A Communal Learning Center for the Aged and the Undergraduate, 1972 to Present

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In 1972 a group of six undergraduate students developed the notion of entering into a joint living relationship with a like number of elderly. Conceived when the idea of communal living was perceived as a solution to a variety of concerns of society, the undergraduates assumed that a cooperative setting would encourage intergenerational rapport. The students imagined themselves performing those activities for which youth is best suited (heavy cleaning, snow removal) and the elderly contributing their talents (cooking, sewing).

After two years of experience regarding the powers and interplay between state and federal agencies, the group, now somewhat changed in composition and purposes, received funds from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education and the Surdna Foundation for the project. Bucknell made available a house on campus near the residential and shopping areas of the town and the students set to work to achieve their goals.

This chapter is written by three persons associated with the project. It is helpful at the onset to identify their roles in the project, so their points of views can be evaluated.

Douglas K. Candland served as advisor to the students, first informally and then, as funds became available, as director of the financial aspects of the program. Ernest Keen, whose scholarship is in clinical and humanistic psychology, evaluated the project at various times and served, less formally, as an advisor to the house especially at times when the advice of a person outside the house was needed. Scott Kerr became a member of the student group during its second year. He visited (1976) and prepared profiles on twenty programs throughout the United States in which an attempt was being made to engage elderly in higher education. In 1978 he reevaluated these programs, substituting letters and questionnaires for a personal visit.

The project, which came to be known as the Cross-Generational Project or Leiser House (after the name of the facility), was explicit in saying to students and elderly alike that this was not a research project. Because the goals were to enhance the sharing of opinions and tasks among two age groups, we guaranteed no intrusion into their affairs. The comments we make are based on incidental or anecdotal information or on interviews conducted by Mr. Keen. Our views express experience, not the acuteness of statistics. Each member of the group sees both his or her role in the project and the goals of the project somewhat differently. It is from these differences that the program gained its vitality, changed its goals, survived the 1970s, and remains operational now in the 1980s.

This chapter is separated into five parts (1) Some perplexing issues of aging, (2) Methodological problems in evaluating a program which precludes intervention and rejects the use of traditional experimental techniques, (3) The early years of the project, (4) Evolution of the program, (5) Who learns what?

SOME PERPLEXING ISSUES OF AGING

Two themes appear in writings on aging, popular and otherwise, that have appeared recently. The first theme is the idea that life is divisible into units, most easily described as decades. This theme tacitly assumes that the problems of the 20-year-old differ from those of the 40-year-old and that both differ from the problems of the 60-year-old. This theme assumes that there is an orderliness to life, or at least to its problems. This theme focuses not merely on differences, but on different problems, thereby laying aside what might be similar to human beings of all ages. The second theme is that we are more alike those of the same age than those of different ages because we have similar experiences. The 20-year-old has no immediate sense of the depression years or of the feats of Captain Midnight and the 60-year-old is uncertain as to the nature of Pink Floyd or Captain Kangaroo. Beneath these themes lie other observations more complex and potentially more deceptive. One can subdivide life spans

however one pleases, and it is evident that we share most of our culture with those of our own age and experiences. To treat these periods as "passages" is to obscure the point that aging is only superficially related to age.

It is generally descriptive of roles in our society to write that one is a child and student for twenty years, then assumes a role beyond his or her own family, becomes a parent and spends twenty years as the rearer of a new generation and quite likely the supporter of the preceding one, retires and dies, yet this description says little about the process of aging. Only some of this description is mandated by physical limitations. We can be students at any age. We may enter and remain in the work force at any period of life. From the aspects of our description, only childhood and the period of childbearing are mandated by age. The remainder is mandated by how society sets the rules, legal, social, and financial, that determine aging.

The origins of this project and of our concern with aging begin with a story common enough to our society. The words are those of a person of middle age:

"After my mother's death, my father ceased caring for himself. My family and I lived on the opposite coast, a situation that limited contact to letters and phone calls. It became clear from calls from my father's neighbors that 'something had to be done.' Our decision, like that made by so many people in similar situations, was to suggest that he

move to the town in which we live. We offered part of our house, but my father quoted a saying well-learned from his own marriage; that 'There is no house big enough for two families.' We live in a small town and it was possible for us to find an apartment within walking distance of our home that also permitted him to be near the grocery, drugstore, laundromat, banks, barber and other services necessary to him. In the course of the day's events, we and the children would meet him shopping or just being around. We didn't have to make a special effort to see him, or him us, because we saw each other naturally in this small town. We thought ourselves fortunate, for he liked the community, made acquaintances of all ages, and that while financial problems appeared, they could be dealt with provided no major medical bills appeared.

"The only difficult aspect of the situation was that the apartment was in a building inhabited mostly by university students. Whereas father had been accustomed to a conventional life-style of courting, marrying, working, and raising children, he now had neighbors of different races, who seemed to work at odd hours, had no special religion, nor were much concerned about it, who were actively interested in politics at the demonstration rather than voting-booth level, and who seemed to live in groups of unusual combinations of sexes.

"Because of my relation with the college, I knew many of the students who lived in the apartment. I don't recall that any made the connection between him and me, even though the surname is distinctive. As a result, I occasionally heard

from students about 'the old man who lives downstairs' and from my father about the 'comings and goings of young people, seemingly without benefit of either morals or clergy.' I don't think that father was incensed by these arrangements so much as he was interested in knowing the relationships least he make a mistake that would offend the students. When I appreciated this, I also saw for the first time how much he had come to depend upon their friendships.

"After perhaps six months, I realized that something more significant had happened. The students now were talking about 'the nice old man' who knows a 'lot about baseball and old movies and has a way with the girls' (A quaint phrase from student lips) and 'who likes his beer with the boys.' I was stunned when I realized that these comments referred to my father. My father began to talk about his belief that blacks found themselves in a sad situation, that although long hair on men was unattractive, there were, after all, characteristics of greater concern about a person, such as honesty, integrity, and concern for others; that his elderly friends in town who took a negative view of student conduct were perhaps limited in their knowledge of young people and that if people lived together for a time, there might be fewer unhappy marriages.

"It did not take a great deal of cleverness on my part to see that the two groups -- the young and the elderly -- had demonstrated substantial shifts in their attitudes to one another. Although large differences remained, they appeared slight when compared to the enormity of the changes. After

seventy years, one does not usually change one's views on race, sex, and cohabitation. Do I say this because the old people whom we encounter seem intransigent in their views (are they more intransigent than the combative twenty-year-old on different topics)? Is it because we think it improper to discuss such matters with the elderly? In any case, it was obvious to me that both ages changed attitudes about one another and about matters of substance. I remarked on this situation to a class one day: The result was that sometime later six students came to me with the plan for communal, cross-generational house."

Robert Butler can be credited (1975) or debited with coining the term "ageism" to refer to that cluster of attitudes, preconceptions, and feelings that prejudice us against older people. Like racism and sexism, ageism refers not merely to personal views, but to the policies of our institutions that separate a particular group of people from others and cause them to be treated differently. These practices are changed only by our changing our perceptions. Sometimes these perceptions are matters of happenstance, as described in the changing perceptions of the older man and the students described above. Other times, demonstration, political conflict, and social reform appear to be the means by which changes in perception come about.

Our thinking about aging and ageism is somewhat different from that requiring a reform movement such as racism in the 1960s, who shall set war (1965 to the present); and sexism

(1970 to the present). If we are a vital society, others will surface in the 1980s. While ageism is like these reform movements, it is also unlike them. The first difference is that eventually we shall all be subject to the effects of ageism, if we are fortunate. Generations of Caucasian males can complete their lives without being the objects of racism or sexism, but each such person will be the object of ageism. One may point at the racist or sexist, but how does one point to the ageist and bring him or her to public scrutiny? One can, but one does not, for the finger would most often point at one's family, or, as often happens, to those very persons who are providing our emotional and financial support. Unlike racism and sexism, dominant themes of previous decades, ageism is the blurring of the line between culprit and victim. We all play both parts. The reform required to change ageism is different from a reform movement in the usual sense. There are no announced anti-aging groups, as there are groups organized to favor or oppose racism and sexism. There are no laws against being old, but our society creates a psychological climate that affects our emotions more than it creates difficulties legal and recognizable. The young avoid discussing with the elderly those issues that the elderly most want to discuss; e.g., memories, the course of life, and preparation for death. This both results from and creates physical and psychological distance and the fear of confronting death. The middle-aged, for their part, are often caught in decisions between assisting their parents or their children.

The college years, in America these being traditionally the years from 18 to 22, are years when understanding of ourselves, our values, and our society, undergo profound changes. These years would appear to be the optimal time to understand and alter our perceptions of the stereotypes that lead us to make uninformed judgements. The problem of any professor is how to open the mind of the student to different ways of thinking without resorting to indoctrination. No doubt a required course on aging and ageism would change the opinions of some, but that is not the purpose of education. Our students changed their perception of the aged and aging when they found themselves living among a person himself aged and aging. Their wish to build a communal facility in some ways approaches the indoctrination so characteristic of the convert; yet it also indicates an understanding that opinions change because of experiences and perceptions, not through classroom dictates.

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

In the most refined of experiments, the variables are known beforehand. To reach the ability to select well-defined variables, the experimentalist already knows much about the effects of major variables. Such refinement is not possible at present in the study of aging or ageism. It is for this reason, we suppose, that many investigators rely on age in years as the principle independent variable, a notion we have

suggested to be deceptive. We do not believe that present knowledge includes identification of the nature of the independent variables that affect aging or ageism. We suggest that qualitative questions about these issues must be described before quantitative questions can be set.

The methodological issues involved in qualitative research are unresolved, at least in comparison with quantitative research. The current requirements that social programs be evaluated and accountable often leads to the misuse of quantitative data which is collected before the qualitative questions could be phrased properly. We argue that in analyzing the Cross Generational Program at Bucknell, our first task is describing how the program has been experienced by those who participated in it or who observed it. Such description may yield the hypotheses that may be tested by quantitative ways.

The problem then becomes to gain descriptions of experiences systematically. Such descriptions may be written by observers, and we expect observers to experience the project from differing aspects. Perception is intransigently perspectival, else it would be of little interest. The problem of perspectivity has been discussed carefully by Van Kaam (1966), Giorgi (1970), Colaizzi (1974), Bogdan and Taylor (1975) and Keen (1975). Our system follows most closely the approach set out by Keen[1] which states that the multiple perceptions of a particular event are to be gathered

and formulated in the natural language of the observer. These descriptions are allowed to interact systematically with one another, yielding a comprehensive description. In order to demonstrate this method, this section on methodology concludes with a description and analysis of an atypical evening at the Cross Generational Project.

This method includes consideration of our temporal perspective. The Cross Generational Project was not the same in 1971 and 1981. Some programs were tried and failed, some worked and continued: not unlike the force of natural selection, a like force works on social behavior to shape the outcome while the outcome itself is constantly changing. Moreover, our method asks observers to describe experiences. Experiences refer to what is recalled, yet what is recalled is affected by recollection of goals, persons, happenings, all now compared to present goals and views, this being our understanding of the present.

Our data include (1) what the hopes of the program were, (2) what activities were tried; why and how they were tried, (3) what happened, and, (4) how what happened affected the hopes, goals, and activities of the participants.

During 1975, six students met with six elderly persons for one of the project's regular discussion groups, groups of varying degrees of success in the views of students and elderly. This particular meeting was not seen as successful by any of the participants: What happened?

"What happened" is always seen differently by participants. No single participant has a special position that makes the description more accurate than the others. To arrive at a reasonable description, perspectives of various participants are sought and integrated into a final description. The "what" of "what happened?" is an interaction among the several perspectives.

We have relied on data primarily from three sources. First, the host and hostess at whose home the meeting took place were interviewed. That interview was summarized in writing and submitted to them for their editting to assure its accuracy and propriety. While Mr. and Mrs. A are two persons, their view is seemingly similar enough in this case to be considered a single perspective. Second, Ms. B, a student, who participated in the discussion, was interviewed. Third, we interviewed Mr. C, who is the student director of the project. Ms. B and Mr. C both submitted written descriptions. All parties agreed that their comments are essentially public; they have all submitted them in the spirit of a cooperative effort to discover what happened, why, and with what implications for the project in general.

Mr. and Mrs. A.

(What follows is the description of the meeting from the point of view of the host and hostess. Some of the questions asked during the interview remain in the text, as do occasional indications of who is speaking. These are all placed in parentheses.)

"The discussion group in August 1975, at our home, took the direction of marriage, divorce, abortion, and free living. All the older people thought marriage was for life. One woman said that she had had a happy married life, but of course her husband was gone now. One of the girls said, "Oh, that's easy to say when one partner is gone." I thought that was a cruel thing to say. It hurt the lady's feeling, and ours too.

(What did the student mean by that?)

(Mr. A) "It was questioning her veracity, questioning the truth of her memory of her husband."

(Mrs. A) "Maybe they think she should find someone else. They definitely don't think you should keep one partner for life, the way they talked. Now of course, I believe in divorce in some cases; people do make mistakes.

"Then abortion came up, and of course "the pill" was the solution for that problem. We did not go along with that solution, and we asked how they thought they will feel when they get to be our age. They were so flippant in their replies.

(Can you describe in a few words just what happened? For example, would you say they insulted you?)

"That word is too strong, but I do not think they have any consideration for our age or feelings. They do not want to hear our side and how we feel. They just think we should accept all they say as truth.

"Then free living without marriage came up. That went a little hot and heavy for a while. One girl said she went to a party and a boy she knew less then fifteen minutes asked her to go to bed.

"Maybe we came on a little strong. I think Scott and Rick thought it was time to quit and left. I give them credit for that; the meeting was out of hand. I do not think these discussions should continue without a leader and a subject beforehand. I do not think abortion and free living are subjects for us, because they do not want really to know what we think.

"We are squares and nothing but hard feelings would come out of it. To us, such talk is putting yourself down with the animals, and we have a Soul. It really made us feel a little dirty, not good, and very much upset after the meeting. I will never expose myself to any more of their discussions.

"I do not think that way of life is the true American way of living. It is just a fad of this generation."

Comment

A number of things are evident from these remarks. Mr. and Mrs. A were offended by the content of the discussion. They perceived the students as uninterested in what they as older people had to say, as dogmatic in their views, and as insensitive to the feelings of older persons in having the discussion at all.

It is not clear the extent to which Mr. and Mrs. A are representative or typical of elderly people in the community or at that meeting, but their views are certainly not rare and so we are obliged to understand them. We gain some insight into the larger viewpoint behind these remarks in the reference to the "true American way of living." At

stake, here, for Mr. and Mrs. A is more than the discussion of sex; indeed, the American way is threatened by the "fad of this generation". This interpretation, that greater issues are at stake for Mr. and Mrs. A, is confirmed in their appended statement to the protocol concerning their attendance at Sunday Lunches sponsored by the Cross-Generational Project: "The Sunday get-togethers are nice: we visit with our friends. The question of right and wrong comes up here. Should we be a part of it? Then again, by going, we may show in some small way that our life style is not so bad." When issues as momentous as right and wrong appear, whether it is right to be a part of the project at all, then the issues are serious. In a second appended note, Mr. and Mrs. A express that seriousness in the following way: "We would like to know why tax money is being used to support the coed house for the Cross-Generational Program."

A third and final appended note to the protocol offers another context within which to understand Mr. and Mrs. A's feelings: "We are very happy to see so many (students) helping with the flood over in the court house and at Lutheran (Home). That is the trouble. We had so much faith in these young people. Then they showed us the other side of their thinking." This comment puts the discussion into the context of Mr. and Mrs. A's faith in the young people where it became a dashing of that faith and therefore a profound disappointment.

Ms. B.

(What follows is the text of Ms. B's written description.)

"The two issues I remember us focusing upon were (1) marriage and modern morality, and (2) employment or the lack thereof, as related to attitudes.

"I can't recall which group brought up the topics, but when they were being discussed, the general pattern was this: Older person makes a generalization about an action common among today's youth which is perceived by the older person as improper; younger person tries to explain why those "offenders" do what they do; older person takes these statements as being statements of younger person's viewpoint on the issue and tries to convince younger person that he/she is sinful for thinking things.

" Generally, Mrs. D (one of the older people) ended up on the younger people's side; especially on the issue of marriage, probably because she thinks pragmatically about marriage.

"Misunderstandings were frequent. Examples: (1) X (a student) tries to explain the attitude of men in unexciting, low pay work who would rather stay home and collect unemployment compensation. One woman tries to convince him that there is a joy to be found in the act of any work (Protestant ethic), and that he should enjoy working.

"(2) Y (student) mentions that one possible reason for older people to attest to the happiness of their marriages is that there is a reluctance to say anything bad about a deceased spouse. (She feels her mother has idealized her marriage after the death

of her father.) Mrs. E (older person) takes this as an affront against the wonderful things she has said about her marriage, and asserts in a very hurt one of voice that that is not true at all.

"(3) I try to introduce the concept that only superficialities of our morals have changed; that our basic criteria of right and wrong are the same. The example I give is of a woman living with a man, and taking the pill so that they will not bring an unwanted child into the world (basic criterion: not hurting a child). I added the expression, "There is often honor among thieves." Mrs. A burst forth with a remark to me about "living like animals," being extremely upset because she believed my point was to endorse premarital sex.

"From here a discussion developed over whether people should live together before marrying. Mr. and Mrs. A said you should be sure you could live with a person just by dating them, and only when married should you live together. Mrs. D endorsed living together previously, citing an example of a miserable couple where the husband was impotent and they were still together after 30 years, because they didn't believe in premarital living together or divorce. I can't remember which of us commented on this, but the tone was supportive of trial periods of cohabitation when neither person takes advantage of the other.

"Somewhere here we talked about "true love"--how many times this can happen in a person's life. We (younger people) replied that it can happen a number of times, in or out of a marriage-bound situation. I believe this is the point when Mrs. E remarked that she knows of people who believe that, but when we asked her if she agreed, she said no. Mrs. A insisted, "Only once." Here she asked for and got support from her husband. Ironically, one woman who also said true love occurs only once told us afterward she has been married twice.

"At the close of the session, Mrs. A said, "Here, this is all that matters," and she lifted up the Bible on the coffee table. "That's right," replied her husband. It was hard to think of a reply."

Comment

From Ms. B's perspective, the discussion group was characterized by the frustration of being misunderstood. Statements made in a spirit of explaining a viewpoint, not necessarily theirs, were taken as their own. Attempts at making distinctions or introducing concepts were branded as evil. According to Ms. B's perception of the meeting, many of Mr. and Mrs. A's judgments about students ("They just think we should accept all they say as truth") would apply to Mr. and Mrs. A themselves. Ms. B seems to be telling us that an open discussion with people like Mr. and Mrs. A is impossible as long as the latter insist that there is only one way to consider issues, the Bible, and refuse to take other

possibilities seriously. We see here an almost perfectly reciprocal pattern in which each side sees itself as misunderstood and the other as dogmatic; each side sees itself as desiring to be understood and the other as unwilling to understand.

Not only did Mr. and Mrs. A take the discussion to refer to issues much larger than the discussion itself, i.e., the Bible, and American Way, and the uniqueness of human beings in the great chain of being, so Ms. B (and probably other students) took the discussion to refer to convictions felt dearly concerning the rights of individuals to make certain decisions, so long as they are willing to take responsibility for those decisions. The irony is that this group, designed explicitly to promote cross-generational understanding, produced a classic example of misunderstanding.

There are two kinds of disagreements that may be seen in the data. First, there is a manifest disagreement about the explicit issues being discussed. More subtle, but more important, is a second disagreement, not about the content of the issues discussed, but about whether the discussion should be taking place at all. Mr. and Mrs. A felt the discussion got "out of hand," became something that should not happen at all, leaving them feeling "a little dirty." Ms. B, in contrast, seems to be assuming that any discussion, of anything, as long as it is carried out in good faith, is a good thing. (Mr. C later says this explicitly.)

The second difference is more serious, for it precludes not only agreement in content but agreement about why everyone is there at all and what is supposed to happen at all--an issue that bears not only on what one thinks of what the other is saying, but also on why one thinks the other is saying it. A disagreement at this level leads each side to reflect through what is being said to the assumed motives of the speaker. Might we venture the interpretation that, while the purpose of both parties was to improve understanding, each side had its stereotypical view of the other side that precluded such understanding?

Mr. C.

(What follows is excerpted from Mr. C's written statement.)

"Apparently, prior to my late enterance, the group had been talking about the subjects of sexual morals, youth, and marriage. I chose from the outset to observe rather than participate for the first few minutes, feeling that there may be a need for me to serve in a syncretic role. I thought that the best way to facilitate a common understanding would be to first assimilate each individual's perspective, and to follow up by later interjecting that our differences in perspective were due to differing assumptions about human nature.

"What I heard, saw, and felt were the following--I heard the students (and Mrs. D) saying that they wanted an open discussion on sexuality and marriage, with Mrs. A responding by offering her opinion that premarital sex was an offense against

the Church. I saw Mr. and Mrs. A coalesce and heard them expounding on the sins of abortion, a concern not at all unfamiliar to at least five of the seven students I recall being present. I saw Mrs. E, in her beautiful pacific altruism, being clandestine about her views on the institution of marriage, divorce, and sexuality. From her, I heard little. I heard X (a student) conceive the idea that each individual should be able to make his/her own decisions with regard to premarital relationships. Yet, I saw him stumble as he misphrased his intentions, and saw Mrs. A counter his opinion with her own, one which seemed to be in accord with the moral dictates of the Church."

Comment

We interrupt Mr. C's account at this point only to state that our impressions of at least two levels of disagreement have been confirmed. Mr. C has hinted that Mrs. A was dogmatic and X (a student) was inept. The former judgment is a harsher one, bearing on Mrs. A's motives, while the latter questions only the facility, not the motives of X. In one sense we might call this the application of a double standard, but that is too simple. We can hardly expect Mr. C not to have a perspective, a particular slant, and we see it favors the students.

Mr. C continues

"I heard students ready to open themselves to older people, to let their fears, concerns, and fantasies be shared. And what I thought I heard Mr. and Mrs. A saying was that these issues were not ones of individual morality, but those which should be decided with deference only to the Word of God."

Comment

At this point we can confirm an earlier interpretation, and expand it. For Mr. and Mrs. A, more was at stake than this discussion or personal opinion. God was to be taken seriously. This sense of what is at issue contrasts sharply with students' sense of what was being risked in the conversation--"their deepest fears, concerns, and fantasies." That which was put at stake was highly valued on both sides. Neither side quite understood this sense of the stakes for the other: any affirmation by either side was not seen as putting something on the line; it was perceived as a simple rejection of what he or she had put on the line.

We are bound to ask how each side could perceive the other so poorly. How could the students perceive Mr. and Mrs. A's remarks as a mere dogmatic rejection and not see that Mr. and Mrs. A were risking something valuable to them in their comments? How could Mr. and Mrs. A perceive the students as "flippant" and not see that the students wanted to "open themselves to older people"? Could it be that Mr. and Mrs. A failed to make clear how central an issue was at stake? That the students failed to make it clear? Or could it be that

each was clear enough but the other did not want to understand what was clearly expressed? We have in our data no neutral perspective from which to decide these questions. But we are coming closer to seeing what happened.

Mr. C continues

"After 30 minutes of several students drawing examples from their personal lives (with regard to premarital relations, in particular), I began to take notice of the thermodynamics of the situation. Peoples' feelings were becoming distressed, and the air was charged with tension. As I felt it (and I felt it as a mixture of excitement and loss), we seemed to be preparing for the perfect misunderstanding. Students were describing present situations, trying desperately to emphasize that once a person is in a particular situation it is up to him/her to work his/her way out of it. This was our opinion, or so we thought. Mrs. A seemed to be countering these opinions with a dogma of how things should be done in accordance with knowledge of the Word of God. The students were speaking in terms of their personal experiences; Mrs. A and her husband spoke in general, moralistic terms. Rarely, until directly encountered, did any of the older adults draw from their personal experiences."

Comment

We may now elaborate our understanding yet further. Mr. C is telling us here what we already know, but further he is drawing a distinction between "personal experiences" and

"general, moralistic terms." Each side not only put these different things at stake; they also had fundamentally different ways of talking and ideas about how one should talk. The students understood the issues to be personal and to demand from everyone a degree of rigor in exploring the personal. Mr. and Mrs. A understood the issues to be super-personal and to demand from everyone a degree of rigor about general moral relevance. Each failed to fulfill the other's sense of what the discussion demanded, even as each felt he or she was fulfilling exactly what the discussion demanded. Mr. and Mrs. A were bound to see the personal honesty of students as flippant, and the students were bound to see Mr. and Mrs. A's loyalty to their religious beliefs as mere dogma. It is also clear that each side, while starting with an understandably different set of ideas along these lines, failed to learn anything about the other in the course of the discussion. It is one thing to see you are misunderstood. It is something else to brand that misunderstanding as mere dogma or flippancy and thus fail to change your approach so as to be understood.

Neither the students nor the older people wanted to misunderstand or be misunderstood. How could this have happened?

Mr. C continues

"We had miscommunicated many times that evening--perhaps miscommunication is not the term. We had not communicated, for we spoke in different tongues.

"There is no reason to believe that even though we may think differently, that we can not be friends. The most important lesson to be learned from this experience (hopefully, not moralizing in trying to say it) is that when understanding another perspective fails, the very least one can do is accept the other."

Comment

Mr. C's first paragraph above confirms our interpretation. His second paragraph expresses a nice sentiment, that people who disagree can still be friends if they accept one another, but we now have reason to argue that such a sentiment does not say enough. Acceptance is not enough. In addition, a deeper understanding of the other is required in order for that acceptance to be real, durable, and to fulfill the student's own goals. Mr. C's lesson to be learned is, of course, exactly what he thought before the meeting. He does not think he learned anything from Mr. and Mrs. A; there is no evidence that he really understood Mr. and Mrs. A. For Mr. and Mrs. A to feel understood, Mr. C must be willing to consider the relevance of the religious and moralistic teachings to himself. His unwillingness to do this, of course, is matched on the other side by Mr. and Mrs. A's unwillingness to consider the possibility that sexual issues might be decided individually, and their posture betrays a similar lack of respect for the views of students.

Mr. C concludes

"I felt many things at the end of the evening. I was no longer quiet, but I was not in a mood to be "upset" at these people. I think that although many of the students were emotionally drawn out because they could not understand many of the older people's opinions, still they should accept that others had differing opinions. It was the semblance of dogma that confused us."

What happened?

In our attempt to see and to say "what" happened that evening, we have considered data exhibiting various perspectives on the same event. Through this method, we have been able to adopt a perspective from which aspects of the event become visible to us which remained hidden to the participants, both during and after the event. Our perspective differs from those of the participants by including more, not less, than the participants could see. We hope to have understood both sides, included that understanding in our own, and integrated it all at a deeper level.

Without making claims about the omniscience of our perspective, we ought to see if we can say, as well as we can, what happened. What was this event? The event was an <u>enactment of a disagreement</u>. First we shall look at the disagreements, then the enactment. We shall speak below of two groups, students, and older people, recognizing that there were no

doubt variations within these groups. In terms of the event's enactment, however, it appears that in fact sides polarized and, with the possible exception of Mrs. D, participants played their roles in terms of that polarization.

The disagreement

We can say that the disagreement has several levels. First, and most obviously, there was a disagreement about how people should behave. A number of issues appear at this level, but premarital sexual relations is typical.

Second, these issues lead us to a second layer of disagreement; how such issues of morality and behavior should be decided. The students understand the issues to be matters of personal decision; the older persons understand the issues to be matters that must be dealt with under the guidance of God and the Bible.

Third, behind the issue of how to decide is the issue of how to decide how to decide, or stated differently, the proper conditions under which a decision can be made about how to behave. Students envision the proper conditions to be open discussion, with interpersonal sharing, feedback, and even confrontation--against the backdrop of an agreement that this is necessary for individual decisions. Older persons envision the proper conditions to be religious training and a reverence toward that authority higher than any individual.

We may summarize the structure of the disagreement as follows:

	students	older people
how to behave	premarital sex is sometimes legitimate	premarital sex is never legitimate
how to decide how to behave	individual decision and conscience	the authority of the Word of God
how to decide how to decide how to behave	discussion, sharing, feedback, confrontation	religious training, reverence toward higher authority

The enactment

We see that this is no simple disagreement. As it came to be enacted in this event, it became even more complex. It is possible, even in complex disagreements like this one, that parties can move carefully from level to level, discover their various levels of disagreement, and come to see their own views in a new context. This did not happen in this event, even though both parties had some commitment to it happening. Finally, it appears that the commitment to the process of understanding and learning from disagreement was not so high as the unspoken commitment by all parties to enact a preconceived conflict.

The data for such an interpretation are indirect, but let us consider: Did student Y who made the remark about how easy it is to idealize a relationship after it has been severed by death really think that her remark would not offend, or at least be misunderstood, by Mrs. E? Did Mr. and Mrs. A really expect, when they asked the students how they will feel when they get to be their age, that students would hear anything but preaching? Did the student who told the story of being

propositioned after a fifteen minute acquaintanceship really expect the older people not to be shocked and disgusted? Did Mr. and Mrs. A really think that lifting the Bible from the table with the remark that that is all that matters would give students pause to reflect on their attitude in light of the Word of God?

There is some indication that both Mr. and Mrs. A and Mr. C realized, after the fact, that they had done it all wrongly. "Maybe we came on a little strong." "...we seemed to be preparing for a perfect misunderstanding." But the evidence also indicates that during the event what happened was mere conflict, with little understanding, as if they intended it to happen that way.

We cannot say that the conflict was explicitly planned, calculated, and that it satisfied everyone because it was so thorough. But we can perhaps say that the misperceptions we have seen cannot be accounted for without figuring in some preconceived stereotypes, the preservation of which became more important than their correction. Perhaps we can also say that the apparent frankness and straightfoward-ness by all parties was not designed to increase openness, but to draw battle lines. Perhaps we can add that everyone either came to the meeting having decided, or decided soon after it started, to teach the other something, not to learn something.

None of this is intended to impugn the motives of the participants, but only to call attention to their complexity. The purpose of this study is not to adjudge a curse on both

houses but to describe, as accurately as we can, what happened. The enactment of a preconceived conflict is not always a good or a bad thing to do; it may have its place. The fact that it conflicted, in this case, with the stated goals of all parties merely indicates that these goals apparently are not the only goals. Everyone will be better off realizing that fact.

The universal dissatisfaction with the meeting was understandable in light of the goal of understanding that was frustrated---a goal which, while not the only one, was real enough. That feeling of frustration need not be the final word on the matter; we can all learn something from what happened that night.

Appendix

(Mr. and Mrs. A submitted the following reflections on this report. These reflections further clarify the seriousness of their views and the challenge in taking them seriously.)

Dear Professor:

"I am going to try to answer your summation of the meeting here in October.

"I think for one looking from afar it was mostly fair. I did have the idea that the religious angle was put down, letting the immoral side to come on strong. As you know, we are Christians believing in a living God who lives within us if we let him.

"That is why we cannot accept the free living life of these young people. I know a lot do not think the free life is good. You cannot live unto yourself. Your life comes in contact with others everyday, just as lives touched each other the night of the discussion. Life is real and life is earnest and your body is not to be defiled.

"I think many people enjoy a nice clean evening without a lot of drinking and sex. People are crying out for good moral guide lines that they do not have and could be comfortable with at any College. We do not think of ourselves as saints, only plain people, trying to live for Christ. The longer you live the harder you find the job to be.

"But enjoy the benefits and satisfaction. I do not think any one planned the subject for discussion. That was one mistake. The old members were so shocked by the openness of the young members that we were really taken advantage of because of their quietness in thinking. The students did not nor want to listen. They did the talking and showed signs of not knowing what they were talking about when it comes to hardships and making do with what you have. The Government was not available to keep us as it is today.

"I like the new program you talked about, going to visit some people; they need that. One boy doing volunteer work from B. U. goes to the Methodist Home and spends a lot of time with my brother-in-law. I would say it is a hard job. You have to be very understanding and like people for that work.

"Hoping we can work together and come to a good understanding."

Sincerely,

Summary

We might review our research questions and see what investigation such as that discussed in the preceding example does and does not do in moving us toward answers: (1) How do people understand themselves and how do they understand aging such that they are motivated to try new interactions across generations?; (2) How are people's self-understandings changed by trying such new things?; (3) What kinds of interactions seem most fruitful in producing new self-understanding and a new understanding of aging?; (4) Do such new understandings open up the range of possibilities for how to become old?; and (5) What are the possibilities, and the impossibilities, for how to become old?
These questions led us to see that investigation relevant to them should be social action research which involves institutional innovations that change the experiences people live through over an extended period of time, and it should be qualitative research, which describes these experiences in sufficient detail that we know what happened, why, and with results that were experienced how.

In the discussion group just described, might we see some answers to these questions? We saw that some actions initiated at one level of self-understanding (planning to have discussion groups in the conviction that it would be good to exchange views and understand others, the better to understand oneself) can be contradicted by actions informed

at another, less explicit, level of self-understanding (the enactment of a disagreement). Of course, this is not the whole story of the Cross-Generational Project, but we have definitely learned something about the complexity of human motivation and interaction quite relevant to our questions.

THE EARLY YEARS

All goals are limited by environment. For this project two environments were evident: that inhabited by the young and that by the old. Bucknell is a privately controlled, coeducational, nonsecterian university located in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, with 3,000 students. Lewisburg is a community of 13,000 in its "metropolitan area." Both university and town are on the Susquehanna River and the university slowly shades into stately 18th and 19th Century residences, and within walking distance, the main shopping street. "Suburbs," built since 1960, have grown around the university golf course and the old town. There is no public transportation. The town is supported by the university, corporate headquarters, and light industry.

In 1972 and 1973 students focused on finding the funds necessary to acquire a house to be used to house themselves and the elderly. Numerous leads were followed, many of which served to mature the students and educate them regarding the ways real estate sales work, the less pleasant sides of political,

but especially beauracratic, maneuvors which, to the students, appeared irrelevant to the needs of those whom the officials were expected to serve, and the difficulties in locating appropriate government agencies and, once finding them, learning how to make application for support. Students involved in the program during this period learned far more about these matters than about aging and ageism: theirs was a political role and they learned with astonishment of the discouraging attitude toward the project taken by those from whom they expected support; e.g., operators of nursing homes.

In 1973, the students learned of FIPSE and prepared a preliminary proposal. When they were later told of the interest of FIPSE in their supplying a complete application, they were more elated than the request deserved. A final proposal was prepared by the student group during their senior year, and news of funding was received six weeks before they were to be graduated.

In 1974, the university assisted the students by making available to them Leiser House, a house with two living rooms, a small kitchen, and 17 bedrooms located where the university imperceptibly becomes the town.

The second generation of students (1974-76) inherited a well-funded program (approximately $16,000 per year for two years) and set out to (1) find a property and (2) begin to engage the elderly in the program. The first goal failed, chiefly for lack of funds and the absence of properties that

could be used by both students and the elderly without extensive renovation. The students, undaunted, organized a series of meetings with some elderly known to them by visiting nutrition sites and churches, and by asking those whose enthusiasm for the program was not strong (nursing home administrators, local council on the aging) to participate in a planning group. The stated goals of the second generation are instructive when compared to those of later generations. They were (1) to meet older people from the area, (2) to establish advisory and planning committees composed of local elderly, service providers, faculty and students, (3) to hold intergenerational activities, and (4) to secure housing for the project. Note that no mention is made of education.

There has been a consistent difference in feeling between the faculty advisor and the students; namely, the advisor believed it important to make activities educational, to introduce the elderly into the classroom, and to have students encourage the elderly to take part in the cultural and athletic events of the university. In his view, there was never more than polite interest in such education, by either students or elderly, for they consistently turned to social activities, always involving food or refreshments, perhaps because these activities permitted the young to "do something" and the elderly to receive. The source of this proclivity may well be that it proved difficult to entice elderly to the Leiser House without offering a picnic or lunch.

Such events did prove to be the mechanism by which the first set of elderly began to attend the house, yet this tone has continued even though student participation and management changes annually. One student, tiring of the consistency of food being a requisite for talk, interrupted a lunch one day by saying, loudly, "This place is one big Skinner Box: they perform and we feed them."

The second generation of students worked to interest elderly in the project by making arrangements for elderly to live in the house as guests with the ideal that some would be suitable and interested in long-term occupancy. Guests stayed for 1-2 weeks. Although the guest program was popular with the students, it became difficult to find elderly capable and interested in living in the house, even for short periods. Those elderly who were competent preferred the freedom of their own accommodations: the relatives of those who were not were all too ready to find a home for their responsibilities. The faculty advisor noted two distinct feelings on the part of this generation of students. One was a frustration at being unable to attract capable, interesting, and active adults as residents and the second was anger at the number of elderly who were living or placed in unsatisfactory places. Some of this anger was toward middle-age children who were (to the eyes of the faculty advisor) desperate to find someone to care for their aged parents. Other anger was directed at a society that appeared to leave no alternatives but to enforce unwanted dependencies between

aged parent and child. Campus unrest with policies in southeast Asia were related to this anger, although none of the residents of Leiser House were notably active in the peace movements of the time. As frustration with the program grew, the program floundered, and the number of elderly attending events decreased along with student interest. In order to restimulate interest, the student leadership decided to hold a conference on aging in the spring. Maggie Kuhn of the Grey Panthers was enlisted to speak, workshops were arranged, and the students set out to make the house visible both to town and fellow students. The conference was a success. Between 300 and 500 persons attended part of the conference over the two days on which it was held, about 60% being elderly persons, many of whom were brought by bus from neighboring towns chiefly through the interest of nutrition site leaders. (Two years later, Ms. Kuhn was to return again when interest was low, this time to lecture to the elderly about their responsibility to the young.)

The 1974-76 period was characterized by high rates of activity, especially among the students, in part because the program waxed and waned in terms of number of participants. The original goal of having elderly live communally had not worked and the reliance on social activities had begun to disturb students who had entered the project with other expectations. Sunday lunches thrived and provided an opportunity for participants to meet regularly to talk about the week's

activities; discussion groups were of interest to a limited number of participants, and became a chore for the students. (The faculty advisor, however, believes that these sessions were of far greater interest to the elderly than the students appreciated: the students tended to think of success only in terms of numbers.) Attempts to have elderly sit-in on courses or contribute to courses about which they have first hand knowledge (e.g., the depression in courses in history and economics) were not notably successful, and attempts to engage interest in cultural and athletic events, while highly successful in some cases, surely did not change anyone's habits; i.e., elderly who had always enjoyed university events continued to do so.

The students suspected that the perceived line between the university and townspeople was stronger than they had imagined. They decided to reverse their course and to enter the town directly. They did so by visiting the elderly participants in their homes, by organizing activities away from campus, and most noticeably by defending the elderly's interest in a community squabble concerning the location at which low-cost housing for the elderly was to be built. This was the sole occasion on which students urged elderly toward a political position and aided them in doing so.

Although we refer to the period 1976-78 as being the third generation, the project had now been in operation for so long that students did not know either the previous occupants or the history of the project. The faculty advisor did little

more than attend planning meetings and approve expenditures. His attendance at functions was sporadic, following the principle that either the project's offerings were of interest to the participants, or the project should fold. The faculty advisor believed that a student-initiated and managed program should continue only so long as the participants felt it worthy of their time. During this period the project experienced its high point of activity and its low. From the viewpoint of the advisor, the determining factor was the qualities of the person selected by the students to be their leader. Successful leadership appears to require a sense of the mission of the project, an ability to delegate authority, and an ability to attend to detail without interfering with the authority once delegated. As may be expected from familiarity with any organization, leaders emerge for varying reasons. Some see leadership as a means of enhancing their future careers, some appear to work from unexposed feelings of guilt regarding aging relatives, and some merely assume authority because it is seemingly unwanted by anyone else.

During this period a new set of published goals appeared. These were (1) to involve more students and elderly into intergenerational action, (2) to develop "outreach" efforts to the rural population, (3) to bring an interest in education to the elderly, and (4) to begin a proper evaluation of the program. A program was set for each week and monthly calendars were mailed to the elderly. The principle activities were the

continuation of the Sunday lunches, now sometimes followed by a talk or discussion, the scheduling of Tuesday evening discussion groups, the appointment of a student to direct "outreach", a program by which students not necessarily living in Leiser House visited an older person routinely. The elderly person was usually a person living alone in the farmland or mountain areas surrounding Lewisburg. Outreach was an attempt to engage students in the program by making a commitment of their time less than that required of house members. Such students could also serve a population of elderly not reached by the program. It had become evident that the elderly and students at Leiser House had become a cohesive group, but one which was perceived by students living elsewhere as "closed." The university faculty was asked to approve a course on "Aging: An American Neurosis," a seminar available to entering freshman. Coincidentally, the program became involved with a grant to the community from the Office of Economic Opportunity to assist elderly in locating part-time jobs. Support was received from the Surdna Foundation to encourage the elderly to contribute toward classes and cultural events.

The faculty advisor noted that this third generation of students had no previous interest in any academic program related to aging. Their principle interest appeared to be in making the program a success. If the first generation may be called idealistic, this generation was pragmatic, not to say calculating.

As all teachers know, the students' motives for participating are far less important than the fact that the student begins to question. Whatever the motives of this generation of student members when they joined the program, some came to appreciate the problems of aging and ageism. Consider this portion of an interview with a student of this generation at graduation:

(Question: What about the program seemed to you to be of value?) "I guess it was a novel situation, plus the thought, which was new to me, that these two groups, where relations are supposed to be most strained--youth and the elderly--really have a lot in common, such as their financial dependence on the middle age group and the fact that neither is very well understood by the power centers in our society. That made it seem novel and interesting--especially the original plan where the elderly and college students would live together. I was somewhat disappointed when this modified plan came up (because of the limitations of Leiser House, where there are guest rooms but not permanent housing for elderly).

(Question: What would you say are the goals of the program?) This answer may sound sort of canned, because it's what everyone says, but I think it's right: To try to come to some understanding between college students and old people. And second, to bring about some pragmatic improvements in both groups in how they relate to other groups, and of course some material gains for the elderly. Of course, we also want to see the feasibility of this kind of living arrangement."

This third generation was united in believing that older citizens' should be made aware of the rights as citizens and attempted to motivate the elderly toward political action. The students saw themselves as leaders, some as missionaries, believing that this program was the first of its kind and therefore of national significance. The students developed a canniness for public relations: one appeared on a national talk show with Maggie Kuhn to talk about the program. Students "testified" at state and federal hearings; newspaper and magazine publicity appeared; professional conventions sought their participation. From the faculty adviser's viewpoint, public relations became more important than the program itself to some students. Nonetheless, viewpoints were being changed on the part of both students and elderly (Puccetti, 1981) especially regarding national policies in regard to defense and the welfare of the aged.

The following description of an event by a student speaks for itself:

"At a casework meeting for the Union and Snyder Counties area, one of the students heard of an elderly woman whose mother had to be taken to the hospital. That the father was bedridden came to light as the meeting progressed. The problem was that the daughter could not visit the mother because of the father's state. The student wasted no time in offering our services to the daughter, Miss C., age 64. Though her

parents had been ardent churchgoers in the town (several miles outside of Lewisburg), since she was sometimes overly suspicious of others, the church had apparently deserted her and her family.

"This student arrived the same day and found that the father, 89, was covered with bedsores and had been bedridden for eighteen months. He was incomprehensible and so weak that he could not move. He had lost control of his urinary functions, and the smell of urine, mixed with the grime and fly infestedness of the room, was shocking.

"Over the next few weeks, four students alternated, in groups of two, sitting with the father while the daughter visited the mother. During that time, they also discovered that Miss C. had either not been informed or had forgotten many of her welfare rights. The students researched the multiple problems, found her to be eligible for free prescription glasses and other benefits. There was little to be done for the father except wait.

"On one occasion, a few weeks after the students had earned her confidence, Miss C. notified us that her father would like to go for a wheelchair ride, and she also said that she could not obtain a wheelchair from the local authorities. A student called the officers in question, and learned that the bureaucracy was so arranged as to necessitate the daughter's appearance at the courthouse to sign documents releasing the wheelchair. Obviously a catch-22,

one of the students went and asked that he be able to sign for the device. The answer came back as a negative: the forms required a relative's signature. At this point, the student, infuriated with the particular inappropriateness of the paperwork, demanded the wheelchair. The woman at the office, obviously in no position to decide, submitted to his wishes under pressure of his threatening stance. He later related that although he regretted having had to take such a position, he found it shameful that the bureaucracy prohibited assisting the people in need.

"Shameful as it may have been, it appears that the situation justified his recourse. It was the father's last view of the community in which he had lived for over eighty years. His last ride, as one of the two female students relates, centered on "saying goodbye to the trees, buildings, and sidewalks."

"The father died several weeks later, uninformed of the death, just a week prior, of his eighty-four year old wife. The students, upon return from their two weeks holiday in the latter part of August, sought means through which to improve Miss C's lifestyle, including putting her name on the list for the elderly highrise in a nearby town. One of the other outreach visitees from the same town, although effectively blind, was encouraged to visit Miss C. and to assist her."

The students learned a great deal from this experience, about themselves, about these three older adults, and about institutions. It made personal to many of them the meanings of the terms "bedridden," "terminal," "bureaucracy," "isolation," and "limited income." It also taught the students about the character of some religious communities. Finally, the episode supplied the students with the "outreach" idea, which like the Sunday Lunches, discussion groups, and visiting elderly guests, gave the Program substance--things that would happen and, in happening, achieve the goals of the Program.

Toward the end of 1976, ennui set in and the program became listless once again. The faculty advisor suggests a number of reasons. First, students perceived their need to "catch-up" with academic work as "crushing": studies had been neglected. Second, students complained that they could not get beyond a superficial relationship with the elderly. (Perhaps because the elderly came to sense that they were being employed by the students for uncertain motives.) Third, the students were unable to change the constituency of the elderly participants by the outreach program. They perceived this as a failure of their goal of motivating social action. Fourth, there was a subtle falling-out regarding leadership, perhaps aided by the TV coverage given one student. Later interviews produced additional information on what occurred at this time:

"The program lacks an integrated student effort. We are disorganized and many seem alienated. Responsibilities are not being equally distributed (to the point where the large majority of responsibility is in the hands of 2 or 3 people). If we cannot change the atmosphere of alienation that prevails in the house we will be unable to attract new blood."

Another student's rather lengthy comment helps:

"At the outset of the program I was interested primarily in the outreach program. I had hoped to be visiting older individuals in their homes, and inviting them in turn to House functions. This is due mostly to my own negligence and lack of time. But I think it is also due to my reactions to the House and the program as a whole. I must admit that at times I feel quite uncomfortable there. I know a lot of this is due to my own guilt feelings about not having taken the time to do outreach calling and visiting. But it is also a result of the feeling of underlying tension that I perceive within the House. There are others in the House who perceive this tension also and are often more affected by it than I am--and that troubles me. The commitments to the program of the individuals in the house are of varying degrees, and I think this adds (or may indeed be the cause) to the tension. Some individuals are deeply involved whereas others, like myself, remain merely on the periphery. These different commitments then include different expectations. Everyone has a different idea about and expectation for the program--which can potentially be a good thing!--but somehow I think it just adds to the tension."

The various organizational structures, such as the Student and Elderly Board, the Executive Advisory Board, and the Evaluation Advisory Committee, were made irrelevant. A paradox might be stated: Students felt that the program was not really the student/elderly cooperative venture that they had in mind and that the program was becoming merely another on a list of service agencies that give to, but do not receive from, the elderly, thus reinforcing the passivity of the elderly, passivity that they had hoped to combat. But how could the elderly be anything but passive recipients, even outsiders, when they were not invited to share the most central concerns of the program? It is understandable that the students did not want to frighten the elderly away by confronting them with such problems, nor did they want them to feel as discouraged as they, the students, felt.

A second paradox is that insofar as publicity itself is a goal, its effect on a program, like its effect on a person, is mixed. In this case, publicity was a goal because the local and national consciousness was to be raised, yet it also confronted students with the stark contrast between the Cross-Generational Project's public image and their personal experiences with the program. This contrast, in turn, made them feel hypocritical, a feeling which heightened the contrast.

We might well be tempted to say simply that the students' expectations were unrealistic; the task they set for themselves was too large for the amount of time they were able to

devote to it, and their image of the elderly was idealized. We must become more precise if we are to understand the students' experience. There appear to be two categories of expectations in this case: expectations about the elderly and expectations about the students themselves.

During the summer the students recognized that the elderly were manifestly different from themselves, but they assumed that these differences were merely superficial and that in essence the elderly were just as they felt themselves to be; desirous of intimate, trusting, sharing relationships, and capable of seeing social injustice and becoming angry about it. Although it may be true that every human being wants close relationships and is angered by injustice, it does not necessarily follow that these commonalities can easily be mobilized into natural relationships such as those envisioned by the students. Perhaps some of the manifest differences between students and elderly were not merely superficial; perhaps they expressed fundamental differences in outlook that would have required negotiation and mediation. If this had been true, the required negotiation and mediation would in turn have required a desire on both sides to move from present courtesies to more complex relationships, a desire that would have presupposed that both sides perceived the abstract commonalities and where they might lead. The elderly did not prove to be who the students thought they were supposed to be; rather, they insisted on being who they were, and that difference led the students to be disappointed.

The second category of expectations--those the students had about themselves--were also involved in making what happened a disappointment. That time would become dear, that relationships between students and elderly would become complicated, and that the program would present difficult challenges---none of these outcomes was a surprise. That they would add up to profoundly guilty/angry/suspicious feelings, and that these feelings would result in social fragmentation and a collapse of morale was a surprise. What seems to have happened to the project's goals was also a surprise. Meeting the most difficult challenges, such as reaching the rural poor and engaging the elderly in the operation of the program itself, came to be ignored in favor of recruiting new members, merely to continue the existence of the program. "Superficial" contact with the elderly was grudgingly accepted; the most difficult tasks of the program were jettisoned in order to concentrate on survival. This is not, of course, the whole story, just as the disappointment with this turn of events is not the whole story, for new goals turned up, or perhaps we should say new formulations of new goals, formulations that have allowed the program to continue without the wide fluctuations in morale that were experienced in 1975.

We have noted these changes at this point because the adjustments in students' perceptions by May 1976 can help to tell us what happened six months earlier. These adjustments were successful; students are not insensitive. Perhaps without

articulating the dynamics of their own psychology as clearly as our present perspective allows us to do, they knew what was wrong and they changed it. What is it they knew? For one thing, they knew that if they did not retreat in order to concentrate on the survival of the program, their continual frustration with themselves and with the elderly would spell its demise. As to what else they knew, let us listen to some of what they said in May 1976:

"For me the program has been beneficial. During first semester it helped greatly to have it as an outside activity, where I could feel I was doing something worthwhile. It also gave me a chance to relax from the pressures of the academic scene for a little while."

Another student said:

"It has been extremely rewarding to be with people other than those of my age class here at school. I think it is important to associate with people in the community in which one lives and particularly with the elderly. Also, I've met many 'neat' people and have made friends with some of the elderly."

Also typical at this time:

"Besides becoming well trained at filling out questionnaires and evaluation sheets, I feel that I have become very close to individuals living in the house and I doubt whether a dorm environment would have provided me with as valuable an experience. I have come to know a few of the older people very well, especially some of those who stayed at the house."

What is the tenor of these remarks? Meeting new and otherwise unavailable people, living in a house instead of a dorm, being in touch with the community, doing something worthwhile. These remarks are about what was good about being in the program. Those feelings express what the students could advertise in recruiting new members. However, the goals were a long way, psychologically, from what had been expected less than a year earlier.

In the spring of 1976, there occurred a pulling back from the optimism about changing the world and a refocusing on what the Cross-Generational Program had to offer as compared to other ways of spending one's time. This question was generated by the students themselves. It is the sort of question one asks about programs that are established; it differs notably from what one asks when a program is being founded. Perhaps the most important thing that was learned by this generation was that the goals of the program could change, and that changing them did not automatically require one to feel guilty.

The fourth generation occupies the period from 1976-1981. Although students engaged in the program in 1976 and those now engaged do not know one another, their responses to the program have been similar. Each year up to 20 students have lived in the house, and the Sunday Lunches continue with the addition of a cultural or educational event afterward. On some winter Sundays, conversations among students and elderly have continued cheerfully throughout the afternoons. The

discussion groups were replaced by educational experiences (a talk on Judaism brought out large numbers of elderly; a talk on Buddhism and Hinduism one less large). Attendance at concerts, especially those at holiday-times, plays, and musicals includes house members and elderly. Leadership problems have arisen, and been solved, most often by a strong leader taking command and moving to the background once the program regains its stride. The outreach program is gone (but the effort now has been assumed by another student group as part of a larger university program of social concerns).

Some of the first elderly members have died. Each death brings out sharp reaction from the students who are stunned by what they perceive as the elderly's lack of interest in the death of one of their friends. On such occasions, discussion groups have been formed in which the elderly explain that death is perceived very differently by the elderly from its perception by the young. In terms of the original goals of learning of the other's perspective on life, these meetings are obviously productive happenings. Some elderly are participating in courses (especially in "Death and Dying", "British poetry" and "Economics"). Conversations center on financial concerns (a matter which the young think natural to discuss, and about which the elderly are made uncomfortable to discuss) as if discussions of one's financial picture are the 1980 equivalent of the discussion of sex described that took place in 1975. There is no further financial support from any governmental or private agency.

The Association of Bucknell Students gives annual grants to worthy student projects, and funds from this source have supported the program from 1976 onward. This appropriation was recently reduced and it may be necessary to decrease the frequency of lunches, for although contributions are requested, the project consistently fails to meet costs of lunches. For the year 1981-82 the house is filled with students eager to continue and change the program in ways yet to be learned.

Who learns what?

How we understand aging determines, to some degree, how we age. Had our purpose been to assess the changes in behavior that could be attributed to participation in the project---had we known that the project would succeed and fail in ways different from the original goals---had we known that the project would survive for at least a decade---we might have designed ways of measuring the effects of the program on the participants. But the original goal was to change society's view of intergenerational support by forming an institution that succeeded in demonstrating that intergenerational living was a workable alternative to a society that is often segregated by age.

How much can the pattern of age segregation be reversed? This goal of the project was compromised within two years. The chief obstacle was that for reasons of security, one's residence is the last thing one gives up. If the project failed to achieve age integration in housing, it pointed to

the laws and financial regulations that work against integration in living. The original students could not forsee that a movement favoring building housing specifically for the elderly would become the prominent pattern.

What have students learned? If one has little contact with the elderly, or if the contact has been negative in tone, as so often happens when the elderly are supported by their children, phrases such as "the elderly," "old people," and "senior citizens" are stereotypes. At the least, we know that our students changed their stereotypes because of contact with the older participants. A major shift was the students' recognition that there is as much (or more) variability among old people as there is among the young. Through experiences with the elderly, students came to appreciate the notion that aging is a continuous process. To return to words from interviews:

"It's also helped my confidence, I think, and given me something more to grab on to in thinking about where I'm headed in the future--I mean my old age. It's brought the reality of getting older a little closer. I'd never given it a serious thought. Everyone knows they'll get old, of course, but I just never thought about it. And I find that it doesn't bother me, really; I feel I'll be very content to get older, and I have had a chance to really think about it now.

"I'm seeing people and saying to myself, 'I wouldn't mind having these qualities when I get old ... .' I guess I'd like to keep my idealism. There is the darker side, physical things, the loneliness, and knowing your peers are dying, and that younger people don't care--the noncommunication that the program is trying to do something about. How much of all this, and its emotional accompaniment, can be prevented, I don't know. Some people at the luncheons just sit and don't talk, even while others crack jokes. I don't know how much of that difference was always there and how much of it has been produced by the expectations we all have of older people. I just don't know how much of that can be changed.

"I also think that maybe a lot of them have accepted the idea that the most important part of their lives is over, that they should just take a back seat, and not participate as much as they used to. (Of course, you won't be that way when you become old...) I hope not, but there's a good chance of it. (Why?) I don't know, it seems natural, in a way. Maybe if I had other old people around me who weren't like that--that is, if I had a good model.

"When I see the variety of old people at Leiser House, I can't help wondering how I'll turn out. I think of the frustrations of remembering some things so well and knowing that you're forgetting other things--your eyesight failing, your health failing, the money problems, and so on.

(Have your own views on aging changed? Of your own aging?) "No, I think not. I don't really have a different view of aging, although I do know more about the problems of the elderly. I don't really think about it that much; I assume that no matter how old I get, I think of myself as staying in shape, working at a job that interests me--it's a very unrealistic view, really. When I do picture myself in the physical and mental condition of some of the older men I've met, it scares me tremendously. I guess that's why I don't think much about my own aging.

"Also, I think you get to see what it's like to be older. (Have you thought about that?) Not really thought about it, but I'm somehow more aware of it. We all know that we are getting older, but in this situation, where you're volunteering to be in the program, the direct contact with older people makes that somehow different, more real."

These responses do not constitute a resolution of fear, nor a whitewash of difficulties, nor a litany of good intentions and resolutions. What they most importantly do not indicate is fleeing the issue. Even the student who says he doesn't think about his own aging much because it frightens him tremendously is far ahead of most Americans in confronting his own feelings about becoming old.

We suspect that one's understanding of aging influences how one ages and that students who have been involved in the Cross-Generational Project will age on the basis of a more

thoughtful and reflective understanding of being old. It is noteworthy that of the first student originators, four became physicians, and two have specialized in practice with the elderly. Three of the students were women who did not, as undergraduates, consider themselves as involved in a career in medicine. The decision to attend medical school came after experience with the project.

What do the elderly learn? Our data indicate very few formative changes in the elderly. They appreciate the program, their faith in students as a group is sometimes stated, generalized by one elderly widow into a more optimistic sense that the future may be better: "It restores my faith in the future, so that maybe my children and grandchildren don't have such a terrible world to live in."

Many elderly commented both on the aid and the enriched experience in their lives from the project, but each remarks on a different aspect of the program. Contrary to the hopes of the founders, the elderly did not become more active politically, they have not reflected differently on aging; they have not undertaken new intellectual or cultural adventures; and they have not taken much responsibility for organizing and mobilizing the project. There are exceptions to each negative statement.

The first two of these negatives--the elderly have not become more politically active, and they have not reflected more or differently on what it means to be old--both indicate that our local elderly have not acquired the particular awareness

of being old that was originally envisioned for them. That is, to become politically active as an old person requires an awareness that I am old, you are old, we together are not heard or understood, and we feel a kinship in our being victimized. It requires, a consciousness of our common goals, as a group, against other groups. To become reflective about being old, in the sense that the students meant it, is not only to face death---which the elderly already do---but also to become articulate about the enriched sense of life that comes from that struggle. These first two negatives state that the elderly have not become the kind of people the founding students wanted them to become, and they have not done so because these particular affirmations of agedness have not been made.

In the case of the second two negatives---the elderly have not taken advantage of the growth opportunities that the university community can offer, and they have not taken over, or even participated very fully in, the development of new aspects of the program---we can see another way in which the older participants have not acted according to hopes or expectations: They have not affirmed certain attitudes that are, in our culture, attributed to youth; ambition to grow personally and to create new social institutions. These negatives do not say that our elderly have failed to affirm a preconceived sense of being old; they say instead that our elderly have enacted the already existing sense of being old rather than rejecting it, as was envisioned for them.

It is not evident from our Cross-Generational Project whether these envisioned changes did not come about because they cannot come about, or whether they can happen, but did not because our project was not radical enough. We cannot conclude that old age necessarily precludes teaching what life is about from a perspective young people do not have, that it means ceasing to grow intellectually, or to participate creatively in the social world around one. As a matter of fact, we do not know whether these negatives are negative because of the age of the Lewisburg elderly or because of what we have called a "cultural" difference. The older people, did, of course, grow up half a century before our students, and the America of the early decades of this century is not the America of today.

Either of these hypotheses, that the negatives are negative because old age precludes what was hoped for or because of a cultural difference, might lead one to see these descriptions as determined. Cultural training might be just as determinative and unchangeable as the biological aging process. These two possible causes may interact with each other and with further psychological determinants that we do not understand or even glimpse. We cannot, on the basis of project, reject this negative hypothesis. From the data of our project, neither can we affirm it. We do not yet know whether such changes as were envisioned for the elderly are possible. Neither do we know they are impossible. What we do know is that if they are to occur, something different from the Cross-Generational Project will have to be tried.

Changes in the Cross-Generational Project

During 1975 and 1976, profound changes took place in the goals of the Cross-Generational Project; we have some understanding of why they took place. Changing the elderly became less important as a goal. By 1978, helping the elderly the way one helps people who need help, by offering a lot, demanding little, accepting them as receivers of services---this theme becomes common. The content of what students feel they have to offer the elderly has changed. Students want to enrich the lives of the elderly more than they want to transform them. Their aims are less ambitious, less visionary, and less idealistic.

We are unable to reject either of two possible reasons for this change. It may have come about as a local reflection of the widely noted national shift in student consciousness, from the activistic and social-political-moral sensibilities of students in the late '60s and early '70s, to the career-oriented, achievement-conscious dutifulness of the students of the late '70s. Or, this change in goals may have occurred because of the internal dynamics of the history of the program. Programs have a kind of inevitable "natural history," from idealistic beginnings, through an early crash, and, if they survive, to a more modest settling for less and an attempt to make the most of what seems possible in spite of the failure of the earlier vision.

It is important to make this discrimination between causes because if the change came about as a result of the larger cultural change on college campuses, then it is essentially

exogenous and accidental. It does not reflect an inevitability about it, as if there were "laws" governing the maturing of programs aiming at institutional change. Other programs aiming at institutional change have experienced a similar history, and one can even note similar details of the processes of disillusionment, disappointment, and the decision to lower expectations in order to survive.

If we reflect upon what did happen, we recall that the students in 1975-76 suffered a disappointment not only with themselves but with the early appearance of the "negatives" described. The students did not change the elderly; rather, the elderly insisted on being who they were, and that was quite different from how the students had envisioned them. In a word, the students confronted the "otherness" of the Lewisburg elderly, and the apparent intransigence of that otherness led to the students' being disappointed. It is never a simple matter when one group initiates action in the hope that another group will change. In addition, in this case it was (and remains) impossible to say whether the difference that is the "otherness" is an age difference, a cultural difference, or both; it is also impossible to determine the relative importance and the particular relevance of age and culture.

As of this writing, frustration due to the elderly's otherness is much less than previously. The elderly of Lewisburg are accepted for whom they are. The stability of the

"otherness" had to be accepted, at first grudgingly, later routinely. The students of 1981 still wish the elderly would be more active politically, would share more of their knowledge about being old, would be less fearful of learning new things and less hesitant to jump into the program with initiatives of their own, but they do not stake the success of the program on the fulfillment of these wishes.

In general, the shift in goals has been from changing the elderly to changing the students. In terms of changing those relevant attitudes that support the social phenomenon of ageism, such a shift in goals means that direct social intervention has become less important and the indirect effect of education has become more important. In part, this change was dictated by the social realities that blocked the original project and forced a compromise plan. We have therefore learned that, at least under the social conditions in which the Cross-Generational Project finds itself, direct social intervention through the creation of totally new, intergenerational living institutions is not possible. We have also learned, however, that the compromise experiment, more educational in nature, has had positive results for students about which we are entitled to feel hopeful.

It seems reasonable to suggest that being old differently from how we currently become so must begin many years before one retires or is widowed. The college years may well be crucial. The kind of thoughtfulness that Cross-Generational Project

students have about their own eventual old age is not likely to have been a part of most people's experience. Education, in this crucial sense of learning to take seriously the necessities of life and to explore a variety of possibilities within these limits, seems to us to be the necessary accompaniment of the needed reform movement, in order that the spirit, as well as the letter, of our culture may evolve into more humane ways of understanding aging and ageism.

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Notes to Chapter

[1]These procedures were submitted to the Ethical Practices Committee at Bucknell University in compliance with the specifications of 45 CFR, Part 46, implementing section 474(a), of the Public Service Health Act. A description of the procedure is available on request to the second author.

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