

Intergenerational Engagement, Friendships and Learning Together

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Childsplay Nursery is a non-profit making cooperative located in Newcastle city centre. Opening its doors over 40 years ago, Childsplay has thrived, becoming a research informed provider and promoting innovative approaches to learning for young children. With an ethos based around the Reggio Emilia approach to learning, focus is placed on the capabilities of the young child and how they learn from exploring and investigating the world around them. Over the years, they have embedded their practice, working alongside researchers in strengthening their curriculum, developing an outdoor learning programme as well as establishing a successful and pioneering intergenerational project.

Intergenerational practice brings together different generations to engage in activities and experiences which benefit everyone. The young and old develop meaningful and authentic relationships through trust and mutual respect. Intergenerational practice is already embedded in some cultures across the world and it is now becoming more recognisable within the UK with the implementation of integrated care home and nursery settings as well as many projects involving generational learning.

In August 2022, after much research, we contacted a local care village who had a very similar ethos to our own. As a non-profit making business, Winton Court had the welcoming, community feel which radiates around our nursery setting. Visiting with 12 preschool children and three educators, initially our thoughts were those of apprehension and uncertainty. Discussions regarding safeguarding, health and safety and risk all ensued. Regrettably, we were clouded with thoughts of 'what could go wrong?' instead of embracing this unique opportunity to engage with the older generation. We would quickly be proved wrong.

After our first visit we knew we were involved in something special. The educators followed the children's lead and as usual, the children demonstrated their compassion and kindness. They were able to see past the mobility walkers, wheelchairs and walking sticks and began to engage with the wonderfully knowledgeable older people. The children did not allow for obstacles, moving chairs and tables to allow the older adults to be able to fully connect with the materials

and resources on offer. They climbed higher onto chairs, perching themselves along the arms in order to share a story with those adults who were less mobile. Stories became the foundations of our friendships. The universal language of books was a great starting point and demonstrated the capabilities of young children and how they are able to communicate and interact with people of any generation. Books for many of our older residents have been a way in which to open a channel of communication with the children and vice versa. More information about how to implement best evidence-informed approaches to improve practice and support children's communication and language development, can be found on the [EEF's Evidence Store](#), see the [Communication and Language themed document](#).

One of the adults' resounding qualities is that of time. The children feel listened to and their opinions accepted and valued. The adults give eye contact, listening wholeheartedly to whatever the children have to say and conversing with them about everything from holidays to pet snails. They are interested and want to be a part of this child's early life. They distil their knowledge and as with the Reggio approach philosophy, want children to learn for themselves and don't immediately pass on the information, rather waiting for the children to form a hypothesis, problem solve and create their own conclusions. These older friends are the true educators. They may not believe this but they are instilling skills in these young children which will last a lifetime. The children reciprocate this learning, teaching their older friends about what they know. We observed a child explaining what an iPad was to a resident and then it was selfie time. The resident was amazed by the 'instant' photo and before we knew it, the resident was sharing his new skill with the other residents. Learning comes in all shapes and sizes but to be listened to, valued and respected is a skill both the young and old in our project have accomplished and we are so proud of them all.

A special moment was shared between one child and a resident earlier this year. The child had visited London and was very excited to bring his London book to the care village to share with everyone. Little did he know that one of our residents is a retired London bus driver. The two shared the book and before our next visit, we asked our nursery community to support the child's interest by bringing in any London resources they had at home. We were inundated with support and on our next trip, the child took everything with him. The resident was overwhelmed by everything and amazed by an old road map. He shared with the child his old bus routes, even pointing out Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament which the child relished as he had seen these on his trip.



Observing the children's interactions, it is clear that over our time at the care village, these older people who were once strangers have become friends. The children chat at the nursery about visiting the care village and visiting their older friend and planning what they would like to do when they arrive. The older friend becomes part of our Childsplay family as we begin to spread our message throughout the community – intergenerational practice works. It has had a profound effect not only on the children and residents but on the carers and educators and long may it continue.

Useful reading:

[Born4Life: Creating and Supporting Meaningful, Authentic Intergenerational Experiences](#)

[Apples and Honey Nightingale](#)

[Generations Working Together](#)

[EEF Early Years Context for Teaching & Learning: The Early Years Pedagogical Continuum](#)

[EEF Self-Regulation and Executive Function: evidence informed approaches and practices to support children's self-regulation and executive function development in the early years.](#)

[EEF Early Literacy: evidence informed approaches and practices to support children's early literacy development in early years](#)

[EEF Communication and Language: evidence informed approaches and practice to support children's early communication and language development](#)