

Intergenerational Auditor Program: Involving a Retired Professional in the Classroom

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Abstract

Most literature regarding involvement of retired adults in the classroom focuses on feasibility rather than benefits directly perceived by individuals, let alone the lack of research on academic learning purposes. This report presents the pilot action of an intergenerational (IG) approach/program, within which a retired professional crossed the border (i.e., from Hong Kong to China Mainland) and engaged a class of ESL (English as a second language) undergraduate learners — as an auditor — in a credit-bearing course. The program was staged through intergenerational programming in terms of purposeful planning and activity design to facilitate contacts between young and old. Post-program responses to Likert-based scales and open-ended questions were employed to examine what perceived benefits across generations could be found after program implementation, thereby examining the value of intergenerational learning through the pilot action. Evaluation findings indicated that the value of intergenerational learning can be conceptualized as a pathway leading to benefits perceivable across generations and the significance of academic learning purposes valued by young and old. Despite benefits found, the auditor approach is arguably a way of working due to lessons learned. Further studies should investigate how an auditor system like the program could contribute to the goal of promoting impactful results in other course settings. Explicit appreciation of the retired citizen's involved is also documented as a concluding note.

Keywords: intergenerational program, auditor, ESL, health psychology, perceived benefits

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Introduction

Most published details regarding the teaching and learning practice of involving retired citizens or the aged in a classroom and having them engage students mainly focus on feasibility (Dauenhauer et al., 2018; Doll, 2006; Heffer-nan et al., 2019; Krout & Pogorzala, 2002). It is little known as to how this kind of practice may lead to evidence-based benefits to individuals — it is even more unknown as the shared site is placed in a credit-bearing course — relevant evidence and caveats are scarcely documented.

The practice is of evidence though. For example, an auditor approach has been brought to the high school system in Japan since 2002 (Nishita & Nakagawa, 2015). Its first launch began at Fuso Junior High School in Fuso Town of Aichi Prefecture (K. Mizobe, personal communication, December 19, 2015). The program involves a senior retired citizen in a history class as an auditor, a voluntary role that empowers the retired citizen to interact with high schoolers, share stories, and learn together. In reporting the evaluation of the auditor approach, Mizobe (2017) emphasized that it has made possible on yielding positive outcomes, such as younger and older participants' positive comments and compliments to the system; however, direct

benefits to individuals are yet revealed. In addition, whether retired citizens with a professional background could also benefit from the auditor approach remains unknown.

Likewise, the City University of Hong Kong is another one currently adopting a similar approach — it aims to match retired adults with undergraduate students in a wide range of credit-bearing courses (The Elder Academy of Hong Kong, 2019). It has demonstrated significant capability to foster lifelong education, and especially in the case of weaving retired adults into an undergraduate structure through friendship-building. For example, an older participant's reflection revealed such a way of working: "After 4.5 years of study, many classmates and I become good friends and we were in communication with each other" (City University of Hong Kong—Scope, 2019, p. 17). To learn more about benefits for both retired adults and undergraduate students — especially in the context of academic learning purposes, further research is suggested.

Intergenerational-ESL Auditor Program

Inspired by the examples with demonstrated outcomes, a pilot project titled *The Intergenerational-ESL Auditor Program* (IG-ESL AP) was launched. Most broad-