

SOCIAL GROWTH FOR CHILDREN AND OLDER ADULTS THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITY

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Abstract

A unique research project emerged between a nursing home adjacent to a preschool, the preschool children, their teacher and two preservice teachers. Two-three pre-schoolers were grouped with one elderly person and they met on a regular basis, something that contributed to a feeling of intimacy, warmth and formed meaningful bonds between them.

A case study was done using a qualitative analyses, it's tools being interviews and observation (Denzin, 2008). Data was collected from 12 transcripts by two preservice teacher's conversing with two preschoolers, ages 4-5. Thematic data analysis led to the identification of two main themes that are related to the types of participation: Affective Participation and Collaborative Participation.

Implication: Intergenerational activity can teach children new perspectives and empower them to teach others while being beneficial for the elderly as well, reducing medical and emotional distress. This study suggests that opportunities should be sought to involve young children within early childhood education in the lives of the elderly.

Keywords: *Intergenerational activity, authentic dialogue, verbal & nonverbal interactions.*

1. Introduction

Research indicates that investing in a well-planned intergenerational relationship, where the elderly and young children choose to engage, is key to significant learning for both groups. Furthermore, informal settings provide a relaxed atmosphere and are essential for engagement and reciprocal open conversations, leading to valuable learning experiences.

2. Intergenerational practice

Intergenerational practice refers to 'cooperation and interaction between people of different generations' (Heyman, Gutheil, White-Ryan, 2011, p.436). Literature suggests that involving older people in the education of young children has many benefits (Gallagher, & Fitzpatrick, 2018). The impact of children growing up in a society where they only relate to their own age group has led to a loss of wider community inclusion and has limited opportunities for them to learn from more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978).

Rosebrook (2002) explained that there are social and emotional benefits to intergenerational activity for three- to four-year-old children. However, there tends to be a 'generational disconnectedness' (p.31) meaning that reduced interactions between people of different generations which could have a potential negative effect on children's development.

Femia, Zarit, Blair, Jarrott & Bruno (2008) evaluated the potential impact of intergenerational programs on children's socio-emotional development, behaviour, school performance, attitudes and behaviour towards older adults. They showed that children ages 6–8 years old had higher levels of social acceptance and positive attitudes towards and displayed higher levels of empathy towards older people.

3. Purpose of the study

There were two main goals for the research; to strengthen the bond between pre-schoolers and the elderly and to examine the way they apply values taught in preschool while interacting with the elderly.

4. Research methods

The research design employed a qualitative case study methodology and interviewing and observation tools (Denzin, 2008) in which a phenomenon within a particular context is researched through various data sources. An in-depth examination of individuals or groups reveal multiple facets of the case at hand. We were interested in the meaning of real-time experiences to the subjects themselves, rather than in generalizing results to other groups of people.

4.1. Participants

The participants are two preservice Israeli teachers in their third and final year of training and two pre-schoolers, ages 4 and 5.

4.2. Research tools and data processing

Each of the two preservice teachers conducted three conversations with the same preschooler who visited the nursing home. Back in the preschool, they conducted a 10 minute personal dialogue with them about their visit. The conversations with the children revolved around the photos and videos taken during the nursing home visits. This was done in order to create an opportunity for dialogue that would interest both parties involved.

During the dialogue, preservice teachers videotaped and took notes. They then produced a transcript combining the information from the oral videotapes and written notes that were analyzed using a qualitative content method (Denzin, 2008). Videotaping is a tool that is used to document authentic situations and to help teachers learn to critically reflect on their classroom interactions (Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, & Pittman, 2008).

5. Findings

The analysis led to the identification of two main themes related to types of participation: **Affective Participation**: empathy compassion, concern for emotional needs and **Collaborative Participation**: concern for physical needs and comparison to the private family.

5.1. Dialogue conducted between Yael (preservice teacher) and Yahav (child)

1. Yael: I have a very special picture I took at the nursing home.
2. Yahav: This is the grandmother who was with me (answers happily) .
3. Yael: Correct
4. Yahav: I drew a picture with the elderly woman. The picture fell and a boy picked it up for her because she is old and can't walk. We need to help her.
7. Yael: You're right.
8. Yahav: I t fell again, then I picked it up. She couldn't get it.
9. Yael: I'll show you another picture.
10. Yahav: That's me, the old woman is hugging me.
11. Yael: How did you feel?
12. Yahav: I like it. She wanted us to take a picture because she misses her children.

The dialogue expresses the manner in which the girl, Yahav, understands the older woman's feelings and limitations and is there to help her. The empathy stems from the recognition of the physical limitations of the elderly woman and the desire of the girl to help her. She also understands the emotional state of the elderly woman when she said: "she misses her children ". We can perceive that a positive attitude has developed and contains the physical and emotional state of the elderly, while trying to help her.

6. Conclusions

Intergenerational activity can teach children new perspectives and empower them to teach others. It is beneficial for the elderly to interact with young children, informally, in early childhood educational centers as well as in nursing homes.

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