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Canadian Perspectives on Intergenerational Learning: Voices of Toronto AI Workshop Participants

ABSTRACT

Our Appreciative Inquiry Foundations workshops have attracted a diverse group of people for nearly a decade. Since 2004 we have also involved youth in each workshop. The youth voice adds rich dimension to the workshop experience for every participant. In this article we share the voices of a few youth and adults who have attended these workshops.

Context

For nearly a decade now, we have offered our Appreciative Inquiry Foundations workshops twice a year in Toronto with Jane Magruder Watkins. We have been so fortunate to attract a diverse group of people eager to explore this powerful strength-based approach to conversation and action. Since 2004 we have also involved youth in each workshop. We first did this as an experiment, part of a larger project with the Toronto District School Board involving students in grades seven through ten. We were so surprised and delighted with that first experience that we looked at each other and said ‘Let’s do that again!’ Since then we have regularly connected with our school boards, and college and university colleagues to extend an invitation to youth, eagerly received without exception.

The youth voice adds rich dimension to the workshop experience for every participant. In this article we are delighted to share directly the voices of a few youth and adults who have attended these workshops giving their perspectives on the value and impact of the intergenerational learning experience they shared.

Intergenerational perspectives

‘The inclusion of young people in the Appreciative Inquiry Foundations Workshop gave me the chance to really hear these young peoples’ stories for the first time. Through this process I came to understand in my head and feel in my heart that younger people aren’t really that much different than us older folk ... What these young people lack in years they make up for in their astonishing articulateness and the global reach of their awareness.’ *Susan Brown, Senior Policy Advisor, Economic Development, Culture and Tourism, City of Toronto*

‘The AI experience has taught me that...our potential to affect others in positive ways is not limited to age, to social or professional standing; our intrinsic value is our value to each other, the value of community. And the value of community is infinite.’ *Ben Hanniel-Cherette, post-graduate student and teaching assistant, York University*



Youth and adults working together to prepare and present their 'dream' of an ideal learning community.

'My experience of the AI workshops and my experience in the world of education is that when adults and youth have the opportunity to dialogue about life's important lessons, magic happens. What we refer to as the 'generation gap' seems to disappear as we realize that our dreams for our present and future lives and that of the planet are really very similar. The dialogue is energizing as we share our favourite stories and discuss the values that we hold. It feels good as an adult to know that the path laid down may be walked upon by our next generations with hope and faith.' *Nancy Nightingale, retired principal, Toronto District School Board*

'I have always felt that contained within each generation are certain experiences, wisdom and knowledge. The AI workshop experience verified my beliefs in the significance of intergenerational dialogue and stressed the importance of continually creating similar environments for learning. It is integral that both young and old are able to learn from each other, exchange ideas and mentor each other in the various aspects of life, if we are to build a better world for tomorrow's leaders.' *Randy Yeboah, 3rd year student, York University*

'When I think back...., it changed my point of view on everything. I used to see only the negatives when I saw a challenge. Now I say I am going to tackle this – it is all in the mindset. As soon as I think about AI everything just changes ... remembering the experience I have had, the fun, relating with the adults...'
Ricky, grade 12 student

'Over the past 25 years, Ralph and I have facilitated AI workshops around the globe with the widest possible variety of people involved. Of all that experience, the most surprising and profound for me has been the amazing result of adding high school students to each of our workshops in Toronto. Without fail, participants are delighted, enlightened and excited about the intergenerational nature of the learning that takes place.' *Jane Magruder Watkins, Appreciative Inquiry Unlimited*

Conclusions

There is little that we could say to punctuate the enriched experience these folks had by being part of an intergenerational learning experience. By asking the question 'what did you value about your experience' we confirmed that it works and we can do more of it. For us that means:

- Being more purposeful in aiming for at least 20% of the registration to be youth under 24.
- Staying in touch with the youth participants and seeking their voices frequently, tracking their experiences as they mature.
- Looking beyond the AI Foundations Workshops for creating an intergenerational learning experience.
- Including the key message of 'intergenerational learning experience' in our marketing materials targeted to the 'adult' population. This is clearly an 'aha' for us and something that until now we did not think of doing!