

Original articles

Impact of dialogic intergenerational activities on the perception of children, adolescents and elderly

Impacto de atividades dialógicas intergeracionais na percepção de crianças, adolescentes e idosos

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: to analyze the impact that intergenerational dialogic activities can have on the perception that children and adolescents have with respect to elderly and vice versa.

Methods: the participants were twelve elderly and twenty-one children and adolescents interested in developing intergenerational dialogic activities. For eight months, they attended weekly joint activities organized around oral dialogical activities of reading and writing, involving the relationship among generations. At the end of this period, semi-structured interviews were carried out with subjects to verify the activities impact on them.

Results: responses were organized and interpreted in accordance with the methodological proposal of Content Analysis, resulting in the formulation of seven categories. These categories showed a less discriminatory view of the participants, facing the opposite generation.

Conclusion: in regard to the elderly, the activities provided remembrance of the past and a reframe of the present, expanding self perception, and strengthening the intergenerational ties. Children and adolescents, in turn, recognized the need to overcome negative stereotypes about old age and realized the learning opportunities that may arise through the interaction with the elderly.

Keywords: Aging; Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences; Intergenerational Relations

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar o impacto que atividades dialógicas intergeracionais pode ter na percepção que crianças e adolescentes têm sobre pessoas idosas e vice-versa.

Métodos: integraram a amostra da pesquisa 12 idosos e 21 crianças e adolescentes interessados em desenvolver atividades dialógicas intergeracionais. Durante oito meses, eles participaram de atividades conjuntas organizadas semanalmente em torno de atividades dialógicas orais, de leitura e de escrita, envolvendo a intergeracionalidade. Ao final deste período, foram aplicadas entrevistas semiestruturadas junto aos sujeitos da pesquisa para verificar o impacto dessas atividades sobre eles.

Resultados: as respostas foram organizadas e interpretadas de acordo com a proposição metodológica da Análise de Conteúdo, resultando na formulação de sete categorias. Estas evidenciaram uma visão menos preconceituosa dos participantes frente à geração oposta.

Conclusão: no tangente aos idosos, os mesmos afirmaram que as atividades os levou a relembrar o passado e ressignificar o presente, ampliando a percepção que tinham de si próprios e fortalecendo o vínculo intergeracional. Crianças e adolescentes, por sua vez, reconheceram a necessidade de ultrapassarem estereótipos negativos em torno da velhice e perceberam as possibilidades de aprendizagem que podem surgir mediante o convívio com os idosos.

Descritores: Envelhecimento; Fonoaudiologia; Relação entre Gerações

INTRODUCTION

The fast world growth of human longevity has become more and more evident and challenging. Brazil, which until the 1980s was considered a country of the young, will have its age profile changed, becoming one of the countries with the highest number of aged people in the near future. IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) data point that Brazil will be the sixth country in the world in terms of aged people in 2025¹.

This continuous growth of the aging population has been raising national and international legislative initiatives towards health protection, social promotion and safety of subjects over 60 years old. Such initiatives ultimately focus on the quality of life of people who are reaching older ages due to the development of health sciences. The text “Active ageing: a policy framework” released by the World Health Organization (WHO), announces that old age should be considered not only a life stage apart, but a wider process, dependent on social conditions, political, economic and health possibilities, which permeate each subject as well as social groups’ history².

As for social participation, it is pointed out the importance of integrating aging subjects within their families and communities by strengthening the ties between people from different generations. This proposal is grounded in the recognition of elders’ human rights, as well as in the principles of autonomy, independence, participation, dignity, care and self-fulfillment of the elderly, named by WHO as “Active Ageing”².

The perspective of active ageing is distant from a restricting notion, merely guided by elders’ biological needs or losses, it stresses the relevance that these subjects assume to build a fairer, healthier, more educated and, therefore, more humanized society. Such a point of view moves away from the simplistic association, directly correlating ageing with disease, dependence and economic burden to the opposite direction, focusing on older people as a social resource, a taxpayer and society beneficiary. Therefore, old age is configured as a useful time, covered in possibilities of accomplishments and re-meanings, while ageing is a process full of meanings built along a lifetime, and may take new meanings, if old age should be viewed under a constructive bias by confronting stereotypes loaded with negative connotations³.

A possible way to put down such stereotypes on old age is by bridging the gap between different generations. Thus, a study⁴ held with adolescents at a school

in the northern region of Paraná State, Brazil, tried to analyze the interaction between adolescents and older people, and their perception on the different situations surrounding ageing. Results showed that positive conceptions about the elderly came from a statistically significant number of adolescents, which would daily interact with them. This study points out that there is a wider gap between the elders and the young, and such a gap must be bridged so that people from different generations reframe their discriminatory perceptions on each other. A research study focusing on an across-generations program of health promotion, in the city of Uruguaiana⁵, positively influenced young and elders’ interrelationships. Both groups carried out weekly activities and participated in workshops and conversation rounds, holding discussions on ageing. This research study aimed to evidence the influence of such activities on young and elders’ quality of life. Its results pointed out that elders and young people referred to a profitable closer relation between them, stressing the importance of the program of health promotion targeting intergenerational relationships. In another investigation held in Southern Brazil⁶, the ties established between the generations by means of intergenerational programs were proved positive. It also unveiled that intergenerational activities not only strengthen the relationship between people from different ages, but also have beneficial effects on the health and welfare of all the involved generations⁶.

Keeping in mind the aforementioned benefits of intergenerational activities to put down stereotypes on old age, the present study proposes an articulation of such activities with a speech-language therapeutic work mediated by the discourse practices of the language. In this context, language is conceived as an essential practice, able to reassure elders’ continuous participation and engagement within their families and communities, involving people from different generations⁷.

Thus, it is worth stressing the role of language while dialogical practice in health promotion, overcoming discriminations around ageing as well as in the implementation of intergenerational meetings. Viewing the relevant role of the language in the social integration of people from all ages and generations, the current study aims to analyze the impact that intergenerational activities, mediated by dialogical practices, may have on the perception that children and adolescents hold towards elderly people, and vice-versa.

METHODS

The current research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná, under protocol number 102/08. Thus, meeting all the criteria of the committee, all participants signed the Free Consent Form and had their rights of confidentiality, free participation and drop out of the study at any moment, complied. Moreover, keeping in mind that the sample also entailed minors, they accepted to participate, and their parents or guardians signed the Free Consent Form.

The present study is analytical, longitudinal, qualitative and quantitative. In order to organize and interpret data, a methodological proposal known as Content Analysis (CA) by Bardin⁸ is used. According to this author, CA is a methodological device that carefully examines linguistic productions and their parts, enabling objective data analysis without disregarding subjectivity fruitfulness, which is present in any language productions. The central axis of the CA is related to the action of inferring, that is, implying in a logical way over quantitative and qualitative indicators, exploring the collected language content. In qualitative terms, the CA is characterized by the fact that the inference lies on the linguistic index itself, which can be an account, a sentence or a word. From a quantitative standpoint, the inference process of the CA lies on the recurrence of the researched linguistic material. Therefore, from the frequency exam, the focus lies on the major recurrence of the linguistic indexes produced by the participants, thus enabling text interpretation. That is, data categorization and analysis take into account the thematic recurrences present in the participants' accounts.

The research sample comprised 21 children and adolescents from a non-governmental organization which carries out activities in the opposite period from the school shift, and 12 elders from a university extension program, which offers weekly dialogical activities on oral and written practices. As an inclusion criterion, the participants should often attend the groups during the opposite period from the school shift for one year. Thus, the research sample totaled 33 subjects.

After eight months of joint weekly activities with an average of 100 minutes, based on discourse practices addressing intergeneration relationships, data collection began. During the activities, the young and elders discussed orally, read and wrote specifically about personal accounts on intergenerational

relationships, involving the different factors which encompass a generation. Among such factors, historical determinants that feature several generations, generation gap in the family context, intergenerational conflicts in the corporate context and intergenerational prejudice were focused.

A semi-structured interview, applied by the researchers, was used for data collection. The interview was divided in two parts: the first part aimed to feature the subjects' socioeconomical profile; and the second one asked about the possible changes in the representation of the opposite generation in view of the developed activities.

RESULTS

The results in this study are organized in two parts. The first one contemplates participants' general profile, including sex, age, marital status, schooling, income and who they live with. The second one features the impact of the intergenerational activities, mediated by dialogical practices, on the perception of the children and adolescents over the elders and vice-versa, comprising seven categories with their meanings. These categories, elaborated according to the Content Analysis, are organized in a descending order of recurrences in the participants' answers.

Profile of the Participants in the Research

Among the older participants, 12 subjects were between 50 and 90 years old. The 21 younger participants were between 10 and 15 years old. Average age of the elderly participants was 68.7 years. As for the children and adolescents, their average age was 11.4 years. Among the elderly subjects, only two participants were male, eight had complete higher education, one had incomplete higher education, one had completed basic education, one never attended school, and one did not answer. Elderly subjects' income ranged from less than one minimum Brazilian wage to over three minimum Brazilian wages, being higher wages related to a higher educational level. As for marital status, four were married, three were divorced, three were single and two were widowers/widows. Regarding family interaction, four elders reported to live with their spouses and children, three reported to live with children and grandchildren, two referred to live with only their children, and three reported to live alone, according to Table 1, presented below.

Table 1. Profile of the elderly participants' sample

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	%
SEX		
Male	2	25.0%
Female	10	75.0%
AGES		
51 to 58 years old	2	16.7%
63 to 67 years old	5	41.6%
71 to 77 years old	3	25.0%
82 to 83 years old	2	16.7%
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	3	25.0 %
Married	4	33.30%
Divorced	3	25.0%
Widows/ers	2	16.6 %
SCHOOLING		
Complete Higher Education	8	66.6%
Incomplete Higher Education	1	8.3%
Complete Basic Level	1	8.3%
Did not attend school	1	8.3%
Did not answer	1	8.3%
MONTHLY INCOME		
Less than one minimum Brazilian wage	1	8.3%
Up to one minimum Brazilian wage	3	25.0%
Up to three minimum Brazilian wages	2	16.6%
More than three minimum Brazilian wages	5	41.6%
Did not answer	1	8.3%
WHO THEY LIVE WITH		
Husband, wife and children	4	33.3
Children and grandchildren	3	25%
Children	2	16.6 %
Alone	3	25%

Source: the authors

The group entailing the children and adolescents totaled 21 participants. They were single and lived with their families, featuring diversified members and types: some were more conventional, comprising fathers, mothers and siblings; others comprised stepmothers

and stepfathers, and still families entailing uncles and/or grandparents as their guardians; 12 were male, and 9 were female, all were in the basic educational level, grades according to their age, none worked, so they did not have any income source, according to Table 2.

Table 2. Profile of the young participants' sample

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	%
SEX		
Male	12	57.1%
Female	9	42.9%
AGES		
10 to 12 years old	14	66.6%
13 to 15 years old	7	33.3%
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	21	100.0%
SCHOOLING		
Incomplete Basic School	21	100.0%
GRADE		
5th grade	1	4.7%
6th grade	10	47.6%
7th grade	7	33.3%
8th grade	2	9.5%
Did not answer	1	4.7%
WHO THEY LIVE WITH		
Father, mother, siblings, stepmother, stepfather	12	57.14%
Father, mother and grandparents	4	19.04%
Father, mother, uncle or aunt	1	4.76%
Father and siblings	1	4.76%
Did not answer	3	14.28%

Source: the authors

Impact of the intergenerational activities on the perception of children and adolescents about the elderly and vice-versa

Seven categories of analysis emerged from the participants' speeches: learning with the other, respect and valuing, reduction of the discriminations, tie strengthening, experience exchange, positive interaction with children and adolescents, and satisfactory interaction with elderly people. These categories are organized in a descending order, following the highest number of occurrences in the answers provided in the applied interviews by the children, adolescents and elders, according to the sequence below.

Category 1: Learning with the other (61.89 % of children and adolescents)

Most children and adolescents pointed out that they could learn from the elders' life history, besides getting to know social and personal aspects of the time those elders were young. The intergenerational meetings, in their perception, provided them with broad learning,

referred to in different aspects and comprising: learn to talk, learn about the different, learn to respect the elderly. That is, in the children and adolescents' accounts, there is recurrent use of the word learning, and refers to the possibility of interacting with elderly people, broadening their understanding about them and the social context they are in. Among the children and adolescents' accounts, it can be pointed out the following: *"We learned about the differences between children and elders"; "I learned to respect the elders"; "I learned to talk to elders"; "I love it because they tell us about their life history, and stuff about their old times."*

Category 2: Respect and valuing (58.32% of the elders)

For most elders, their participation in the program brought about positive changes on the way they perceive children and adolescents, and relate to them. When they justified these changes, they reported several feelings perceived from the intergenerational activities. Among those, the most mentioned ones were feelings of respect towards

the young, and a sensation of fulfilment for being willing to listen to the children and adolescents, who in turn awaken the elders' own memories through their reports and conflicts. Moreover, the elders also referred to their own desire of letting the young out of themselves, and their wish to be more accessible to the young, making them feel comfortable, while perceiving that they also have knowledge and life experiences to help elders. Elderly group's accounts refer to the following: *"When I get near them, I feel happy and fulfilled, get more lively!"*; *"I realized that I should understand younger people better, without pushing them much, after all, each one is unique."*

Category 3: Reduction of discriminations (56.4% of the children and adolescents)

A significant number of children and adolescents, standing out for the majority of the younger generation, reported that their perception on elders changed positively due to the intergenerational meetings, ultimately the reduction of discrimination. These participants reported that it was necessary to respect the differences between the generations. For them, it is necessary to develop another view of the elders, focusing on mutual care and values that the elders sustain. By justifying the perceived changes, they reported that they had the chance to think about the elders in a more positive facet, observing that their interaction can be enhanced as elders' values are considered and respected. The children and adolescents' accounts stressed this category, according to the following: *"I've started having more respect, patience and care."*; *"We should respect their values."*; *"I've changed my opinion, they aren't grumpy."*; *"I saw them on the street, and thought they were poor things, but now I think it's nice they're really healthy."*; *"You're going to grow old one day, you'll go through each phase of a lifetime. Then, don't be judgemental."*

Category 4: Tie strengthening (41.66 % of the elders)

A significant number of elders perceived that the intergenerational activities enabled the interaction and tie strengthening with the children and adolescents. To these elders, the relationship with people from younger generations is necessary in order to have effective interaction between them. Thus, they mentioned that after such interaction, they perceived they were able to strengthen ties between

generations, recognizing values of their life history. To them: *"Interacting with another generation contributed to enhance my interpersonal relationships"*; *"This relationship was great, elders and young people have the same opportunity to perceive this interaction as learning"*; *"It was an excellent opportunity to rescue and strengthen ties between generations, recognizing their own history."*

Category 5: Experience exchange (25% of the elders)

To another number of elders, the intergenerational activities were perceived as capable of making exchanges of knowledge and experiences possible. They stated that such activities were enriching not only for the generation of children and adolescents, but also for the elderly, as they broadened their worldview, promoting dialogues and reflections. Among their accounts, we have these statements: *"I believe that they enrich both generations. They take the elderly from their framed universe, and add elders' personal value to the young."*; *"Youth did good to me."*; *"They brought about reflections that I hadn't had before."*; *"That broadened understanding about myself."*

Category 6: Positive relationship with children and adolescents (20.83% of the elders)

To a group of elders, the intergenerational activities did not result in any changes in their way of perceiving and relating to people of younger generations. Being questioned about the reason for that, they explained that, along their lifetime, they had always been close to children and adolescents, they already enjoyed this interaction, as it can be followed in this speech: *"There were no changes, I already had a good relationship to them."*

Category 7: Satisfactory interaction with elders (11.9% of children and adolescents)

To a certain number of children and adolescents, it was not also possible to perceive any changes in their relationships to the elderly. According to their reports, they already had a good interaction with people from older generations, ultimately with their grandparents. Therefore, those children and adolescents stated: *"I haven't perceived any changes, I've already lived with older people, and I already like them"*; *"No, because I've already lived with my grandma."*

DISCUSSION

Regarding the elderly participants in this research study, it was evidenced women's predominance. On the other hand, among the children and adolescents, the opposite could be observed, males predominated. These data enable to infer that there has been a feminization of old age, corroborating the statistical profile held by IBGE¹ (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), which indicates female predominance in the older population all over Brazil. One of the reasons presented for such a phenomenon is related to a higher search of health services⁹ on the part of women since the 1980s. The same is not verified among men, who have to respond to some psychosocial factors, which relate them to some chauvinist and invulnerable positions, moving them away from health services, even when they feel fragile¹⁰.

Unlike the elderly segment, IBGE evidenced that among the young Brazilian population, ages between 10 and 19 years old, males predominate¹. However, such predominance decreases as age increases, for several reasons. Among them, it can be pointed out the use of alcohol and drugs, besides a higher rate of cardiovascular diseases among men, leading them to die earlier than women¹¹.

As for elders' monthly income and schooling, it could be observed the proportionality between educational level and income, thus, the ones with complete higher education had higher income, comprising over three minimum Brazilian wages. Among the elders without higher education, accounting for 37.3% in this research, income did not go over one minimum Brazilian wage. Likewise, another study presents similar results, evidencing that elders with complete higher education earn monthly income ranging three to five minimum Brazilian wages, being significantly higher than that of elders with lower educational level¹².

In relation to the impact of intergenerational activities on the perception of children and adolescents over the elderly and vice-versa, in category (1) "Learning with the other," it is possible to infer that children and adolescents perceived that their relationship to the elders provided them with learning possibilities. To them, the interaction with the elderly made them review discriminating positions, learning to respect them and value their life history. In this sense, this study evidences the relevance of promoting intergenerational activities mediated by dialogical practices in order to get children, adolescents and elderly people closer, to the extent that younger people realize that they

can value the elderly, recognizing them as knowledge mediators. In a study aiming to analyze the subjective changes of intergenerational relationships in society, it can be perceived that such relations have currently been established by the cultural transmission occurring from one generation to another by means of identification points they perceive among themselves¹³.

Category (2), "Respect and Valuing", consists of the recognition on the part of the elders of the importance to respect and value children and adolescents. That is, by means of intergenerational activities, they could perceive that, apart from having knowledge to be shared with younger generations, elders can also learn with children and adolescents, valuing their experiences and the way they face life. Similar results were obtained in a study which held recreational activities with young people and elderly people in a public park in the municipality of São Paulo, Brazil, evidencing the relevance of intergenerational practice on the way elders viewed the other generation. According to this study, people from different generations came closer, to the extent that older people could perceive that the young are capable of establishing a peaceful coexistence. Thus, in their view, such coexistence can be beneficial to both generations, because elders as well as young people have something to learn and something to teach¹⁴.

Category (3), "Discrimination Reduction", points out that intergenerational activities made children and adolescents perceive and respect the existing differences among people from several generations because they started questioning some stereotypes correlating old age to grumpiness, fragility and disease. That is, children and adolescents in an effective relationship to the elders could review taken-for-granted positions relating, in a simplistic way, old age to physical decay and social burden. In this sense, the WHO points out the importance of putting down negative concepts which have been adopted towards old age, unveiling the need to promote realistic and positive images of active ageing by means of activities involving all generations².

Category (4), "Strengthening of Ties", evidenced that for a significant number of elders, that is, 40% of them, intergenerational activities bring about interaction and strengthening of ties. In their accounts, the elders claimed that they had the opportunity to perceive that intergenerational meetings may take them to value the stories they tell younger people. They point out that the bonding established between them contributed to enhance their interpersonal relations. Thus, a study

carried out with grandmothers caring for their grandchildren in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, pointed that elders who established a family bonding with younger generations perceive the enhancement in their quality of life, involving their own physical and emotional health¹⁵. Therefore, it is possibly to infer that effective bonding between people from different ages may contribute to older people's more social participation, paramount for ageing people's health promotion².

Regarding category (5), "Experience Exchange", it was verified that intergenerational meetings favor knowledge exchange. To the older participants, such activities gave them the chance to reflect and recognize their own values, perceiving that they are capable of passing these values on to children and adolescents. Meanwhile, they perceived that younger people are also capable of contributing to the elders, leading them to broaden their self-understanding.

Therefore, by means of intergenerational meetings, elders recognize that experiences from people of different generations, if accepted and valued, may promote the reciprocity between them. Research held with young Computer Science students and elderly people proved the effectiveness of sharing experiences between generations. Results of this research showed that the elders were capable of recognizing the value of their own history, and young people, responsible for transmitting some computing knowledge, could review their negative perceptions on older people, besides perceiving how helpful they could be to this ageing population, helping them use the new technologies¹⁶.

In relation to categories (6 and 7), "Positive relationship to children and adolescents" and "Satisfactory Relationship with the elderly," children, adolescents and older people claimed that they already had a positive coexistence with different generations in family settings, prior to the intergenerational activity. These categories unveiled the extent to which established lifetime intergenerational relationships are relevant to determine the perception that elders have over younger people and vice-versa. Another study⁷ involving family and intergenerationality, also showed that an effective family interaction between people from different ages may positively influence intergenerational relationships out of the family context. Similarly, daily coexistence between grandparents and grandchildren strengthens their interaction, even if it features peaceful and conflicting moments¹⁷.

Consequently, it deems necessary to consider the relevance that actions on health promotion aiming

at intergenerational meetings may take in order to establish interactions capable of benefitting children, adolescents and aged people concomitantly.

CONCLUSION

Data analysis of this study enabled to evidence that dialogic intergenerational activities provided moments of learning, proximity and experience exchange among elderly people, children and adolescents. Similarly, it showed that such activities positively influence the perception that children and adolescents have over the elderly and vice-versa. From the elders' point of view, the possibility of establishing a dialogue and participating in group activities with children and adolescents led them to consider the need to respect and value the younger generation. On the other hand, children and adolescents enunciated that the intergenerational meetings enabled reflections on stereotyped views of the old age, dimming judgemental representations, loaded with negative meanings.

It is worth pointing out that the current research study was elaborated with a limited number of subjects, that is why it does not support generalizations, as this study was developed within the group by means of their members' contributions. However, it exemplifies a study model which may inspire further research.

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