

Title: Bridging generations: Co-creating knowledge with intergenerational programs in extended education.

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Abstract

Research Overview: In Australia and intergenerational programs have been considered as an effective opportunity to meet the needs of children and older adults. This session will share research which aimed to examine the characteristics of intergenerational programs to support the development and sustainability of intergenerational initiatives in extended education.

Changing social circumstances have implications for the delivery of education and community services. This research has significance to policy makers who are grappling with the changing community demographics, to develop communities that have greater social cohesion particularly utilising the extended education settings. These programs need to be facilitated to meet the needs of children, young people and older adults. The skill set of educators facilitating these programs need to include knowledge about the characteristics of children and older people, the ability to be able to collaborate to develop activities that appeal to both generations; the ability to be flexible to meet the physical and social capabilities of participants and the ability to critically reflect to enhance and transform practices to ensure the sustainability of program. Australian research has been undertaken to examine the the growth of intergenerational programs in extended education such as Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services.

Research Methods: The research design was guided by a focus on theoretical perspectives about the significance of relationships across the lifespan. These theoretical perspectives were used to underpin for the choice of the case study approach to examine the features of intergenerational programs. The focus on relational engagement was used to develop the data collection tools including interview questions and the criteria to guide the field observations. The case study was focussed on multiple outside school hours care services that conducted

intergenerational programs. The researcher attended the services to engage with the various stakeholders to discuss the creation and programming for intergenerational activities. Semi-structured interviews with educators, children and older people as well as organisation leaders who had been involved with planning and conduct of the intergenerational programs were undertaken. The transcripts of the interviews and field observations were thematically analysed. Observation scales as well as fieldnotes provided additional data to contextualise the case sites.

Results and Discussion: The findings extend current understandings by providing a context-specific evaluation of what works in intergenerational programs in extended education settings. The significance of the role of educators as facilitating the bridge between generations is illuminated. Motivation to develop intergenerational programs appeared to be linked to educators' personal experiences with their own grandparents or older members in their community. Further, the need to understand the needs and interests of both children and older people was significant. The value of the programs to generating knowledge and wellbeing of the generations is highlighted. By considering key characteristics like trust-building, mutual benefits, inclusive design that accommodates diverse abilities and ages, balanced facilitation approaches incorporating structured and free play activities, and thorough planning was priorities in each of the case sites to optimise for meaningful intergenerational engagement. This has implications for best practices within the growing intergenerational landscape in extended education settings such as outside school hours care (OSHC) services. This aligns with the My Time Our Place Framework for School Age Care in Australia 2.0 (MTOP 2.0), the curriculum that guides the principles and practices in extended education in OSHC. The Framework (MTOP_2.0) provides clear outcomes for children's wellbeing, learning and development. The connections between the MTOP_2.0 outcomes for children and the needs of older adults underscore the value of integrated intergenerational programs, suggesting that extended education settings should consider the broader impacts as well as the specific nuances that emerged from this research when designing and implementing their activities.

Keywords: intergenerational program, community engagement, critical reflection, outside school hours care service, extended education

