

# **INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATIONS**

*By Marjorie Schiller, PhD*

Schools and youth are agents of benefit for their communities and the world. They are the future. Sustainability of that future depends on human beings, young and old meeting our responsibility as stewards of the earth.

Our organization, The Positive Change Core, has 10 years of success working with groups of adults and youth who want to create a future of hope and prosperity. We have had great success using two of our foundational principles.



## **First: Don't Do Anything About Me Without Me**

When those who are affected by a policy or program are consulted in the planning as well as involved in the doing, the potential for success dramatically increases. In Ohio, young people planned and participated in a conference called "Flourishing Canton."

The young people were very practical. While they enjoyed dreams and possibilities, their real passion was to come out of the conference with bold strategies. As a result of intergenerational conversations and partnership, three goals emerged and all of them have or are happening:

1. Young People wanted a Youth City Council. The Mayor was at the conference. She said, "Yes," and the program was implemented.
2. Young people wanted a teen center that was specifically for them. They also wanted to be part of running the center. It happened.
3. A local Business man wanted a scholarship program that funded education for students when they came back to or stayed in Canton. Canton is a city that has been losing industry and population. If a student agreed to return to live and work in Canton for a year, 25% of that student's tuition costs would be reimbursed. If a student agreed to live and work in Canton for four years, 100% tuition would be reimbursed. Plans are underway.

We find that involvement leads to engagement, and engagement produces success.

## **Second: Maximum Mix is Magic**

In the one on-one dialogues that are foundational to our work, we know that the more improbable the interviewing pair, the more likely that new ideas, knowledge or perspectives will come out of the conversation.

For a businessman to talk with a high school student is a chance to construct a wisdom bridge, providing mutual learning from another's experience.

I would not know about “nings” or “couch surfing” or “copy left” if I had not had conversations with 20 year olds. I am less sure what it is they are learning from me but I do know these are mutually important conversations.

Our values are transmitted less by labeling them, and more by our stories and actions.

## **Intergenerational Conversations are Co-Inspirational.**

### **Some thoughts on how to proceed:**

1. Begin by identifying existing programs that serve the community and youth. Inquire into the good that exists. Find worthwhile programs so we can KNOW THE GOOD.
2. Invite adults and young people to gather together to tell the stories of some of Brazil’s best organizations and Programs so we can collectively SHOW THE GOOD. What makes each of these programs good? What is the proof? Identify the outstanding qualities and find the practice based evidence that emerges from the stories.
3. GROW THE GOOD by using rapid prototyping to take what you have and to create what you need. Be prepared to continuously re visit your programs and projects and focus on what is working.
4. Co design as co-inspirational leaders at every level. Working with Inspirational leaders at every level can produce amazing results.

### **Three suggested phases of such a gathering are:**

1. Pre gathering: identify existing programs and resources. Develop curricula that can be used in schools to learn “Knowing Showing and Growing” the good in school and community projects.  
  
Find partners for necessary funding, “in kind” donations, and other kinds of help.
2. The Gathering itself: Identify the multiple methodologies and technologies that have worked best. Find the powerful stories. Who are my new friends?
3. Post Gathering: Plan communications strategy for keeping the friendships nourished and the projects moving forward.

The opportunity is challenging. The pathways to intergenerational collaboration offer rich opportunity for exploration and action.

**Marge**

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