

Building the Bridge: Inter-Generational Generativity

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“Blessed is he who plants tress under whose shade he will never sit.” -- Indian Proverb

Western Washington University is noted for its collection of outdoor and indoor sculptures and for its history of innovative educational programs. Yet, there is another interesting feature of this public university. Two of its dormitories are situated on each side of a highway going through the campus. These two dormitories are connected by a bridge that spans the highway and affords students with the opportunity to travel between the two dormitories without have to go to the ground floor and walk across the highway.

One summer a program was offered at this university for senior citizens. There was nothing unusual in this regard, for many colleges and universities have provided these educational services during the last couple of decades. As was the plan at most educational institutions, the older students were provided with their own space for not only the classrooms where they are taught, but also the dorm rooms where they lived for a short duration.

At Western Washington U. this meant placing the senior learners in one of the two dormitories by the highway, while the other dormitory was still occupied by the traditional young students attending classes at the university. Some concern was voiced about the younger students annoying the elder students by hanging around on the bridge between the dormitories or even wandering into the dorm reserved for the older learners. A barrier was erected in the middle of the bridge, so that this disruption would not occur. After all, we need to be sure not to bother the senior citizens with the noise or disruptive energy of the young folk.

Something interesting occurred. Both the young students and the old students became curious about what was occurring on the opposite side of the barrier. They began to talk with one another over the barrier and soon became frustrated with this situation. Both group of learners asked that the barrier be torn down. Rich and dynamic interactions occurred among these young and old learners. Some indicated that this was the highlight of their summer program. Forget about the parental perspective and author, let’s leap across the generations and talk frankly and with humor to one another. The physical bridge had become an inter-generational social bridge where “real” learning could take place.

A Soulful Bridge

The Western Washington Bridge provides an interesting portrait of the vivid and vital conversations that can occur between the young and the old. This portrait, however, is not unique to this university. It is to be found in abundance among grandparents and grandchildren, among senior mentors and newly-minted mentees, and among those who reach across age groups to assist others who are in need—regardless of their age (old helping young and young helping old).

The Wakeup Call

One of us [JW] has documented this inter-generational dynamic in SOULlinks (Wright, 2015). The documentation begins with a bit of history and a wake-up call (Wright 2015, pp. 7-8:

For thousands of years we have relied upon the wisdom and experiences of those generations that came before us to enrich our own wisdom and knowledge. But lately the cross-generational relationship has been placed on the list of "endangered species." There are a number of reasons for this, including the fragility of today's family structures (divorce, ease of travel and separation, etc.), cultural and values differences. . . .

Not only has technology caused a generational gap that widens exponentially faster than the click of a mouse, it has also developed a social relationship gap that is troubling. We seem to be losing our ability to communicate face-to-face, develop social skills, and promote personal relationships. Now it's all done with our fingertips, separated, remote and distant. Personal relationships are moving over in favor of digital - and impersonal - relationships. I read an article recently that made the bold statement (I'm paraphrasing and summarizing) that we are the most affluent society ever, yet we are also the most depressed, isolated and addicted society ever. Wow. That should tell us something needs our attention - fast.

The alarm becomes even louder as consideration is given to the needs of the older generation (Wright, 2015, p. 8)

Studies have shown that today's "elder" generation is more depressed and isolated than at any other time in history. They believe they have become "irrelevant" and unneeded: And today's young adults are also depressed and disheartened more than ever, because they are fearful about their futures and haven't lived enough life to see there are ways through these hard times. The solution to this situation seems obvious, doesn't it?

Mentoring is one of the most productive and satisfying pursuits. We both often promote these kinds of relationships in our work as executive coach with high level business leaders. We are also aware of the beautiful fruit that is harvested from these mentoring relationships in our personal lives. So, the ears of one of us [JW] perked up a few years ago watching the Today's Show, psychologist talk about current research involving depression. A quote from professor Dr. Sara Moorman institute on aging at Boston College, Department of Sociology.

We found that an emotionally close grandparent-adult grandchild relationship was associated with fewer symptoms of depression for both generations... The greater emotional support grandparents and adult grandchildren received from one another, the better their psychological health.

The research revealed that when grandparents receive but do not give to such a relationship, they are more likely to experience depression. But when they can both give and receive in a mutually 1-2-1 relationship depression decreases markedly.

Today the incidents of depression and loneliness have only been accelerated because of the pandemic. Research is saying that 25% of Americans were lonely before COVID, not its about 36%. 61% of young people feel lonely frequently or almost all the time, marked rise in suicide and opioid addiction.

This was a Eureka moment for JW. This wasn't just about grandparents and adult grandchildren from a biologically connected. She witnessed this firsthand in her own life with an unlikely bond.

Andrew and Jennie

JW offers the following story. Young Andrew often wandered next door to visit Jennie who was an extraordinary cook and allowed Andrew to watch, learn and even participate in her cooking adventures. This became a thing which included trips to Reid's for meats and cheeses and to the Matthews Farmers market early Saturday mornings. This bond grew and grew but what I came to learn years later that this relationship served to offset some significant challenges in both their lives.

Andrew was experiencing lots of anxiety at his own home as his parents' marriage was falling apart. He himself had been tested after challenges at school. Told he was of average intelligence, certainly not college bound, on the other hand, Jennie, had her own struggles. Her husband was struggling with retirement and started drinking to much and having an affair.

What this amazing bond allowed without words of their struggle, to do with what is working in their lives. Andrew's love for cooking and Jennie's unconditional love for Andrew.

Jennie could have kicked her husband to the curb and Andrew could have felt branded by these test results. Jennie's husband came back so to speak and joined in the fun and relationship with Andrew. Andrew went on to complete a four-year degree program at Johnson and Wales after a series of jobs at world class restaurants like the French Laundry in Napa, California, he NOW serves as the Director of Culinary Operations at The Inn and Little Washington under Chef and Proprietor Patrick O'Connell. You may have seen Amazon Prime, the highly acclaimed documentary, featuring how this restaurant went after and achieved the coveted 3 Michelin Stars three years in a row

So having witness this real-life story, you can understand why JW had to write about it and why the Boston College research made such an impact and passion for mentoring across generations.

Andrew is JW's stepson.

The Alarm is Not Set

Apparently, it was not obvious to administrators at Western Washington University who erected a barrier on the bridge that would have connected the young and old generation. It seems that the case must be made in clear and compelling fashion for the "obvious" answer—this answer being removal of the barrier and encouraging the generative and soul-full engagement of the young and old generations. The answer at Western Washington was the bridge. It is the same answer in many other sectors of contemporary society: build and strengthen the bridge. Provide encouragement and facilitate meaningful dialogue across these generations.

We know that the alarm has also not been set for many other people, communities and entire societies. Retirement enclaves are set up in ways that not only restrict physical access to those not in the facility, but also discourage psychological and sociological access. As Robert Bellah and his colleagues (Bellah and others, 1985) have noted, American societies are often partitioned by Lifestyle Enclaves with citizens restricting themselves to affiliation with other people of the same age, same socio-economic level, and same interests.

The old ethnic and racially based communities (often identified as “ghettos”) might have exemplified a world of discrimination and isolation; however, they typically encouraged intergenerational communication, with grandparents taking care of grandkids, and neighbors taking care of other neighbors (of all ages). At a recent meeting that both of the authors attended, a conversation took place with one of the other people in attendance. She was an executive coaching serving many people. However, her perspectives and values are still based on her African American heritage. She talked with us about the inter-generational communication and caring that still took place in her community—and about the need for her heirs to preserve this caring, inter-generational foundation.

In this essay, we offer further evidence for the value of building and maintaining the inter-generational bridge. We then provide some guidelines for ensuring that the interactions among generations on this bridge are richly beneficial for both parties.

Benefiting the Grandparent

A strong case can be made for the benefits that accrue to the grandparent when they choose to spend time with and build a strong relationship with their grandchildren. We can point to recent research (Wright, 2016, p. 1):

Dr. Sara M. Moorman, an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and the Institute on Aging at Boston College said 'We found that an emotionally close grandparent-adult grandchild relationship was associated with fewer symptoms of depression for both generations...The greater emotional support grandparents and adult grandchildren received from one another, the better their psychological health.'

In an earlier study, one of us [WB] found through a set of interviews with men and women over 50 that grandparenting can lead to yet about psychological benefit (Bergquist, Greenberg and Klaum, 1993). Those being interviewed were often now grandparents and they frequently reported that they are better grandparents than they were parents—this was particularly the case with the men who were interviewed. It was a matter of both competing priorities during the years of active parenting and a matter of simply being more emotionally mature and attuned people at this older age. As younger people working full time in a job and devoting time to being successful in their career, there was sometimes not enough time for attentive devotion to a child’s needs and wants. After a long day at the office or at the factory, the highest priority was to take a deep breath and read the newspaper—or immediately starting to prepare dinner. Child-care (other than meeting basic needs) would have to wait.

Harry Chapin and Bob.

Bob is a colleague of mine and has a huge passion for promoting eldership. This passion is rooted from his experience with his own dad who often used to hum the lyrics from the Harry Chapin song- Cats in the Cradle. Jennie you are way too young to know this song from the early 70s. However, for those of us who are older, the Chorus is deeply embedded in our memory (and our heart):

And the Cats in the cradle and the silver spoon, little boy blue and the man in the moon, “when you coming home Dad? I don’t know when, but we’ll get together then and you know we’ll have a good time then.”

Catchy right? But when you really study the lyrics, we find this song to be heartbreaking and true of our culture today, The boy is born, father is too busy catching planes to play with the boy. His son thanks his dad for the ball he has received a present (a bribe? a trivial attempt to placate?). Son asks: please come out and play ball with me. Teach me to throw. Dad- sorry, not today, too much to do . . . but soon.

The boy grows up, is off to college and returns. His Dad is now older and no longer flying off all the time. Dad asks: can you sit for a while? His son says no, but can I borrow the car keys. Then the son moves away and the dad is retired and asks to see his son and family. His son now is the one who does not have the time--but promises that we'll get together soon and have a good time then. Now unintentionally, the boy wishes to grow up just like his Dad and DOES, only to promise for that time that never happens.

Well, back to our friend and colleague Bob. This was his Father/Son story. He committed to break this cycle with his own children and even more powerfully with his two granddaughters. He and his wife may have lived next door ever since the girls were babies. And, through his term *Eldership*, has a huge presence AND influence in this family larger family unit. Such a beautiful example of what Steven Covey (xxx) called the Maturity continuum. From dependence to independence to interdependence.

We ask Jennie: do you think we have lost that failure to connect with our children? And do our grown-up children stay connected with us? Thankfully, technology has really helped- Facetime? Twitter? But is this the same thing as going out to play ball with our son. Or sitting in front of a living room fireplace during a cold winter evening so that we can rehashing old family stories or even reading aloud from the novel that is a family favorite?

The Time in Our Life for Deep Caring

Biologically, many men (and some women) were simply “wired” during their early adulthood to competition and achievement, rather than bonding and nurturing. The biology begins to change (thanks mostly to alternations in hormonal composition) for these men and women as they grow older. With maturation comes greater “emotionally intelligent” (Goleman, 1995). In part this shift toward bonding and nurturing occurs because of these hormonal shifts and in part because of accumulating relational experiences. In our 50s (and particularly even later in life) we are inclined to spend more time with the people we love (including our grandchildren) and are usually better able to spend this time relating skillfully and with emotional attunement to the needs of these loved ones. A lovely convergence of shifting priorities and expanding competencies.

We would suggest that this new world of relationships often engages an even more important and not always appreciated benefit—a benefit that is very soul-filled. The more fully engaged and skillful relationship with grandchildren can lead to a profound sense of redemption. We can begin to forgive ourselves for being a less than “perfect” parent. We can “make up” (at least in part) for the evening when we read the paper rather than listened to our daughter’s latest story about a broken relationship with her best friend. We can begin to compensate for the inappropriate priority assigned to the carefully prepared lasagna rather than the carefully listened to conversation with our son as he recounts inning-by-inning the baseball game in which he played left-field.

It is important for us to acknowledge that these benefits seem to accrue even when our grandchildren are grown up and are now adults. As one of us [JW] has noted (Wright, 2015, p. 22):

We all know the benefits of a close and loving relationship between grandparents and their young grandchildren. What we often overlook, however; is the incredible richness and significance of these multi-generational relationships among adult grandchildren.

We might no longer be seeking redemption. However, we are now blessed with the opportunity to witness the success of our own children as parents. They have raised one or more children who are now themselves thriving in life – and may be raising their own children (imagine now being a great-grandparent!!). To know that our care for children and grandchildren – however imperfect—has led to continuity and succession of family legacy over several generations is one of the great mysteries of life.

Soulfully, we can see ways in which the best part of us remains alive and replicated in future generations. We are leaving a legacy. We can reiterate John Kotre (1984) assertion that this allows us to outlive our self. We might not be sitting under the shadow of the tree or even marvel at the tree and those who can sit under tree—but we will know (or at least hope) that the tree and those dwelling under the tree will be there in the future. It was well worth the effort to plant and nourish the tree.

Expansion of the Legacy

One final point. We believe that these benefits accrue not just to grandparents, but also to the older men and women who choose to spend high quality time with young people—whether or not these young people are related to them. Many of the stories shared by one of us [JW] about multi-generational relationships were about relationships that existed outside the traditional inter-generational family structure (Wright, 2015). Redemption can take place in many settings and with many younger people. There can be many different kinds of forgiveness that comes with establishing caring and nurturing relationships with a younger generation.

One of us [WB] has served as president of a graduate school of psychology for many years. The mature graduates of his school are the primary speakers at their own graduation ceremony. One of the graduates several decades ago had served in the British Air Force during World War II. He was a bombardier who was responsible for dropping bombs over Dresden during the war.

As most of us know, the bombing of Dresden was even more devastating than the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the war. Our graduate had lingering and haunting memories of the devastation he helped “cause” in this city. Now, many years late, this man has been working on his doctorate in psychology so that he could begin working with troubled adolescents. He sought redemption and told of his journey during the graduation ceremony. This was a powerful moment—for many in the graduation audience could identify (in a less extreme but just as meaningful) with this soul-filled journey in their own life.

Benefiting the Grandchild

For a member of the younger generation, the benefits are great. Imagine finding an older woman or man who will listen intently to your excited recounting of finding a new friend on the playground or learning something new and expansive in your college English class. The grandparent is perfectly positioned to do the listening. They often exhibit the ability and the willingness to listen attentively and appreciatively to their grandchildren. We offer another excerpt from SOULink: (Wright, 2015, p. 24)

The uniqueness of the adult grandchild-grandparent relationship is due largely to parents who have to walk a tightrope between mercy and tough love, as well as professional and personal obligations. The grandparent is not restricted in these ways. He or she can offer unconditional mercy, love, support and caring despite the mistakes made by the "grandchild." Grandparents usually have plenty of time, and have already pursued their professional goals. They are beyond the need to keep climbing the ladder; so to speak. Parents of young adults are typically still engaged in their professional pursuits, and lack the time and even patience to deal with all the emotional needs of children who are "supposed to be on their own by now." But grandparents are beyond that, and we all know that being needed is a vital and critical human need. By the time retirement has come, and professional challenges are over, the retiree often feels unneeded, or that what they have achieved means little without someone to share it with. Adult grandchildren often don't understand what they need, or where to get what they need.

College-Talk

What must it have been like for the young students at Western Washington University to share with an older, "wise" person their own excitement about a Summer class they are taking—especially when this elder is themselves taking a class and is also themselves engaged in learning something new. Imagine what it must be like to meet and interact with a "lifelong learner". A wonderful role model and source of sustained inspiration regarding the value of learning.

One of us [WB] recently was blessed with the opportunity to spend time with his granddaughter at the end of her first year of college. She talked about the joy of exposure to new ideas in her English course and (at the opposite end of the disciplinary spectrum) in her Economics course. Coupled with the mind-blowing experience of being away from home for the first time was the experience of finding that college was opening up whole new worlds for her—far beyond what she knew and felt in high school. Oh, to have the opportunity to go back to college again . . . Appreciation and love for a grandchild was mixed with a touch of envy!

End-of-Life Talk

There is another benefit that is likely to accrue (in most cases) at a somewhat later date. The important bond that has been established with the grandparent and grandchild can take on a very important role when the grandparent faces their own end of life. While hopefully they can turn to their children for support and care, it is even of greater benefit if their young and energetic grandchildren can "lend a hand." It is not only a matter of grandchildren providing physical assistance with the care of their elderly grandparents—it is also a matter of legacy. As we have already mentioned, the grandparent can spend their final days on Earth savoring the presence of their own flourishing grandchildren. They really do live on through these grandchildren.

As we have noted, for someone like our British bombardier, there can also be the recognition of legacy and redemption, even though the young people being served are not members of their own family. We imagine that some of the adolescents this man served were either present at his own death bed or were in his mind and heart as he entered the final days of his life. They were there for him soulfully--so that they might let him know that he was indeed a "good man" who left the world a better place for coming generations.

Bridge Over Troubled Waters: Helping Harried Parents

Let's face it. Parents need some help. With the extended life in recent years of most older people, the typical parent is graced with the challenge of "parenting" both the younger generation and the older generation. The term "sandwich generation" has been assigned to these folks as a way to describe the experience of being the meat squeezed between two buns. While real sandwiches might be a delight for many people to eat, this is much less likely to be the case for those living in the middle of the inter-generational sandwich.

Competing Priorities

We can add job-related obligations and financial worries as the "bread winner" to the burdens of parenting upward and downward. In many ways, this challenge has become greater in recent years with the shattering of boundaries between work life and home life. Employees no longer punch out at the end of the workday and leave their job-related cares, worries and obligations behind them. They bring their work (and digital devices) home with them. They keep communicating about work with others via their mobile device, computer or Zoom.

In sum, there are only so many hours in the day—especially if the parent wishes to remain healthy (good night of sleep, meals that are not consumed on the run). They might even want to find a few minutes for not only their own care-and-feeding, but also for their deep breaths and serving an advocational interest. This doesn't leave much time for child-rearing beyond the meeting of basic needs. Listening is deferred to a "better time" (perhaps the weekend—when not racing from soccer practice to weekend grocery shopping!!). Playful interaction will simply have to wait until our week-long summer holiday (if work-demands don't necessitate the cancelling of these plans).

Part of the problem resides not just in the sandwiching of parenting responsibilities about and below their own generation and the shattering of work/life boundaries, but also loss of the extended families. In most of the so-called "modern" societies, there is an inclination of adults to assert their independence and move far away from their home of origin. Grandparents are also inclined to fly away from their "rust belt" home of origin and find a warmer community in which to reside. The footloose parents and snowbirding grandparents chose (and create) a family culture of disengagement. The more "enmeshed" culture of their ancestors is set aside in favor of expanded job opportunities and climate options.

In many more traditional societies, the grandparents, parents and children live together, in a family "compound" or in the same neighborhood. In contemporary times, the grandparent in these societies often do much of the childcare (and even other domestic chores)—while the parents are in putting in a full day of work (and are often doing work at home during the evening). This culture of extended care usually is accompanied in these traditional societies by a complimentary culture of community support. Even if grandparents are not available, it is not unusual for neighbors to help out and for other members of the community (even if not living next door) to serve as surrogate grandparents. SOULink (Wright, 2015) is filled with stories that exemplify this broader, multi-generational support that is embedded in many traditional communities.

We return to *Cat in the Cradle*, the song that Harry Chapin wrote to portray something about this conflict in priorities—and about the habits that are formed pass on to the next generation. The harried father doesn't have time to spend with his son—who in turn doesn't have time later in his own life to spend time with his now-elderly father. Chapin focused on the father and son. The father and daughter

– and husband and wife—were left out of the song. We would suggest that the grandparents were also left out. Did the ignored son turn to his grandfather for attention and some shared activities?

We might also ask if the now-elderly father had a grandchild to engage with when his own grown-up son had little time for the father/son engagement. Perhaps a new version of *Cat in the Cradle* can be composed with the more optimistic outlook of inter-generational relationships. To borrow from another song, a bridge across the “troubled waters” of sandwich generation parenting might be built by the grandparents—or by other older men and women who lend a hand to these harried parents.

Lingering Competition of Priorities

There is one other important point to be made. It seems that the challenge of parenting in the midst of other priorities doesn’t end when the child grows up and leaves home. While the parent might no longer be faced with the obligation of caring for their own parents (who would have passed away), their job-related demands are still there as are financial obligations—and their grown children still need (and deserved) their attention.

We wonder what happened when the kids returned home from Western Washington University and told their parents about the remarkable interactions with the senior learners? Did the parents have time to listen to their learning-filled children or as Chapin portrayed in *Cat in the Cradle*, did they say “can’t listen now, but we will find a time soon to talk.” This deferred conversation might never take place. Perhaps, the parent would see this as an opportunity for increasing the interactions between their own parents and their children? Were grandparents brought in to lend a hand?

One of us {Wright, 2016, p. 2} has written about this continuing challenge and about how grandparents can still play an important inter-generational role:

Parents of young adults are usually still engaged in their professional pursuits, and lack the time and even patience to deal with all the emotional needs of children who are "supposed to be on their own by now." But grandparents are beyond that, and we all know that being needed is a vital and critical human need. By the time retirement has come, and professional challenges are over, retirees often feel unneeded, or that what they have achieved means little without someone to share it with. Adult grandchildren often don't understand what they need, or where to get what they need.

It seems, once again, that it is not only the harried parent who benefits from the building of a bridge. Tangible and soul-full benefits also accrue to the young and old—even when the child is now a young adult.

Generativity

While one of us has written about soul-filling inter-generational relationships, the other [WB] has written about an important personal need that seems to undergird these soul-filled connections. This need is identified as “Generativity.” First used by Erik Erikson (1980), the noted developmental theorist, generativity refers to an important stage in the development of maturity among those of us who are in our 40s and 50s. Erikson suggests that we have a choice to make. We can be generative and seek out that about which we care most and then engage in deep caring about this cared-for entity (be it a person, a principle, a belief, an outcome).

The theologian, Paul Tillich (1984), would speak of this as that about which we have “ultimate concern.” Generativity is also about leaving something of value for future generations. We began this essay with an Indian proverb: “Blessed is he who plants tress under whose shade he will never sit.” This proverb speaks to this fundamental perspective of legacy—of “leaning into the future” (Bergquist, 2017) and “learning into the future” (Scharmer, 2016). John Kotre (1984) identifies this element of generativity as one’s “outliving of the self.”

The alternative to generativity, according to Erikson, is Stagnation. When we are stagnant, the world becomes quite constrained. We envy the success of other people rather than appreciating what they have accomplished (and acknowledge our own success). We find those of the younger generation to be rivals and recognize only the ways in which they are different from us in terms of both perspectives and practices. We hold no sense of (or hope for) the future—living mostly in the present and often living a whole lot in the past.

Generativity or Stagnation

One of us [WB] can offer an example of the distinction between generativity and stagnation that he witnessed while sitting in on a traditional jazz session in New Orleans. The featured musician was Wallace Davenport, a legendary trumpet player. The doors to this jazz venue were all open – it was a typical hot and humid evening in the Big Easy. Amplified music from a bar across the street was sometimes drowning out the music being played by Davenport and his sidemen.

At the end of the set, WB went up to Davenport and indicated that he was sad and frustrated that Davenport’s music was being “replaced” by that horrible music coming from across the street. Davenport stopped Wb at this point and said that the music emanating from across the street was fine. It represents the new era of jazz. WB took from this exchange with Wallace Davenport and suggesting that WB should learn to enjoy or at least appreciate what was being played.

What a remarkable stance. Wallace Davenport could have envied or at least dismissed this new music. He could have been irritated that the sounds coming through the open doors was making hard for his own music to be readily heard. He could have been a recalcitrant, stagnated relic of the good old times. Instead, Davenport was generative. He appreciated and supported a changing of the musical guard. We suspect that he even occasionally jammed with the young musicians across the street—or at least shared a few tricks about how to win over an audience (and perhaps how to win over an older audience). The stage was set for inner-generational dialogue—and it all begins (at least on the part of the older generation) with a strong dose of generativity.

The perspective on generativity and inter-generational relationships doesn’t stop here. In his study of generativity, one of us {WB} has made the care that generativity doesn’t just exist as a later life development stage. Rather it is to be found throughout the life of adults and is manifest in at least four ways (Bergquist and Quehl, 2021). Each of these four modes of generativity relate directly to inter-generational relationships—and ultimately to inter-generational deep caring. We provide a brief description of all four modes of generativity and how they relate to intergenerational relationships.

Generativity One: Close to Home

We are generative when we are raising our children and/or starting and caring deeply about a special project (Generativity One). We are generative in a similar way when we extend our caring concern

beyond our own children and project to the welfare and learning of other people in our organization or community. Furthermore, generativity one can not only extend beyond the family. It can also extend in time. We are generative as grandparents who still are “parenting.” In fact, as we have already noted, many men might be doing a better job of parenting at this later stage in their life.

Generativity Two: Mentoring

The second form that generativity takes aligns closely with what Erikson originally proposed. We become mentors to other people who are usually younger or less experienced than we are in the work they are doing. Generativity Two also relates directly to many of the intergenerational relationships being described in SOULinks. One of us [JW] offers her own conclusions regarding this important type of helping relationship: (Wright, 2016, p. 1).

Whether in professional or personal application, I know that mentoring is one of the most productive and satisfying pursuits, and I often promote these kinds of relationships in my work as an executive coach with high level business leaders. I am also aware of the beautiful fruit harvested from these mentoring relationships in our personal lives.

Generativity Three: Extension in Time

The third and fourth mode of generativity lead to a soul-filled sharing of expanded perspectives on time and space. The third way in which we are generative centers on our extension of caring back in time and forward in time. We are “guardians” of traditions (Vaillant, 2012)

Generativity Three Guardianship is evident in another story we would like to share. It concerns Dorothy and Her Court Retirement Center. The environment in this Center is unique. There is very much the feel of home. In part this is because there is a fully functioning preschool on the premise. Much as the bridge provided an opportunity for the Western Washington young adults and the older adults to interact, this center provided an opportunity for an even wider divergence of ages.

The environment of the Center is conducive to the kind of playful interactions across generations that we have portrayed in this essay. This Center is filled with light. It is inviting, bold and busy. As a result, the senior residences, many with forms of dementia, can interact with these 3 and 4 year old children. Despite her short-term memory being shot, Dorothy can hold court with her stories as a flight nurse who was rescuing veterans during the Korean war.

Her mind is able to recall these harrowing incidents while captivating these little ones. And then there were all those spontaneous moments when the little ones interacted with the seniors, some who had not engaged, just came alive in conversation. Jennie, you have brought your own children to this Center, I know you have your own stories regarding the value of intergenerational connections in LIVING LIFE

We offer a second story regarding Generativity Three. It comes from a project one of us [WB] helped to conduct in the State of Montana, funded by the humanities council in this state. The project concerned homesteading in Montana. Early settlers in Montana and many other states (and Western Canadian provinces) were given a plot of land by the government. They paid no money for this land but agreed to build on this land, grow crops and raise livestock for a certain period of time (usually 7 years). An extraordinary movie, *Heartland*, has been produced that documents the challenging experiences of these homesteaders—including the actual birth of a calf.

As part of this project, we went to retirement homes in Montana and showed the movie. We then met with many of the senior residents who had been homesteaders earlier in their life. The stories they told were often remarkable—having been sparked by these residents viewing of Heartland. One of the residents talked about having to give birth to a child without any assistance because their doctor was unable to come to her home (because of a severe snowstorm). A similar scene was played out in the movie.

Other residents talked about their birthing of calves and lambs, or of enduring the invasion of insects, as well as droughts and intense heat. The movie had offered accurate (though dramatized) portrayals. The residents offered firsthand accounts (often with strong accompanying emotions). These audio-recorded interviews were archived by the humanities council and have been shared many times with a wide diversity of listeners—coming from many age groups and cultural backgrounds. This project was gratifying for all involved. Generativity Three was in full operation.

Generativity Four: Extension in Space

Finally, we are generative when we extend our perspective and caring actions in space (Generativity Four). We move beyond our family and organization to our community, to our broader society and, ultimately, to our world. We are in the words of Dewitt Jones (2020), not just concerned about being the “best IN the world” but are now concerned with being the “best FOR the world.”

We find this form of generativity among those who have successfully built their own intergenerational bridge and are now assisting other individuals, groups and communities in building their bridges. We also find Generativity Four playing out in the advocacy of *Inter-Generationality* as a perspective and set of practices that is well worth public and private financial support—and as a priority in the creation of new institutions (such as Dorothy’s Retirement Center) and new projects (such as the documentation of Montana Homesteading).

Passing the Torch: Generativity and Values

These modes of generativity are soul-filled in large part because they are founded in deeply held values. We would suggest and both of us have emphasized the critical role played by values in our contemporary, “postmodern” world (Bergquist, 1993; Wright, 2015). Fundamentally, the primary benefit offered by both generativity three and generativity four is the maintenance of what Talcott Parsons (1970) calls the “latent pattern” to be found in any viable society. With boundaries often being shattered through digitalization and globalization, and agility taking the place of stability as a dominant organizational strategy, it is vitally important that there be an anchoring set of values (alongside a clear and compelling mission, sense of purpose, and vision of the future). Without these values, “the center will not hold.”

Multi-generational relationships can serve an important role in the maintenance of these values (latent patterns). We offer the following observation from the SOULink essay that one of prepared (Wright, 2016, p. 2):

In our materialistic culture, another valuable asset lost when multi-generational relationships falter is the incredible richness of traditional values. Some have said that our current “younger” generation has no values, except materialism entitlement and self-centeredness. How did that happen? While this is certainly not true of every young adult, it is prevalent today partly

because we have not passed them along from generation to generation. In the past, this was a vital role of the grandparent.

To further expand on this observation, reference is made in this essay to a tradition found in the Jewish culture (Wright, 2016, p. 3):

I have long admired the traditionally Jewish practice of something called a "Jewish Will" or an "ethical will." These documents have their ancient roots in Judaism, but regardless of belief or faith, it is a mindset and a valuable tradition we all need to insure a more values-based future. An -Ethical Will is a document that is designed to allow a person to pass on their ethical and moral values from one generation to the next. It has become more and more popular with the general public in the past few decades, but the Jews have been doing this for millennia. Its origins are apparently in the book of Genesis, when Jacob was dying and blessed his sons.⁹ It is seen in Moses' speeches to the people of Israel before he died, and many other occasions in the Old Testament (Jewish Tenach). This practice of passing on belief systems and values, dreams and goals, is a Hebrew tradition which today is even used by others for estate planning.

We can point to the recently enacted rituals found in many African American community where traditions—and traditional values in particular—are imparted from the older generation to the younger generation. Generativity Two mentoring is coupled with Generativity Three storytelling and Generativity Four engagement of the new initiates in community projects.

While the Jewish and African American communities begin with an established culture of shared care and collectivism, other communities can emulate the generative, inter-generational processes. We recognize, however, that leaders of these more modern (and even postmodern) communities often must "swim upstream"—having helped to establish (or at least learned to live with) an individualistic, disengaged culture that discourages the kind of bridging presented in the two Wright essays and the current essay.

Generativity and Eldership

While the concept of Eldership arises out of the Christian tradition and is most often associated with the development of leadership in Christian churches, it is also a term and tradition that is of great potential value for anyone seeking to be generative in their inter-generational contributions. Eldership concerns preparing of community members for assuming positions of leadership in their community with a strong knowledge base, as well as clear sense of values and commitment to the mission of their community.

The Nature of Eldership

While eldership is usually found in Protestant churches, we are reminded of the "eldership" that was found for many years in Catholic orders of nuns. Women in these orders often prepare for leadership in their community by attending a major leadership development program (such as those found at Harvard University), serve for a year as assistants (mentees) to other women who currently serve as leaders in an institution elsewhere in the United States (or world), and are encouraged to read a wealth of books on leadership and the history of their own order.

One of us [WB] had the privilege of serving as chief consultant to a major postsecondary educational association in Washington D.D. This association included Catholic colleges and universities. It was

observed, when meeting with the Board of Directors of this association, that the women presidents from Catholic educational institutions were vastly better prepared for work in their own institution and as members of this association's governing board than were the men. Eldership was fully evident!

Eldership and Generativity

We can turn again to the four types of generativity as we seek to recognize and realize the potential benefits to be found in establishing an Eldership program – whether it is in a religious institution, human service organization or inter-agency community development program. Generativity One is found in the emphasis on the developing leader's understanding of and commitment to the mission of their own institution, while Generativity Two is evident in the commitment made by those working with these emerging leaders as mentors, teachers and coaches.

We find Generativity Three engagements in the emphasis on an appreciation of and gaining knowledge about the history and traditions of one's own institution. We see this in the nuns reading about and reflecting on the history of their own order. Finally, an Eldership program typically is intended to expand the knowledge and commitment of those in training to higher and broader purposes. The elders in a church or community are committed to a broad vision of sustainability of not only their own institution but of life on our society, nation and ultimately our world. For those aligned with a specific religious institution this often means a dedication to spiritual growth and to the Godly vision of a heaven on earth—a New Jerusalem.

In the Greek language, this broader dedication is often referred to as *Agape*. This refers to the love that two or more people share on behalf of a third, greater entity—such as God or preservation of the world (Paul Tillich's ultimate concern). It is in this broader love and dedication that we find the basis for a shared dedication and love extending beyond generations. It seems, as those working in Eldership programs often observe ad note, that unexpected or unlikely multigenerational relationships can be good for the SOUL.

Safe Zones

By introducing the Eldership programs and the relationship between these programs and a broader spiritual base in many of these programs, we are setting the stage for several final frameworks regarding inter-generational relationships. Specifically, we introduce two other dimensions in setting the stage for effective inter-generational methods of communication and support. These dimensions concern safe zones, rituals and spiritual sandpaper

As we have noted, successful mentoring requires the establishment of mutually satisfying cross generational relationship. Safe zones are where the magic happens. Back to Andrew and Jennie, it was those times when they shared their common love of cooking and had the ritual of going to the farmers market every Saturdays. The drive to Matthews was precious time to share

This could be that special place for breakfast where only the two are invited. Or the time when one of us [JW] found out that their own dad was taking his granddaughter big secret for ice-cream RIGHT before dinner. Safe zones are also where the bonding happens: "I must be pretty special if Grandpapa and I can break a rule and keep a secret."

Spiritual Sandpaper

We all know that we can't love everything about the special people in our lives. That we have to pick our battles, and overlook some things, find acceptance. Having unconditional regard is important to build trust and love. One of us [JW] can't help but remember a particular tough time that her own mother had with her first grandson. She was eager to build a bond with him as a young adult especially since he and his family lived 1,000 miles away. Jack went through quite a rebellious period which included getting not just a few tattoos, but both of his arms tattooed wrist to next.

The family was planning an Easter holiday. How was Jack going to be able to go to The Club for Easter brunch--not to mention, Grandmamas reaction seeing the tattoos that could NOT be hidden even with long sleeve shirts Each of us can offer our own examples and versions of spiritual sandpaper that gets in the way of that unconditional love. Given these sandpaper challenges, we must find ways to make successful inter-generational communication happen. This where we now turn.

Making It Happen: Eight Actions

In bringing about enhanced multi-generational relationships, one of us [JW] has offered a list of eight actions that should be taken. Here is a summary of this list (Wright, 2015, p. 98):

S	SHARE	Be open and available, share self, no censorship
O	OBSERVE	Pay attention, know through observation
U	UPHOLD	Keep agreements (confidentiality, etc.) be trustworthy
L	LISTEN	Listen carefully with heart, HEAR to know
I	INVITE	Invite into relationship, identify common ground
N	NURTURE	Foster, nurture, provide tender care (<i>person and relationship</i>)
K	KINDLE	Ignite interest, kindle fire, awaken spark
S	STAND	Stand with, stand by, and stand for

Here is a fuller description of the basics that were offered in SOULinks (Wright, 2015, pp. 96-97) regarding how to build Multi-Generational Relationships that are linked at the Soul. We have both added our own reflections on and embellishments of each basic.

To help remember these points, each word is a verb, an action word, and begins with each letter of SOULINKS. These are things we must DO, not just know.

S = SHARE

This isn't about sharing stuff, but sharing self. Be open and available to share of yourself, and willing to receive what your SOULink shares with you. Sharing is a two-way form of communication. Share and receive without censorship.

Two way communication. Both people learning. Dialogue not discussion. Narratives/stories are wonderful and contain insightful gems that might at first seem hidden—but are often revealed from the differing perspective of the other person.

O = OBSERVE

Pay attention to the other person. Observe everything about this special person. Get to know him or her through careful observation of what they say, how they act, what they do. Observe in order to take advantage of any opportunity that presents itself for a better relationship, more conversation, and any chance to deepen and bless the relationship.

An appreciative perspective is especially important. “Catch them when they are doing it right” is a common dictum of appreciation. Catch them when they are being especially open and eager to engage. Catch them when they are offering humor and perhaps a bit of a dance or song (which speak to and come from the Soul).

U = UPHOLD

Keep any agreements (do what you say you will do) made with this person, most especially upholding the bond of confidentiality. What happens between you, stays between you, and make sure your word is trustworthy.

You don't need to be in Las Vegas in order to keep things compartmentalized. What occurs here, stays here. This helps to build trust and is a strong indicator to both people that this is a special relationship.

L = LISTEN

Too often in our zeal to share or form meaningful relationships we skip this critical component by talking or doing too much and not allowing the other person the gift of our time and attention. Listen carefully to everything that is said, and even for what is not said. This is one of the greatest gifts, and rich relationship boosters, you can give another person. It's also the only way you can really know someone.

We learn when we are listening, not when we are talking. Allow yourself to be surprised regarding what the other person is sharing. After all, they come from a quite different world than you – but at the same time come, at the present time, from the same world as you. This should be more than enough to motivate your own intensive, high-curiosity interest in what they have to say (and what they do).

I = INVITE

Through words and actions, invite the other person into this relationship. Invitations come in the form of interests and identifying common ground, conversation points, and places where you can come together physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and every other way. Invitations can be given through interested questions designed to know the other person better. Draw them in.

There is often reticence by some of a quite different age to “intrude” in your life. You might have to take the initiative. We wonder who took the initiative at Western Washington University to speak through the barrier and later to walk across the bridge and say hello to someone who was much younger or much older. You can cross your own inter-generational bridge – and perhaps even build the bridge yourself!

N = NURTURE

Any relationship requires work, especially nurturing. Nurturing includes tender care and encouragement for personal growth. Be aware of the other person's needs and attempt to be the inspiration, support, resource or partner he or she needs to move forward. This nurturing is necessary both in the other person, and in the relationship itself.

One of the challenges of the sandwich generation (the parents) is to nurture and take care of both the older and younger generations. You can help them out by doing some of the nurturing yourself. As we noted with regard to Generativity, this nurturing can take many forms. It might include sharing some historical facts, taking the other person to your favorite monument and talk about its significance, or joining your younger or older colleague, grandchild, grandparent, mentor, mentee at an event that represents something of importance and value in your own life (such as attending a rally for some cause that is important to you or visiting an antique car show or sporting event with the other person).

K = KINDLE

Kindle means to ignite interest, to encourage, promote and awaken something or someone. The easiest way to do this is to KEEP TALKING! Find the places of mutual blessing in this relationship and kindle a fire there.

This means don't give up. The fire often doesn't light up with the first match. The wind blows it out or the wood is wet or green. Try again. Maybe add more wood or reduce the amount of wood. In the case of people rather than fires, it is about trying a new topic, or relate in a different way (perhaps a joke or an old story told in a new way, or asking for advice, or talking a walk with the other person.”

S=STAND

Stand with, stand by and stand for the other person. This often requires unconditional love and acceptance, even in the difficult times. Stand with and stand by your SOULink through good times and bad times. Stand for, become an advocate, of the other person. This does not mean to accept and promote bad choices or behaviors. It means to continue supporting and loving the person, if not the behavior.

There is an old tradition to be found in many cultures. This is the act of standing for another person. We have the remnant of this tradition in our standing at the start of a wedding when the bride comes down the aisle or at a sporting event when we stand in honor of a spectacular play or the retirement of a revered player. We can engage this tradition today by standing in support of another person. We can

stand (even many miles away) when our young colleague is about to take a major test at college or is about to propose marriage to a loved one. We can stand when our older colleague is about to undergo major surgery or is about to move into a new home.

We can literally stand next to our special person when they are announcing an important decision in their life that they have deliberated with our gentle guidance. We stand in honor of their courage, their commitment and persistence, and their trusting relationship with us. We stand in honor of their Soul-filled self.

Conclusions

In this essay we have offered a portrait of the special, soul-filling relationships that can be created – and have often been created—between the young and old of a society. We have shown how a cross-generational bridge can be built that benefits not only the younger generation and older generation, but also the “sandwich” generation that resides in “troubled water” between the young and old. We offer this portrait and accompanying action steps because the need for these relationships is great in our mid-21st Century world and the opportunities are plentiful (and soul-full). We return once again to the essay on SOULink written by one of us (Wright, 2016, p. 3):

Our world cries out for these long-term, loving and lasting relationships among generations. We have become isolated, small worlds to ourselves, even though we have global reach. We spend too much time communicating via technology, and becoming compartmentalized instead of promoting relationships. We drive up our driveways and shut the doors. Our young people are facing a scary world without the benefit of an older generation's experiences, wisdom, values and loving support that can help them successfully navigate this often terrifying place we all live.

We both invite you to engage even more fully in the kind of multi-generational relationships that yield rich, soul-full benefits for all involved. What better way to be generative and engaged in activities that are “best FOR the world.”

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