Théâtre Wakefield

Cultural Mentoring for Seniors

a report prepared for the River Valley Rendezvous Project
(funded by ESDC's New Horizons for Seniors Program
and Canadian Heritage's Community Life Program)

May 2015

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This report is intended to provide guidance on seniors cultural mentoring, and recommendations for future related programming, based on the experience acquired in the River Valley Rendezvous Project undertaken by Theatre Wakefield. The project is in fact still underway at the time of writing (May 2015) but the primary inputs to the seniors' cultural mentoring component have been completed.

Part one of this report begins with an overview of the context of Theatre Wakefield and the funding program New Horizons for Seniors. This is followed by an outline of the River Valley Rendezvous project, and Part One finishes with highlights of the implementation to date.

Part two of this report begins by asking why cultural mentoring, and explaining the context of cultural mentoring within the River Valley Rendezvous project. The concept of cultural mentoring competency is then discussed, and a competency chart for the project is proposed based on standards developed by the Cultural Human Resource Council of Canada. (CHRC). Part Two concludes with a detailed examination of how the competency chart was used during the project, and finally lessons learned and recommendations.

Thanks for reading. Your feedback is welcome.

And thanks to our seniors, our youth and our artistic community for their enthusiasm for this learning experience.

PART ONE – The Project

1.The Context - NHSP and Theatre Wakefield

Theatre Wakefield is a 13 year old community based organization in La Peche Québec. Begun as a community theatre company, Theatre Wakefield has steadily increased its operating capacity to the point where it is now a key player in the sustainability of the new Wakefield La Pêche Community Centre and its services for the regional population. The organization has provided professional lighting and other technical equipment for the Wakefield Centre's Great Hall performance space. Theatre Wakefield technicians offer services to visiting performances and productions, and our volunteers help set up raked seating, operate sound and lighting equipment, and handle ticketing and front-of-house.

With the opening of the Community Centre's Great Hall performance space and regular home for its productions, Theatre Wakefield is now in the process of seeking more ways to support the village's thriving creative economy. Ultimately, these activities all sustain and grow Theatre Wakefield's role as a core contributor to the regional population's artistic and cultural expression through the performing and cinematic arts.

Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP) enables seniors to share their knowledge, skills and experiences with others, and help communities increase their capacity to address local issues.

2.The Project – Overview and Design

River Valley Rendezvous is the third in a series of history animation projects under taken by Theatre Wakefield. With River Valley Rendezvous! - "re-vitalizing the cultural heritage of the Lower Gatineau Valley with seniors and youth" - Theatre Wakefield is creating a model for engaging English-speaking community (ESC) seniors and youth living in the western Quebec's Outaouais region in various heritage animation activities. The project is co-funded by NHSP and Canadian's Heritage's Community Life Program.

The project runs from September 7, 2014 to September 6, 2015, principally in the Outaouais municipalities of La Pêche, Chelsea, Low, Cantley, and Aylmer (Gatineau). Activities include heritage animation training to 12 local ESC seniors, and engaging the newly trained cultural mentors in sharing and recording their stories with 12 local ESC youth using various formats (e.g., dramatizations, songs, narrated tales, and recorded interviews); holding two variety shows in each of the five municipalities where local emerging and semi-professional ESC artists (e.g., actors, musicians and storytellers) will re-enact these stories; moderated public discussion workshops engaging audience members after each presentation; and a Heritage Animation DVD capturing these activities.

Presentations and workshops are expected to attract a total of 500 participants (50 per show), namely youth, seniors and school groups, as well as local heritage associations. The Heritage Animation DVD is expected to be shared, namely with members of the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network's (QAHN), and promoted in 37 Community Learning Centres located in ESC schools across Quebec. This intergenerational project will help preserve and showcase the region's ESC heritage through a variety of artistic activities, as well as increase the visible presence of the Outaouais' ESC arts and culture.

3.The Project - Implementation

Participants
Seniors were recruited from the volunteers and members of the Fairbairn Museum, the Gold Age Club which meets at the Community Centre and from the members of Theatre Wakefield. We drew the youth from our extended Theatre Wakefield data base which includes a large contingent of over 50 per year built over 7 years of Film Camps. Also from youth who have attended our workshops, improvization group and the Mainstage plays that have been done over 12 years. Many of our youth have been working with us for 7 or more years.

The coaches and team leader (3) are also seniors. There were originally 10 senior writers but two dropped out due to family and health challenges. In the recording process there were 26 actors ranging in age from 11 to 70. Each skit was rehearsed and then recorded in a professional sound studio. In total 41 people participated ranging in age of 11 years to 90.

Artistic Team
Robert Rooney headed the artistic team. He is Director of Summer Film Camp and has directed in theaters in England, the US and Canada. He worked at the Banff School of Fine Arts Playwrights Colony for 6 years, has dramaturged many original plays written for Toronto Workshop Productions, Theatre Wakefield, GCTC and the Berkshire Theatre Festival. Rooney was joined by Ian Tamblyn musician, playwright and educator, John Hardie who has written and performed three one person shows as well as writing two plays for the Mainstage, and Doug McArthur, musician, writer, theatre Wakefield actor, past film camp councillor on the console.

The Workshops
The first workshop focussed on research with presentations by the Fairbairn Museum President, Michael Cooper, Tamara Tarrasoff who is Products Specialist - New Media and Exhibitions, Direction, Relations externes / External Relations Branch of Parks Canada / Parks Canada and Marc Cockburn Senior Archivist at the National Archives and President of the Gatineau Valley Historical Society.

The second workshop was on writing and interpreting historical material for presentation and. The mentors were available between workshops for one on one sessions. The mentors were:

- Robert Rooney – on different approaches for transposing stories from an idea/article/song/court records/municipal council meeting minutes to audio/still visuals
- Ian Tamblyn – on creating drama, what to keep and what to ditch
- John Hardie – on writing techniques
- Marc Cockburn - on researching history, tools

The third workshop continued with the coaches. Each senior read their draft story and all discussed how to improve and develop it.

This process was continued on the final workshop. Rooney then worked with individual writers to turn the "stories, poems and diary pieces" into skits for performance.

The Creations
There are 8 stories. Each story has music recorded by professional pianist Deborah Thompson and fiddler Nathan Curry. Museum and GVHS archivists provided images and additional stills were purchased to illustrate each story. Director Rooney edited the actors' performances of the skits, music and stills photos on Final Cut Pro to create videos for use as an enhanced permanent installation on the Fairbairn Museum touch screens. They have been praised by historians, community development specialists and the general public.

For the summer 2015 presentations based on the history animation pieces Ian Tamblyn has developed a rehearsal script and 8 songs for inclusion in the production. Director Mary Ellis is recruited and performance venues are booked.

PART TWO – Cultural Mentoring

1.Why cultural mentoring, and its place in the project

Canada's artistic community has in recent years recognized the importance of diverse competencies well beyond the technical ones, and has been a driving force for the development of protocols for development of those competencies. Cultural Mentoring is one of the strategies, and the Cultural Human Resources Council of Canada (CHRC Canada) has developed the "Competency Chart for Cultural Mentors" as a key tool to ensure that mentoring is effective and has the desired results.

http://www.culturalhrc.ca/mm/e/01-05-01.php

In this project this cultural mentoring component was driven by the heritage animation training to local ESC seniors, and the engagement of the newly trained cultural mentors in sharing and recording their stories with local ESC youth using various formats (e.g., dramatizations, songs, narrated tales, and recorded interviews).

Theatre Wakefield, cognizant of the work by CHRC and already somewhat experienced in the area of mentoring youth in theatre, decided to adapt the CHRC materials for use in this project.

2.Cultural Mentoring Competency

Creating a competency chart for use by the project

The scope of the CHRC Cultural Competency Chart is vast, and the so project decided to focus on four of the ten competencies detailed in the CHRC Chart. For each of the four competencies three or four skills were chosen as demonstrative of that competency.

This focused selection competencies and skills was based on the following rationale:

- Limited sample size – four mentors and 12 mentees
- Age of the mentees – all seniors
- Goals of the mentees – not for professional development but rather for community service and personal development
- Guiding factor was soft skills (human) skills vs more technical and networking skills.

The project's Cultural Mentoring Competency Chart

Competency	Skills Required
Establish Rapport	Define roles
	Identify mutual expectations
	Agree on ground rules to govern the mentoring relationship
Establish a Work Plan	Support protégé goal setting
	Support protégé work schedule setting
	Establish assessment process for the work
Demonstrate Communication Skills	Listening Skills
	Speaking skills
	Writing skills
	Facilitating groups
Demonstrate Personal Skills	Passion
	Reliability
	Flexibility
	"Get it done"

How the Competency Chart was used

The competency chart was used in three ways

1) Training Workshops. Over the course of the four training workshops the competencies were
   a) introduced as key skills to be developed by all parties, and
   b) referred to in specific training sessions when the competency was seen as particularly relevant to the outcome of the training
2) The two key Project Activities – Story Development and Animation. At each of three important milestones in the activities the competencies were reflected on as part of
   a) a formative evolution of the process to date and,
   b) a refocus on the project goals and one change to the project deliverables
3) Project Evaluation. At the end of the project each participant submitted an evaluation consisting of a questionnaire about various stages of the project, and a critique of the mentoring process vis a vis the competency chart.

3.Feedback and Analysis from the use of the adapted materials, Lessons Learned, and Recommendations

Feedback Analyses

Participants provided feedback throughout the process, although the principle formal vehicles was at the end (see Annex One - Participant end of Project Feedback Template).

Two analyses of the feedback were undertaken

Analysis one is the feedback on the process – this served as both a critique of the project and input to Analysis Two.

Analysis Two is the feedback on the Competency Chart.

Analysis One – Process Feedback
The High, Medium or Low Score (totalling 100%) reflects the importance of this factor, or the extent to which it was present or not.

Factor	High	Medium	Low
Value of Trainings	80	20	
Use of Materials	20	40	40
Importance of Time with Mentor	30	40	30
Contribution of Resource People	60	20	20
"New Process"	100	0	0
Use of suggested topics	60	0	40
Use of family material	40	0	60
Value of Group working for ideas	80	0	20
Value of Group Working for Collaboration	20	20	60
Clarity of Final Product	20	20	60

Analysis Two - feedback on the Competency Chart
Value to the process = how important was this skill to the mentoring process
Success of the mentor = how well the mentor performed this skill

Competency	Skills Required	Value to the Process Very important Moderately important Not so important	Success of the Mentors Very successful Moderately successful Not so successful
Establish Rapport	Define roles	Very	Moderate
	Identify mutual expectations	Very	moderate
	Agree on ground rules to govern the mentoring relationship	Moderate	moderate
Establish a Work Plan	Support protégé goal setting	Moderate	moderate
	Support protégé work schedule setting	Very	Very
	Establish assessment process for the work	Very	Not so
Demonstrate Communication Skills	Listening Skills	Very	Very
	Speaking skills	Very	Very
	Writing skills	Not so	Moderate
	Facilitating groups	Moderate	Moderate
Demonstrate Personal Skills	Passion	Moderate	moderate
	Reliability	Very	moderate
	Flexibility	Very	Very
	"Get it done"	Moderate	Moderate

Key Findings and Lessons Learned

- Workshops were good, a lot got accomplished, and more take home materials would have been helpful.

- Getting started was difficult – finding a topic, finding a voice and writing style

- Once initial writing challenges were over it was fun and a good challenge

- The group critique process has mixed results – some folks found the group feedback useful others felt it slowed the process down. Those who were critical did not necessarily spend as much time as they would have liked to one on one with their mentor

- The cultural mentor competence chart proved a useful guideline for developing the relationship between mentor and mentee, and a helpful analytical tool for evaluating the mentoring process. Certain assumptions made in selecting the skills were not correct. The mentors in general were strong in a few areas but only moderately strong in many areas.

- Seniors like anybody else need direction and at least occasional revisit of that compass.

- Timing of the call for youth participation was problematic and resulted in most youth participants being focussed on the multimedia production side as opposed to the story development side,

Recommendations

- Ensure that the seniors' resource group already developed continues to benefit from the experience, and shares their experience with the community. Call on these people, acknowledge their contribution, actively search them out for future volunteer assignments.

- Be cognizant of the size of the initial hurdles in starting a story writing project including lack of writing experience, lack of knowledge of the subject, lack of confidence about ability. Undertake a short series of quick start writing exercises that demonstrates the ease and the fun.

- Provide more milestones. Perhaps a checklist so that over the course of the project participants can bite off clear pieces and see the accomplishment.

- Revisit the final outcomes as often as is necessary. When changes to the deliverable are being considered bring the participants into the discussion ASDAP.

- Ensure a good diversity of resource people and artistic mentors. The more lenses available the more your participants will identify with the passion.

ANNEX ONE – Participant end of Project Feedback Template

Overall – Looking back
How did the process work for you?

Workshop 1
Getting the background and research tools – was this useful? Did you get enough help and insight to go off and start writing?
There was the option of either picking one of the suggested themes or going for something completely different. Did you like the freedom or did you feel it didn't give novice writers enough direction?

Between workshops 1 and 2
Did you get enough input and help from your coach?
Was it primarily by email, phone or in person?
Did you contact him or were you waiting for him to contact you?

Workshop 2
1st draft – scary?
Was the feedback helpful? Supportive?

Between workshops
Did the exchange between you and your coach change as you delved more deeply into your story and were getting a better grip on it?
Did you make less or more use of your coach at this stage?
Did you contact any of the other writers to discuss?

Workshop 3
2nd draft – did you feel you had progressed since the last workshop?
What did you learn about the writing process?
Were you satisfied with the 'product' you handed over to Robert for 'transformation'?
Did you feel proud?

The whole development phase
If you had to do it again, what would you suggest to improve the process?

Cultural Mentoring Competency Development
Please complete the competency chart by critiquing
 a) The importance of each skill to a successful mentoring process, and
 b) The extent to which your mentor(s) performed that skill.

Looking ahead
Now that you know what's involved and acquired some new skills:

Would you like to write some more historical vignettes?
Would you like to guide and mentor others through this creative process?

ANNEX TWO –
The project's Cultural Mentoring Competency Chart

Competency	Skills Required
Establish Rapport	Define roles
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