

EDCI 554 A01 - Essay #1

Intergenerational Play

Sandra A. Beckett/Student # V00106819

University of Victoria

Submitted via e-mail to: tannockm@uvic.ca

Due: November 13, 2014

Play is important for brain development at all ages. It is a pleasurable, universal way to explore the unknown, to confirm the familiar and to stimulate memory in the elderly. I contend play should underpin activities children and elders engage in together during intergenerational programs. In agreement with Gelb and Howell (2012, p. 47) and Anaka (2010, pp. 161-162) play stimulates growth in the brain developing numerous pathways for learning. This benefits all participants.

As an elder myself – at the age of fifty-six – I am able to appreciate the value of play. I consider myself lucky to have a job in which I play daily. Recent participation in a gnome-making workshop allowed me to witness adults engaging in the playful creation of an imaginary world. Each week – when I take my kindergarten class to an assisted living facility – I see firsthand how elders and staff engage in playful activities as readily as children. These life examples are testaments we are never too old to play.

Ownership of play is important for both elders and children; play should be open ended and involve choice directed by participants. Era and cultural experience of elders should be considered when selecting play artifacts. Toys that provoke memory will lead to connections and historical stories – and opportunity for the elder's to impart personal wisdom and knowledge to the young. Consideration should be given to size/ease of manipulation of toys and to artifacts that provoke engagement, curiosity, and pleasure. Wooden blocks, dolls, puppets and bubble catchers are intergenerational toys suggested by Davis, Larkin, and Graves (2002, p. 42). Puzzles, traditional board and card games, trains, play dough and balls are also toys and games that many elders would be familiar with.

Cultural appropriateness of play artifacts could be an issue; tolerance of gender and cultural perspectives has changed from the era of elders' childhood to now. Neutral toy artifacts

might be the safest choice when trying to blend the past and the present. Letting the players choose how to play with gender/cultural neutral toys allows for player choice without using artifacts that might be considered inappropriate today.

Engagement with modern toys also stimulates play and conversation. I endorse the inclusion of modern toys as I have witnessed the delight elders take in learning from the children. Light tables, modern blocks, tangrams, and technology are a few curios that might intrigue elders and inspire children to be mentors.

Persons can be playthings. Joking, being silly, making things up and acting are playful behaviors in which every age can participate. George and Sedena Cappannelli (2013, p. 167) argue necessity of freedom from judgment and ridicule when we enact such in-the-moment experiences. Williams, Renehan, Cramer, Lin, and Haralambous (2012, p. 257) note residents need time and space for development of relationships alongside choice in how they will participate. Trusting relationships should be developed before these playful behaviors become evident.

Playful behavior can be experienced through multiple activities. Cooking, juggling, music and dance, movement, story, collage, painting, drawing and colouring, gardening, bringing the outside in and playing with natural objects (sand, leaves, pinecones, sticks, rocks, water...) are just a few of many possibilities. These activities provoke shared curiosity, thought, manipulation, and conversation, stimulating the mind and the soul.

Interviewing both elders and children for preferences around play gives organizers direction. Toys, space, duration, support staff, and child-elder groupings are all considerations that should be factored into the intergenerational play set up. It is important that play based

activities are open-ended, and that process is more important than product; final products should be created by the players. Play becomes the joint responsibility of participants.

Prior knowledge of upcoming play activities helps elders and children prepare for their time together. In a study on the effects of intergenerational program on elders, Underwood and Dorfman (2006, p. 50) note elders sometimes feel unprepared for student visits. Responding to this, I acknowledge importance of telling elders about the activity prior to arrival with the children. I am able to do this as I set up in the dining room during their lunch hour. This information reminds the elders we will be attending that afternoon and lets them chose to attend based on personal interest in the activity as well as the program. The children learn about the activity in the classroom prior to walking to the facility; they arrive ready, knowing what to do. Pre-teaching increases comfort and success for all participants.

Both personal experience and research reveals the loss felt by participants when programs are interrupted for school holidays. ‘Magic Box’ activities (Davis, Vetere, Francis, Gibbs & Howard, 2008; Davis, Vetere, Gibbs & Francis, 2011; Vetere, Davis, Gibbs, Francis & Howard, 2006) study the impact of a physical box filled with artifacts delivered between grandchildren and grandparents. A magic box delivered between the elder’s care facility and the children – implemented by families that volunteer – might be a viable way to keep the intergenerational program alive during school holidays. Staff and elders report how much they miss the children during these breaks. The delivery of a ‘Magic Box’ provides opportunity for interaction during the delivery as well as for playful behavior and creativity when filling and emptying the box.

Play is a beneficial activity for intergenerational programs focused on lifelong learning. Play encourages social participation of all ages by transcending boundaries and promoting interaction. The informal, natural quality of play provides non-threatening reciprocal learning

between generations. Expanding on Whiteland's (2013, p. 26) premise that intergenerational learning through the arts transforms prejudicial attitudes among generations, I contend play also provides situations that foster understanding, compassion, and empathy. George Bernard Shaw's statement, "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing" (as cited in Gelb and Howell, 2012, p. 47) defies the social misconception that play is for the young. Through play generations are able to unite and build positive relationships.

References

- Anaka, G. (2010). *Brain Wellness: The Secrets For Longevity*. Vancouver, BC: Portal Press.
- Cappannelli, G. & S. (2013). *Do Not Go Quietly: A Guide to Living Consciously and Aging Wisely for People Who Weren't Born Yesterday*. Culver City, California: Agape Media International.
- Davis, L., Larkin E., & Graves, S.B. (2002). Intergenerational learning through play. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 34(2), 42-49.
- Davis, H., Vetere, F., Francis, P., Gibbs, M., & Howard, S. (2008). "I Wish We Could Get Together: Exploring Intergenerational Play Across Distance via a 'Magic Box'". *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 6(2), 191-210. doi: 10.1080/15350770801955321
- Davis, H., Vetere, F., Gibbs, M., & Francis P. (2011). Come play with me: designing technologies for intergenerational play. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 11, 17-29. doi: 10.1007/s10209-011-0230-3
- Gelb, M.J., & Howell K. (2012). *Brain Power: Improve Your Mind as You Age*. Novato, California: New World Library.
- Underwood, H.L., & Dorfman, L.T. (2006). A View from the Other Side. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, 4(2), 43-60. doi: 10.1300/J194v04n02_04
- Vetere, F., Davis, H., Gibbs, M.R., Francis, P. and Howard, S. (2006). A Magic Box for Understanding Intergenerational Play. *Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1475-1480. doi: 10.1145/1125451.1125722
- Whiteland, S. (2013). Picture Pals: An Intergenerational Service-Learning Art Project. *Art Education*, 21-26.

Williams, S., Renehan, E., Cramer, E., Lin, X., & Haralambous, B. (2012). 'All in a days play' – An intergenerational playgroup in a residential aged care facility. *International Journal Of Play*, 1(3), 250-263. doi: 10.1080/21594937.2012.738870