Intergenerational Programs: A Review of the Empirical Literature

InterGenNS Project

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Introduction

It is projected that individuals aged 65 and over will represent 16.7 percent of the global population by 2050 (United States Census Bureau, 2015). In the Canadian context, it is estimated that older adults will make up 23% of the Canadian population by 2030, which is higher than the global projection (Government of Canada, 2019). In fact, the global average life expectancy increased by 5.5 years between 2000 and 2016 largely due to pivotal advancements in public health (World Health Organization, n.d.; Martins et al., 2018). As the average age of populations continues to rise, the older demographic faces unique social issues and health challenges that must not be ignored (Wang, Subagdja, Kang, Tan, & Zhang, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary that the older adult population has access to opportunities that can help counter the social and health related challenges they face to stay socially engaged and active in the society and achieve the highest possible quality of life.

Currently, it is becoming more socially common for parents with young children to move away from grandparents resulting in great difficulty to sustain close relationships between generations (Together Old and Young, 2020). In fact, the older adult population is 13% more likely to live independently in 2010 compared to 1990, while at the same time co-residence with children has become 13% less likely in 2010 compared to 1990, indicating that opportunities for meaningful social interaction within the family may be lacking (United Nations, 2017). This disconnect between younger and older generations may have negative health and social implications for both younger and older members of society. For instance, the mental health and well-being of the aging population is being compromised as Landeiro and colleagues (2017) found that "approximately one-third to one-half of the elderly population" is affected by social isolation and loneliness (p. 1). Adopting, supporting, and implementing intergenerational

approaches among various population groups is a promising way to address the challenges in the lack of meaningful social connections and mental health challenges faced by older adults.

An intergenerational program can be defined as "a social service that involves the ongoing and purposeful exchange of resources between members of younger and older generations"; however, it is important to note that currently there is no clear, agreed upon definition (Murayama, Murayama, Hasebe, Yamaguchi, & Fujiwara, 2019, p. 2; Jarrott, 2011; Vanderven, 2011). Connecting generations through programs develop a social space for younger age groups to learn about older adults and aging. Intergenerational programs create unique educational opportunities that have the potential to combat ageism and stereotypes as well as improve older adults' sense of well-being, health, life satisfaction, and quality of life (Gaggioli et al., 2014; Bellamy & Meyerski, 2011; Cardona, 2002; Santini, Tombolesi, Baschiera, & Lamura, 2018; Courtin & Knapp, 2017; Liu, 2017). The objective of this paper is to provide a review of the empirical literature that relates to intergenerational programming, particularly focusing on the Canadian context. The specific purpose of the review is to identify types of programs, activities, and participants as well as outcomes for the participants and challenges relating to intergenerational programming.

Methods

A review of empirical literature was completed that was directed by the outlined objectives and purpose of the paper.

Search Process

Relevant peer-reviewed journal articles were identified by using the following databases: (i) Canadian Business & Current Affairs (CBCA) Database Complete; (ii) AgeLine; (iii) Google

Scholar; (iv) PsycINFO. The database searching came to an end on October 30th, 2020. A combination of the following keywords were included in searches in all the databases: *"intergenerational programs", intergenerational relationships, intergeneration*, program*, evaluation, space, older adults, and aging, relation*.* Variations in search phrases were used to ensure that synonyms for the keywords were included, providing the most accurate representation of available articles that surround the research question. The asterisk was used in order to find various endings of a particular word and the quotations were used for phrase searching ensuring the words within the quotations would remain in that particular order. The empirical journal articles in the review were selected based on the following criteria: (i) publication date ranging between 2000-2020; (ii) peer-reviewed in academic journals; (iii) available in English; (iv) central focus of the research was on intergenerational programming, evaluation, relationships, and space.

Study Screening and Selection

The titles of the literature items were screened by the project Research Assistant (RA) using the keywords to identify a set of full-text articles to be reviewed regarding their relation to the study objectives, purpose, and eligibility criteria, aligning with the screening process outlined by Levac et al. (2010). A total of 3,148 articles were initially identified, of which 3,024 were excluded after eliminating duplicates as well as screening the titles and abstracts. This process resulted in 124 articles that were evaluated based on the inclusion criteria mentioned above. Articles were excluded if: (i) full-text was unavailable; (ii) focus of the study did not relate to intergenerational approaches specifically relating to intergenerational programs, relationships, spaces, and evaluation; (iii) inadequate information was provided in the article to fill the categories in the empirical data chart.

In total, 21 full-text articles were finally selected and reviewed to provide an understanding of the empirical literature that relates to intergenerational programming. During the review process a data chart was created in order to organize, synthesis, and assist in the analysis of the findings from the 21 selected studies. The data chart consisted of the following categories (see Appendices A for data chart): *a) authors and year of publication; b) country of study; c) study purpose or objectives stated d) research design and methods, incorporating sample characteristics, sample size, and research method implemented, e) main findings f) overall synthesis of study.* After reviewing the 21 full-text articles and completing the data chart main findings of the articles were grouped by the following overarching themes: 1) types of intergenerational programs; 2) demographics of participants; 3) activity types; 4) participant outcomes; 5) promoting factors; 6) challenges.

Findings

1) Types of Programming

There are various types of intergenerational programs that are available for older and younger individuals. Four main types of programs were identified: community-based programs, residential care-based programs, school-based programs, and merging programs. In order to group the types of programs into these categories, the primary setting of the program was taken into account. The types and the characteristics of these programs are discussed below.

Community-based Programs

These types of intergenerational programs take place in the community setting that are identified as public gathering places such as at a community, youth, or seniors centre (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Moody & Phinney, 2012). Community-based programs may involve formal

or informal community groups that relate to certain cultures or interests, which assists in the logistics of the programming (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Snow & Tulk, 2020). In addition, these community-based programs can be affiliated with schools or universities whereby the related institutions play a large role in the organizational aspects of the intergenerational program; however, the program takes place at a non-exclusive setting such as an urban farm, a banquet hall, or community theatre hall (Dumbrell, Durst, & Diachun, 2007; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006; Anderson et al., 2017).

School-based Programs

These intergenerational programs take place in the school setting; therefore, members of the community or residents in care facilities attend the school to participate in the program. Many school-based intergenerational programming involves engaging older adults in the school setting by taking on a volunteer role, participating in interactive co-learning, or workshops (Babcock, Malonebeach, & Salomon, 2017; Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000; Doiron & Lees, 2009; Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017; Freeman, Martin, Nash, Hausknecht, & Skinner, 2020). It is important to note that these types of programs often include community-dwelling older adults.

Long-term care facility-based Programs

Residential-based intergenerational programs take place in long-term care facilities. This may consist of youth volunteers, schools, or universities organizing students to attend the facilities to visit with the residents and take part in the intergenerational program (Caspar, Davis, McNeill, & Kellett, 2019; Canning, Gaetz, & Blakeborough, 2018; Gardener & Alegre, 2019). This type of program provides easy access for the older adult participants to be involved in the

program as it is close in proximity as well as allows younger individuals to take part in service-learning opportunities in their communities.

Merging Programs

These types of intergenerational programs are unique as they take place in facilities that integrate Adult Day Services and Child Learning and Development Services, creating a co-located intergenerational community (Jarrott, Smith, & Weintraub, 2008; Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017). Therefore, this creates a natural space for intergenerational interaction to take place as well as formal organized opportunities through programming. It is important to note that the studies that discussed these types of programs were from the United States.

2) **Demographics of Participants**

Participants

The older adult participants in the intergenerational programs were at least 50 years of age and their younger counterparts were at least 15 months. The eldest participant was 90 for the older adult group and the oldest reported age for the younger group was 17-18 years old. It is important to note that, although the studies included university students, their ages were not mentioned. Additionally, there was little representation of old-old adults aged 85 and above. The most common age in the younger group was age 11. Younger participants' ages or grades were reported more often than that of the older adult participants. Only one study looked at youth from an all-girls private school (Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006). Three studies included older adults with health issues, physical, or cognitive impairments, displaying low representation within the studies reviewed (Canning, Gaetz, & Blakeborough, 2018; Jarrott, Smith, & Weintraub, 2008). In addition, there was low representation of males within the older adult participants (Kemp,

2005; Canning, Gaetz, & Blakeborough, 2018; Anderson et al., 2017; Moody & Phinney, 2012). It is important to highlight that three studies focused on intergenerational initiatives in a First Nations community of Canada (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Freeman, Martin, Nash, Hausknecht, & Skinner, 2020; Gabel, Pace, & Ryan, 2016).

3) Types of Activities

Arts- focused Activities

Several intergenerational activities mentioned in the literature related to the arts. For example, an informal fibre art group and an Arts, Health and Seniors (AHS) Program for seniors were able to make intergenerational connections by discussing and sharing art with community members and artists (Snow & Tulk, 2020; Moody & Phinney, 2012). In addition, activities like community theatre, dance, and singing were the central focus of intergenerational programs with the goal of connecting older and younger adults in a creative and interactive way (Anderson et al., 2017; Canning, Gaetz, & Blakeborough, 2018; Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017; Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000; Beynon, Heydon, O'Niell, Zhang, & Crocker, 2013). Moreover, these art practices can also be a component of an intergenerational event or programming. For instance, at an intergenerational gala event university students and older adults participated in sing-alongs and dancing activities among various other activities (Dumbrell, Durst, & Diachun, 2007). As well, singing was used as a communication tool for an intergenerational program that focused on developing educational multimodal literacy projects (Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017).

Education-focused Activities

A variety of education-focused activities were included in the program to enhance understanding surrounding topics of inquiry that relate to learning objectives in the educational system. Digital media was used to provide more literacy options and to provide an opportunity in an intergenerational environment for participants to learn how to use new tools through sharing experiences through storytelling (Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Freeman, Martin, Nash, Hausknecht, & Skinner, 2020). In addition, letters were exchanged between a small group of students and older adults so students could practice their literary skills as well as learn about WWII history and career experiences (Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000). To deepen the intergenerational education interaction, the older adults visited the school to share their stories and experiences with the students in detail through interactive presentations and discussions (Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000). Project L.O.V.E (Let Older Volunteers Educate) is an intergenerational project that allows older adults to come into the school to assist students with their reading and literacy skills (Doiron & Lees, 2009). Moreover, environmental education was incorporated through farming and gardening activities during an intergenerational program, whereby retired farmers and students worked together in the natural environment to cultivate environmental intergenerational learnings.

4) **Outcomes for Participants**

First, outcomes of older participants in intergenerational programs will be discussed. Second, outcomes for the younger participants will be identified. Following this, the mutual benefits and outcomes will be discussed in detail.

Older Participants

The participation of older adults in intergenerational programs allowed them to be active members in the community by voicing their opinions (Moody & Phinney, 2012). This provides older adults an opportunity to advocate for their community which can in turn give rise to health care responses reflective of the community and culture such as the initiating the promotion of improved healthy brain aging (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020). Moreover, older adults' play a pivotal role regarding their involvement in intergenerational initiatives, especially regarding school volunteer roles as they actively create interconnections between the school and the community (Doiron & Lees, 2009). As a result, participating in intergenerational programs play an important role in the development of self-esteem and motivate learning for older adults (Snow & Tulk, 2020).

Older adults, especially First Nation Elders value and play a highly role regarding intergenerational cultural and traditional teachings. Intergenerational initiatives create an opportunity for Elders to pass on culture, tradition, lessons, and knowledge in an intergenerational format onto younger generations to achieve cultural continuity and generativity (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Freeman, Martin, Nash, Hausknecht, & Skinner, 2020; Gabel, Pace, & Ryan, 2016).

Younger Participants

Intergenerational programs provide the opportunity for younger individuals to interact with older adults, which in turn facilitates an increased understanding and awareness of older adults' lives. Through participating in intergenerational programming younger participants identified the many similarities and commonalities they shared with older adults, rather than

focusing on the differences with one another (Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000; Canning, Gaetz, & Blakeborough, 2018; Gardener & Alegre, 2019). Additionally, the engagement and discussion with older adult in the intergenerational programs provide the opportunity to break gendered and ageist stereotypes and attitudes that youth participants may hold (Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006; Gardener & Alegre, 2019). Younger participants viewed older adults more positively and as more capable than their view prior to their involvement in the intergenerational program, demonstrating the powerful impact that these programs have on changing the perceptions of youth (Caspar, Davis, McNeill, & Kellett, 2019; Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000; Canning, Gaetz, & Blakeborough, 2018; Gardener & Alegre, 2019). In addition, participating in intergenerational programs enabled younger participants to improve their teamwork skills and ability to work with a diverse group of individuals (Caspar, Davis, McNeill, & Kellett, 2019; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006).

Intergenerational programs not only foster positive change in perceptions but also cultivate agency in the younger participates. For instance, after participating in the program there was a significant increase for students to spend time with older adults outside of the family as well as an increase interest in knowing more about their grandparent's history (Babcock, Malonebeach, & Salomon, 2017). Therefore, the change in students' perceptions in turn resulted them to be change agents by applying what they learned through their involvement with the program in their daily lives (Gardener & Alegre, 2019).

Mutual Benefits and Outcomes of Participation

The various mutual benefits of intergenerational program participation for the active participants will be discussed. Intergenerational programing fosters the development and growth of meaningful relationships through relationship building among the participants (Caspar, Davis,

McNeill, & Kellett, 2019; Freeman, Martin, Nash, Hausknecht, & Skinner, 2020; Moody & Phinney; 2012; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006; Heydon, McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017; Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017). Interestingly, the factor of time may play an important role in the development of these relationships among participants as more time allows for more opportunity for bonds to form and strengthen among participants (Bales, Eklund, & Siffin, 2000; Canning, Gaetz, & Blakeborough, 2018; Kemp, 2005).

Intergenerational programs contribute to the development of a community through facilitating community connectedness, community building, expanding social networks, social inclusion, social cohesion, and social capital (Moody & Phinney, 2012; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006; Anderson et al., 2017; Snow & Tulk, 2020). These programs bring a strong sense of meaning to the community as they provide an intergenerational context, whereby members or participants can connect and interact with people of other age groups in an inclusive environment (Freeman, Martin, Nash, Hausknecht, & Skinner, 2020; Moody & Phinney, 2012).

Participating in intergenerational programming creates a space where the participants can learn from one another through their interactions. Mutual learning/co-learning took place in various intergenerational programs through storytelling, environmental teachings, cultural teachings, interactions with technology, dramatic arts, and creative arts (Freeman, Martin, Nash, Hausknecht, & Skinner, 2020; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006; Anderson et al., 2017; Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017). Therefore, intergenerational programs provide an opportunity for bi-directional mentoring to take place among participants, which may in turn play a role in lifelong learning or discovering new interests (Snow & Tulk, 2020; Heydon, McKee, & Daly, 2017; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006).

Intergenerational programs cultivate positive experiences for both older adults and youth participants. For example, Casper et al. (2020) findings suggest that youth and older adults both demonstrated positive experiences identified through their levels of engagement and positive affect. In addition, Dumbrell, Durst, and Diachun's (2007) study suggests that older adults and younger individuals experienced fellowship, and generally enjoyed spending time with one another. Intergenerational programs can enhance feelings of self-esteem as well as empathy and support for others, which can contribute to well-being among the generations in the community (Anderson et al., 2017; Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020; Jarrot, 2011).

5) **Promoting Factors of Intergenerational Programming**

Facilitators

Factors that lead to successful intergenerational program creation are discussed here. It is essential that a health professional provides adequate training (Caspar, Davis, McNeill, & Kellett, 2019; Jarrott, 2011). The training will ensure that the activities are meaningful, appropriate, engaging, and interesting for all participants, while keeping their community as well as their culture in mind (Caspar, Davis, McNeill, & Kellett, 2019; Jarrott, 2011; Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020). Having strong administrative support assists in the facilitation of training and developing of intergenerational programs (Jarrott, 2011). Interestingly, the presence of technology is identified as both a facilitator and a barrier to intergenerational programming. It is important to note that awareness and guidelines regarding the proper and productive use of technology may be an important opportunity to address the engagement gap between older and younger generations (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020).

Sustainability

The sustainability of intergenerational programs is an important factor regarding longevity, maintenance, and growth. Programs that align with the structure of an informal community of practice demonstrate sustainability (Snow & Tulk, 2020). In fact, adherence to tradition or promise of the future and being part of something bigger and beyond the self, contributed to program longevity (Snow & Tulk, 2020; Peterat & Mayer-Smith, 2006).

6) Challenges of Intergenerational Programming

Barriers

There are many factors that present challenges to the development or maintenance of intergenerational programs. For example, resources, accessibility, staff knowledge, and lack of education on the benefits of intergenerational programs as well as the attitudes of staff, participants, and the general public present barriers (Ayala, Hewson, Bray, Jones, & Hartley, 2007; Beynon, Heydon, O'Niell, Zhang, & Crocker, 2013). As a result, these barriers hinder the development of intergenerational programs even though there is a substantial interest. In addition, there are concerns regarding health and safety regulations, transportation availability, facility use or spaces, and personal issues which impede the implementation of intergenerational programs at an organizational level.

Issues of health status and physical functioning in older adults can make engaging in intergenerational programs difficult for residents in long-term care settings (Heydon,McKee & Susan O'Neill, 2017). The emotional fear in older adults and younger individuals of the Anishinaabe community of Wiikwemkoong result in hesitation to become involved in intergenerational programs (Cornect-Benoit et al., 2020). Moreover, Cornect-Benoit et al. (2020)

also identified that policies were viewed as a barrier to people of the Anishinaabe community of Wiikwemkoong regarding the facilitation of intergenerational interactions as policies pertaining to funding were identified as obstructing inclusivity, especially pertaining to generations within the community.

Evaluation Concerns

The current evaluation of intergenerational programs is lacking, and improvement and expansion is required (Jarrott, Smith, & Weintraub, 2008; Babcock, Malonebeach, & Salomon, 2017; Heydon, O'Niell, Zhang, & Crocker, 2013; Ayala, Hewson, Bray, Jones, & Hartley, 2007). Due to poor evaluation tools researchers often turn to self-assessment measures and outcome measures that focus on general perceptions and attitude change (Babcock, Malonebeach, & Salomon, 2017; Jarrott, 2011). Qualitative research methods are used most often when assessing intergenerational programs as they provide in-depth insight into the experiences of participants involved in the programs. However, more quantitative studies are needed to evaluate intergenerational programs as there is a lack of empirical studies due to the lack of standardized quantitative measures and sample sizes that are too small to perform statistics analysis (Jarrott, 2011). Many studies are unable to capture quantitative results as the duration of the intergenerational programs may be too short in length (Babcock, Malonebeach, & Salomon, 2017; Dumbrell, Durst, & Diachun, 2007). Additionally, it is identified that several studies neglect to mention challenges or limitations of the intergenerational programs, which limits the scope for identifying areas of improvement (Jarrott, 2011). Jarrott, Smith, and Weintraub (2008) expanded the Intergenerational Observational Scale (IOS) by incorporating theory and achieving interrater reliability to measure behaviour and effective outcomes of the older adults and children that participate in intergenerational programs. This is a step in the right

direction towards improving quantitative measures that can be used as an evaluation tool for assessing intergenerational programs.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to review the existing academic literature on the types of programs, activities, and participants as well as outcomes for the participants and challenges relating to intergenerational programming. Four main types of programming were identified in the literature: community-based, school-based, long-term care-based, and merging programs. Participants consisted of infants, children, adolescents, young-old and old adults. Therefore, the mid-adult and old-old adult population were not included in the studies that were reviewed. Types of activities were grouped into art-focused and education-focused activities. Intergenerational programs provided older adults an opportunity to become active members in the community.

By participating in intergenerational programs, younger participants' preconceived notions were questioned through interactions with older adults. As a result, intergenerational program participation created an educational experience in young participants that evoked agency and facilitated positive perspectives. Most importantly, there was a mutual benefit among both younger and older participants, as intergenerational programs created development of meaningful relationships, an inclusive and accepting community, mutual learning, and a positive generational experience. These mutual outcomes make intergenerational programming stand out among other programming as they enhance the well-being beyond the participants and impact community well-being.

The promotive factors of intergenerational programs include facilitators for training, administrative support, and appropriate use of technology. Additionally, sustainability of intergeneration programs is an essential factor to achieve long-term benefits. Even though there is a high level of interest in intergenerational programs in the community, current barriers seem to prevent the creation and implementation of these programs. However, refining and focusing on the promotive factors mentioned may help to offset challenges that relate to intergenerational programming.

Limitations: This review has a few limitations that should be noted. The studies included in the review were not inclusive to the old-old, LGBTQS+ community, and did not mention the participants' ethnicities, with the exception of the studies that identified First Nation populations. Therefore, a more intersectional lens in research on intergenerational programs is required. Even though intergenerational spaces was intended to be a key focus of this paper; however, it was not discussed in much depth, as the literature did not explicitly discuss this key focus. Nonetheless, this review demonstrates the potential of schools and long-term care facilities in providing space for intergenerational programs.

Next steps: There is potential for intergenerational programs to be incorporated in service learning and experiential education opportunities in the school-systems at all education levels. Future research on intergenerational programming must consider the use of applicable theoretical frameworks and standardized quantitative measures for evaluations along with qualitative research methods. The duration of intergenerational programs must be investigated to identify the relationship between program's longevity and its impact, as this remains ambiguous in the literature. Gaining a better understanding of these factors will assist in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of future intergenerational programming.

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