

Reconceptualizing Children, Teaching, and Learning Through Inter/Intragenerational Educational Opportunities

Rachel Heydon, Guest Editor

In the minority world, we routinely divide the population according to generation. For instance, in Canada, where I am writing this, we have institutions designed by adults (of working age) for children to spend their days (e.g., schools, childcare centres), and there are others created by adults (of working age) for older adults to spend their days (and nights). We then subdivide these generations into manageable categories of infant room, toddler room, kindergarten, grade one, and so forth through to senior independent living apartment, assisted living, and so forth. The spaces and experiences ascribed to young and old are formed through a developmental logic where individuals are grouped by virtue of their age (e.g., 3.8 years of age) or a single defining cognitive feature (e.g., memory problems), rather than by a complexity of attributes. Simplifying placement and programming by a single defining feature like age means that programming can claim efficiency and developmental appropriateness (e.g., this is what 5-year-olds need; this is what a senior citizen needs). As for when adulthood grows into senior citizenship and there becomes a bifurcation between those who make the decisions and those about whom decisions are made, it has been argued that participation in paid employment is one of the markers that etches this line (e.g., Heydon, 2007). Herein lies one more place where developmentalism and neoliberalism clasp hands, promoting programs and subjectivities that squander the ethical possibilities of living well together (for other such places, please see Sonu & Benson, 2016; Stearns, 2016; Türken, Nafstad, Blaker, & Roen, 2015). This special section of this issue of the *Journal of Childhood Studies* recognizes that particular kinds of engagements between people who are at least one generation apart can challenge taken-for-granted notions of human development and what is meaningful and valuable for the constituents of our world across time. Importantly, by constituents I mean all of what and who make up the world, including humans and nonhumans, such as water and trees.

Creating opportunities for skipped generations (persons separated by at least one generation, such as grandparents and grandchildren) to live with each other in ways that are meaningful to them and their communities is the backbone of intergenerational programs that defy *naïve pragmatism*; that is, what complexifies and situates what these programs generate, for whom, with what affordances and constraints, as well as what “assumptions, theories, and metatheories” (Skrtic, 1995, p. 69) these programs are founded upon (Heydon & O’Neill, 2016). The call for intergenerational programs of this ilk has been put out in a time when occasions for informal, organic, communal, and/or familial intergenerational learning are uneven. The literature suggests that the quantity and quality of interactions between skipped generations varies (Bangerter & Waldron, 2014). Discrepancies in frequency and type of contact are correlated with factors such as culture and ethnicity (Fuller-Thomson, Serbinski, & McCormack, 2014), socio-economics, and immigration status (e.g., Milan, Laflamme, & Wong, 2015). For example, Sherry Holladay and Heather Seipke (2007) noted minimal interaction between grandparents and grandchildren in United States retirement communities even though increased intergenerational contact has been documented in grandparent-headed households in countries (e.g., Australia) where kinship care is mandated over foster care (Bell & Romano, 2015) and in multigenerational households in cases such as new immigrants to North America sharing housing to reduce costs (Milan et al., 2015). And, of course, the primacy of intergenerationality is a lesson that Indigenous people on Turtle Island and across the world have never neglected (e.g., Faulkhead, Bradley, & McKee, 2017; Gutiérrez, 2012; McLeod, 2012; Young Leon, 2012).

A special subsection of intergenerational programming is intergenerational learning programs. Much of the classic research on intergenerational learning has involved familial intergenerational learning and has tended to focus on what children acquire from grandparents (e.g., Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004). Much of this research is indebted to

Barbara Rogoff's (1990) concept of guided participation, in which children learn as they engage with caregivers, such as grandparents (Kelly, 2004) during shared activities. For instance, in families that had recently migrated to London, UK, Eve Gregory (2008) identified grandparents as "mediators of literacies" (p. vii) and found that, by traversing generational and linguistic lines, children acquired "membership in different culture, language and literacy groups in different contexts or domains of their lives" (p. 25). Formal intergenerational learning programs have typically been charged with finding ways to "create connections for non-biologically linked old and young people that could promote the social growth, learning and emotional stability that often characterizes relationships between elder and younger family members" (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008, p. 32). The papers in this special section express a related, more nuanced concern with the *co-generation* of knowledge by skipped generations. Studies in this vein explore the meanings of intergenerational learning opportunities (formal and informal) for all participants, subverting the idea that children are the only or primary learners in these relationships.

My own involvement in this kind of research has found that intergenerational learning programs can expand people's literacy options across the lifespan (Heydon, 2013), help participants forge and deepen different kinds of connections through literacy practices (e.g., among young and old, institutions, and community partners and organizations; Heydon, McKee, & O'Neill, 2018), and create expansive identity options for people, including identities based in folks seeing themselves having something valuable to communicate and the means to do so (Heydon, 2007). Research has identified that intergenerational learning program affordances reach beyond the children and adults enrolled in the program. Studies have found, for example, that children discuss intergenerational learning experiences with parents irrespective of the parents' participation in the intergenerational program (Vaughan, Gack, Solorazano, & Ray, 2003), and when children shared what they learned from intergenerational programming at home, the home was changed (Ballantyne, Fien, & Packer, 2001).

Exploring what intergenerational learning programs can create in and for the world and its constituents is an inter- and transdisciplinary project. This work has been taken up through program development and study concerning, but certainly not limited to, intergenerational art programs (LaPorte, 2002), singing groups (Beynon & Lang, 2018), technology programs (Gamliel & Gabay, 2014), and civic literacy (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018). Still, intergenerational inquiry is in its infancy and its theoretical underpinnings have been dominated by developmental theories and an acritical, apolitical posture (e.g., Hatzifilalithis & Grenier, 2019). The literature does contain traces of critical discussions pertinent to early childhood education, such as the social positioning of young (and old), understandings of disability, and the purposes of education (e.g., Heydon, 2007). This criticality can too often be missing from the intergenerational literature and therefore was the crux of the call for papers for this special section. In an era when the status quo is killing our planet, these old logics will not do. It is time to produce thinking that can overcome old modes of affect and thought, to (re)read intergenerational learning for what it might say about creating, not just more livable futures, but more livable presents, and (re)appreciating what the past might teach about what is important today and tomorrow.

Intergenerational learning can transgress developmental and neoliberal logics and thus has been called a *radical* curricular project (Heydon, 2013). One way it enacts this transgression is by underscoring that people acquire, cogenerate, and practice new knowledge within and across generational lines. Learning, generating knowledge, communicating, living, and being intergenerationally are *intra-active* (Barad, 2007). There are no singular entities. Karin Murriss and Cara Borchers (2019), for instance, explain that all living beings "including human bodies ... are only because they are in relation to and influencing each other" (pp. 198–199, emphasis in original). These bodies can also be conceptualized as plural, existing and becoming as (at least) social, political, and physical coconstituents of myriad systems (Watson, Emery, & Bayliss, 2012). Using this understanding and extending it, Heydon et al. (in press) have argued that the bodies of young and old are read socially and politically based on

biological essentialism—woman, child, old person, disabled, for example. Intergenerational learning can interrupt this thinking. Within intra-action, the persons across these bodies cogenerate knowledge. What emerges is not yours or mine but ours. Young and old are indivisible in an ontology conceived through relation.

Two critical ideas for thinking radically in intergenerational curricula emerge from this ontology: first, in the absence of individuality or singularity, difference (e.g., difference in age or generation) is a difference “*within*, not *without*” (Murriss & Borchers, 2019, p. 199, emphasis in original), hence eradicating binary-orientated thinking and hierarchy. The meaning of generations together is equally produced *within* the overlaps, interstices of the intergenerational *us*, never to be premised in a banking model of education (Freire, 2000) where the adult teacher inputs knowledge as currency into the child with the expectation of getting back exactly what has gone in. Relatedly, the collapse of the *without* is the demise of the “adult/child dichotomy” (Murriss & Borchers, 2019, p. 199) which has dogged the institutional structures I mentioned at the outset of this editorial. Instead, the intra-actions involving generations of people and the entanglements of their situ (e.g., the stuff of their program) can give rise to an “ageless subject ... who is always in process ... and is affected and *e/merges* relationally through intra-action” (Murriss & Borchers, 2019, p. 199) rather than by chronological age.

The irony of intergenerational learning programs is that, when they are done in a way that cuts through the black box of developmental and neoliberal logics, their curriculum is an *ageless* curriculum. It is in the spirit of this ageless curriculum that I dedicate this special section.

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