

Approaching Planetary Crisis Through Intergenerational Dialogue

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A Complex Crisis

The environmental crisis has many facets: resource scarcity, social inequity, climate change, etc. Each has their own unique leverage points for change.

A central theme, though, is that action must happen now, and it must involve widespread restructuring of the way we organize and identify as humans.

For this transition to happen equitably and successfully, **all people** must be involved in shaping it and **all perspectives** must be considered. Spaces for the conversations that do this work are critical to shaping a more environmentally conscious future.

Generational Disconnect

People are organizing into increasingly homogenous groups, across demographics - age is one. Interactions across generations occur infrequently and situations that foster them are declining in the west. The "age-segregated" nature of work and school institutions as well as societal fear surrounding death and aging contributes to an increasing emotional and physical distancing from the elderly.

Inherently Intergenerational Issue

Due to the vast temporal scale of processes like climate change and resource depletion, a holistic and rich understanding of them is nearly impossible from the perspective of a single generation. Effects are delayed far enough into the future that the generations who cause them may not live long enough to experience them. No generation in isolation is able to comprehensively make sense of our environmental crisis on their own, or experience firsthand all of the impacts of their action or inaction. To develop this wide understanding, multiple generational perspectives must be engaged.

Existing Content

Intergenerational programming has been used as a tool for addressing a wide array of community issues.

Chile - Participants of varying ages were brought together to create public health plans that could better meet the needs of multiple generations

India - Intergenerational women's dialogues helped empower younger generations while raising older generations' awareness of modern challenges and barriers.

Intergenerational events in the context of **climate and environmental concern** have been carried out, and have proven to be rich spaces for discussion and learning.

Existent literature has identified the following outcomes in participants across age groups.

- **Heightened sense of intergenerationality**
- **Reduced misconceptions & stereotypes**
- **Shared wisdom, tools and lessons**
- **Development of common goals**



Intergenerational Event

Based on insights from existing research, as well as broad principles of public engagement from deliberative theory, this intergenerational dialogue focuses on producing the outcomes identified above.

- **Held at local senior center**
- **2h duration**
- **Ages 55+ and 24-**
- **Multiple groups of 5-8 participants, each led by a student facilitator**

Potential Activities

- *Values exercise* in which participants individually rank notecards of various community values. They discuss similarities and differences among their rankings.
- *Discussion* of participants' visions and dreams of an environmentally stable future.
 - What are your visions?
 - What are key differences from today's world?
 - What are strengths? Weaknesses?
 - What do you think we would need to do to get there?
- *Call to action* to prompt participants to continue the conversation and their involvement.
 - How can you start these conversations in your personal circles? At work? At school?
 - When and where can you reflect on this topic on your own?
 - How can you promote or maintain intergenerational connections in your own lives?

Thoughts?

I'll be hosting this event in Fort Collins, CO in the Spring of 2024 as part of my university honors thesis. I'd love feedback on the process, theory, concept, life... I want to make this a practical contribution to my community. Let me know how. Thank you!

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