



Article

Watching Relationships Build over Time: A Video Analysis of a Hybrid Intergenerational Practice Program

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Abstract: Intergenerational programs are devoted to bringing older adults and children together because of their mutual benefits for both parties, such as reduction of ageism, relationship building, and shared learning. This intergenerational practice program included high school children and residents at an over-55 retirement village. The aim of this study was to develop an intergenerational shared learning program during COVID-19 using a hybrid model of face-to-face and videoconferencing technology. As a result of video analysis, researchers observed participant interactions and engagement during face-to-face and video conferencing sessions. The findings highlight the importance of a program structure that adapts to the changing environment and recognises that different settings (video and face-to-face) require different relationship-building activities. In addition, co-collaboration in the development of the program structure was essential to facilitate shared learnings.

Keywords: intergenerational learning; intergenerational connection; intergenerational relationships; COVID-19; video analysis; socially distanced learning



Citation: Kosiol, Jennifer, and Gabriela Di Perna. 2023. Watching Relationships Build over Time: A Video Analysis of a Hybrid Intergenerational Practice Program. *Social Sciences* 12: 96. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12020096>

Academic Editor: Ilkka Arminen

Received: 7 September 2022

Revised: 17 January 2023

Accepted: 25 January 2023

Published: 13 February 2023



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1. Introduction

Intergenerational practice programs (IPP) are programs that bring together younger and older people for reciprocal benefits and are planned, developed, implemented, and evaluated. IPPs that focus on learning across generations are defined as planned, mutually beneficial, ongoing learning activities that connect people from different generations (Wadsworth and Whitehouse 2007). Intergenerational relationships that foster shared experiences across generations are crucial in order to remain connected to the community (Kirsnan et al. 2022; United 2013). However, research into the observed behaviours of children and older people that foster engagement during these programs is in its infancy.

2. Literature Review

Intergenerational Programs

IPPs were reported as providing benefits for older and younger generations involved (Femia et al. 2008; Golenko et al. 2020; Heyman et al. 2011; Jarrott and Bruno 2007), fostering empathy between generations (United 2013). According to Dellmann-Jenkins et al. (1993), sociality—in particular, cooperation, helping, and sharing behaviours—was found to increase as a result of IPPs. In addition, increases in social engagement, self-confidence, and resilience were evidenced (Femia et al. 2008; Golenko et al. 2020; Hayes 2003).

Highlighting cohort-specific benefits, intergenerational programs showed improvements in self-efficacy outcomes in adolescents (Murayama et al. 2021) as well as in reading (Rebok et al. 2004) and communication outcomes for children. Additionally, the likelihood of children becoming delinquent or participating in malicious behaviour was found to be reduced (Ohmer 2022; Whitten et al. 2017). For older adults, positive outcomes in terms of health and wellbeing were observed via facilitated individual or group activities (Borrero 2015; Park 2015; Thompson and Weaver 2016).

Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, there had been growing interest in IPPs. However, the socially distanced environment brought about many changes and innovations to the normal way of doing things. It posed unprecedented demands and social conditions to all areas of society, including local communities, retirement villages, and schools; during the pandemic, socially distant communities had to rethink how to connect older and younger populations.

There was a revival of IPPs globally right before the COVID-19 outbreak began. This revival led to the normalisation of intergenerational practice to reconnect generations, reduce social isolation and loneliness, and counter ageism (Lytle et al. 2022). Researchers suggested that connecting generations after the lockdowns in 2020 has become increasingly difficult (Alonso Ruiz et al. 2022; Lytle et al. 2022). These long periods of social distancing have led to feelings of social isolation for many, negatively impacting the mental health of the population across the globe (Rauschenberg et al. 2021).

Although IPPs are increasingly popular in the US and the UK (DeVore et al. 2016; Sánchez et al. 2021), as well as in Europe (Sánchez et al. 2021; Canedo-García et al. 2017), in Australia, these programs are still in their infancy.¹

With the development of IPPs, there was also a great need to build an evidence base to justify the existence and creation of further programs. COVID-19 delayed some of the research, but innovative programs using technology to connect older and younger people made intergenerational practice possible. Virtual connections between the old and the young prior to COVID-19 had shown promise in successfully countering social isolation and feelings of mental distress, particularly in vulnerable groups (Waytz and Gray 2018). Responding to a socially distanced environment worldwide, intergenerational programs have either come to a halt, or seen their leaders attempt to continue the programs by using digital technologies to connect generations (Alonso Ruiz et al. 2022; Lytle et al. 2022; Sánchez et al. 2021).

To add to the existing evidence base around intergenerational practice in Australia, this research trialled a “hybrid” intergenerational practice learning program between July 2020 and May 2022 known as the “Cromwell Intergenerational Practice Pilot” (hereafter referred to as “the pilot”). A hybrid learning program in this context is to be understood as a program that includes face-to-face as well as socially distanced video conferencing meetings.

As these virtual and hybrid programs have only been running fairly recently, evidence of their effectiveness is slowly emerging (Canedo-García et al. 2017). Canedo-García et al. (2017) noted that the level of effectiveness of virtual modes of connection is comparable to in-person programs, with virtual modes being more cost-efficient. Jarrott (2011) added that although intergenerational programs in general are gaining in popularity across sectors such as aged care, education, and mental health, the evidence of the effectiveness of such programs still remains limited (Jarrott 2011). Jarrott (2011) also pointed to the missing evidence when it comes to the impact of intergenerational programs, particularly the absence of longitudinal studies, theory limitation, and one-sided assessment of generations involved. Therefore, the opportunities for further research are evident.

The aim of this pilot was to explore an alternative for face-to-face IPPs by delivering a hybrid program with the potential to move fully online if needed, adapting to a socially distanced environment in an attempt to counter subjective experiences of social isolation or loneliness in a socially distanced environment. In this paper, we focus on the video analysis that was recorded over the entire experimental period. Our research question was: “How do hybrid intergenerational learning programs influence the level of engagement between generations?”.

3. Methods

3.1. Recruitment and Sampling

This research was funded through the Cromwell Property Foundation in collaboration with MercyCare, Perth, WA and Griffith University in Queensland (QLD). MercyCare was in contact with the Griffith University research team, expressing interest in setting up and codesigning an intergenerational pilot project. Mercy Village is MercyCare's only retirement village, and it was chosen as a pilot with plans to potentially extend intergenerational programs into residential aged care homes in the future. The participants were recruited by the MercyCare staff, who invited residents from the retirement village to participate in the pilot. The school children were recruited via a call out to schools to ascertain interest in participating in the program. John XXIII College was interested in being a part of the pilot program, as students were familiar with Mercy Village through their music program. After recruiting Mercy Village and John XXII College, a working group was established to co-create a mutually beneficial program. This resulted in a group of 6 older residents from Mercy Village and 14 students (year 7, aged 12–14 years) from John XXIII.

All participants received the same consent form in which they could indicate their level of consent regarding participation, photography, and audio-visual recordings. Participants were required to consent to each of the following: images being used for research purposes; dissemination of research findings; marketing and communication purposes. Additionally, parent/primary carer consent was required for each of the students in addition to the student's consent.

3.2. Training the Staff

Training included information sessions with residents, teachers, and project sponsors as well as facilitators on each site. A program orientation followed, including all staff involved across the two sites. A technology briefing was held with program facilitators at each site to enable quality video recordings for data analysis. In order to ensure that stakeholders were equipped with the necessary skills and capabilities to run an intergenerational practice program, several staff members completed a professional development certificate in intergenerational practice that was delivered through Together Old and Young (TOY) in The Netherlands.

3.3. Design and Process

In order to design an effective hybrid model that might be able to shift to a virtual model entirely, a theoretical underpinning of value co-creation was utilised in the design process. Co-creation is defined in various ways, of which one is "a joint collaborative, concurrent, peer like process of producing new value, both materially and symbolically, through the voluntary contributions of multiple actors in reciprocal well-being" (Vargo and Lusch 2016; Busser and Shlga 2018 as quoted by (Rubio et al. 2020, p. 2)). The five dimensions of co-creation are meaningfulness, collaboration, contribution, recognition, and effective response.

Hence, value co-creation from a conceptual perspective is a complex construct, including multiple stakeholders that interact in direct and indirect ways in various activities that are mutually beneficial to the overall network involved (Rubio et al. 2020). For the purpose of this paper, it is important to mention that value co-creation can take place in a virtual as well as a face-to-face environment while involving various stakeholders (Rubio et al. 2020).

In order to ensure a robust hybrid model, we utilised value co-creation processes in order to safeguard a flexible, mutually beneficial program created for both generations involved. Importantly, initiating the relationship-building process during this co-design phase between the stakeholders allowed for a potentially more robust program due to the mutual involvement in building and alignment of expectations (Rubio et al. 2020). Accordingly, the activity work plan was co-designed between the two sites and the research team based on the expectations of all stakeholders and agreement on the implementation plan.

The program was conducted over seven sessions of shared learning. The sessions included 2 face-to-face sessions held at the retirement village and 5 virtual sessions via videoconferencing. The hour-long sessions were video- and audio-recorded.

3.4. Multimodal Visual Analysis

Video clips were systematically selected by two researchers with the goal to help identify and document interactions between older people and children. Video clips that preserved the interactional context were given priority during the selection process. The selected video recordings were viewed independently by the same researchers, and multiple visual transcripts were created. A multimodal visual transcribing process was undertaken to create these visual transcripts. Multimodal visual transcribing is a systematic process of annotating the precise temporal and sequential details of verbal and embodied actions occurring within the video materials (Mondada 2018). Transcribing multimodality from video recordings involves annotation of a diversity of phenomena ranging from facial expressions, posture, movements, body arrangements in interactional spaces, silent activities, camera movement, and verbal conversation. All data were stored in line with the requirements of the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research and Griffith's Best Practice Guidelines for Researchers, Managing Research Data and Primary Materials.

Drawing on (Bezemer and Mavers 2011; Goodwin 2013; Kirsnan et al. 2022; Ramey et al. 2016), the process of creating the visual transcripts involved systematic and sequential analysis of both verbal and non-verbal interactions. Because the visual transcripts are products of the researchers' representational choices, key questions such as "How do we frame the transcript? What do we select to place in the transcript? What needs to be highlighted and what needs to be removed?" were asked throughout the visual transcribing process. According to Bezemer and Mavers (2011), "video extracts selected for transcription are both framed by the communicational aims of the original interaction and by the purpose for which the graphic version is made" (p. 194). Still images were taken from the selected video recordings to represent context and meaning, but these were supported with written commentaries. Keeping in mind the multimodality of communication (Bezemer and Mavers 2011), both researchers ensured that a broad range of modalities (e.g., gestures, facial expressions, body postures, touch, and tone) were included in the transcription process. Figure 1 illustrates an excerpt from one of the final visual transcripts which contains an image of an interaction between the children and older person with written commentary.

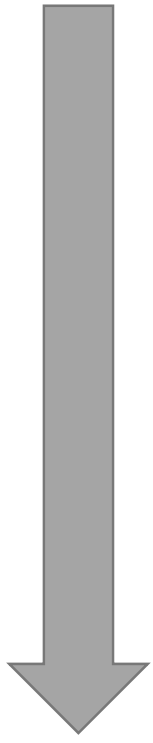


Figure 1. Example of video transcription.

The multiple visual transcripts developed by both researchers were compared and refined to produce one final transcript for each of the selected video recordings. For validation purposes, selected final transcripts were sent to facilitators who were present during the video-recorded sessions.

4. Data Analysis

The final versions of the transcripts were fed into Qualitative data analysis Software for Researchers (QSR) International NVivo 12, which was used as a tool to conduct the thematic analysis of the visual transcripts. An abductive approach was taken to analyse the data, whereby a Guiding Components Framework was developed (see Figure 2) and an inductive approach was employed to identify new emergent themes. The Guiding Components Framework developed by Kirsnan et al. (2022) was adapted for this study. The sub-empirical questions were developed to guide the study using four key components: *participant characteristics; role of the facilitator; technology and environment; type of activity* (see Figure 2). The key components and the linked sub-empirical questions set out in the Guiding Components Framework provided the structure and framework for the thematic analysis.



Main question	Focus areas	Specific empirical question	Operational categories
How do hybrid intergenerational programs influence the level of engagement between generations?	Participant characteristics	How do the students contribute? How do the older people contribute? How well do they interact? How does familiarity impact interaction? What is the extent of shared thinking?	Participate in the activity, listening, ignores activity, relies on facilitator, focused on assessment task. Superficial understanding throughout the interaction, progress with activity (some, good, great). Is the interaction exchange of learning, trust, and safety? Remembering the children/older person, confidence with familiarity. Does interactional behaviour change over time? Collaborative, building on each other's ideas?
	Facilitator style	Leadership roles? Is there a difference in facilitator influence in the online and face-to-face sessions? Is there guidance from the facilitator? What is learned from the guidance?	Laissez-faire (novice) didactic (expert) Explanation of the activity, conversation while interacting, questioning. Is it interrupting the interaction?
	Technology/environment	Does the environment and setup influence interactions? Is there a difference observed between online sessions and face-to-face sessions?	Is the camera position influencing the engagement? How is the equipment used? How does the setup engage participants, broader strategies that go beyond the immediate local strategies of involvement, just visual movement not really interaction?
	Type of activity	What is the contribution with the activities?	Type of activity that facilitated interaction and engagement, external barriers to activities (seating, camera position, online/face-to-face mode, student assessment priority) time, tempo, duration.

Figure 2. Guiding Components Framework. Adapted from [Kirsnan et al. \(2022\)](#).

5. Results

Overall, the four key components of *participant characteristics, role of the facilitator, technology and environment, and type of activity* demonstrated strong influence over the types of interactions and the levels of engagement between the generations. The findings showed that the quality of the engagement was observed in different behavioural illustrations such as looking at the screen, eye contact, facial expression, leaning forward, laughing, smiling, and waving. Levels of engagement between the older persons and the students varied in relation to each of the four key components.

5.1. Key Component 1: Participant Characteristics

Participant characteristics were influential over the type of interaction and the level of engagement between the older and younger generations. There were enough students and older persons in the program to allow for two to three students each to be paired with an older person.

Characteristics for the older participants impacted their level of engagement. For example, their level of physical condition (e.g., eyesight, hearing) and cognitive ability (e.g., memory loss). Some of the participants had limited hearing, which created a barrier to participate in some of the group sessions in which they could not hear all of the conversations and thus missed opportunities to interact. For example, when others were talking and participants could not hear the conversation, they withdrew from the interaction. In activities where conversations were held individually between the student and older participant, the level of engagement was higher.

Student characteristics included temperament and personality types (e.g., introverted vs. extroverted). For example, students that were confident to interact with the older person initially had more free-flowing conversations. This was particularly noticeable at the beginning of the program, where some of the shy students relied on the facilitators to initiate the conversation. However, as the sessions progressed, the students were more at ease with the older participants as they became more familiar with them. The students would start conversations without waiting for the teacher to instruct them. For example, there was a student who was shy at the start of the program and would rely on her fellow students to create the conversations. As she continued through the program, her confidence at initiating conversations grew, and she started interactions with the older persons without encouragement from the teacher or facilitator. At the same time, the older participants enjoyed the more confident interactions. This example demonstrates that intergenerational programs are beneficial in helping students overcome shyness.

5.2. Key Component 2: Role of the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator and the teacher strongly influenced the level of interaction and engagement between participants. Findings show that the facilitators took on supporting, initiating, or dominant roles during the sessions.

The supporting role occurred when the facilitator or teacher were in the background during the interactions but provided support when needed. For example, a few times, the students were unsure of what questions they should ask the older person, and so the facilitator or teacher moved closer and encouraged the student. The initiating role occurred when the facilitator or teacher initiated engagement between the participants. For example, a student was not sure of what question to ask the older person, and so the teacher provided a topic which facilitated engagement. Facilitators also initiated some questions during the sessions to start conversations and also provided instructions, such as the order of students asking questions in the group sessions.

The dominant role occurred when the facilitators/teachers adapted their role in response to certain levels of engagement. For example, in this role, they led some of the discussions between participants. This was mostly noticeable in the group sessions where the participants were slow to start interacting. However, some facilitators were not able to recognise when there was a good exchange occurring between participants. For example,

an older person was observed telling a story of her childhood to the student, and they had been laughing and interacting with free-flowing conversation, but the facilitator interrupted them to ask what they were discussing. This disrupted and ended the interaction between the student and older person.

5.3. Key Component 3: Technology and the Environment

The online environment required setting up of the Microsoft Teams site and organising the participants so that they could all be seen on the screen. The use of cameras and video technology was an important element in the success of the interactions and in levels of engagement. For example, in the online group sessions where not all of the participants were able to be on the camera screen, the level of engagement dropped, with some participants talking with their peers and not engaging in the conversations. However, when the facilitator managed to create an interaction, it was not sustained due to the barrier of them not being able to see each other on the screen.

It is important to consider the environment and the technology for hybrid inter-generational programs. Suitable technology and video equipment designed to allow all participants to be seen and heard is essential to successful engagement.

5.4. Key Component 4: Type of Activity

The findings indicate that the type of activity (interviewing, general conversations, and student assessment requirements) and whether it was conducted as a group or individually influenced the level of engagement and interaction. For example, when the students were interviewing an older person, some of the students were so focused on asking their questions that they were not listening to the answers being given. This was observed when students read questions from their paper rather than looking at the older person and building conversation based on the answers to the questions. The students had an assignment as part of the project in which they had to create a biography of one of the older persons. This task did increase the level of engagement, as students needed the information for their assessment. For example, a student was observed listening to the older person talk about her life at the same age as the student. The student and the older person were laughing and making faces at each other. These moments provided the students and older persons opportunities to establish bonds. Over the course of the program, it was observed that participants became very familiar with each other, waved at each other online, and started conversations spontaneously. It is important to consider the type of activity when designing hybrid intergenerational programs. Activities should be planned to create free-flowing discussion to facilitate interaction and engagement. The biography of an older person was a good assignment, as it encouraged the students to consider what questions they needed to ask in order to write their assignment. This was a good starting point for interactions, and as the sessions progressed, interactions became more natural and spontaneous.

6. Discussion

From the video analysis, the researchers compared the first couple of sessions to the last couple of sessions and discovered a difference in how students and residents related to each other. Students as well as residents were more confident with their developing relationships, and conversation and laughter flowed as stories were shared over time. This was evidenced by the students initiating conversations with the older people rather than waiting for the facilitator, calling them by their names, and smiling and waving at them through the online sessions.

Students showed interest when the older persons were sharing stories about themselves at the same age as the children by looking at the older person, smiling, and asking more questions about the story being told. Students were interested in how life was as a child back in the older people's time, and this was evidenced by increases in smiles, nodding, and verbal responses from students and residents to each other. After a few sessions,

the group was more familiar with each other, interactions took place more spontaneously, and the children and older persons had more confidence to respond spontaneously, ask questions, and initiate conversations.

Curiosity about the other generation and aiming to see life from their perspective was a desire stirred in both students and residents. For example, one student proudly reported that she was searching for information on the life of a particular resident with whom she was working, and that she enjoyed learning more about him and his life. An example of a resident's reflection was her comparing her life with those of the two students she was working with and finding commonalities, being proud that students are encouraged to "find things out for themselves" just like she was.

The online sessions were not as free-flowing in conversation as the face-to-face sessions, and this was largely hindered by the use of only one video camera for the sessions. The children and older persons had to take turns to ask questions, and this created more stilted responses in the earlier sessions.

The students and residents had not met face-to-face before the online session, and both groups appeared to be unsure about how to ask questions, as many of them turned to their facilitator for advice and guidance. At first, the children aimed to get through as many questions as possible, often failing to absorb the answer fully and missing the residents' reactions and emotional responses to their questions. This was evidenced when children were observed to be reading the next question while the previous one was being answered; as soon as the older person finished speaking, the child in the conversation asked another question. There was little "deep delving" to explore the answer that was provided.

At the first session, to create conversation, both groups relied on the facilitators. Facilitators were observed to be driving the questions that were being asked, which did not stimulate discussion in the room. From this observation, it can be concluded that the facilitator has great influence over the way the sessions flow in the earlier sessions. This can be both a strength and a weakness for the program. The strength is that a good facilitator will allow the connections to occur naturally between older and younger people, can read the situation well, and is patient to let engagement happen. However, a more controlling facilitator influences and directs the relationship by taking on more of a mediating role or even a director's role, which can hinder natural relationship development.

The video analysis revealed that the Interview structure adopted for the video learning sessions included the whole group but focused on 1–3 students and one resident at a time. This meant that the other residents and children were sitting watching the interactions, and this occasionally resulted in boredom in those students and residents not participating. Students not participating started to fidget in their seats and were looking away. Although every student had time talking to a resident, 50–67% of the class-time was spent as an observer with no active part. This was an interesting finding that highlights considerations for enhancing online interactions and engagement. Having more individual in-camera sessions rather than larger groups would have enhanced shared learning and the building of relationships. With the hybrid program structure, the use of face-to-face sessions showed that the relationships took on a more natural selection of relationship building, as the students were familiar with the residents from the online sessions and were able to initiate conversation and share stories.

Limitations of the Research

As researchers of qualitative studies, a close engagement with the data throughout the research process is necessary; thus, researcher bias is unavoidable to a certain extent (Tong et al. 2007). As in all qualitative research, it is accepted that the results of this research are likely influenced by the two mature female researchers. However, in this research, the analysts believe that the rigor and trustworthiness of the analytical process is imperative to the reflexive and subjective nature of video analysis. Some mitigating strategies employed in this analysis include using two researchers for the analysis who employed a thorough examination of their own roles and opinions. These include a reflection on how qualitative

research is at risk of becoming fiction, which results in rendering the research useless; thus, effort went into ensuring each statement and finding was derived from the evidence. A third researcher was engaged to critically reflect on the findings and spot check the findings were indeed evidenced.

The program's biggest hurdle was the existing technology. Both participant groups reported that technology failure was a common issue within this program. Technical difficulties with sound as well as camera position were a frequent occurrence on the resident's premises, leading to delays in the conversations between students and residents. Although the school was well-equipped with suitable rooms and technology as well as technological support within the room, the retirement village was not equipped for programs of this kind and was lacking in suitable rooms and staffing to support navigation and setup on-site. Although every effort was made and specific technology was purchased especially for this program, reflections from the aged care organisation staff echoed a naïve approach to technology, noting this area as one of their most important learning opportunities to improve for future programs. In order to run a successful hybrid or purely virtual intergenerational practice program in the future, technology setup and support must be carefully considered.

7. Conclusions

The hybrid intergenerational program provided an opportunity for connection between non-familial participants of different generations by fostering intergenerational relationships. Learning from the life stories of others, an opportunity to reflect and compare presented itself for both students and residents, promoting intergenerational wisdom.

The video analysis showed positive and negative elements of hybrid intergenerational programs. There was increased engagement over time as evidenced by increased acquaintance between older and younger participants, calling each other by name, and demonstrating signs of recognition and familiarity.

The video analysts used the engagement framework of (Kirsnan et al. 2022) to explore the data and focused on *participant characteristics, role of the facilitator, technology and environment, and type of activity* (see Figure 2). The findings indicate that each of these key components have a bearing on the level of engagement and interaction between participants. Successful hybrid intergenerational programs require careful consideration and planning of the key components. Technology is an important factor that will either facilitate or hinder effective hybrid engagement and interaction. Having a contingency plan if some of the technology fails will provide for continued progress during the sessions. As such, the environment requires more attention, including the position of camera(s), the kinds of activities available, and the setup of intergenerational participation to ensure success of the program.

Nevertheless, although program design improvements must consider activities that generate wider discussions, these findings indicate that positive interactions overall were observed and reported by the residents and students involved. These findings indicate that when hybrid intergenerational programs are carefully designed, taking into consideration the key components for engagement, the social capital of older persons and students can improve. Older persons can draw on it to reduce feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and diminished confidence and self-worth; for students, the building of relationships, trust, and empathy as well as shared knowledge builds self-efficacy and reduces ageism.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, J.K. and G.D.P.; methodology, J.K.; software, J.K. and G.D.P.; validation, J.K. and G.D.P.; formal analysis, J.K. and G.D.P.; investigation, J.K.; resources, J.K. and G.D.P.; data curation, J.K.; writing—original draft preparation, J.K. and G.D.P.; writing—review and editing, J.K.; visualization, J.K.; project administration, J.K. and G.D.P.; funding acquisition See acknowledgement. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Philanthropic funding for this project was received from the Cromwell Property Group Foundation.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical approval was obtained from Griffith University HREC 2020/166.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data available on request due to privacy restrictions. The data presented in this study might be made available in parts in an anonymised form on request from the corresponding author. The data is not publicly available due to privacy and ethical obligations. An industry report on the Cromwell Intergenerational Practice Pilot is available here: <https://aiip.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Cromwell-Report-FINAL.pdf>, accessed on 7 September 2022. A short 3- minute Intergenerational Practice Pilot Project video is available here <https://aiip.net.au/resources/videos/>, accessed on 7 September 2022.

Acknowledgments: The research reported in this publication is part of a university study in collaboration with MercyCare and Rehoboth Christian College titled “Cromwell Intergenerational Practice Pilot”. Core funding was provided by the Cromwell Property Foundation. Expert advice and contributions were provided throughout the project by Anneke Fitzgerald, K. Radford, Jennifer Cartmel, Neil Harris, G.Barbery, J. Kosiol, and G. Di Perna (project manager). The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of MercyCare staff, its residents, and the staff and students at John XXII College.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ To support the sharing of evidence and knowledge around IPPs, the Australian Institute for Intergenerational Practice (AIIP) has recently been established, hoping to accelerate the development around intergenerational practice in Australia (www.aiip.net.au, accessed on 7 September 2022).

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