Chapter 5: Hearing Children's voices in Intergenerational learning and practice

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Abstract

Children are an active participants in intergenerational care learning opportunities and programs, however, children's agency within these programs is often not clear. The perspectives and contributions children make in intergenerational programs needs to be considered as part of children's rights to have a say on matters that affect them. Understanding young children's experiences in intergenerational care programmes and unpacking the level of choice and impact these programs have on their lives is a critical, yet understudied, area in the intergenerational practice literature. This chapter discusses the use of strategies to explore young children's voices and experiences of services in which they participate. The example of a case study from a pilot intergenerational care program, which took place in in Brisbane, Australia and gathered the voices and experiences of seven of the 3 to 5 year-old children who participated is discussed. The case study used photo elicitation to seek children's perspectives about their experiences. The children shared ideas about the physical location of the program as well as the relationships they made with the older adults. The chapter is intended to stimulate further conversations and research about strategies to consult with children who are participating in intergenerational care programs.

Intergenerational care learning opportunities and programs often involve young children. However, children's agency within these programs is often not clear. Questions arise such as, how much choice do children have regarding whether they participate or not? Are they 'recruited' the same way as older adults are? Or are they opted in by their parents and forced to go along with it? Do they get to have a say as to whether they want to stay in the programme or is it something their parents and educators maintain control over? More importantly, are their views and experiences of the program taken into consideration in their planning and implementation? Understanding young children's experiences in intergenerational care programmes and unpacking the level of choice and impact these programs have on their lives is a critical, yet understudied, area in the intergenerational practice literature.

This chapter contributes to addressing this gap by discussing a number of research strategies designed to explore young children's voices and experiences of services they participate in. These will be illustrated with reference to a case study of a pilot intergenerational care program, which took place in in Brisbane, Australia and which prioritized the voices and experiences of the 3 to 5 year-old children who participated in it. The chapter is intended to stimulate further conversations and research about strategies to consult with children who are participating in intergenerational care programs

Before describing the case study and the context with which it was undertaken, we first explain what we consider an intergenerational care program to be, outline the various models for implementing intergenerational care programs and discuss why children's perspectives are important.

What is an Intergenerational Care Program?

Intergenerational programs provide care, learning opportunities and social support for older adults and children in the same setting. They have been shown to have psychological benefits for older adults by giving them a sense of purpose and enhancing their dignity. An intergenerational program can also change community expectations of what care and support services can offer older people, including those living with dementia (Goswami, Köbler, Leimeister, Krcmar, 2010; Skropeta, Colvin, and Sladen, 2014). A review of the international literature conducted by the authors of this chapter identified at least four different delivery modes or models of intergenerational care programs. These were: the visitation model, the co-located models (either visitation based or in a shared space) and the single site model (Radford, Gould, Vecchio, Fitzgerald, 2018). Each are now briefly described.

The **visitation mode** included those programs where both generations (younger and older) live off site and separate from each other and one group travels to the other group's place of gathering for a shared purpose or activity at an agreed day and time weekly, or monthly (see Chapters 10, 11 and 12). The Children's Family Centre in the United States described by Murphy (1984), and the Intergenerational Playgroup Program in Australia described by Skropeta, Colvin & Sladen (2014) are examples of this model. In these programs both populations visit a centre to participate in these programs for a specific time with set of activities. These programs require transport from one venue to the other and are often costly to run without the use of volunteers.

In the **co-location model** both populations are actively engaged in learning and care programs on the same site but in different rooms (See Chapter 9 and 13). They either visit each other by walking down the hall or driveway; or, both generations come to a common space to interact and engage with each other. Examples of these modes include the TreeHut School (United States) (Murphy 1984), *PACE Maluhia* (Hawaii) (Larson, 2000), *Valspan community* (South Africa) (Roos, Silvestre & De Jager, 2017) *Stride Rite Stride Rite* (United States) (Laabs, 1993) and *Intergenerational Summer Program* (United States) (Giglitotti et al., 2005) and *ONEGeneration* (United States) (Jarrott & Bruno, 2007). In the *TreeHut School*, *PACE Maluhia* and *Valspan community* elderly participants live at a retirement village or in a residential aged care centre, and the children attend a formal day care program. The *Stride Rite*, *Intergenerational Summer Program* and *ONEGeneration* intergenerational programs provide community day care programs for the elderly and the young together. Co-location has the advantage of not having to rely on formal transport to move participants from one location to the other. This makes these programs potentially cost-neutral and easy to coordinate amongst the services involved. Furthermore, the potential for more regular contact between generations is greater than in the visiting model that relies largely on the availability of transport between venues.

Finally, the **single site model** refers to those programs that have both aged care and early childhood care and education (ECEC) services on the same location and operates as single entity. An example of this program is Chamberlain et al's (1994) description of the *Glenwood*. This program provides residential aged care for six elders, day care for pre-schoolers, and afterschool care for school age children in one location. Currently in Australia aged care and ECEC services are only legislated to operate as separate entities. Some non-government organisations are licenced to operate aged care services and ECEC services on the same location however these services are managed independently of each other.

Combined, these models provide multiple options for the delivery of intergenerational care and learning programs involving young children and older adults. However, what is common throughout these programs is that younger participants are selected by either their parents or educators to participate in these programs, and often do not have a say. In addition, it is unknown if children who do not want to participate in the program are allowed to opt out each session.

Why children's perspectives are important

The discussion about children's rights was a starting point in considering how children's voices could be acknowledged by those providing intergenerational care programs. Historically, children have been described as 'future adults' who are not yet developmentally competent of being active research participants (Mayall, 2008). Over the past two decades this viewpoint has been strongly challenged and there is extensive literature on how to include young children's voice in research and practice (Clark & Moss, 2001; Quinn & Manning, 2013; Tangen, 2008). This viewpoint reflects Article 12 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child which states that children have a right to be to have a say on matters that affect them. The children's rights agenda has cultivated child research by nurturing a realisation that children and young people have a right to be consulted, heard and to appropriately influence the facilities and services that are provided for them (Quinn & Manning, 2013). It is important that this is not a token approach rather meaningful processes need to be employed to listen to children's perspectives about services provided for them.

Understanding engagement and being open to hearing children's' voices is central to respecting the child's rights to have a say regarding their participation in intergenerational care programs. This is particularly relevant in intergenerational care and learning settings where interactions between adult and child are fundamental to the program's success. The TOY for Quality Program stresses the importance of consulting children as well as older adults in design, planning, monitoring and evaluation of intergenerational programs (see Chapter 14). The use of photography (and photographs) is widespread in early childhood education as a pedagogical tool. It also has an important role in research – whereby photos taken by the researcher or indeed by the children of activities, experiences, objects, people can prompt observations and new insights enabling a more complete picture of a program being researched (Stephenson, 2009).

The following section presents a case study of an intergenerational learning program conducted in Brisbane, Australia from April to August 2018. The case study explored the perspectives of children aged 3 to 5 years about their contribution to the program and the impact the program has on their life.

Case study: Children's perspectives of an intergenerational learning program in Brisbane Australia

The case study presented is part of a larger multidisciplinary research project that was designed to develop a business case for intergenerational programs in Australia. The project team includes researchers from the disciplines of health management, health economics, human resource management, early childhood education and care, human services psychology and nursing. The project was built on existing knowledge about intergenerational programs and identified three key areas which have remained relatively unexplored and

needed further attention. These concern pedagogy, workforce and cost/benefits. Specifically, it was felt that more attention needed to be paid to:

- 1) developing an evidence-based intergenerational pedagogy that is suitable for both early childhood and older adult development.
- 2) developing a new career structure that combines Aged Care ¹and ECEC qualifications, and exploring the attraction and retention capabilities of an intergenerational care program to both ECEC and aged care sectors.
- 3) assessing the economic and social costs and benefits of intergenerational care and education programs.

Part of the research involved conducting a pilot of two different models of intergenerational care programs, visitation and co-location in four research sites in the states of Queensland and New South Wales in Australia. The pilots involved six organisations. Two of the organisations managed aged care and ECEC services, two were privately owned ECEC services and two were aged care service providers. Aged care services included a residential facility and the other three services were day respite services. It is expected that findings from the larger multidisciplinary research project will contribute to developing age-friendly communities by informing the development of recommendations and guidelines for the operationalisation and evaluation of Intergenerational programs designed to enhance engagement between the generations.

The case study reported on in this chapter focuses on one of the trial sites located in Queensland, which was a co-located site. It involved a group of nine older adults aged 70 plus years in residential care and a group of seven children aged three to five years attending childcare setting. The childcare centre was located within the same premises, directly opposite the residential aged care facility. The children walked across to the aged care facility where the activities were generally conducted in a large common room, with some activities conducted outdoors in a grassed area.

The particular focus of this case study was to examine whether the opportunities provided for children promoted their learning within the Intergenerational program. Recognising children as research participants and whose perspectives were important to listen to was particularly relevant in the Intergenerational Care Program given that deeper understandings about the interactions between adult and child was fundamental to determining the program's success. The initial program design included surveys, observations and interviews with older participants and teachers. The decision to interview the children was added to the research protocol in the later stages of the project as the members of the research team became aware of the importance of collecting children's perspectives about their participation in the project. Therefore, a second objective of the case study was to utilise and assess a range of methodologies designed to gather children's perspectives of their experiences. This case study highlights the kinds of learning activities that the children 1) remembered and valued and 2) the effectiveness of the research protocols and data collection tools used to gather the children's perspectives.

To participate in this intergenerational program, aged care and ECEC staff first selected potential candidates, based on their willingness to participate and suitability in terms of

¹ Aged Care is the term used to refer to the provision of services to meet the unique needs of older people in Australia.

health status and general behaviour. The older people in the program ranged from having no symptoms of neurocognitive disorders to being diagnosed with some neurocognitive disorders. All lived permanently in the residential care facility where the activities took place. The children were selected based on their fulltime attendance at the ECEC service and had parental consent to participate.

The intergenerational learning program ran for sixteen weeks and was held once per week, for one hour. The same group of participants were required to attend each week for the full duration of the program, however there was some absenteeism within each group. Considered thought was provided to the underlying intergenerational learning program before the program was developed.

The intergenerational learning program was informed by a systematic review of the evidence about effective programs for children and older adults (Cartmel, Radford, Dawson, Fitzgerald & Vecchio, 2018) as well as consultation with a selected group of stakeholders including older people living with dementia and their personal carers, parents of pre-school-aged children, aged care and childcare managers and workers, and experts in aging and dementia, and early childhood development. The underlying intergenerational learning pedagogy draws on understandings around early learning and play, neuroscience and community development drawing from two frameworks:

1. *Being Belonging and Becoming*: Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009);
2. A Neurosequential Model of Education (Perry, 2012).

Being Belonging and Becoming (DEEWR, 2009) describes the principles, practices and outcomes that support and enhance children's learning from birth to five years of age. It is a key component of the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care in Australian and was developed by the Australian and state and territory governments with input from the early childhood sector and early childhood academics. It was been designed so that ECEC services were able to develop their own strategies to implement its objectives that 'all children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life'. The overall five principles of learning in this framework were:

1. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships,
2. Partnerships,
3. High Expectations and equity,
4. Respect for diversity and,
5. Ongoing learning and reflective practices.

These principles also reflected successful ageing. This framework was blended with understandings about the Neurosequential Model of Education (Perry, 2012). This model is based on the principle that the brain develops in a certain order of neurosequential development and that each individual has a unique genetic, epigenetic and developmental history and therefore it is difficult to have a one size fits all approach to working with children and adults. Our approach was to select a sequence of enrichment and education interventions informed by the Neurosequential Model of Education which is based on the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) (Perry, 2012). This model focuses on

identifying areas of the brain that are underdeveloped and applying interventions that bolster development in those areas. In young children the brain areas are growing and in older adults the areas of the brain may be declining in capacity. Interventions (or what we termed as activities) can be used to sustain brain development. This knowledge is especially important in understanding how children (and older adults) learn and why they may behave as they do. Consequently, based on these understandings the staff structured the program in such a way to try to ensure that all adults and children felt safe, engaged, successful and capable of building relationships. There were clear linkages between child and adult pedagogy to encourage best practices. The pedagogical concept is that both generations can learn from each other. Therefore the roles of the teacher and student were undertaken within both groups.

Drawing from the principles, practices and outcomes of the Being Belonging and Becoming Framework (DEEWR, 2009) and the Neurosequential Model of Education (Perry, 2012), the operational components of the weekly educational program were jointly prepared by ECEC and aged care staff in a shared meeting. Activities such as games, singing, art, gardening and reading activities were included in the learning program. Most weeks the gatherings of children and older people was located in a meeting space - a lounge – which was filled with adult-sized chairs and tables. One week there was an animal farm that came to visit and one other session was held in a space with enough room to move freely for dancing.

Children's perspectives about their engagement were gathered using three forms of data collection methods.

1. Staff observations of individual participants using the Leuven Scale (Laevens, 1994) The Leuven scale measures observed levels of participant involvement and well-being and was completed for each individual participant during each session. The ECEC practitioners completed the scale for the children and aged care practitioners complete the scale for the older adults.
2. Workforce reflective journal – Individual practice and program reflections – Each week practitioners reflected on the experiences of the participants as well as the operationalization of the program. Excerpts about the children's responses to the program were linked with the themes identified in the transcripts of the children's focus group. In the workforce reflective journal staff noted comments made by children or information they had gained from children about their perspectives about their involvement in the intergenerational program. These comments were gathered in an *ad hoc* informal way as children returned to the childcare setting or when they were having morning tea prior to their weekly visit to the residential care facility.
3. A focus group interview with children was conducted by the researcher in the week following the conclusion of the 16 week program. Photo elicitation, whereby photographs taken by practitioners during the weekly sessions were shared with the children were used as conversational focus. In this focus group children were asked to make a drawing to support the conversational process and this added another dimension to the focus group discussions. The following questions were asked
 - Tell me about your visits with the older adults.
 - What is happening in these photos?
 - What do you remember about these times?
 - What else do you remember about visiting?
 - How did you feel when you visit?

- Who were some of the adults that you met?
- What else would you like to do if you went to visit again?
- Using this paper and pencils draw a picture of going/ being with older adults. Tell me about it.

Transcripts of the focus groups and the children's drawing were coded inductively for themes. A similar process was undertaken for the comments made about children's responses to the sessions in the reflective journals.

The findings reported in the following section pertain primarily to the focus group with the children and their thoughts about their experiences.

Children's voices about the intergenerational learning and care program

The data collection process generated two components for consideration. The first component was the perspectives of the children about the intergenerational program and the second was insights about strategies to support children to have a say. Both these perspectives provide insights for future delivery and research about intergenerational programs.

An analysis of transcripts of the focus group indicated that the children had a variety of recollections of their experiences. The children shared ideas about their connections to the physical location of the program, the connection to the older adults and activities they found engaging. These ideas were linked to the observations that staff had included in their weekly workforce reflective journals and to the Leuven Scale scores that staff had made about each of the children. The researchers had tabulated the weekly Leuven scores with the descriptions of the activities in the program to provide additional context about the children's engagement and involvement.

Connections to the physical location

In the initial part of the focus group discussions the children discussed the location as a connection to their parents' workplace. Both Anna and Tom had mothers worked at the residential aged care facility.

"Tom and my mum works there (Anna, FG: 28/08 /18)

I talked to Norm and Anna talked to her mum (Amy FG: 28/08/18)

The children also assumed that the researcher was connected with the aged care facility. Addressing the researcher who was on her third visit to the setting, Anna asked: - *Do you still work at my mum's work?* (Anna, FG: 28/08 /18)

It was while the children were drawing that they provided more insights about the physical location of the intergenerational program. What we learnt was that, while the distance between the residential care facility and the childcare setting was less than 500 metres, for children this was a long way!

In his drawing, Owen focused on the detail of the journey between the two settings and the length of time it took to get there (see Figure 1). As he drew he narrated – *I was going a long long way from daycare and then we turned went to St Matthews, down here* (Owen FG: 28/08 /18).

[INSERT FIGURE 5.1 HERE]

The learnings for the children extended beyond the intention of intergenerational relationships to a broader understanding of community. Owen shared his knowledge about mapping and his spatial abilities.

There was also a collection of toys in one of the resident's lounge areas. This small collection of toys was available to visiting children throughout the week and the children remembered that they were there. Eli drew the truck that was in the collection (Eli FG: 28/08 /18).

[INSERT FIGURE 5.2 HERE]

Children were also able to link the resources that were used during the program and remembered how some resources were sourced and shared between the ECEC setting and the residential facility. Amber drew and narrated – *we are having play toys and picking things, picking leaves and I give to my friends (older people)* (Amber FG: 28/08 /18). Natural materials were an important resource to the program. As well as spending time outdoors in the garden, the children remembered making a mobile construction which contained individual leaves on which the names and birth dates of the children and the older adults were written. They tied all these leaves onto a long stick. This stick mobile was hanging in the children's room at the ECEC service. This was a daily reminder of the connections they were making with the older people living in the facility besides the childcare setting. The physical space encounters as described by children are linked to their sense of belonging and participation (Kernan, 2010). These recollections by the children, albeit brief in length, are significant to the considerations about intergenerational programs.

Connections to the older adults

The children were reminded of their relationships with the older adults when they talked with each other during the focus group discussion while looking at the photographs of the sessions. They discussed the connections they made with the older adults, in particular Norm and Yvonne, as the following excerpts illustrate.

Amy said: *I looked at Norm's photographs, and Norm's mum [wife, sic] died. She just died. She was just old.* (Amy FG: 28/08/18). Norm had moved into the residential facility a couple of months prior to the commencement of the program. His wife had died and his family did not want him to live alone. Norm had indicated to the staff of the program that he enjoyed the company of the children. The children also mentioned the songs Norm used to sing to them.

The other person the children remembered was Yvonne. Alana said: *I talked to Yvonne, she just said hi.* (Alana FG: 28/08/18). The children looked carefully through all the photos to find Yvonne.

These connections with the older adults have continued post the 16 week program in an informal way. As ECEC service is situated in the centre of the residential complex there are incidental opportunities for contact. For example, the older adults walk past the ECEC service each morning as part of a routine walking activity. The children call out to the older adults and exchange greetings. These relationships were important to the children as they found the older adults to be interested in what they were doing and there was a mutual interest in each other.

Activities that were engaging

The strength of the children's capacity to remember the activities within the program signals that the program had elements that allowed them to engage. They were highly involved and had a high sense of well-being in sessions that had both movement and music embedded within them.

We were dancing and singing, and we dressed up (Amy FG: 28/08/18).

These focus group interviews with children, as well as with workforce reflective journal revealed that these sessions had a lasting impact on the children. While the children were reported to not sing as much as older people, they responded to the musical activities through the rhythms and embraced the costume elements of the program. During two of the sessions – the costume dress-up day, and music and games day, - all children were observed to be highly engaged and focused on what they were doing. The staff also noted that they should focus on more rhythm and music in future sessions in their workforce reflective journal. The ECEC staff also reported that the children continued to request to play 'bobs' and 'statues', two of the games that had played with the older adult, as part of the programming at the ECEC service.

These reflections were reinforced by the intentionality of planning of the activities for the intergenerational program which had included elements of the Neurosequential Model of Education (Perry 2012). The model describes the importance of music and rhythmic activities to support learning and wellbeing. The model views learning as impossible if participants feel stressed or anxious and unsafe and subsequently, they are less likely to remember what had happened.

Importance of visual methods to access children's perspectives

Photographs and drawings illustrating the IG activities were used as a conversational focus in the focus groups with children, who were otherwise distracted by play or morning tea. As demonstrated in the previous section both proved very useful in accessing children's perspectives about the IG program. The conversation with children before presenting the photographs had lacked detail. The children made no oral communication with the researcher even though she had used a couple of prompts. However upon presenting the photographs children were more elaborate in expressing their ideas. In particular, there were squeals of delight when the children looked at the photographs of the costumes day, (which was rated highly on the Leuven score). The children pointed to participants and provided descriptions about the costumes being worn. Indeed what was more impactful in terms of the insights gained into children's perceptions of the intergenerational care programme, were the children's own drawings.

Concluding remarks

James (2007) has argued that despite children's voices becoming a symbol of the modern welfare state's commitment to the values of freedom, democracy and care, such representations of children's voices may nonetheless continue to be suppressed, silenced and ignored in their everyday lives. For children to be heard so that they can influence their decision makers, legitimate acceptance of their rights is fundamental to effecting authentic change, including in the planning and implementation of intergenerational care programmes involving young children. This chapter reported on a study of an intergenerational care

program in which priority was given to gathering the children's perspectives about the program. The perspectives of the older adults and the workforce as well as the findings about the business case and sustainability of intergenerational program will be presented in various other publications by members of the project team.

The experience of conducting this study has brought attention to the fact that children's contribution should be sought at regular intervals during the program rather than just at the end. It was noted in the weekly sessions that not all children were highly engaged throughout the program. Two of the seven children were observed to have a low Leuven scores which highlighted they were observed as being less involved and having a low sense of wellbeing in two of the sixteen sessions. Inviting children to offer their ideas more often throughout the program using strategies that were appropriate to the communicative skills of young children, for example drawings or photo elicitation, would have created an opportunity for staff to get feedback about the program as it progressed. It would have helped practitioners to plan activities that could have led to deeper engagement and sustained relationships. Without asking children directly, the reasons why some children do not engage on some occasions is left unexplored and unknown.

Understanding and reflecting on the value that intergenerational care programs have on children's play and learning is important. Children should also be respected as citizens within the intergenerational community with a right to be heard and listened to on matters relating to planning and assessing and improving quality of intergenerational programmes (see also Chapter 14 for a discussion on assessing quality in intergenerational programmes).

The findings of the case study reported on in this chapter demonstrate that observation scales and staff reflection notes plus photo elicitation methods in focus groups or other visual data collection activities such as drawings can be effective ways of supporting children to have a say. In essence, to hear children's voices about intergenerational programs, multiple methods are needed.

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