One of our country's greatest human treasures is wasting away for lack of use. It is not hidden in far-away lands and obscure places. It is waiting just around the corner, at the end of a bus line, inside a house behind a curtained window—all within reach of the neighborhood schools. Finding this treasure and sharing its wealth is one of education's most immediate obligations, a task recently undertaken in Ann Arbor, Michigan, through the innovative Teaching-Learning Communities project.

Children in Ann Arbor talk about their newfound wealth in a variety of ways. If I delete the subject of their comments, will you know what human treasure they are talking about?

"Having ______ in my art class is much funner."
"From ______ you can learn a lot of different ways of doing things."
"_______ are wonderful and great, and very patient, too."
"_______ make me feel happy all over."

What is it that the children find so great, wonderful, and stimulating? In each of the above sentences, the missing word is "grandpersons," the affectionate term used to describe senior citizen volunteers who are now sharing their lifetime accumulations of skills and attitudes with children in the Ann Arbor Public Schools through a Title III grant from the Michigan Department of Education. The successful contributions of senior volunteers have grown and deepened each year under the direction of the project's innovator, Carol Tice, and its dynamic and articulate staff.

Grandpersons are one of our country's greatest assets. They are also a missing ingredient in educational planning. The children mentioned above know the value of grandpersons, but the educational system does not. If these "funner," "wonderful" persons waste away for lack of opportunity, for lack of tie-in to life's on-going processes, then
Educators must accept some of the responsibility. Are we really ignorant of their potential contributions, or have we suppressed recognition of the vast store of skills and knowledge that senior citizens could offer to the classroom, to curriculum, and most important, to children?

My eyes were opened last year when I witnessed grandpersons sharing their arts and crafts skills with children in the schools, with the school community responding very positively. More important, the data I gathered and examined as an external evaluator of the Teaching-Learning Communities project supported and confirmed my personal observations. My experience demonstrated that this elderly human treasure is mainly untapped, lying dormant, yet wishing to be involved, in a well-paced manner consistent with each person's health and mobility.

There are 20 million people in the United States today over 65 years of age (almost 10 percent of our society), and 1,000 more persons join these ranks each day. Consider the number of retired senior citizens who were master carpenters, master auto mechanics, or who, for example, served in World War II and could relate historical events they lived through. There are grandpersons who are retired musicians, bookkeepers, home economists—grandpersons with skills that could greatly enrich existing school district curriculum.

Rather than utilizing the human resource they represent, our society assigns grandpersons to benevolent ghettos where they serve no function in life's mainstream. We seem to assume that usefulness stops at a certain age. I am reminded of the Eskimo tribes who placed their aged on ice floes, with a minimal food supply—their solution for people whose physical contributions had become limited and who were therefore perceived as having little value.

As educators, we too ignore the constructive role the aged could play.
as active participants in our schools.
We too place the aging on an ice
floe—one of mental exclusion, with
only a minimal supply of stimulation.

Some groups in our society are
recognizing the desire of the aging
members of our population to remain
part of the mainstream. Roger
DeCrow, former Director of the
Older American Project, Adult Edu-
cation Association, Washington, D.C.,
completed a survey showing that 72
percent of the nation's community
colleges that responded were initi-
ating new programs for the elderly,
while 50 percent of the public schools
reported doing the same thing.¹ This
clearly is an indication that the
elderly are looking for outlets to con-
tinue the process of learning and liv-
ing, and that community colleges are
responding commendably.

However, it is one dimension of
living "to receive," as from a class or
course, and quite another dimension
"to give"—that supreme human act
of giving to others in response to
needs. Our aging citizens want to
give of themselves, to give of their
skills and knowledge. And one obvi-
ous beneficiary of this hidden treasure
should be the public schools.

Fortunately, what is hidden can
also be found. In the Teaching-Learn-
ing Communities project, grandper-
sons do give of their skills and
knowledge, and they are needed.

I have already mentioned the
enthusiastic statements of elementary
school children regarding grandper-
sons. School principals have also
expressed positive feelings when ap-
plying for participation in the
Teaching-Learning Communities proj-
ect this year. One principal com-
mented:

I think it [senior citizen involve-
ment] will enrich the art program in a
mutually beneficial way. The children
will learn from the grandpersons and
benefit from the extra personal attention.
The grandpersons will feel needed and
appreciated and have a channel to share
their skills. Both groups will grow in
respect and caring for each other. We
would be happy to have grandpersons as
tutors in whatever skill area they choose.
We just like them.

Other goals expressed by educa-
tors involved in the project are to
create more small group work, to
enrich students' lives, to foster greater
rapport between students and grand-
persons, and to add a new dimension
to the school program. It is very
important to note that in addition to
the art program, principals expressed
interest in having grandpersons tutor
in woodworking, photography, cook-
ing, science, music, reading, library
skills, and gardening.

A detractor might say that it is
one thing for children to feel warm
and happy when working with a
grandperson, but question what the
students learn. The answer is: MUCH!
Grandpa Pitts, for one, brings a life-
time of woodworking skills and tal-
ents to class. In a non-threatening
atmosphere, he works elbow to elbow
with children on various projects in a
nongraded class. It is a situation in
which children and seniors, as one
teacher said, "take to each other like
bees to honey." There exists a
natural learning environment of inter-

¹ Roger DeCrow. *New Learning for
Older Americans: A Survey.* Washington,
D.C.: Adult Education Association of the
generational understanding—an empathic communicative link between two age groups that society has tended to perceive as having little to contribute.

Involvement between the generations has great potential for teaching more than skills. One outcome is that children learn a sense of time and an understanding of history. Surprisingly, senior citizens participating in some scattered secondary school programs throughout the country are being accepted as part of a generation peer group, a group that has historically tended toward psychological emancipation from its elders. Adolescents tend to perceive grandpersons as non-authoritarian and in most cases, as non-directive humans, who relate experiences that they had in similar settings many years ago. It seems as if most grandpersons have retreated from the battle of moralizing; instead, they simply relate their experiences, giving examples of alternative behaviors they have found effective in coping with problems and in living their own lives.

Grandpersons also benefit tremendously from working with students. In an interview with one elderly grandlady, I asked, “Do you like coming to the Teaching-Learning Communities art classes?” She answered, “Yes, on Tuesdays when I come to Teaching-Learning Communities, I am out of bed early in the morning getting dressed for my children. Before I used to just sit in my bed until noon and watch T.V.”

This grandlady’s comments shouldn’t surprise educators. We have studied and restudied the concept of “feeling needed” and its relationship to motivation and to self-concept. We write about, talk about, and lecture on these basic needs of children. But don’t these same needs also exist for our seniors? Is age the sole determinant of when one stops learning, growing, and contributing, or is attitude the critical variable? If attitude is not the important variable, how do we account for the fact that grandpersons—using 22 different types of art media ranging from oil pastels to clay, from styrofoam to tongue depressors—worked on more than 246 projects, all in a three-month period of time in the Teaching-Learning Communities program?

We educators have all been engaged in activities designed to get children “ready.” We have developed the kindergarten to ready children for first grade. We have developed the preschool to ready children for kindergarten. Now there is talk of 0-3 learning. If we prepare children for entry into the mainstream of life, why do we draw the line at age 55, 60, 70, or 80 and arbitrarily consider the value of this experienced segment of society as irrelevant to the educational process? Perhaps we need to get ourselves “ready” to deal with this problem.

The report of the White House Conference on Aging in 1971 stated that: “We should create opportunities for the aging for life-long involvement in community affairs.” It is ironic to note that sociologists have found the aged much more thoroughly integrated into the life of the so-called “primitive” rural societies than they are in our modern industrial society.

Those who have studied aging in pre-industrial societies have found one of the basic needs of the aged is to remain active and to maintain intellectual acuity. In this area, too, the Teaching-Learning Communities project has demonstrated what stimulation-deprivation research has shown for a long time: that human beings

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must be actively involved. In this
vein, the Director of the Ann Bach
Nursing Home in Ann Arbor has
gone so far as to state that the pro-
gram has “saved the lives of some
of our seniors who were literally
giving up their spirit.”

Naturally, there are some prac-
tical considerations to be met when
involving grandpersons in educa-
tional programming. It must be rec-
ognized that the very old and those
with extremely serious health prob-
lems will not be able to participate.
This is a reality that can’t be avoided.
However, the same situation exists
for middle-aged and young people
who are not functioning effectively
due to physically or emotionally in-
hibiting factors. One needs also:

- To consider and plan for
  transportation and to recruit volun-
teers to assist with logistics;
- To recognize that personal
  conversations with grandpersons are
  an important part of their involve-
  ment;
- To survey the interests and
  existing skills of grandpersons and to
  match them carefully with the teacher
  and the teacher’s general classroom
  style;
- To establish a good working
  relationship with teacher organiza-
tions and unions to ensure that a
  senior involvement project does not
  thin the ranks of professional teach-
ers needed.

All of these considerations are
part of the real world and all have
been built into the Teaching-Learning
Communities program in Ann Arbor
by its Director, Carol Tice, who has
shown that such logistical problems
are no different from other school
district problems.

Another essential building block
is the cooperation of the school prin-
cipal. Bob Stevenson, principal of
Pittsfield School in Ann Arbor, says
that from his perspective, the grand-
persons have a calming effect on chil-
dren. He strongly supports the
Teaching-Learning Communities proj-
ect and reports no complaints from
teachers.

Ann Arbor Superintendent
Harry Howard has said:

At Teaching-Learning Communi-
ties, we are discovering that the involve-
ment of senior citizens is an important
step toward developing a total com-
munity concept. Numerous students have
never had the opportunity to relate with
a grandparent generation. Our program
is often the first opportunity students
have had to interact with a person hav-
ing a fairly long historical perspective
that involves a time period beyond the
student’s own experiences.

Other districts, such as my own
Wayne-Westland, are adopting the
program. Timothy J. Dyer, Superin-
tendent of Wayne-Westland and a
regent at Eastern Michigan University
has said, “Both the local school dis-
trict and university must share in the
responsibility for developing an in-
creased awareness of the great poten-
tial our most experienced citizens
have to offer to education.”

Margaret Mead has said that
older people should again assume the
role they have played throughout
human history—a role that aids in
the total development of the younger
generations and recognizes the deep
need children have to grow under the
affectionate and genuinely caring eye
of the aged. Indeed, we might sew
some of the wounds of our decaying
family system with the greying
threads of aged wisdom.

We have our hidden treasure
nearby. Educators should look for it
around the corner and at the end of
the bus line. We must open our eyes
and see behind the curtains; and most
of all, we must open the school doors
and bring grandpersons into the
mainstream of educational program-
ning.