

## Chapter Four

# Play for All Ages

### *An Exploration of Intergenerational Play*

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The purpose of this study was to determine how play has changed over the generations and find patterns and trends in childhood play from generation to generation. Continuity theories of reminiscence framed intergenerational play memories. The overall method was qualitative with a descriptive design. The investigation was an assignment in a play course in which over 70 college students conducted interviews with someone 25 years older than themselves. The results indicated that an important place for play was outside within participants' neighborhoods. The toys of choice were dolls and figurines, balls, bikes, and board or card games. The most popular play material reported was natural or homemade items such as sticks, dirt, or structures made out of cardboard. Results reported from technology interview questions indicated differences between elders and university students' use of technology play. Providing the opportunity to bridge older and younger generations highlights the importance of tapping into the potentialities of using play in interdisciplinary programs to understand play theory and research across the life span.

The United States will experience many demographic changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and trends indicate that there will be a changing age structure driven by increased longevity. *Healthy People 2020's* (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2010) vision is to create a society in which all people live long, healthy lives and includes healthy development and behaviors across all life stages. Bengtson (2001) claims multigenerational relationships will be more important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for 3 reasons: (a) demographic changes of population aging, (b) the importance of grandparents fulfilling family functions, and (c) the strength of intergenerational solidarity over time. The guiding questions for this chapter are how play will be affected by

these changing demographics and how can future early childhood educators be part of the change?

Play is universal and can provide mutually beneficial relationships between younger and older generations. Shared play experiences across the life span can improve cognitive development, social development, physical development, and healthy emotional development (Davis, Larkin, & Graves, 2002). Intergenerational play takes place as soon as an infant is born. A parent playing peek-a-boo or reading a board book to a newborn helps infants learn about their world. Much research has been conducted on intergenerational play (Davis, et al., 2002) and intergenerational use of technology games (Chua, Jung, Lwin, Theng, 2013; Siyahhan, Barab, & Downton, 2010). Another area of research related to the benefits for both older adults and children are intergenerational programs (George & Singer, 2011; Hayes, 2003). Intergenerational programs foster the understanding that play and learning is a lifelong process.

This chapter includes a description of a study designed to help participants understand an integrated sense of play theory and research across the life span. As teacher educators teaching a play course to undergraduate and graduate students, we conceptualized a project to start investigating play across generations. The primary goal was to engage students in conversations with older adults to reminisce about their own play experiences (Merriam, 1995). A second goal was for students to apply developmental theories (e.g., Erikson, 1963) to the understanding of multigenerational relationships. The last goal was for students to develop interviewing skills, then to conceptualize and critique changes in play across the generations. The overall method is qualitative with a descriptive design. The investigation is an assignment in a play course in which college students interview someone 25 years older than themselves. There is limited research related to play memories (Sanburg, 2001) that frames the research using reminiscence theory (Butler, 1963; Parker, 1995), so we embarked on a pilot study to look in that direction.

The chapter begins with examining theories of reminiscence to frame our study on intergenerational play memories. A review of literature related to intergenerational programs and play and technology follows. The programs in this review describe play interventions and experiences implemented with cross age participants. Next, the methodology of the study and results are described. The chapter ends with implications and a call for future research related to intergenerational play theory.

The guiding questions pursued were:

1. What are the patterns and trends from members of past generations as they give their personal recollections of their childhood play?
2. How has play changed over the generations?

## REMINISCENCE: A CONTINUITY THEORY APPROACH

Reminiscence is sometimes defined as the recalling and re-experiencing of one's life events. It is the process of recollecting memories of oneself in the past. One way to make memories more meaningful is to ask questions to help recall meaningful memories or life events. Early writings by Erikson (1963) and Butler (1963) have influenced most subsequent work in this area. Two of Erikson's (1963) life stages, generativity versus stagnation and ego integrity versus despair, are related to theories of reminiscence. Generativity versus stagnation is a reflection of a person's life. Generativity includes contributions to society, productivity, and providing guidance to the next generation. Adults are reflecting on memories of accomplishments and disappointments. Erikson's (1963) last stage of the life cycle, ego integrity versus despair, posits that with approaching death, the older person feels a need to review and evaluate his or her own life.

Butler's (1963) view of reminiscence became prominent with his article on life review and reminiscence, "The Life Review: An Interpretation of Reminiscence in the Aged." Butler (1963) proposed that as one approaches death, one engages in a life review and defines life review as "a universal mental process characterized by progressive return to consciousness of past experience, and particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts" (p. 66). Butler (1963) further argued that in order to adapt to old age, an individual must review the experiences of life, revive them, and reintegrate them; the life review is conceived as "possible response to the biological and psychological fact of death" (p. 66). Reminiscence is a normal process that emerges from a desire to enjoy, grow, cope, or change.

Researchers (Lo Gerfo, 1980; Wong, 1995) have discussed types of reminiscence which take place. Three specific types are as follows: (a) information, (b) evaluation, and (c) obsessive (Lo Gerfo, 1980). Informative reminiscence is "focused on the factual material reviewed instead of on its relevance to a re-evaluation of the personality or life history" (Lo Gerfo, 1980, p. 40). It is about retelling, reliving, and sharing memories of the past. Informative reminiscence was used in this study when college students asked older adults to share their memories of play. Recalling memories is a source of mastery and gratification in old age.

Evaluative reminiscence is based on Butler's (1963) work on the life review process. For Butler (1963) the life review included reminiscing from the past from an evaluative perspective. It involves recalling memories throughout one's life in an attempt to come to terms with old guilt, conflicts, and defeats, and to find meaning in one's accomplishments.

Obsessive reminiscence is characterized by unpleasant past events and can be associated with poor mental health (Wong, 1995). It is accompanied by feelings of guilt, shame, resentment, and despair on an unpleasant past. It

also may occur upon the death of a loved one, close relative, or friend. Methods of psychodrama help reminiscers to discuss their feelings and work through issues to find new outlets to relieve anxieties.

The literature on reminiscence theory is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, Parker's (1995) continuity theory approach to reminiscence is used to examine the play memories of older adults. Parker states, "there must be a recall of what has come before and the role of reminiscence is a valuable mechanism for creating a sense of continuity with older adults" (Parker, 1995, p. 521).

Older adults in this study shared their play memories and past events with college students to help provide continuity between play from one generation to other generations. Based on continuity theory the purpose was to examine, describe, and increase the understanding of intergenerational play by sharing the play memories between two generations. Before discussing the current study, a review of intergenerational programs focusing on play is in order.

### PLAY: INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRAMS

Intergenerational programming can be defined as a "way to bridge the generation gap by engaging younger and older generations in structured activities" (Belgrave, 2009, p. 9). Intergenerational programs unite people of different ages and provide opportunities for individuals, families, and communities to enjoy and benefit from the richness of a culturally and generationally diverse society. They give children positive role models and break down barriers created by fear and uncertainty. Intergenerational programs give older adults needed feelings of accomplishment, worth, and joy. They offer both groups a medium through which they can share their talents and experiences (Generations United, 2007).

Intergenerational play creates a context for social interaction and learning for both younger and older generations. Pairing younger generations with older adults in play situations that are active and interactive have benefits that can result in positive outcomes for all ages. The play can include art, music, cooking, or puppet play. Most intergenerational programs that involve one or more play activities have specific outcomes that are geared towards the younger and the older generations. Two specific outcomes are to enhance cross-age interactions and to improve cross-age attitudes. Additional goals may be based on the age and functioning level of the generations. For older adults, wellness may be a goal of improved psychosocial well-being as they engage in cross-aged interactions during intergenerational programs. Children may improve their attitudes toward older adults or even teach them new technology skills. College students may have a goal to work with geriatric populations (Belgrave, 2009).

The Foster Grandparent Program was introduced in 1963 as a component of the war on poverty. The purpose was to provide opportunities for low-income persons aged 60 and over to support children with special needs while reducing isolation and poverty among elders. Since 1963, intergenerational programs have grown exponentially in the United States and include people of multiple ages and address many social concerns (Generations United, 2007). Intergenerational programs benefit older adults when they play with younger generations. Older adults learn to navigate a technological society, engage in physical activity, and acquire more concentration. Younger generations acquire positive social emotional attitudes about diversity and disabilities. Below is a description of several intergenerational research studies in which participants engaged in intergenerational play activities.

### **Preschoolers and Older Adults**

Intergenerational studies (Heyden & Daly, 2008; Hayes, 2003; Holmes, 2009) were conducted in facilities that combine two generations (preschoolers and older adults) in the same facility. A childcare center located in the same building or in close proximity was found to be a major logistical advantage (Holmes, 2009) allowing for spontaneous interactions between generations and allowing for a more naturalistic approach to cross-age play and interactions. Two studies (Heyden, 2007; Heyden & Daly, 2008) described an accordion book art project for children and older adults. The purpose was to help “participants engage in inter-and-intra-generational discussion to see how they are alike and different” (Heyden & Daly, 2008, p. 82). In this intergenerational site the young children have been at the facility since “infancy, spending time with elders and persons with disabilities” (Heyden & Daly, 2008, p. 85) so the goal was to build upon the attitudes of participants through a shared play activity. The findings concluded that a better understanding between ages can be maintained through dialogic playful interactions.

Similarly, Hayes (2003) examined the following intergenerational play activities: (a) music and singing, (b) cooking, (c) gross motor activities (i.e., indoor basketball and bowling), and (d) art and craft activities. Results from both studies indicated that the most meaningful encounters between generations occurred during non-structured open ended play activities. The sing-along activities engaged the children, but not the older adults. Older adults worked as partners with children and appeared happier when engaged in cooking activities. Additionally, older adults with dementia appeared to have increased concentration when they participated in art and cooking activities. An interesting finding speculated by Hayes (2003) was that older adults with dementia that were spectators and “were not involved directly in an activity

still derived some benefit from being within an intergenerational environment” (p. 124).

Playful intergenerational activities in programs can also change the way children portray older adults. Holmes (2009) interviewed preschoolers individually before and after participating in a cross age program. A key interview question, “What do old people do?” generated positive and realistic perceptions of older adults at the conclusion of the study (Holmes, 2009, p. 117). Responses prior to participation included, “they bought presents and gave hugs or older people are poor, ill, or just hung around” (p. 119). After participation in an intergenerational program, responses were more positive and included “they love to sing or they make good play dough cakes.” The findings provide evidence that intergenerational programs can promote positive attitudes toward older adults.

Unlike the research of Heyden and Daly (2008), Hayes (2003), and Holmes (2009), Rosebrook (2002) conducted an empirical study to examine social playful interactions between older adults and preschoolers. The study included 200 preschool children assigned to one intergenerational (experimental group) and two non-intergenerational (control group) preschool centers. Children in the experimental group had been playing and interacting with senior adults for 12 months prior to administration of the assessments for the study. The preschool children in the experimental group achieved higher developmental scores on the Personal/Social component of the Learning Accomplishment Profile than preschool children in the control group. The researchers determined that these results support the assertion that generationally enriched environments do enhance the person/social development of preschool children. One can easily understand the use of cross-age playful activities in research using preschool participants. Play is ubiquitous and elementary-age children have hobbies, interests, and talents to share with older adults in intergenerational programs.

### **Elementary Students and Older Adults**

Belgrave (2011) and Biggs and Knox (2014) examined cross age interactions and cross age attitudes with elementary-age children. Whereas, Belgrave’s (2011) empirical research examined the effect of music, Biggs and Knox’s case study (2014) examined essays written by Girl Scouts after conducting service learning activities in an assisted living facility. Belgrave (2011) employed singing, structured conversations, instrument playing, and moving to music activities to engage child and older adult participants. Favorite Girl Scout activities included,

... reading to the seniors, celebrating and decorating for holidays and birthdays, playing games together, making arts and crafts, baking cookies, having a

tea party and an ice cream social, doing skits and play for the residents, singing together, planting flowers and gardening, giving manicures, watching television and movies together, walking together, and playing with the residents' pets. (p. 62)

Data analysis of Belgrave's (2011) cross age interventions revealed the interventions "structured conversations" and "moving to music" were more effective in eliciting interaction behaviors than the interventions "singing" and "instrument playing." Results of bi-weekly post-session questionnaires revealed a significant improvement in adults' and children's attitudes after their participation in the intergenerational program. Briggs and Knox's (2014) conclusions were similar. Eighteen essays mentioned social interactional play and activities. In a focus group, one girl stated, "The elderly join our troop and do our activities with us. When I first came here, no one really came out of their little private areas. Once they realized that we would be here twice a month, they started coming out and being near our meetings" (p. 63). Two older adults were former troop leaders when they were younger and "talked about how things are different these days" (p.63). Eleven essays reflected positive attitudes about seniors, growing older, and living in nursing homes. Clearly, benefits for elementary-age students and older adults include increased opportunities for relationship building, learning and mentoring play activities, social interaction, and personal changes.

George and Singer (2011) used a randomized experimental design to evaluate the effects of an intergenerational volunteer program to enhance the quality of life with older adults with dementia. The intervention group participated in hour-long structured volunteer session with a kindergarten class and a sixth grade class in alternating weeks during a 5-month interval. The kindergarten children engaged in singing and small group reading and writing activities and the 6<sup>th</sup> graders participated in intergenerational life-history reminiscence sessions. The control group received 12 hours of seminars on aging. Results indicated a significant decrease in stress for the older adults in the intervention group that participated in cross-age activities with children. This is an important finding for future use of intergenerational programs that involve playful interactions between young and older adults with dementia.

### **College Students and Older Adults**

Some higher education programs offer service learning programs to bridge course work and real-world experiences to expose students more fully to social, educational, and community issues. The Educational Council (2013) defines service learning as "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" ([www.edcouncilk.org/servicelearning](http://www.edcouncilk.org/servicelearning)).

Studies (Lokon, Kinney, & Kunkel, 2012; Penick, Fallshore, & Spencer, 2014) describe intergenerational service learning to supplement college course work and enhance community-university relations. The overall purpose of both investigations was to assess college students' attitudes toward older adults after participating in cross-age interactions. Although the researchers' investigation had similar goals, there were differences in instructional techniques, participants, and methodologies.

The goal of the Penick et al.'s (2014) study was for college students to have weekly discussions with older adults using discussion prompts. The questions were guided by Erikson's theories and "encouraged reminiscence to support ego integrity, while similar and often identical questions for young adults explored identity and relationships" (Penick et al., 2014, p. 31). Using a different instructional technique, Lokon et al.'s (2012) service learning research involved elders with art-making and creative play. Another difference between the two college age studies was Lokon et al. (2012) investigated the impacts of intergenerational programming involving college students and elders with dementia in an intervention called *Opening Minds through Art*. Penick et al.'s (2014) study was an investigation with an established program entitled, *Meaningful Connections*; the older adult participant recruitment was from senior centers and assisted living facilities with no reported health issues. Also, pre- and post-test data were gathered using two measures: (a) Aging Semantic Differential Scale and (b) Community Service Attitudes Scale in Penick et al.'s (2014) investigation compared to a qualitative analysis of 300 journals written by college students in Lokon et al.'s study.

Given the differences between the intergenerational college service learning programs, the reported outcomes were very similar. The findings (Penick et al., 2014; Lokon et al., 2012) provided evidence that both programs positively impacted college students' attitudes toward older adults, with and without dementia. Lokon et al. (2012) noted further research is needed to analyze the impact of an intergenerational art program from the perspective of the older adults.

#### INTERGENERATIONAL PLAY AND TECHNOLOGY

Technology is pervasive in our society which includes computerized gift registries, banking, and email. While some older adults may try to avoid the technology boom and "bank with live tellers and write letters in long hand" (Azar, 2002, p. 28), many older adults are utilizing the internet, social media, and cell phones. Our younger generation is typically more expert in using these technology resources, but many communities offer classes and resources for older adults to get support and to stay technologically connected.



Two studies (Chua, Jung, Lwin, & Theng, 2013; Siyahhan, Barab, & Downton, 2010) examined intergenerational video-game play. Chua et al. (2013) investigated the role of game enjoyment on intergenerational perceptions when younger and older adults played video games, whereas Siyahhan et al. describes parent and child video-game play.

Chua et al. (2013) randomly assigned older and younger dyads to two conditions: (a) video-game condition (n=38, 19 dyads) and (b) non-video game condition (n=36, 18 dyads) to examine the effects of intergenerational perceptions on video-game play for two months. Each pair of participants consisted of one youth and one older adult. The ages of the younger participants ranged from 16-to-18-years and old participants were 60-to-86-years of age. The authors conclude that a shared activity such as video-gaming supported positive perceptions and attitudes towards interaction partners. Additionally, the results indicated game enjoyment played a role in developing positive intergenerational perceptions only for the elderly, not the younger generation.

Additional work by Siyahhan et al. (2010) confirms the potential for video-game play as a context of intergenerational play. A five-week qualitative study was conducted with 7 parent-child dyads (children ages 9–13 years). The families played *Quest Atlantis*, a 3-D video game. The parents reported the intergenerational activity allowed them to spend more quality time with their children. It also provided a way to engage with their children's thinking, character development, and learning.

The preceding studies on intergenerational play point to the benefits and rewards of shared play experiences between older and younger participants. There is little doubt that play is the unifying factor in allowing participants the opportunity to communicate and share in the joys and wonders that play provides. The literature provides a background for the present cross age study in which we asked college students to interview older adults as they reminisce about their play experiences.

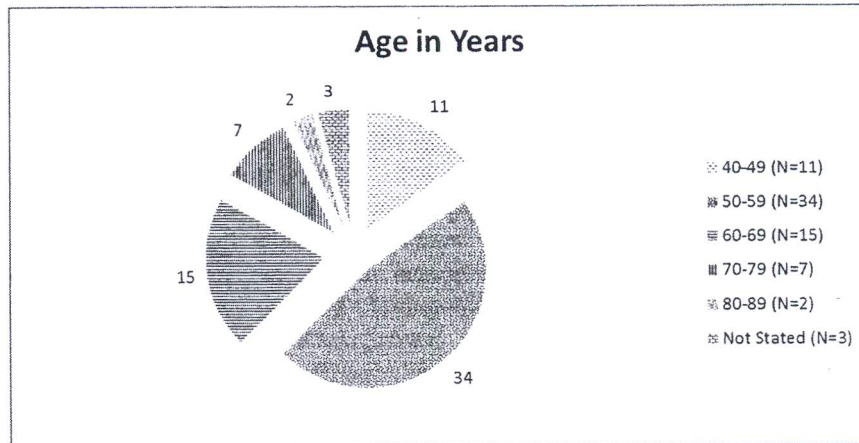
To investigate this topic, we devised an interview project whereby undergraduate and graduate university students interviewed members of earlier generations about their recollections of play when they were young children. These interviews were collected in 2012 and 2013 at two different university campuses in two different states.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 72 undergraduate and graduate students (66 females and 6 males) enrolled in a play course at the two northeastern universities and 72 older adults (55 female and 17 males). The courses took place over one term

(four months) and had 3 credits assigned, distributed in 2.5 - 3 hours a week for 15 weeks. The gender of the interviewers was predominantly female (66 out of 72 or 92%) and the gender of the interviewees was predominantly female (56 out of 72 or 77%). The college students ranged in age from 19 to 28 years. The older adults ranged in age from 46 to 85 years, with an average age of 58 years. The age breakdown of the interviewees is reported in figure 4.1 with 11 respondents being between 40–49, 34 respondents between 50–59, 15 respondents between 60–69, 7 respondents between 70–79, 2 respondents between 80–89, and 3 respondents not reporting their ages.



**Figure 4.1.** This figure represents a percentage of ages of the interviewees. The majority of the older adults were between 50-and-59 years of age.

All but two of the interviewers reported socioeconomic status. The SES was reported for the interviewees' childhood. The predominant memories were from members of the middle class. The majority of the interviewees self-reported themselves to be middle SES (63.9%), with low SES following (25%), and high SES being the least reported (6.9%).

### Procedure

The authors, who were also the students' instructors, asked students to obtain a statement from interviewees giving permission for use of the information gathered without identifying the interviewee. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their grade if permission was not obtained. IRB approval was granted as an exempt research project.

The play interview project had three objectives corresponding to the traditional knowledge, skills, and concepts of undergraduate and graduate course work: (a) to improve the learning of developmental concepts and theories related to life span research (Erikson, 1963), (b) to enhance research-

related skills, such as interviewing, (c) for college students to draw conclusions about childhood play by learning about an older adult's memories of play.

To achieve these goals, the project had the following tasks: (a) interview a person who was 25 years older by means of an open-ended interview, (b) transcribe and report the interview, (c) examine similarities and differences between their childhood play and the older adult's play, and (d) write a summary paper that combined objective reporting, connecting to theoretical concepts reflecting trends in play over at least two generations.

The conceptual and practical knowledge necessary to complete the assignment was explained in detail in sessions during the course. These sessions included the importance of play in the development of children and older adults. There was also limited practice of interviewing techniques and strategies, including how to present questions and gather play memories, how to be sensitive to interviewees' reactions and feelings, and how to avoid judgments and ethical issues related to research with human subjects. Hand-outs and guidelines related to the assignment were distributed and discussed.

For the data collections, the students were encouraged to meet an older person and interview him or her face to face. A few of the interviews were conducted via telephone, but all interviews were conducted during "real time" to allow for back and forth interactions between participants. Wellin (2007) suggests avoiding rules about selection of perspective interviewees. To make it easier for the students, family members were allowed as candidates for the interview, as long as they met the age requirements of a person 25 years older than the interviewer. Most of the interviewees were women (76.4%) and the age ranged from 48 to 85 years ( $M = 58.3$ ;  $SD = 9.0$ ). Students were to transcribe interview questions and responses verbatim whenever possible.

The students then completed a short paper that included a full description of the interview questions and responses, including where, when, with whom, and what the interviewees remembered about their childhood play experiences, comparison of their own childhood play experiences with that of the person they interviewed, and a summary of trends they discovered in intergenerational play. Students were instructed to adhere to American Psychological Association format in their papers.

### **Data Analysis**

The authors, with the help of our graduate assistant, first read all the responses to the questions to become acquainted with the data. Then the transcribed student responses were entered into an EXCEL spreadsheet as categories emerged from the data. Specific details or units of meaning were identified in each response. The next step was to combine ideas into more

specific categories, based on the repetition among threads of similarities. Using the constant-comparison method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), first developed in their classic volume on naturalistic inquiry, a set of categories emerged and was refined by both authors. Consensus was reached between the two researchers in the coding and category system. Play categories that emerged included play memories of setting (indoors or outdoors), play memories of playmates, memories of materials used in play, and presence of technology. Importing the information into an EXCEL spreadsheet allowed for quantifying and comparing frequencies of responses, allowing patterns and trends to emerge.

## RESULTS

After the 72 interview data were entered into an EXCEL spreadsheet, a number of quantitative patterns could be discerned. The following is a summary of some of the trends that emerged.

### Play Memories: Setting

The types of setting where the interviewees grew up were divided into rural (including small towns), suburban, and urban. Not all of the interviewees reported on the setting, so only 43 of the 72 interviews could be analyzed. Of these, 24 (55.8%) reported memories of play in rural areas (woods, grandparents' farm, open fields, streets in a small town), 11 (26%) reported memories in urban areas, and 8 (18.6%) reported memories in suburban areas.

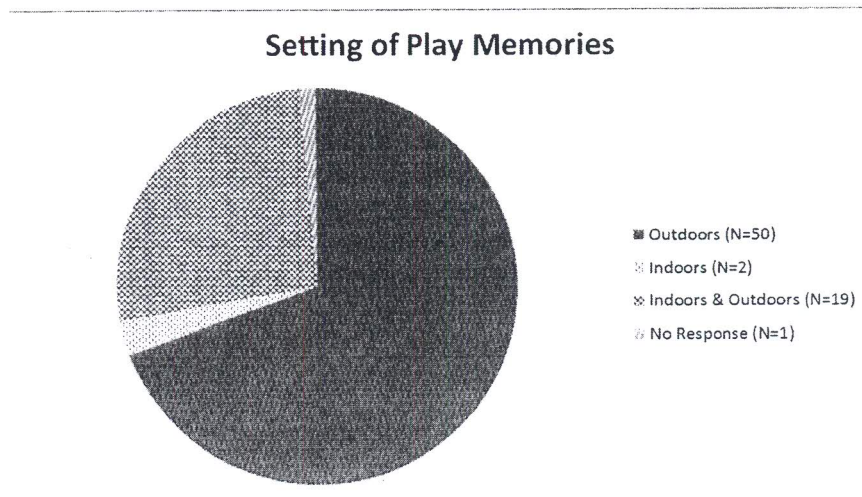
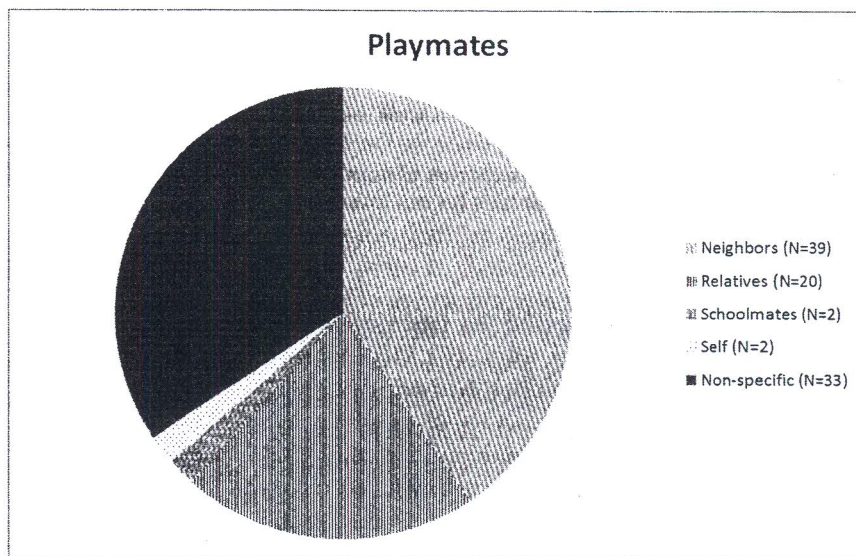


Figure 4.2. Most interviewees reported playing outdoors during their childhood.

Related to the setting is the type of play that the interviewees reported as memorable. The majority of the play memories were of outdoor play (including school playgrounds) (70.4%), with a combination of indoor and outdoor play reported by 28.8 %, and indoor play only by 2.8%. One interviewee did not report in this category. It should be noted that the interviewees most probably played both indoors and outdoors, but when asked to recall their memories of play, 88% reported on their play out of doors.

### Play Memories of Playmates

Many of the respondents reported with whom they remembered playing as children. They could have reported more than one category. The categories that emerged were neighbors (39 out of 72 or 54%), relatives (20 out of 72 or 28%), schoolmates or self (2 out of 72 or 2.7%), or non-specified (33 out of 72 or 45.8%).

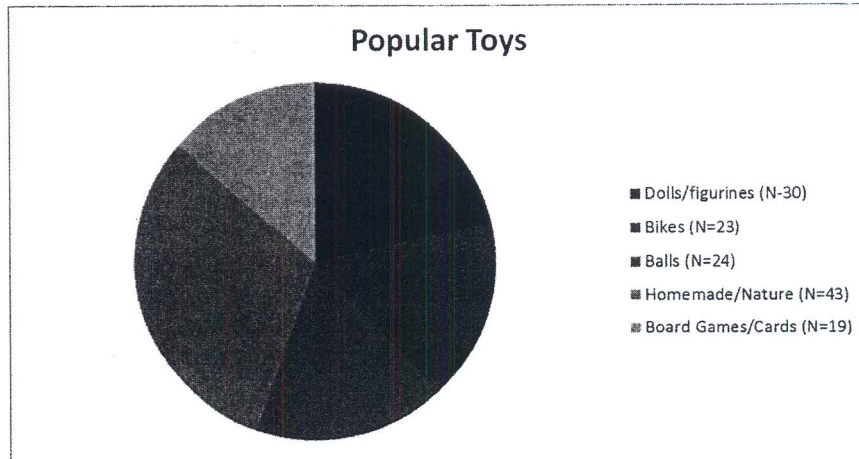


**Figure 4.3.** Interviewees reported memories of playmates. Most played with either neighbors or relatives.

### Play Memories of Popular Toys

As part of the interview, the respondents mentioned many different types of toys or play objects in their memories of childhood play. Some of the categories that emerged from the data analysis were dolls and figurines, bikes, balls, board games, and handmade or natural materials. Respondents could list more than one of these categories in their responses. The most popular play material was natural or handmade items such as sticks, dirt, structures made

out of cardboard, and so forth. This was mentioned by 43 of the 72 respondents (59.7%). Dolls and figurines were the second most mentioned item (30 out of 72 or 41.6%), with balls (24 out of 72 or 33.3%) and bikes (23 out of 72 or 31.9%) ranking third and fourth in popularity. Board games (including playing cards) were mentioned by 19 of the respondents (26%).



**Figure 4.4.** Percentage of play memories of popular toys. Dolls, figurines, and homemade objects were popular toys for our interviewees.

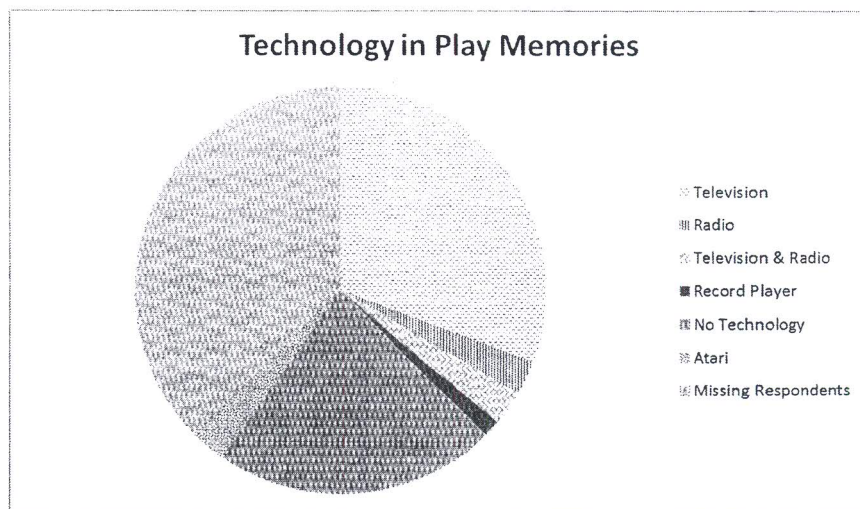
### Technology and Play

Some of the interviewees asked the interviewees about memories of using technology. Forty-five older adults (62.5%) included technology or lack of technology in their play memories. Not surprisingly, 35.6% (16 out of 45) of the respondents said they did not recall using any technology in their childhood. Television was in the homes and viewed by 48.9% (22 out of 45) of the interviewees. The other responses included radio (4.4%), radio and television (4.4%), record player (2.2%) and Atari (4.4%).

## DISCUSSION

College students were asked to interview a person at least 25 years their senior and ask them to reflect on memories from childhood play. The method described is based on Parker's (1995) continuity theory approach to reminiscence. The goal was to highlight the play experiences of older adults and examine how play appeared to them and the role of play in past generations.

The results seemed to justify the academic value based on collecting and analyzing an older person's play memories. It helped college students understand developmental concepts related to play and integrate them with theory



**Figure 4.5. Technology and Play.** Most interviewees that responded to this question either said they did not use technology or they reported watching television.

to improve research-related skills. Similar benefits appear in college intergenerational service learning projects (Lokon et al., 2012; Penick et al., 2014) as college students learn to use art projects or conversations with older adults. Penick et al. (2014) found that when reminiscence is used in “conjunction with intergenerational service learning programs, younger and older participants share memories in an effort to gain insight into their own lives as well as into the lives of one another” (p. 28).

Therefore, using reminiscence theory to gather information on an older person’s play experiences in play coursework has the potential to facilitate the attainment of our learning objectives for college students: (a) to improve the learning of developmental concepts and theories related to life span research (Erikson, 1963), (b) to enhance research-related skills, such as interviewing, and (c) for college students to draw conclusions about childhood play by learning about an older adult’s memories of play. Penick et al. (2014) further notes that getting generations together can be promising but one must fully consider the activity that contributes to one’s goals. In our case we wanted college students to bridge Erikson’s (1963) psychosocial theory with concepts of reminiscence theory. We brought college students together with older adults to become more secure in their sense of identity as play experiences were re-experienced and similar and different perspectives were shared.

According to our results, the value of interviewing an older person about play memories goes beyond the academic aims of the assignment. College students may begin to examine the state of play in today's schools and become advocates for play, both indoor and outdoor. The data suggest that older adults shared memories of playing outdoors and in nature rather than indoors. Similarly, Sandburg (2001) reported that outdoor play created the strongest play memories from childhood when adults reported childhood play experiences. Pre-service college students may learn to challenge current academic standards and provide more outdoor play when they become in-service teachers. The findings with regard to playmates are contrary to previous play memory research (Sandburg, 2001).

The majority of our older adults (54%) reported playing with neighbors and Sandburg's (2001) adults reported mothers were primarily involved in their play activities. The differences may be Sandburg (2001) asked adults to recall memories at specific stages in childhood (i.e., 3–6 years, 7–12 years, 13–18 years and in adulthood). The stages (3–6 years, 7–12 years) in Sandburg's (2001) study are periods in a person's life span in which there is a strong attachment to mother and family members. This was described in the first 3 stages of Erikson's (1963) psychosocial stages: (a) basic trust vs. mistrust (0–2 years), (b) autonomy vs. shame and doubt (2–4 years), and (c) initiative vs. guilt (4–5 years) are periods in a child's development associated with significant relationship, specifically mother and family members. The present study did not specify specific time periods to recall childhood memories and older adults may have been recalling play memories from middle childhood, rather than early childhood years, which would explain the difference between the two studies.

Dolls have consistently engaged younger and older generations in play interactions so the results that 44.6% of the respondents recalled dolls and figurines as a popular toy preference was consistent with the Davis et al.'s (2001) research related to intergenerational learning through play. Whereas, playing with natural or handmade objects could have been connected to participant's memories of outdoor play and playing in open spaces.

Results reported from the technology questions are not surprising because the average age of the interviewee was 58-years-old. Television was recalled as a childhood memory by 48.9 % of the older adults and 35.6 % reported not using any form of technology at all in their play. At the end of World War II in the 1950s a few households had television, then between 1950 to 1960 television gained in popularity and was present in many American households. The college students interviewed mostly participants born between 1950 and 1960 when households were just beginning to purchase and watch television. The Internet, email, and on-line shopping, now changing our society and intergenerational video game play (Chua, et al., 2013; Siyahhan, et



al., 2010), is a new form of play that could be used to develop and support learning and social interaction across generations.

In summary, our study in play reminiscing confirms most of the previous findings in studies on intergenerational play. Outdoor play predominated in the play memories of the older adults, play materials were often made from found materials or common objects such as dolls or bicycles, and most of the older adults remembered playing with neighbors or family members. Technology did not factor in as a major influence for nearly all of the interviewees. When technology was mentioned, it had limited use in terms of time and variety. One of the important outcomes of this study is the use of the one-on-one interview method as a means for younger generations to interact in a meaningful manner with older generations about the topic of play, which is a common component of all of their childhood experiences and memories. In other words, the method was just as important as the findings of this study for the participants.

### **Future Research**

As a small study involving 72 interviews, the purpose was to explore the interview method for university students in their studies of play across the lifespan. This type of study, along with other service learning projects whereby college students interact directly with members of other generations needs further study. All teacher education programs build in experiences for pre-service teachers to interact directly with younger generations, but few require experiences with older generations. Opportunities to bridge the older and younger generations as part of the teacher preparation program, such as in the models researched by Penick et al. (2014) need further study to determine if such models could impact the teaching profession as they learn to tap into the potential of the elder population in educating young children. Such models of teacher preparation have the potential to impact early childhood education on a broader scale if determined to be effective in future research.

Another future study could replicate the interview methodology and ask university students to interview someone from a younger generation, such as an elementary-age child, about his or her play experiences. Since one of the patterns implied in the current study was that the play patterns of the university students and the older adults had much in common with each other, interviewing a member of the current generation (i.e., children born in the last 10 years) could highlight more recent trends in play patterns since the influx of technology has taken place. Questions about the children's play settings (inside vs. outside), play materials, and play partners would allow comparative patterns to emerge between the generation of the future teachers and the generation which they will be teaching. Such research would help future teachers understand the day to day realities of children today.

Another related subject of future research could involve studying today's children playing with technology in intergenerational play venues. Several studies, such as those by Chua, et al. (2013) and Siyahhan et al. (2010) have shown that members of today's generation and past generations approach technology in very different ways. As children become more and more adapted to technological devices in their everyday lives, the play that they engage in with their elders is bound to change and adapt as well, bringing the older generations along. For example, using interactive video and audio communications allows children and grandparents the opportunity to communicate—and play—across distances in real time. How does this type of technologically-assisted play impact both partners of the dyad, the older and younger participants? For older children, playing games via the internet with members of older generations could open the possibilities for both generations to learn from each other. Children and elders can participate in word games, strategy games (e.g., chess), and other familiar and not so familiar games without being in the same room. Researching the possibilities provided by technology would be an important next step for studies of intergenerational play.

### Limitations

There are a few limitations to our study. First, it was a convenience sample drawn from students in existing play courses. Another limitation was the interview data were collected by 72 different interviewers, creating inherent variability in the data collection process. As these were students with limited interviewing experience, the authors needed to keep in mind that there were bound to be some biases in their reports. Furthermore, some of the students were very detailed and comprehensive in their reporting of the interviews; whereas others were more parsimonious in their reporting of the details. Since this was an investigation into the reminiscing of the respondents and their interviewers, what the interviewee and interviewer chose to report signaled what was important in their memories and reporting on childhood play. Thus, this limitation was also considered as an important piece of the evidence as to what was memorable enough to report or reminisce about over the course of the interview and the writing of the paper.

A third limitation was the gender of the interviewers was predominantly female (66 out of 72 or 92%) and the gender of the interviewees was predominantly female (76%). Thus, the results are skewed toward female biases in the memories of play and the reporting on these memories. The interviewers were permitted to select their subjects and could include family members. The only criteria were that the interviewees must be at least 25 years older than the interviewers. So the selection of female subjects was the choice of

the interviewees, perhaps due to convenience or due to identification of similar interests.

## CONCLUSIONS

Intergenerational play covers a wide range of possibilities, from programs that unite the generations in play, to studies of how play changes over one's lifespan, to how play has changed across several generations. As the U.S. population ages and lives longer, the potential to use technology and other means to connect members of one generation to another grows exponentially. This study pointed to the possibilities of pre-service teachers becoming change agents in the process of tapping into the potentialities of using play, technology, and cross generational programs in the educational process of young children with positive outcomes for all participants, young and older.

## NOTES

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