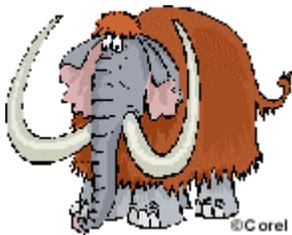


Preserving Culture in a Technological Environment

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From the Ice Age to High-Tech

I belong to the “Ice Age” generation. When I was a child, there was no refrigerator in our home. We had an icebox. We used to carry ice blocks in a

Utah cloth, up to the third floor where we lived. My generation did not grow up with such developed technologies as today’s youngsters. A telephone was a rare thing and a telephone conversation- a happening.

Even when I grew up, a telephone line was hard to get. One had to wait for years to get one. When we were Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, we usually got a watch. My four-year-old grandchild has a few watches. Only those who were rich, in those days, could afford a transistor radio. I got one the other day buying a 4-liter Coca-Cola bottle.

I watched television for the first time when I arrived in the USA; I was twenty-five, then. Until now, I do not know how to program a VCR and I became acquainted with a PC only ten years ago.

The tremendous technological changes that flooded our lives in the last fifty or sixty years are very quick and significant. When a new technology and especially one that has to do with communications is created and becomes wide spread, it brings about changes in tools, in ways of thinking, in social processes and in social structures. The “invasion” of computers into our lives opens new possibilities and gives room for social mobility.

Computer usage and mastery is mainly in the hands of the young generation, whose status in society has undergone much change with the introduction of the new technologies.

The technological revolution, so it seems, has passed over the older members in our society, and mainly the Third Agers.

Whereas the older members seem to be living in a “waste land” as far as technology is concerned, the young ones seem to be born holding the “mouse cord” in their hand. They speak “high-tech” as their mother tongue and their natural environment is a technological one.

The Intergeneration Program and the New Technologies

In this situation, the meeting between the two polaric groups - the young ones, the speakers of “High- Tech” and the much older ones for whom the world of computer and the Internet is an unknown land and the language of this land is foreign and difficult - is most appropriate. In this meeting, between the young and the old, it is the young ones who teach the language of the new country - the land of technology - to the old ones.

For the last 5 years, I have been implementing a program I initiated and started called The Intergeneration Program and the New Technologies. In this program, young students, grades 5-9, tutor seniors at computer and Internet skills and learn from their older students a chapter in the latter’s personal history. Together they write a digital version of the story; they scan pictures, albums, documents; they search for information on the net as well as in other sources and soon will upload these stories to a designated site, on the Internet.

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In the intergeneration program, we preserve whole libraries, treasured in the minds of the elderly, by means of the new technologies. Concurrently with the rapidly changing technological-cultural reality, the demographic reality of the Third Agers changes as well. The senior population is ever on the rise. On the one hand, our society admires youth, but it also yearns for something that used to be and is gone. One could understand this yearning against the background of the ever changing technology and the incessant innovations. There is a yearning for ever lasting values: there is a feeling of weariness from this rapidity of technological changes and there is a dire desire for holding on to a meaningful narrative, one that will last, that won't change in front of our eyes. It is the Third Agers who could supply us with this narrative that connects between the past and the present - between what used to be, what is, and what is going to be.

The Intergeneration Program started in one school, the Alon School at Mate Yehuda in Israel. Now, almost five years later, it has expanded and many middle schools across the country are implementing it. I must admit that each time I watch the bond created between the new generation and the Third Agers moves me very much. These meetings endow the two generations with interest and meaning; the postmodern society is a society in which relationships and connections are loose. However, a society draws its strength from the bond between its members: in the Intergeneration Program: Preserving Heritage in a Technological Environment, we strengthen intergeneration connections and existing heritage knowledge and create new connections, where they are lacking. In other words, the program aims at connecting the various sectors and generations in Israeli society and at preserving the stories of the past of its senior members by the new technological skills of its young members.

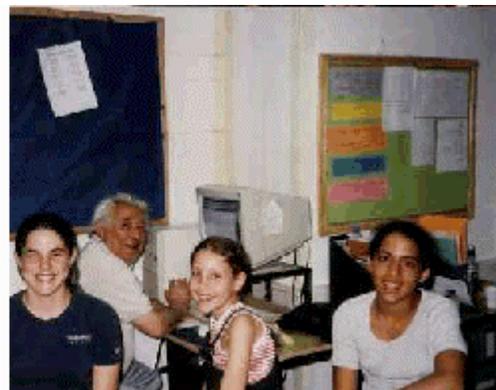
A Meeting of Cultures

This meeting between these two groups, very apart age-wise, is also a meeting between two cultures: it's a meeting between a linear-sequential culture of the Third Agers, and an associative, multi-directional, skipping and surfing culture of the young ones.

The difference between these two cultures is also the difference between a "real," "here," concrete culture and a virtual one. The Third Agers are members of the "Concrete- Here" culture, whereas the culture of the youngsters is somewhere out there, in Cyberspace - sitting on a chair in a small limited physical environment, while the spirit roams in the unlimited space of the cyber: visiting museums, meeting people, going on expeditions and much more.

This meeting is also a meeting between cultures that treat time differently: The information age is an age of immediacy, constant updating and simultaneity. I can hardly do one thing at a time. Today's youngsters use the computer, watch television, listen to music and prepare their homework, and all that simultaneously.

The meeting between the seniors and the young ones, mitigates the franticness of the young, refutes prejudice, and encourages and fosters patience and tolerance. As for the older members in our society, it energizes and stimulates their minds and zest for life, opens new worlds and brings back the joy of life as well as a feeling of belonging.



Kids and adults teaching each other in the Intergeneration Program and the New Technologies program
Source: Prof. Edna Apeh