Learning the Intergenerational Way: Bringing Older Adults into the Classroom

What happens during the weekly Bridges: Growing Together Program sessions?

Each theme-based lesson includes:

- Students greet and welcome the volunteers. Huge smiles all around!
- In small groups, students share what they learned from interviewing grandparents or other adults about the week’s theme.
- Students and volunteers do an activity to learn together. This is where the relationships really grow.
- Whole-class reflective wrap up. Some teachers end with everyone writing in journals.

Weekly themes:

- Getting to Know You
- Schools Then & Now
- Ethnicities, Heirlooms & Traditions
- Teaching One Another
- How Are We Smart?
- How Old is Old Celebrations

Who: 4th grade students and adults age 60+. Teacher is the host and facilitator. A volunteer coordinator recruits and organizes the volunteers.

What: Under the direction of the classroom teacher, 8 older adults visit the classroom and work in pairs with small groups of 4-5 students each week to build relationships through shared learning and conversations.

When: One hour per week for six weeks. We use ELA time, but students are grouped heterogeneously for Bridges. Bridges is aligned to Common Core.

Why:

- Today’s youth will grow up working with and for older adults, personally and professionally. By 2050, adults over the age of 65 will outnumber children under the age of 15. Currently, 10,000 Americans turn 65 each day; they can expect to live to be 85.
- Bridges helps children create positive attitudes about older adults and aging which can positively affect their health and longevity.

A student’s picture of an “old person” before and then after participating in the Bridges program.
When students participate in the Bridges program, they:

- Experience modeling of civic mindedness as local volunteers come to spend time with them;
- Learn firsthand that places and ways of thinking change over time (historical understanding);
- Strengthen their speaking and listening skills;
- Practice inquiry as they interview older relatives prior to each week’s sessions;
- Receive positive feedback and the benefit of a caring relationship.

Bridges Together educating, empowering and connecting generations to transform lives today and tomorrow

INPUT

Bridges Together (BT) is a leader in the intergenerational movement - raising awareness of the need for IG engagement and providing tools to unite adults 60+ and youth

ACTIVITY

The Champion convenes a Local Leadership Team with members from a partner organization(s) with assistance from BT

BT trains the Leadership Team on either the Bridges Program Curricula Suite or how to Build Your Own Intergenerational Program

OUTPUT

The Local Leadership Team:

1. Recruits and trains volunteers and/or youth
2. Implements the program uniting bookend generations
3. Evaluates the program BT supports the Team every step of the way.

OUTPUT

Volunteers 60+:
Learn new things and enhance their socio-emotional well-being, increase understanding and relationships with young people, improve their understanding of schools/services for youth.

Youth:
Increase comfort with older adults, envision aging well, enhance relationships with their grandparents or other elders in their circles of love, improve communication skills and learn new things.

Adult Leadership Team Members:
From professional partnerships with colleagues in other departments/organizations, enhance personal relationships with older adults, re-envisioning what growing old can mean and appreciate the improved well-being of their constituents (youth/adults 60+).

Together creating age-friendly and age-integrated communities filled with interdependence, compassion and joy

Learn more at BridgesTogether.org