

Exploring contemporary challenges of intergenerational education in lifelong learning societies: An introduction

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Abstract

The concept of generation refers to the idea of generativity, and recalls a link of ancestry and descendance, yet in the full sense of the notion of generations and intergenerational relations, we go beyond the generative connections to recall the idea of identity constructions as a crossroads of family, social, historical, and political relationships. In this contribution and, more generally, in this special issue, we will try to look at the concept of generations from an educational perspective, focusing on the potential of intergenerational relations as a space for building communities based on heritage transmission, active citizenship and solidarity. The concept of positive intergenerational interdependence is increasingly common in the institutional and academic debate, and education can play an important role in promoting intergenerational solidarity: a strategic response to the major challenges affecting our communities.

Il concetto di generazione rimanda all'idea di generatività e richiama un legame di ascendenza e discendenza, tuttavia, nel senso pieno della nozione di generazioni e di relazioni intergenerazionali, si va oltre le connessioni generative per richiamare l'idea di costruzioni identitarie come crocevia di relazioni familiari, sociali, storiche e politiche. In questo contributo e, più in generale, in questo numero speciale, cercheremo di guardare al concetto di generazioni da una prospettiva educativa, per concentrarci sul potenziale costituito dalle relazioni intergenerazionali come spazio per la costruzione di comunità basate sulla trasmissione del patrimonio, sulla cittadinanza attiva e sulla solidarietà. Il concetto di interdipendenza intergenerazionale positiva è sempre più presente nel dibattito istituzionale e accademico e l'educazione può svolgere un ruolo importante nella promozione della solidarietà intergenerazionale, come risposta strategica alle grandi sfide che chiamano in causa le nostre comunità.

Keywords: intergenerational programmes; intergenerational education; solidarity; elderly; young

Parole chiave: progetti intergenerazionali; educazione intergenerazionale; solidarietà; anziani; giovani

1. Introduction

Intergenerational practice, a dynamic field encompassing a wide range of interventions, has garnered recognition for its immense potential and multifaceted nature in fostering learning opportunities and transformative experiences across generations (Formosa et al., 2014). In line with Kaplan's (1997) assertion, however, it is vital to emphasize that intergenerational practice transcends mere programmatic endeavours. Instead, it serves as a distinctive lens through which we can critically evaluate social policies, question, and reshape institutional structures and reconsider the allocation of societal resources. Central to intergenerational practice is the concept of “intergenerational engagement”, which encapsulates the different ways in which young people and older adults interact, support one another and provide care (Kaplan, 1997, p. 306). Educational initiatives within intergenerational programmes are intentionally designed to enhance the quality and quantity of social interactions between younger and older individuals. These initiatives recognize the potential risks associated with isolation and marginalisation among different age groups while concurrently fostering the development of communication, exchange, and intergenerational solidarity.

Interwoven within the fabric of intergenerational programmes is the aim of establishing meaningful connections between the present and the past. These programmes serve as transformative conduits, constructing intergenerational bridges that interlace cherished memories and shared aspirations through deliberate and thoughtful pedagogical mediation. By cultivating intentional intergenerational encounters, these initiatives strive to bridge generational divides, fostering a sense of continuity, mutual understanding, and respect. This deliberate intertwining of experiences and wisdom between younger and older participants fosters reciprocal learning, personal growth, and the co-creation of knowledge within a dynamic and enriching educational environment. The significance of intergenerational programmes extends beyond their role as vehicles for intergenerational engagement; they serve as catalysts for broader societal transformation. By nurturing meaningful connections across generations, these programmes compel us to engage in critical examinations of existing social policies, challenge and reevaluate traditional institutional frameworks and envision alternative approaches that prioritize intergenerational collaboration, empathy, and shared responsibility. The comprehensive nature of intergenerational practice permeates all levels of society, shaping our collective consciousness and reconfiguring our communities towards a more inclusive, supportive, and interwoven future. The recognition of intergenerational programmes for their immense potential and multifaceted nature in fostering learning opportunities and transformative experiences across generations has gained significant traction.

This contribution aims to provide a concise yet enlightening overview, offering a glimpse into the profound impact of these educational initiatives. By embracing and expanding intergenerational practices, societies can cultivate intergenerational connections, promote lifelong learning, and build inclusive and resilient communities. By exploring research findings and insightful perspectives surrounding intergenerational practice, our intention is to further our understanding of its transformative power and its capacity to contribute to a more cohesive and thriving society.

2. The origins of intergenerational education programmes

Learning and teaching processes naturally occur through intergenerational exchanges in most educational experiences and environments. Of course, learning can take place through peer monitoring and feedback, but the vast majority of educational institutions and formalised teaching practices are based upon the transmission and exchange between the adults and younger members of a society. The current emphasis on intergenerational education does not concern this kind of educational dialogue, which is the foundation of human growth, but highlights one specific intergenerational relation, which appears to be more at risk in modern western societies:

that between young and elderly people. When dealing with intergenerational education, nowadays we put emphasis on the engagement of seniors in an educational dialogue with the youngest generations. The reasons for this separation among generations can be found both in the demographic revolution (WHO, 2015) and in the transformation of families in economically developed countries (Saraceno, 2008; Saraceno & Keck, 2008). In the traditional family setting, elders and grandparents play a crucial role in transmitting the family's values and culture. This intergenerational exchange aims to keep younger generations connected to their cultural heritage and provide them with a link to their past. On the contrary, in today's modern and complex societies, intergenerational learning is no longer confined to the family alone: it has expanded beyond family boundaries and now takes place in various social groups. While elderly people still hold significance as cultural transmitters within traditional families, the preparation of younger individuals for life in a complex world has become a collective responsibility shared by wider social networks. This has given rise to a new intergenerational “extrafamilial” learning paradigm (Newman & Hutton-Yeo, 2008).

The emergence of the new extrafamilial paradigm, as stated by Newman and Hutton-Yeo (2008), is the consequence of the progressive increase in generational separation between the youngest and oldest members of our families and societies. In fact, changing economies have led to an increase in single-parent and two working-parent families, often resulting in people moving to areas with better job opportunities. Consequently, ongoing intergenerational exchange within families has significantly declined. This shift has created a geographical disconnection among extended family members, reducing opportunities for consistent intergenerational learning and support. This geographical separation has made both the young and the old more vulnerable. Younger individuals have limited contact with their older family members who traditionally played a crucial role in supporting their personal growth, transmitting values and offering wisdom, skills and unconditional love and understanding. Likewise, older adults have limited interaction with younger family members who bring contemporary social insights, energy, unconditional love, support and technological skills. Both age groups lose the unique and reliable support that used to be provided by family members at different stages of life.

This phenomenon started earlier and more consistently in the USA than elsewhere; this is why the very first intergenerational programmes were formalised at the end of the 1970s. The National Council of Ageing - inspired by Eric Erikson's Life span theory (1982) - started promoting projects and programmes to increase the synergies between the young and the elderly. Such intergenerational programmes grew and progressively shifted from the idea of sharing mutual beneficial activities to the purpose of creating social value and social capital. In 1999, UNESCO founded the International Consortium for Intergenerational Programmes to network among the very different intergenerational experiences around the world and to design a common framework (Kaplan, 2001). Starting from the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of positive intergenerational interdependence has been increasingly present in international policies. The United Nations' Political Declaration on Ageing in 2002 recognises the need to strengthen solidarity and intergenerational partnerships, promoting mutually responsive relationships between older and younger individuals. Intergenerational programmes (IPs) are instrumental in fostering this solidarity. The European Commission established 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, to strengthen the idea that attention to the elderly population, its frailties and potentials, cannot be separated from the focus on all other generations and the need to promote positive intergenerational relations. Intergenerational dialogue and solidarity are seen as the only possible answer to the demographic ageing of our societies, to identify sustainable and equitable solutions for all generations affected by this change. The European Commission insists on the urgency to ensure equity and sustainability for all generations, promoting a strong commitment in the direction of mutual solidarity, the only possible

choice to cope with the complexities, fragilities and risks that occurs at every stage of human life in the present era.

3. The benefits of intergenerational education

The increase in intergenerational programmes and projects has been accompanied by an emerging interest from educational and psychological research in investigating the impact of such learning experiences in both young and elderly participants. A large number of studies have been conducted to measure the results of intergenerational practices, and systematic reviews and meta-analyses have been conducted to cross-compare and summarise the main findings of these studies and provide suggestions and directions for designing intergenerational educational experiences.

Numerous systematic reviews and metanalyses have focused on the educational impacts of intergenerational programmes for both the elderly and the young. Gualano et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review leading to the analysis of 27 papers on intergenerational programmes written in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. The review found that these programmes had a positive impact on children's perception of the elderly. The effects on older participants varied in terms of well-being, depression, self-reported health and self-esteem. The studies also highlighted the importance of careful organisation and specific training for staff members, who overall expressed high satisfaction with their involvement in such programmes. The intergenerational programmes were implemented in various settings, including schools, pre-schools, long-term care facilities and the general community, underlining their huge potential. However, studies showed that the co-location of pre-schools and nursing homes in the same building had the most logistic and organisational advantages, allowing numerous intensive interactions. The programmes also demonstrated potential benefits for elderly people with dementia. A wide range of activities were observed, including reading, mentoring, dancing, and playing, but, regardless of the activity, the review emphasised the importance of specific training for operators and the careful organisation of evidence-based activities. It was found that the most successful interactions occurred when promoting conversation and engaging in less structured activities. Nearly all the studies showed an improvement in children's attitudes towards older people, reducing the generation gap and fostering mutual awareness and understanding. These findings remained consistent across various outcome measures, including questionnaires, semantic descriptors, and interviews. For older participants, the most commonly investigated outcome was psychosocial well-being. Despite varying results and evaluation scales, most studies agreed on the positive effect of intergenerational programmes on this outcome. Other positive effects for seniors included improved self-reported health, reduced stress, and decreased depressive moods. These benefits persisted over the long term. Additionally, the programmes contributed to a sense of community among all participants, beyond the individual effects.

Martins et al. (2019) ran a systematic review of 16 studies (screened among 3,796 papers) to examine intergenerational programmes. They classified the projects based on Kuehne and Melville's (2014) framework and categorised theories focused on people and groups in interactive contexts and those focused on individual development. All the selected intergenerational programmes showed improvements in various domains. For younger participants, these programmes led to a new understanding of ageing, as well as an increased understanding of younger generations for the elderly. Mutual learning and increased interaction between generations were reported in multiple studies. The programmes also enhanced competences such as reading, language skills, eating habits and artistic skills for both younger and older participants. Additionally, the programmes had positive effects on well-being and a sense of belonging among older participants. According to this review, successful intergenerational programmes shared common characteristics, including the involvement of at least two non-

familiar, non-adjacent generations and the focus on social and political issues relevant to those generations. Moreover, these programmes fostered awareness, understanding and self-esteem in both younger and older participants. The analysed programmes enriched the lives of children and older individuals, leading to higher self-esteem, improved academic performance, enhanced social skills, increased motivation to learn and more positive attitudes toward themselves and older adults. For older adults, the programmes resulted in a more productive use of time, reaffirmation of value, greater life satisfaction, improved cognitive function, better mental and physical health, and increased self-esteem.

In general, the review, showed that successful intergenerational programmes share some common characteristics. In addition to demonstrating mutual benefits to participants, involving at least two non-familiar, non-adjacent generations, these programmes embrace social and political problems relevant to the generations involved. They promote greater awareness and understanding among the younger and older generations and the growth of self-esteem for both generations (Hatton-Yeo & Ohsako, 2000). All the programmes analysed had good results, as these programmes enriched the lives of both children and older people. For the children, there was evidence of higher self-esteem, better academic performance, improved social skills and increased motivation to learn. There are also reports of more positive attitudes toward themselves and older adults. For older adults, there is evidence of more productive use of time, reaffirmation of value, greater satisfaction with life, improved cognitive function, improved mental and physical health and improved self-esteem.

In 2015, Park conducted a review on studies concerning school-based intergenerational projects between 1986 and 2014 focusing on the effectiveness and economic aspects of these programmes and analysing the impact on children and young people, in terms of academic performance and psychosocial outcomes (Park, 2015). In total 18 papers were selected among 233, excluding intergenerational interventions involving older people with dementia. This review examined the potential effects of intergenerational programmes, including reminiscence activities facilitated by older or young volunteers and multicomponent interventions involving two generations. The overall findings indicated positive impacts in mental health and social outcomes. Regular interactions between young people and older generations in these programmes led to positive changes in attitudes towards elderly people and improved psychological well-being, such as reduced anxiety levels and increased self-worth. Social outcomes were also enhanced, including expressions of appreciation and respect for older people and a shift away from negative perceptions or prejudice related to ageism. Intergenerational programmes also had a positive impact on family relationships. Although improvements in academic performance were not significant in terms of literacy development, disruptive behaviours in classrooms were significantly reduced in a few programmes. Studies adopting the reminiscence method consistently showed positive mental and social outcomes, particularly when conducted in smaller groups or one-on-one settings. These formats provided greater exposure to the accumulated knowledge and experiences of older individuals, fostering understanding and the sharing of wisdom. Pairing older adults with small groups of children for letter exchanges and interactive sessions on listening to stories showed significant improvements in young students' perception of older people. Activities requiring teamwork and collaboration between generations also facilitated bonding and a sense of shared purpose. In a recent meta-analytic review, Petersen (2022) screened and analysed 23 studies. Meta-analyses are not very common in this field, due to the high heterogeneity of intergenerational programmes and studies. Nevertheless, this data analysis showed that intergenerational programmes had a modest yet noteworthy influence on various outcomes. They contributed to positive changes in youths' attitudes towards older adults, a decrease in depression among the elderly and an enhancement in their generativity and overall quality of life. However, no significant association was found between the participation in intergenerational programmes and participants'

physical health on average; on the contrary, the study indicated that such programmes had a greater impact on improving general quality of life.

This very short and non-exhaustive overview of a few systematic reviews on intergenerational programmes simply suggests the variety and wealth of these educational initiatives and the related learning achievements for both the young and the elderly people involved.

4. Models and theories for intergenerational programmes

A few interesting systematic reviews on intergenerational programmes have focused on the analysis of the theoretical frameworks inspiring these educational activities. In particular, Kuehne (2003a; 2003b) and Kuehne and Melville (2014) examined the research literature on intergenerational programmes to discover which theoretical perspectives have been applied to intergenerational practice. The authors analysed 56 articles, published from 2003 to 2014, mostly from the USA, Europe and Canada, and found that the most frequently cited theories were: Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 2008), Erikson's (1980, 1982) theory of life course development, in particular the concept of generativity and the theory of personhood (Kitwood & Bredin, 1992; Kitwood, 1997). The authors distinguished the papers that adopted theories focusing on individuals and groups within interactive contexts from those centred on individual development and founded a few theoretical models for each of these two groups.

Intergenerational programmes addressed to individuals and groups within interactive contexts were based on the following theories:

- Contact theory: interpersonal contact can reduce prejudice and discrimination between generations and improve attitudes when the following conditions are ensured: equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; the support of authorities; law or custom. (Allport, 1954; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Pettigrew, 2008).
- Social capital theory: social relationships established in communities influence individual and community well-being, generating social capital that facilitates learning and collaboration toward common goals. Social capital grows in social environments where different people and different generations work together towards a common goal. Positive social capital may provide the conditions for a learning society for all, both young and old (Coleman 1988; Boström 2002, 2009).
- Social organisation perspective, community capacity framework: building relationships among participants who contribute to the programme's social capital and supporting individual development by creating an infrastructure for enhancing formal and informal network ties, shared knowledge, reciprocity, trust, and sense of community (Jarrott, 2011).
- Situated learning theory: this theory gives value to learning that occurs in apprentice-type relationships and in social-community settings, where different generations work together on a task in which individual actions have real consequences. Intergenerational tasks with real consequences allow children and older people to work together, promoting learning in interactive settings (Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).
- Relational theory: a feminist theory based upon the idea that the female sense of self is relational and that relational connections are crucial for a woman's identity. In this approach, an intergenerational storytelling group retreat can have a positive and beneficial influence on both the adolescents and the older women within a more inclusive approach to therapeutic exchange (Portman et al., 2010).

- Intergenerational communication theory: based on two models of intergenerational communication: (1) the “communication predicament” model, where an older person may be experiencing changes in personal skills and has to overcome extra barriers imposed by others; and (2) the “communication enhancement” model, based upon the concept of promoting health through positive counter-stereotypical intergenerational communicative experiences and training professional caregivers in this direction (Armstrong & McKechnie, 2003).
- Empowerment theory: intergenerational relationships contribute to community strategies for empowerment, increasing access to resources for both younger and older individuals and emphasising shared responsibility for care. (Zimmerman, 2000; Lawrence-Jacobson, 2006).
- Vygotskian theory: children’s literacy and development are bolstered by the support of parents, unrelated older adults or teachers who adopt tutor-like behaviours. These behaviours offer children the chance to master specific skills or tasks. (Vygotsky, 1986; MacDonald, 2005).

The projects based on individual development are inspired by two theories:

- Human development theory: the interaction between different age groups has a positive impact on individuals of all age groups, benefiting them psychologically and educationally (Kuehne & Kaplan, 2001). According to Newman et al. (1997), it is crucial for adults to maintain an active and socially engaged lifestyle in order to sustain their physical, emotional and psychological well-being. This concept is central to various theories of adult development, such as Erikson (1982), Gould (1978) and Schaie (1978).
- Theory of personhood: proposed by Kitwood (1997), this explores the rights and dignity that should be afforded to every individual, particularly emphasising those with dementia. The theory states that personhood is not an inherent quality but rather a recognition granted by others within the framework of relationships and social existence. Person-centred care, which has inspired a culture change in long-term care, is based upon the belief that individuals grow and develop continuously throughout their lives.

Gerritzen et al’s systematic review (2020) consisted in the selection of 21 papers among a list of 155 scientific and grey literature articles and identified six successful programme-specific aspects or methods:

1. The buddy system: creating couples formed by one young participant and one person with dementia.
2. Dementia education: educational sessions addressed to the younger participants in the programme, to teach them about dementia and prepare them for their interaction with elderly with dementia.
3. Montessori-based activities: based on the choice of tasks such as sorting images by categories or chronological order, looking for hidden objects and practicing fine motor coordination, have been found to be particularly suitable for both persons with dementia and children and are very effective for intergenerational dialogue.
4. Being considerate about the activity set-up: setting up preliminary activities to reduce stereotypes among the different generations involved and facilitating equal dialogue and status between the two groups.
5. The use of student-reflective journals: a tool for promoting the analysis of and reflection on intergenerational programmes involving people with dementia by university students.

6. Reminiscence programmes: based on storytelling and the preparation of life-story books, these appear to be important in giving meaning to personal memories, developing a positive attitude towards ageing, and creating connections among different generations.

All the above-mentioned activities and methods shared a few successful elements relating to the relationship between the different generations involved. From the young people's perspective, participation in the programmes fostered: increased knowledge of, a more positive attitude and empathy toward older adults with dementia, personal growth, as well as an increased sense of community responsibility together with personal growth. From the perspective of the persons with dementia involved, increased engagement in activities was recorded, together with an improvement in mood and Quality of Life. Elderly participants also benefited from a more intense stimulation of memory and cognition in general and the risk of social isolation was significantly reduced.

5. Intergenerational teaching and learning

Most studies aimed at outlining a teaching and learning or pedagogical framework of intergenerational education are based on the analysis of intergenerational programmes, occurring in a variety of learning settings.

Kaplan (2002) specifically examined educational programmes implemented in schools, focusing on the interactions between older people and children. He argued that these programmes serve as social vehicles for fostering the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning. Kaplan described the depth of intergenerational engagement using a seven-level scale, with the highest level involving intense and intimate contact. He emphasised the impact of such engagement on the participants and the broader community, outlining the following levels: acquaintance with the other age group without direct contact; observing the other age group from a distance; the two groups meeting and interacting; engaging in annual or periodic activities together; undertaking demonstration projects and trial experiences; implementing intergenerational programmes; establishing intergenerational sharing, support and communication.

Brown and Ohsako (2003) conducted an analysis of several intergenerational educational projects to gain insights into their theoretical approaches and models. Their focus was on exploring the interactions between older and younger generations, resulting in the identification of four distinct typologies:

1. Older adults serving as mentors or tutors for children and young people, sharing their experiences, values, and aspirations.
2. Children and young people assisting older adults.
3. Two or more generational groups engaging in shared learning experiences and activities aimed at developing social skills, such as environmental campaigns or peace initiatives.
4. Two or more generational groups learning together, either through historical topics or by participating in relevant social events in non-formal and informal contexts.

Cambridge and Simandiraki (2006) developed a model that serves as a descriptive and predictive framework for conceptualising intergenerational educational interactions across different domains and stages. The model consists of three axes: the type of intergenerational interaction, based on Kaplan's (2001) framework; the domains in which learning takes place, drawing on Bloom et al.'s (1956) taxonomy and the phase of the learning cycle in which the intergenerational interaction occurs, influenced by Kolb's (1984) theory. Based on the research findings, the authors observed that scaffolding is a prevalent pedagogical element in intergenerational education initiatives, intricately linked to the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development as proposed by Vygotsky (1978). The Zone of Proximal Development describes the gap between a learner's current developmental stage and their potential developmental level, which can be attained through the guidance and support provided by

a more competent individual. Intergenerational educational practices of mentoring and tutoring can be interpreted as a convergence of zones of proximal development in which potential scaffolding is organised to assist, stimulate, and guide learners in various ways, while still promoting self-responsibility within an environment characterised by sharing and exchange. It is important to note that scaffolding, as a temporary support mechanism, can be gradually withdrawn as learners progress and the initial assistance becomes unnecessary. Intergenerational education also encompasses the opportunity for learners to actively shape their own knowledge, rather than merely consuming content. It involves the active control and monitoring of one's own knowledge, along with reflective practices that entail examining past experiences and analysing acquired competencies. Through these processes, learners are able to establish connections between new knowledge and competencies and their prior educational and personal experiences.

More recently, a review on intergenerational programmes was conducted in the UK by Burrowes (2019). This study concluded that, while many intergenerational practice interventions claim to address loneliness and social isolation, these outcomes were sometimes incidental rather than the primary focus of the interventions. In some cases, the initial goal was not to reduce loneliness and social isolation, but these benefits emerged as a byproduct of the intergenerational work. Conversely, in other cases, the primary objective was to reduce loneliness and social isolation, with intergenerational work emerging as a secondary outcome. Overall, the reviewed case study interventions were found to have a greater impact on reducing social isolation than loneliness. Embedded and long-term interventions were considered to have the greatest potential for reducing both social isolation and loneliness. Short-term intergenerational projects, especially those dependent on project funding, have a higher risk of being unsustainable. These types of interactions may potentially leave older people feeling more isolated if they lack access to alternative activities after the project ends. Furthermore, for projects that continue beyond the initial intervention and become integrated into communities, there is often a lack of evaluation to determine the most successful aspects and the areas that require adjustments. The review identified that certain groups are more inclined to participate in intergenerational initiatives, with women showing greater inclination than men. Regular group-based intergenerational activities tend to focus on bringing together older people and children, while community-based initiatives, such as choirs and social groups, attract a wider range of participants across different age groups, offering multigenerational opportunities. Successful initiatives were found to target specific audiences, including young professionals, refugees and migrants and individuals with dementia.

In 2014, according to a theoretical and project-based analysis, Baschiera proposed some guidelines for intergenerational educational projects, in order to foster relationships, exchanges between individuals and social cohesion. The summarised guidelines include the following actions:

- Establish a conducive learning environment through functional and non-hierarchical structures, resources and organisation.
- Design pedagogical environments that consider the interaction between content, languages, tools and participants.
- Create motivating contexts by addressing structural, mental, relational and cultural aspects.
- Emphasise acceptance and interpersonal encounters as integral to education.
- Assess learning needs and set realistic objectives.
- Involve participants in participatory and collaborative planning processes.
- Provide training for educators to effectively mediate intergenerational education.
- Foster learners' autonomy and responsibility throughout the learning process.
- Cultivate empathy through educational activities.
- Establish reciprocity as a founding principle of intergenerational education.

- Prioritise experiential learning as a source of meaningful knowledge.
- Relate topics to participants' real-life experiences.
- Adapt learning to accommodate individual cognitive rhythms and styles.
- Evaluate progress to facilitate metacognitive reflection and enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy.
- Implement cooperative learning methodologies to encourage positive interdependence among participants.
- Involve participants in the evaluation of project outcomes to derive significance from the experience and develop educational competencies.

(Baschiera et al. 2014, pp. 53-55).

Newman and Sanchez (2007) conducted an analysis of successful intergenerational programmes to identify the key factors that contribute to establishing positive connections between generations. They found that successful programmes commonly have the following elements: a strong connection to the local community, effective programme management and planning and collaboration among various local organisations. Additionally, appropriate programme assessment, qualified personnel and adequate funding were identified as important success factors. The authors matched their findings with the ones of a similar study conducted in Australia by MacCallum et al. (2006). This research supports their findings and adds several components that contribute to define the success of intergenerational programmes. These include providing opportunities for relationship development, receiving support from both organisations and the local community, engaging participants in a range of activities to foster cohesion, and adapting the programme to address specific challenges such as participation difficulties for more hesitant groups or a lack of awareness regarding the importance of gender and intercultural issues. Based on these combined findings, the authors conclude that successful intergenerational programmes should address local needs, be well-managed and planned, involve collaboration among organisations, conduct programme assessment, have adequately trained participants, secure sufficient funding, ensure that each participant has a defined role and foster the establishment of meaningful relationships among participants. These factors serve as practical guidelines for planning and organising intergenerational programmes.

6. The evaluation of intergenerational programmes

Pinazo and Kaplan's (2008) seminal work provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of evaluation in intergenerational programmes. Like many other researchers, they have observed a progressive increase in the development of these activities worldwide. However, the adoption of assessment measures has not consistently accompanied this growth. Initially, intergenerational programmes were designed to promote interaction between older and younger individuals. However, over time, the unexpected benefits derived from these activities have surpassed initial expectations. Despite these remarkable outcomes, the evaluation of these benefits has not been consistently integrated into the implementation of new programmes (Kuehne 2003a; 2003b). Kuehne and Kaplan (2001) suggest several potential reasons for this imbalance.

One primary reason is that international programmes often commence with a limited number of participants, which poses challenges in conducting comprehensive statistical analyses. The small sample sizes hinder the ability to draw robust statistical inferences. Furthermore, many evaluation outcomes rely primarily on descriptive data, lacking statistical consistency. Only a limited number of studies incorporate experimental and control groups or adopt pre- and post-test designs. As a result, evaluators frequently rely on unsystematic information, often based on anecdotes from selected participants. Consequently, the findings of these studies tend to be inconclusive, lacking generalisability or replicability.

Recognising the need for rigorous research within the intergenerational field, Boströmet al. (2000) underline the importance of implementing well-developed research with strong conceptual and theoretical foundations. They also stress the need for describing research results and facilitating international comparisons. By conducting thorough research and evaluation on these educational experiences, intergenerational programmes can be adopted as international models, drawing on the wealth of research outcomes. According to these authors, research is crucial as it can demonstrate that intergenerational programmes possess greater potential than community or social programmes.

Bernard and Ellis (2004) contribute to the discourse by providing a comprehensive list of reasons for evaluating intergenerational programmes. They emphasise the importance of evaluation as a means for explaining how educational work develops and how goals evolve throughout the programme duration. Evaluation serves as a tool to identify gaps and provide evidence to all stakeholders, including volunteers and other individuals involved. Furthermore, evaluation is necessary to demonstrate accountability, professionalism, and commitment. It allows the results obtained to be showcased, enabling influence and responsiveness to policy and practice.

The authors unanimously underline the importance of planned quantitative and qualitative evaluation for intergenerational programmes. Moreover, they emphasise the need to define evaluation during the project design phase, in order to promptly identify appropriate techniques, evaluation tools and training for evaluators. Bernard and Ellis (2004) recommend a systematic, continuous, and cyclical evaluation process that involves gathering feedback on what works and what does not. They highlight the significance of embedding evaluation within project design, following a series of steps that include establishing the background and context, identifying aims and specific objectives, determining the necessary actions to achieve those objectives, setting up systems for data collection and analysis and ultimately exploring the outcomes of the programme. This iterative evaluation process ensures that intergenerational programmes are continuously fine-tuned and improved according to evidence-based insights gained through systematic assessment.

7. Conclusions

The profound demographic shifts witnessed in recent decades, coupled with the formidable challenges that our communities currently face, such as ecological disasters, global pandemics, and armed conflicts, require a comprehensive re-evaluation and restructuring of our societal paradigms. To foster equity and sustainability across all generations, it is imperative that we foster a resolute commitment to mutual solidarity, as it stands as the sole viable choice to cope with the intricacies, vulnerabilities and risks that characterise every stage of human life in the contemporary era. Within the framework of an inclusive community, wherein every member is interconnected, our perspective on generations must inherently be inclusive and supportive. Educational institutions, spanning both formal and informal educational spaces, possess immense potential for overcoming the barriers that separate the trajectories and aspirations of different generations, thereby progressing towards more cohesive and inclusive societies. A society characterised by minimal intergenerational interaction engenders a deficiency in both cultural and affective significance for the young and the elderly alike. Moreover, the lack of opportunities for meaningful intergenerational exchanges curtails the possibilities for mutual engagement, resulting in impoverishment on both sides of the generational divide.

This concise and non-exhaustive overview of a few research and systematic reviews on intergenerational programmes merely scratches the surface, offering a glimpse of the wide variety and wealth of educational initiatives and their associated learning outcomes and accomplishments, for both the younger and older participants. However, it is essential to delve deeper into the multifaceted dimensions and transformative potential that intergenerational programmes hold. Numerous studies and systematic reviews conducted across different

contexts have documented the extensive array of intergenerational programmes and their far-reaching impacts. These programmes encompass different settings, from schools to community centres, from healthcare facilities to intergenerational housing complexes. Within each unique context, intergenerational programmes have yielded remarkable outcomes, fostering cognitive, social, and emotional development among participants of all ages. In examining the benefits for younger individuals, intergenerational programmes have been found to enhance their communication skills, empathy and understanding of different perspectives. By engaging in meaningful interactions with older adults, young participants gain insight into different life experiences, acquire valuable wisdom, and develop a greater appreciation of intergenerational connections. Furthermore, intergenerational programmes offer opportunities for young individuals to contribute to the well-being of older adults, promoting a sense of purpose, responsibility, and altruism. At the same time, older adults involved in intergenerational programmes experience a renewed sense of purpose and vitality. The opportunity to share their knowledge, skills and life experiences with younger generations instils a sense of value and validation. Through intergenerational interactions, older adults often report increased life satisfaction, improved mental well-being, and enhanced social connectedness. These programmes serve as a platform for older adults to leave a lasting legacy by actively participating in the growth and development of younger generations. Moreover, intergenerational programmes have broader societal implications. They foster a sense of intergenerational solidarity, breaking down age-related stereotypes and promoting inclusivity. By bridging the gap between generations, these programmes cultivate a sense of belonging and social cohesion within communities. Additionally, intergenerational programmes have the potential to address pressing societal challenges, such as ageism and social isolation, by fostering intergenerational understanding, respect, and support. While the existing systematic reviews provide valuable insight into the various benefits of intergenerational programmes, it is crucial to recognize that the field is continuously evolving. Further research and evaluation are needed to further our understanding of the nuanced dynamics and long-term impacts of these programmes. Additionally, future studies can explore innovative approaches, best practices and effective programme designs to optimise intergenerational learning and engagement.

To conclude, we can state that, in contemporary times, the emergence of intergenerational programmes has posed a significant challenge in addressing the evolving dynamics of our population and societies. To truly benefit elderly and young participants, as well as their broader communities, these programmes must draw inspiration from educational theories, models, methods, and tools. Educational research pertaining to intergenerational programmes and projects serves as a fundamental pillar, not only for monitoring and evaluating the impact of such initiatives but also for providing evidence to inform policy-making decisions and fostering educational innovation in this domain. The potential benefits derived from intergenerational educational practices are undeniably impressive and can be further amplified by disseminating the knowledge gained in this field to every educational institution. Through this paper and the accompanying special issue, our aim is to contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse surrounding intergenerational practices, particularly from an educational perspective. By doing so, we hope to inspire and encourage all educational environments and professionals to embrace and cultivate a positive and generative intergenerational exchange.

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