Protocol for a Paper Tapestry: Using Reminiscence to Create an Intergenerational Textual and Visual Record of Youth

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Abstract: This paper details the protocol for an intergenerational reminiscence activity designed to promote the capacity of older people living in a long-term aged care facility (LTC). The activity focuses on the development of shared memories of youth through weekly interactions with adolescents. This will culminate in a 'paper tapestry' of images and stories around the theme 'remembering youth', co-created by the researchers, and older and younger participants. It will be of significant social value and can be exhibited locally and in regional areas. Using a creative activity to elicit and express the perspectives of older people builds on the successful work of Goopy (Goopy and Lloyd 2006; Goopy, Lloyd and Blakely 2007; Goopy and Howard 2008). The impact of the intervention will be evaluated through quantitative measures – pre/post measures of depression, loneliness and worth, and quality of life – and qualitative tools – interviews, focus groups, observations, photographs, audio-recordings, and artifacts (papers, documents and video). The project is significant as it focuses on capacity building and productive ageing for those often mistaken as being unproductive by virtue of their age (NSA 2008). It highlights the capacities of and the value that older people can add to the social and cultural development of younger generations by drawing on key strengths of our elders – memory, story telling and experience. It will also refine a model that can be rolled out in other RACFs and similar organisations.

Keywords: Remembering, Youth, Memory, Experience, Paper Tapestry

Introduction

THIS PAPER DETAILS the development and application of an intervention protocol, 'remembering youth', for the co-creation of a paper tapestry aimed at promoting intergenerational communication and the capacity of older people. The paper considers how creative methodologies may be used to support research to engage and value the social and cultural capital of older people and youth.

Participatory approaches to research (PAR) have long been used in work with youth (see for example London *et al.* 2003; Checkoway and Richards-Schuster 2001a and 2001b), and there is a growing recognition of the need and benefit of participatory research with older people (Blair and Minkler 2009). However, despite the acknowledged advantages of PAR, relatively little PAR has taken place in which either youth or older people actually take on active and central roles with researchers as dynamic and prominent partners. Neither in the case of youth, where PAR are popular, nor with the older people, where PAR is in its infancy, do we often find an emphasis on researching with, as opposed to about, either group (Thomson 2008; Blair and Minkler 2009).

The protocol for the creation of a paper tapestry arises out of a participatory research project in which older people (drawn from a long-term aged care facility) share memories of their youth during weekly interactions with local high school students (aged between 14 and 17 years). The project aims to highlight the value that older people can add to the social and cultural development of younger generations by drawing on key strengths of our elders—memory, storytelling and experience—and finding points of understanding between the generations. Using creativity to elicit and express the perspectives of older people and youth, the creation of a paper tapestry acts to develop intergenerational connections by linking older adults with youth in a meaningful and interesting way that can provide advantages for both groups.

The protocol presented details the underlying principles, participants and the process for the ‘remembering youth’ intervention and the creation and conceptual mapping of historical and cultural notions of youth through the paper tapestry. We argue that older people as social actors offer more than just an understanding of aging, and that a facilitated and systematic reminiscence intervention can actually highlight the value of memory in understanding youth culture.

Background

Like many other developed nations, Australia is facing a greying population. While community-based care services are generally well recognised by both individuals and governments as the preferred option for providing support and care for older people who require assistance, there is also recognition that not all older people are able to be cared for at home. The end result is that some older Australians live for the final months or years of their life in a long-term aged care (LTAC) facility.

Within LTAC, person-centred care is commonly viewed as the gold standard for care that is individually focused and respectful of the personhood of older people. However, person-centered care is often difficult to achieve in what is essentially an institutional environment and, despite pockets of excellence in practice, aged care remains largely task-focused, bound by rules, routines and regulations (Venturato et al. 2011). For older people, LTAC is often experienced as disabling and there is a tendency for older people to lower their expectations of health care. Within LTAC, there is a tendency to homogenize older people and focus on their disabilities and limitations, and to prioritize biophysical care needs over psychosocial care and emotional well-being.

There is growing recognition of the need to challenge both the culture and service models of care within LTAC environments in order to address these issues and improve the quality of care and quality of life for older people living in LTAC. The challenge, however, for LTAC is two-fold. First, long-term care is rarely a choice or perceived as a desired lifestyle by older people (Wilkerson & MacDonell, 2003). Rather, the move into LTAC is usually driven by necessity rather than desire. The first challenge, as Boyd (2003) notes, centers therefore on how to create a sense of community in LTAC when nobody really wants to be there. The second challenge is closely related to the first. As noted, many older people who are resident in LTAC facilities are there because of need. In Australia, older people residing in LTAC are generally frail with multiple co-morbidities, and most (71%) have high care requirements (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). The second challenge,

therefore, relates to enhancing self-worth and quality of life for older people whose health may be a limiting factor.

While there are a number of research interventions that focus on enhancing quality of life for older people living in LTAC, there are four significant problems with current research: 1) There is often a focus on the negative aspects of aging, such as social isolation, loneliness, depression or disabilities; 2) There is often limited evaluation of the interventions that are undertaken; 3) The interventions tend to be passive – providing older people with something rather than having them actively engage in the development of their own intervention activity; and 4) There is often little acknowledgement of the contribution that older people can make to the broader cultural and social milieu.

This protocol offers one possible approach to addressing some of these challenges by focusing on intergenerational engagement and creativity using the strengths of older people – memory, storytelling and experience. By focusing on capacity building and productive aging for those often mistaken as being unproductive by virtue of their age (NSA 2008), this intervention will highlight the capacities of, and the value that, older people can add to the social and cultural development of younger generations.

Design

This protocol is based on a participatory and partnership research design. A well-designed participatory approach is an empowering process that can enable participants to gain a sense of self-worth and value. It offers researchers and participants the opportunity and scope to work with, and explore, issues that are of importance to them. When seeking to undertake research that is truly participatory, one is faced with the difficulties of establishing a technique that is both rigorous and accessible in terms of its process and the outcomes that it produces. The methodology that underpins this protocol is an extension of the visual and ethnographic methods first mooted by Goopy and Lloyd (2006) and demonstrated through a number of effective outcomes (Goopy, Lloyd & Blakely 2007; Goopy & Howard 2008) wherein ‘the knowledge presented will be accessible to the “common person”, as well as the philosopher/academic (Goopy & Lloyd 2006 p. 34). The methodology, in part, draws on Mary Douglas’s theory on cultural stability and its realization through the interaction between individuals and societies, particularly as expressed in *How Institutions Think* (1987).

Power imbalances between researchers and participants are a key concern in all research, yet, when researching with either youth or older persons (especially those older persons residing within institutions) the power imbalances are of critical concern. Creative techniques and methods, such as those outlined in this paper, provide for more accessible and effective spaces in which both older people and youth are able to tell their stories, explore their memories, and demonstrate their social and cultural contributions – both as expressions of the past and as cultural and social documents of the present.

Cultural and social documents in the form of stories, memories and experiences - as recalled and expressed through images, drawing, writings and other media – can be interwoven to create a dynamic and complex tapestry. Such a tapestry can be used to highlight the way in which creative documentary and visual research techniques and methods, when combined with participatory approaches, may be used to create a legitimate tool of social inquiry and a transmitter of ethnographic knowledge, thus linking aspects of visual and creative practice to the established research traditions of visual and social ethnography. Conversely, the

central role of creativity means that the project acts to transcend traditional models of ethnographic health research and goes some way to extending the view that visual and creative arts are not simply aesthetic but rather legitimate contributors to research.

The protocol presented below provides a way of uncovering the individual perceptions of youth – youth both as current and past phenomena – that shape individual lives and life choices and contribute significantly to how we each understand the other and the social context in which we find ourselves. Because such ‘rememberings’ and contemporaneous understandings of experiences are inherently subjective, no objective reality stands independent of its creator and therefore the ideas being explored through this participatory approach do not lend themselves to be easily understood through scientific-realist paradigms. The design of the youth paper tapestry project is grounded in notions inherent in any ethnographic study, making it possible to explore the processes used by both older and younger people to see, describe, explain and actively contribute to both our (the researchers’) and their (the participants’) understanding of who they are and the contributions they have and continue to make. In this way current research methods associated with traditional visual and cultural ethnographic studies (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995) and participatory approaches are extended.

This participatory approach essentially involves a process of creating and representing knowledge about society, culture and individuals – in this case through the eyes of youth, past and present. By involving the participants themselves in not only gathering the data alongside the researchers, but also in helping the researchers make sense of that data through the creation of the paper tapestry, we ‘offer versions of the researchers’ experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and inter-subjectivities through which the knowledge was produced’ (Pink 2004 p. 18).

The storytelling and use of photographs as ‘memory capsules’ are shared by each person and act as catalysts for the discussion, helping participants to identify items, places, people and activities. The reason for their choice of subject matter and the narratives arising from the discussion in turn assist in prompting the participants to extend their participation. Through this process the research assists participants to invoke stories that offer insight (Goopy & Lloyd 2005; van Leeuwen & Jewitt 2001) and reaffirm their identity.

By shifting beyond simply recording memories and experiences to asking participants to piece together their stories using a range of media that are largely familiar to them—letters, text, photographs, objects—this process explores and encapsulates contingent events that are embedded in the ‘everyday’ but not necessarily easily identified or understood in the social contexts of new institutions that govern behavior and identity. With this in mind the process that underpins the final creation of a paper tapestry attempts, once again, to represent the visual, spatial, cultural and performative (Goopy & Lloyd 2006). It is possible from this then to begin analysis, visual mapping and outcome presentation through the paper tapestry.

Research Question and Aim

The social capabilities of older adults and youth are often limited as a result of their need to learn to negotiate new and unfamiliar social situations – for youth it is the risk and uncertainty of the liminal space they occupy between childhood and adulthood, while for older people it is their placement in LTAC, which is also a liminal space somewhere between the independence of their adult life and the interdependence or dependence that is old age. This is

often because, despite recent advances in the aged care industry, facilities still remain largely institutional in nature, resulting in isolation from the broader community and limiting the quality of life and productive aging potential of the residents.

This research project aims to explore the effectiveness of an intergenerational reminiscence activity, 'remembering youth', on quality of life for older people living in LTAC and attitudes towards aging amongst adolescents.

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Can research with youth and older people be truly participatory?
2. Can a reminiscence activity promote positive attitudes towards aging among adolescents?
3. Are intergenerational activities between institutions for the young (school) and the old (RACF) feasible?

Method and Protocol

This project uses social and visual anthropological methods and participatory approaches to facilitate intergenerational learning and creativity through the sharing of stories of youth. The project draws upon the use of observations, interviews (formal and informal), creative processes, and focused group discussions to explore the research questions. Such methods facilitate the creation and the understanding of the paper tapestry as both process and outcome. Demographic information will also be collected on all participants.

Pre-intervention Phase

Ethics

This protocol requires ethical approval from a registered Human Research Ethics Committee. Given that participants, both the older and younger persons, are considered to be vulnerable by virtue of their age and capacity for consent, particular consideration needs to be given to methods of recruitment, informed consent and privacy, and confidentiality within this protocol.

This protocol also requires approval from management at both the school and the LTAC facility for the research team to access staff, students, residents, and family members. Considerable time may need to be spent at this phase developing communication and relationships between the research team and participating sites, as well as between the LTAC facility and the school. Given the participatory nature of this protocol, the development of lines of communication, trust, and engagement from the various participating sites will be essential to establish participation and co-ownership of the project as it develops. Such a participatory approach can also facilitate the engagement of site and school management, staff, residents and students with the research team in terms of daily logistics and access to resources to ensure the success of the protocol.

Participants

Participants in this study will be 10–12 older people living in an LTAC facility. Inclusion criteria will include:

1. low care requirements,
2. MMSE > 24,
3. able to speak English and communicate verbally,
4. consent to participate

Adolescents attending the local high school will also be invited to participate in the study. Inclusion criteria for the 10–12 young people participants will include:

1. Parental/guardian consent and child consent,
2. English language competence, and
3. Enrolled in grades 9,10 or 11 (aged between 15 and 17 years)

Participants will be recruited through a number of methods, including information sessions conducted by the research team in the LTAC facility and the school, written information provided through the school and LTAC facility, and one-on-one sessions with interested participants.

Setting: The intervention will occur primarily within the LTAC facility with some sessions conducted at the local school.

Design: This study uses a pre/post intervention design coupled with a process evaluation.

Data Collection: Data will be collected using a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures including pre/post measures of depression (GDS – 5), single-item measure of loneliness and worth, and quality of life (WHO – QOL). Qualitative data collection will be broad and include interviews, creative group processes, groups, observations, photographs, audio-recordings, and artifacts (papers, documents and video).

Intervention Phase

The intervention will be based on interactive reminiscence and conversations to elicit youth experiences from older people living in an LTAC facility and adolescents from the local high school. The intervention is participatory – the emphasis is on memory and the lived experience. Participants (both older persons and younger persons) will work with researchers in generating personal experiences of youth by using a range of media (photographs, stories, and songs) through which stories will be revealed, told and recorded with the view to re-invigorating older participants' sense of identity and highlighting their cultural and civic value and the importance of what they can contribute to intergenerational understanding of the concept of 'youth'.

This intervention will take the form of creating a 'paper tapestry' around the broad idea of 'remembering youth'. The precise form of the paper tapestry will develop organically as part of the process of collaboratively remembering and recording memories of youth – it may, for example, take the form of several pieces displaying materials related to emerging common themes. This intervention activity differs significantly from activities that routinely take place in LTAC facilities. Adolescents will be assigned to groups of three and allocated to one older person. These students will be introduced to the topic of 'remembering youth' by being given some general historical information. The older and younger people will then work together with support from the research team. Older and younger people will meet once per week for one hour over an eight-week period (see diagram 1).

Post-intervention Phase

Because the project has such a strong element of partnership and participation, it is essential that all participants are aware of the time frame for the fieldwork and the data analysis. It is important to continually identify for participants the number of weeks remaining and remind them of the post-intervention process that involves data analysis and then the coming together again to finally explore the visual map that is the concluding paper tapestry. Withdrawal from the field will include debrief sessions with participants and a celebration to mark the conclusion of the project. The paper tapestry will be displayed for a negotiated period of time at the LTAC facility and the school. Digital reproductions of the paper tapestry will be made and presented to the two locations. Participants and their families will be invited to any exhibitions of the paper tapestry as and when they arise.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (SPSS), while qualitative data from various sources will be thematically analyzed. Representations of youth evident in the study data will be presented through the design and creation of a 'paper tapestry' that presents the means of visually mapping the findings from the intervention.

Outcomes

This project seeks to highlight the capacity and civic value of older people as important members of Australian society in the 21st century.

Through the ‘remembering youth’ activity and its culmination as a paper tapestry, this intervention will build intergenerational relationships (for both participants and exhibition viewers) and enhance understanding of youth and aging in the immediate and the long term. Importantly this project builds ongoing relationships that aid the psychological and social wellbeing of aged care residents and students and encourages intergenerational understanding and communication. In doing this, it recognizes the capabilities and contributions that older people can make to our understanding of the world around us and provides an accessible way for people to learn about the lives and experiences of older people.

Along with traditional scholarly outputs, the major result of this participatory research is the realization of the ‘paper tapestry’. The ‘paper tapestry’ is so called, first, because the research being undertaken and partnered is itself intended to divulge an intricate combination of things/experience. Second, the image of the tapestry is used as a tapestry is the robust result of a sound warp and an often intricate weft that sometimes tells a story and other times asks the viewer to reflect on what the tapestry tells them. The intention in bringing together the individual elements of each participant pairing is that we are able to both tell the story and promote reflections on youth – on the human condition and the importance of valuing social capital at all stages of life – especially those which are most challenging. The end result will be a series of visual representations of youth that weave together stories that highlight the wisdom, learning, experience, history, values and identity of the participants.

Conclusion

Developing intergenerational connections by linking older adults with adolescents can provide advantages for both groups. These may include giving the older adult and the adolescent a sense of purpose; invigorating and energizing older adults; providing opportunities to keep family stories and social histories alive; filling a void for younger people who do not have grandparents available to them and vice versa; and helping to alleviate misconceptions each generation may have of the other.

Practical applications from this research will include the development of a ‘paper tapestry’ co-created by the researchers, together with the older and younger participants in this research. This will form the basis of an exhibition highlighting the wisdom, experience, history, values and identity of the participants. The work of Goopy and Lloyd (2006), Pink (2007) and MacDougall (1997), for example, highlights how visual representations such as those to be achieved through the ‘paper tapestry’ are particularly powerful tools for expressing the experiences and ideas of participants. There are a number of places in which this could be displayed ranging from the local school fete, community events and the local library, to a far-reaching touring exhibition.

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