revealed, in their technology report, that ‘Most communities lack a broad-based plan to educate seniors on the benefits of computers and technology so the seniors may understand, accept, and use them to better their lives’ (American Library Association, 2004, p. 1). Additionally, the computer industry is including special features into their programs: ‘Microsoft has long included features in its Windows operating system option that makes accessing information easier for the disabled. In February 2004, Microsoft kicked off an information initiative, designed to reach aging baby boomers (or soon-to-be seniors) who are experiencing the onset of vision, dexterity, and hearing loss. The accessibility features are easy to activate and allow users to modify the text size and colour and activate system sounds.’ (American Library Association, 2004, p. 5). Furthermore, the American Library Association stresses the importance of computer classes generated for the elderly: ‘Those staff who train seniors cannot stress strongly enough the need to have skill-targeted classes for seniors and to assure seniors register for the correct class’ (American Library Association, 2004, p. 6).

In conclusion, even though technology offers many advantages, it is sometimes a barrier for the elderly to adapt to. It seems that lacks of interest, financial and medical problems as well as a lack of training opportunities are, to some extent, responsible of the discouragement of the elderly to incorporate technology into their daily lives. On the other hand, there is increased support for the elderly by manufactures, who provide elderly-friendly mobile phones, software companies who design senior-friendly programs and also the internet and mobile provider with affordable or prepaid contracts. Also, training opportunities are constantly being developed to help the elderly to adjust to technology. It
is important that the elderly get ongoing opportunities to use the advantages of modern technology.

Language barriers between the elderly and teenagers

Everybody everywhere communicates whether it is intrapersonal communication, (communication within oneself) or communicating in front of masses of people (public communication). Although, just because everyone is communicating, it doesn't mean that we all completely understand what we are saying to each other, both in movements and in speech. Along with communication comes noise or barriers that can restrict the meaning of the message and change how the receiver conveys the message.

Every single person in this world has met somebody that speaks a different first language and has noticed how hard it can be to communicate with them. Personally, I have come across many as I work in retail and I deal with all different types of people. Sometimes, it can be hard to explain our refund policy to those who don’t speak English but you know that once they leave the store, you possibly won’t see them again for a while and that does make it easier. Having people in your own family that don’t speak the same language as you can be much more difficult at times.

My family, just like many others, don’t all speak English. My grandparents were born in Italy and they travelled to Australia in the early 1960’s. They have adapted to the Australian
lifestyle quite well but still struggle with the language. Their first language is Italian, my first 
language is English and at times we don’t understand each other. Being that I’ve always had 
Italian culture around me, I do understand a lot of it but I am not very fluent. Over the years 
there has been many times when I have responded to a question in English and my 
grandparents facial expressions show they have no idea what I am saying. I then have to re-
word what I have said and try to use Basic English language. My language barrier with my 
grandparents however, does not make us strangers, my family is very close.

People all over the world have communication issues with their grandparents. According to 
Nussbaum and Coupland (2004) a recent study of Finnish-Polish grandchildren revealed 
their relationships with their grandparents. ‘These grandchildren talked more about their 
feelings, differences and similarities in personalities, as well as emotional and intellectual 
skills learned from grandparents, and less about how frequently they interacted with 
grandparents.’ This result displays that people are emotionally attached to their 
grandparents although when there is a language barrier, they possibly don’t interact as 
much as they do with other family members. The question ‘why do adolescents value their 
grandparents?’ (Nussbaum & Coupland 2004) was asked to young adults in Flanders, 
Belgium. ‘Grandchildren responded that grandparents provide affection, reassurance of 
worth, and are a source of reliable alliance in relations with parents. Maternal grandparents 
were generally perceived as closer as and more important than paternal grandparents.’ 
(Nussbaum & Coupland 2004) But moving over to the study done in Spanish speaking 
families around the world Nussbaum and Coupland (2004) state that ‘Spanish speaking 
grandparents reported a greater need for information than English-speaking grandparents, 
and more frustration when dealing with adolescents than with younger children.’ These
researchers advocate the need for programs to help these grandparents deal with language barriers, and other domestic family issues associated with intergenerational residence because dealing with this everyday can be quite difficult in life.

Although every grandparent and grandchild relationship is unique, they are all based on life experiences and memories. Nussbaum and Coupland (2004) believe that ‘the grandparent-grandchild relationship is often characterised by life experiences shared through stories and interpersonal discourse; this is accomplished by grandparents exchanging information about living and deceased family members, life experiences related to historical events, stories about parents and stories of grandchildren in infancy and early childhood.’ Although my grandparents don’t speak English well, everything listed above is something my grandparents have shared with me either through their own story telling or getting one of my parents to translate for me.

We must remember that perhaps the largest barrier in the world of language barriers is the lack of motivation and resources to provide language access but there are many ways to overcome the dividing force of a language barrier. For me, primary and high schooling were a huge factor in learning my grandparents’ language as were my parents who speak fluent Italian. Schooling makes that much of a difference and you don’t realise it instantly. Through my personal experience, every school should offer more than one language to learn because as I speak to my grandparents now, I remember little things I was taught in my younger schooling years.
At a young age, I went to bingo with my grandparents and we were surrounded by elderly who didn’t speak any English. I was able to play because I had been taught how to count in Italian in primary school. Little learning skills like this, I believe do pay off in future events.

Does learning multiple languages at a young age help later in life? Yes it does, not just with grandparents but with elderly people in general that you will meet at some stage in life and has to communicate with. Even if you aren’t fluent in their particular language, as long as you have some understanding, you will be able to communicate to the elderly quite effectively.

As time goes on and humans move further along the age spectrum, communication changes dramatically. At one end of the spectrum the young seem to avoid the elderly and the elderly at the other end try to reach out to the young only to become lost in translation. An abundance of studies have been taken out that prove this point and demonstrate that the young will avoid the elderly, yet do not lose respect for them, the problem lays within the communication barriers that modern society constructs (Howard 2010,p.133). We can begin to break down these barriers by involving youth in the concerns of the elderly and vice versa. More specifically getting youth out there to visit, work with and make time for the elderly, so they may learn from each other.

The world is ageing everyday as birth-rates decrease and life expectancy increases (Huchinson, 2010p.1). This means that it is even more vital that Communication between the young and the elderly is addressed. However it is difficult to push both age groups together when prejudices already exist. Studies have been undertaken that have looked at
the anxiety that the young and the elderly have about being exposed to each other (Huchinson, 2010 p. 1). One such study was done by the London Metropolitan University about the prejudice that each generation has towards the other and discovered that ageism is one of the most common prejudices (Huchinson, 2010 p. 2). The study was mainly taken out in order to see if this prejudice could be rectified through intergroup contact. This was based on Allport’s 1954 hypothesis that by exposing two groups to one another in a positive way, that encourages positive experiences the group is more likely to work well together in the future (Huchinson, 2010 p. 2). However this contact must be made within optimal conditions, where both groups are equal and moving towards a common goal (Huchinson, 2010 p. 2). If these conditions are not met than the contact alone will not be enough to reduce prejudice that past experience has formed (Huchinson, 2010 p. 2). Moffitt and Caspi did an experiment that supports this theory in 1984 where children were assisted in class by elderly teacher’s aids. At the end of the experiment, the children that had been exposed to the elderly demonstrated positive views of the elderly compared to children who had not been exposed thus proving that positive views can be created through exposure (Huchinson, 2010 p. 3).

The young tend to go through the first part of their lives with a negative view of what it means to be Elderly (Aday, 1991 p. 373). This is perhaps due to the fact that many young people are only exposed to the elderly through other adult’s perceptions (Aday, 1991 p.373). In 1991 a nine-month Intergenerational project was undertaken, where twenty-four grade four students were matched with 24 elderly people. Together they took part in a
number of activities over this period and it was found at the end of the year that both generations became more positive in their views of the other (Aday, 1991 p. 372). This project invariably proved that by bringing the two generations together they began to understand each other and were able to work together in a positive and effective manner.

The exposure of both generations to the other has also proven to have educational value, not just in regards to the opposite generation but with the education of current issues. For example a study was done in the United Kingdom in two communities of Pembrokeshire (Becker, 2011 p. 147). In this study the elderly of the community were matched with young people to perform various tasks that were related to a sustainable future (Becker, 2011 p. 147). During the project three sessions were undertaken that educated and took into account the individual skills of both age groups. At the end of the project the two groups were evaluated and it was found that the participants had worked well together, and the project had encouraged them to think about sustainability (Becker, 2011 p. 147). The results also worked as a way of encouraging the widespread bringing together of young and old to discuss sustainability issues (Becker, 2011 p. 147). In this case the project had not only allowed the elderly and the young to work together but also had motivated people to reflect on sustainability issues.

In the Brimbank Council there are also ongoing programs that support the elderly. These programs get younger people to volunteer in activities for elderly who may be alone or disabled (Brimbank City council, 2012). Some of these activities include: community meals,
recreational activities and the planned activities group. Through the help of volunteers, younger then themselves the elderly are able to socialize and still be seen as an integral part of the community (Brimbank city council, 2012). Action needs to be taken in order for the communication issues between the elderly and the young to be solved. Young people will not take care of the elderly or volunteer in programs like these if they do not feel it is necessary. In order for solid communication to occur, young people need to be exposed to the elderly and programs such as these are a great way, to create this exposure while fixing social issues that occur because of the ageing process.

Walls are put up between the young and the elderly that make it difficult for communication to be successful. To smash down these walls the different age groups need to be exposed to each other. Research and projects involving both age groups have shown, that with exposure most prejudices dissolve and leave room for respect. Only when communication can occur with respect can both age groups truly learn from each other.

**Method of evaluation**

As a team, each member of the group will be assigned roles that will help contribute to our project. Although our project will take on a digital media approach, there are other aspects and background research to the work load other than technicality. We are planning on consulting an organisation on what our project is about and hoping by their permission to
continue with our plans for our short film. The organisation that we will be involved with our project is an old people’s home. The way that we have to approach consulting the organisation is by email, contact or placing a meeting, where we will discuss our plans for our assignment. The queries that will need to be discussed with the organisation are filming permissions, patients for interviewing and filming schedules. There are plenty of issues that come with filming such as filming warrants, permissions from patients and the families of the patients willing to be recorded and the scheduled times of filming on location.

Once all the relevant footage has been collected it will then be reformatted onto Final Cut Pro which is a program used to edit film. This process can take some time for it is not certain when exactly it will be completed depending on the quality and quantity of the footage. We also have been aware of the fact that programs and plans throughout the project are most likely to change. All is expected to expect sudden changes and that our ability to adapt to the situations at hand is done in a professional and safe manner.

As an evaluation method, we may try both questionaries and interviews to receive both written and verbal responses to our final project. In order for our group to know for sure if we are successful with our project is through written questions about our focus, relevance, quality and appropriateness about the video. Certain methods include:

- Observations
- Questionaries
**Project Timeline**

**Week 1 July 23**

The first week of semester 2 we will be planning and discussing all the aspects of our graduation video project. This involves the layout of the film, what is intended to be in the film and to what audience we are to address. We will also have a briefing on the plans to come and further important tasks that need to be completed at certain dates.

**Week 2 July 30**

Visit Location, patients, staff members of the organisation. Further briefing

**Week 3 August 6**

Filming- Establishing shots, interviewees, etc. Whole Day activity

**Week 4 August 13**

Continue filming and finalizing locations and interviewee to be shot on film

**Week 5 August 20**

By week 5 all footage takes and interviews should be complete and ready for the editing process. At this point further work for the project will take place in the editing booth at St.Albans campus. All members of the group are expected to attend.
**Week 6 August 27th**

Continue editing process- The score for the short film/documentary will be discussed during the editing process of the project. Reason being is that the music has to match the feel of a scene or plot. Until the video is near finished, the music will automatically be given a stylistic mode of sound.

**Week 7 September 3rd**

Continue Editing process, music and style ideas

**Week 8 September 10th**

Finalizing short film with last preparations and edits

**Week 9 September 17th**

SEMESTER BREAK

**Week 10 October 1st**

Present Video to audience with questionaries alongside recording interviewees (critics) about the video

**Week 11 October 8th**

Go through questionaries and interview recordings writing down all critic information for project results. Begin presentation for major assessment determining whether the video was a success or failure.

**Week 12 October 15th (FINAL WEEK)**

Present video and response results contributing to our final project to the class
Reflection on the Semester

A questionnaire sheet will be made for all members of the group to write down their thoughts on the project. The experience of the project will be documented for further analysis for the tutor to see if there are any problems and how they may have occurred throughout the project timeline. The sheet will consist of questions that associate with:

- Management of the project
- Communication throughout the group
- Learning experience
- Likes about the project
- Dislikes about the project
- Things that you would have changed about the project
- Were team goals reached
- List of contributions
- Overall environment of the group
- Overall thought of the filming and researching experience

As each member answers their questions they will be documented and placed into a folder which will be delivered to the tutor. The information gathered by all members of the group will give a clearer view on how each member worked throughout the project and by what contributions they put towards the graduation project. This is our conclusion of our final project piece and will determine how successful our project went and if possible to be used as further examples for future graduation project students.
Reference List


Hutchinson, P 2010, ‘Anxiety, Outcome Expectancies, and Young People’s Willingness to Engage in Contact with the Elderly’ Vol. 36, no. 10, pp. 1-14.


