

Generation Connections in Outside School Hours Care: Children's Perspectives

JiaJia Fang*, Jennifer Cartmel**

Abstract: Age segregation is a significant social issue in Australia and intergenerational programs have been considered as an effective intervention to meet the needs of children and older adults. Both older community members and children are presenting unmet needs that require innovative and cost-effective care solutions. This paper focusses on the perspectives of children who participated in a series of intergenerational programs coordinated by an Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) service. Semi-structured interviews called Taking Circles were used to gather the children's ideas and to use their perspectives for program design and innovation. The transcripts of the Talking Circles and field observations were thematically analysed. The children reported positive experiences and genuine connections developed between older adults in their community and themselves. This study is the first Australian research to explore children's perspectives of intergenerational programs facilitated in OSHC settings.

Keywords: intergenerational program, children's participation, child-centred approach, outside school hours care service, extended education

Introduction

Generational segregation is becoming a significant social issue in western societies due to increased family mobility, aging population (Campbell et al., 2023) and agism beliefs (Cummings et al., 2004). A lack of meaningful intergenerational contact can negatively impact both older and younger people, affecting their mental health, social well-being, and perceptions of each other (Zhong et al., 2020). Questions may be raised about the opportunities that children are having to interact with grandparents and older people from their community.

An Australian Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) provider intentionally planned and implemented intergenerational programs complementary to their holiday care programs to strengthen community bonds between school-aged children and older residents in the community. The program known as Generations Connection was developed for a twelve-month period undertaken concurrently at ten sites in New South Wales, Australia. The programs were facilitated by educators at each OSHC service. The programs were conducted at OSHC service venues or community locations such as residential aged care homes. The programs were conducted for three days in each school holiday period. They were evaluated to gain insights about the operationalising of these programs and to understand the social, economic,

* Griffith University, School of Allied Health, Sport and Social Work

** **Corresponding author:** Griffith University, School of Allied Health, Sport and Social Work, j.cartmel@griffith.edu.au

educational and workforce implications. This paper focusses on a component of the evaluation. It reports on the perspectives of the children from two of the OSHC services. The research question was – What are children’s experiences of intergenerational programs in OSHC services? The sub-question was – What would children like to see in future programs?

Background

In Australia, school age children are spending more time in formal care provision such as OSHC, which is a form of extended education. Some children spend time in informal care with their grandparents, with two in five grandparents providing some care to their grandchildren under the age of 13 years (AIFS, 2022). However, some grandparents are reporting having less opportunities to spend time with their grandchildren as substitute carers as the children get older (AIFS, 2022). These circumstances are impacting the interactions between children and older members in the community.

Intergenerational programs provide impetus for thinking about the policy approaches, pedagogy and practices for connecting school age children and older adults through OSHC services. The changing care arrangements and social demographics have altered interactions with extended family members for children of school age. There is the potential that both older adults and children have limited opportunities to connect, especially cross-generationally (Campbell et al., 2023; Jarrott, 2012; Kamei et al., 2021). Also, there has been increased use of OSHC services by children and families (AGDE, 2023). The increased attendance means that the opportunities provided by OSHC will influence the children’s development and have significant impact on their well-being (Simoncini et al., 2015). *My Time Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia 2.0* (AGDE, 2022) advocates for children to feel connected to the world around them (Outcome 2). Intergenerational programs have been considered as an effective intervention to give children and older persons opportunities to build relationships with each other.

Intergenerational programs

The history of the development of intergenerational programs began in communities, with varying initial intentions and approaches. Intergenerational programs refer to activities or programs that increase cooperation, interaction or exchange between any two generations. Intergenerational programs involve the “sharing of skills, knowledge or experience between old and young” (Kaplan & Sanchez, 2014, p367). In England, a broader conceptualization was created as Intergenerational Practice:

An active process that aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the younger and older have to offer and those around them (Beth Johnson Foundation, 2009).

Evaluation of intergenerational programs revealed positive outcomes. A trend started to emerge to indicate that intergenerational programs can have an impact on participants’ knowledge, skills and level of involvement in civic activities (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf,