

Sponsoring Committee: Dr. John Dilendik, Moravian College
Dr. Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Ms. Michelle Carlstrom

**Intergenerational Learning: Building Relationships
with Senior Citizens in a First Grade Classroom**

Stephanie Hutzayluk

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
Moravian College
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
2019

Copyright 2019 @Stephanie K. Hutzayluk

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	x
RESEARCHER STANCE	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Introduction.....	9
Ageism.....	10
History	11
Growth Unconfronted	12
Societal Effects.....	13
The Importance of Changing Youth’s Views	14
Changing an Ageist Society	15
An Unsupportive Curriculum.....	17
Development of a New Curriculum and its Effectiveness.....	18
Summary	24
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	25
Research Goals.....	25
Setting/ Participants.....	26
Data Collection Methods	28
<i>The Field Log</i>	28
<i>Parent Survey</i>	28

<i>Pre and Post Writings</i>	29
<i>Pre and Post Interviews</i>	29
<i>Student Artifacts</i>	30
Trustworthiness Statement	30
MY STORY	34
When It Rains, It Pours.....	34
Parent Views	36
You Have Homework Too?	38
Lack of Prior Knowledge.....	40
A Picture Says It All	45
Is Scales The Right Word?.....	48
Fiction Means Fake	53
Pumpkin Jack	57
A Pirate Comes to Visit.....	58
The Trick-or-Treat Hotel	63
The First Review.....	74
Another Try At Fiction.....	77
Photos Around The Room	80
A Thanksgiving Service Learning Visit	80
Our Visitors Share Some Insight	89
Plays and Pie: Another Review	92
Not One to Follow the Trends.....	95
Even Kids Use Wheelchairs	98

Spreading Holiday Cheer	102
Feelings of Appreciation: The Last Review	106
The Lunch Line Commotion	108
Changing Views.....	109
METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS	113
The Field Log.....	113
Parent Survey Data	113
Pre and Post Writing Assessment.....	116
Pre and Post Interviews.....	118
Student Artifacts	129
Coding Bins	133
Theme Statements	133
RESEARCH FINDINGS	134
Positive Feelings	134
Methods for Teaching.....	136
Student Gains.....	140
Benefitting the Elderly.....	142
NEXT STEPS	145
REFERENCES.....	148
APPENDICES	152
Appendix A: HSIRB Approval Letter	152
Appendix B: Principal Consent Form.....	153
Appendix C: Parent Consent Form.....	155

Appendix D: Student Assent Form	157
Appendix E: Parent Survey	158
Appendix F: Elderly Pre/ Post Writing	159
Appendix G: Elderly Pre/Post Interview.....	161
Appendix H: Country Meadows Field Trip Survey.....	162
Appendix I: Country Meadows Visit Survey.....	163

Abstract

This quantitative action research study documented the observed and reported behaviors of an elementary school teacher and her class of 26 first grade students and how their attitudes about the elderly changed when engaged in a curriculum that incorporates both abstract and concrete elderly experiences. The purpose of this study was to reduce the problem of ageist stereotyping by building bonds between students and the elderly while students are still young enough to create their own views, instead of taking on the ageist views of much of society. Through the use of books, videos, and field trips, students were able to learn about the elderly and partake in positive and memorable interactions with them.

Methods of gathering data included parent surveys and student interviews, writings, and artifacts, along with an observational field log. Data analysis methods included reflective memos, coding of student artifacts and observational data, and the formation of related theme statements.

It was determined from this study that intergenerational learning experiences not only reduced age bias toward the elderly in students, but built a wide range of educational and life skills in student participants. Implementation of more intergenerational programs is a great way to build a multitude of skills in students while eliminating the isolation of two age groups and in turn help to alter perceptions and move toward a more accepting society.

Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank my first graders for making me a better teacher every day. They are my best source of knowledge about teaching and keep me updated on the latest trends. They are the kind, passionate, and hard working individuals that made my study such a success and without the chance to share their story, my study would not have the bits of comic relief it does.

Thank you to my family. I would not be where I am today if it were not for all of them. Mom and dad you always supported me and pushed me to be the best. Thank you for always being my biggest cheerleaders and supporting me in my endeavors. Thank you for keeping my fridge stocked with home cooked meals on nights I was up late writing and didn't feel like cooking or for stopping in for a movie night after a long day of writing. Also, to my brother Joey and sister-in-law Lauren for keeping my mind off my work when I wasn't writing. For exercising and studying with me and keeping family game nights going as well.

Thank you to my Moravian family. Thank you to all my professors for making Moravian such a great University and always making class such a pleasure. Thank you especially to Dr. Joshua Kahn, Dr. Joseph Shosh, and Dr. John Dilendik for editing my paper multiple times and offering me tips and pointers to perfect it. Your feedback made me a better and stronger writer, and your encouraging words and praise helped to support me along the journey. Thank you to my Moravian classmates for your support, snack sharing during class, laughs around the table, and always being willing to listen.

Last I would like to thank all of my coworkers for supporting me all the way through my master program and thesis writing. Thank you for covering my bus duty at the end of the day when I had to leave early for class, checking in on my progress, and always leaving snacks on my desk to bring a smile to my face. An especially big thank you to the first grade teacher in the room next to mine, Amy Johnson, for finding such a great nursing home to work with and collaborating with and supporting me throughout the process.

List of Tables

Table 1. Children’s Attitudes About the Elderly: Before and After Intergenerational Learning	22
Table 2. Children’s Pre and Post Elderly Interview Data	122

List of Figures

Figure 1. What is Elderly Class List	50
Figure 2. Hugs Brings a Smile	69
Figure 3. Hugs Also Mean Thank You	71
Figure 4. A Demonstration of Something New	72
Figure 5. Service Learning	87
Figure 6. First Name Basis	89
Figure 7. Thanksgiving Guest One Feedback.....	90
Figure 8. Thanksgiving Guest Two Feedback.....	91
Figure 9. Thanksgiving Guest Two Feedback Continued	92
Figure 10. Bathroom Sign	99
Figure 11. Funny Faces	105
Figure 12. Amount of Contact Outside of School.....	114
Figure 13. Feelings Toward the Elderly	115
Figure 14. Pre Writing: Feelings About the Elderly	117
Figure 15. Monthly Visit Surveys.....	130
Figure 16. G’s October Writing.....	131
Figure 17. G’s December Writing.....	132

Researcher Stance

“Nana, you missed another red car,” I said, as we sat on my grandmother’s porch, like we did almost every sunny day, counting cars as they drove by to see who could get the most of their color car. Although I liked to change up the color car I was searching for, I never picked red because I knew it was my Nana’s “favorite” color and the color car she picked to look for every time. What I did not know as a three year old sitting on that porch, was that she always picked the red cars because red was the only color she could partially see, since she was legally blind. Even though my grandmother could see very little, she lived alone and was extremely independent, taking care of herself every day along with being the one who took care of me while my parents worked. In fact, both of my grandmothers lived alone and were extremely independent.

My Baba and I also spent a lot of time together. Every weekend my dad and I would go to visit her and as my dad spent the afternoon cutting the grass, I spent the afternoon in the kitchen getting spoiled by my Baba. These afternoons usually started with my dad nicely reminding my Baba not to make me any snacks, since my mom was cooking lunch and we would be eating when we got home, but always a star in the kitchen, the second he went outside my Baba would ask “Stephy, do you want anything?”, and my answer was almost always a snack. I knew I could always count on my Baba to make me the best macaroni and cheese or her chicken soup with bouillon cubes that tasted delicious each

time. And when my dad would come back inside and see me with a full bowl or plate all he could do was smile and laugh, because he knew she just wanted to make me happy.

My parents and I were fortunate enough to never have to get a babysitter when I was young, since my grandmothers lived so close and were always more than happy to spend the day with me or even have a sleepover with me at night. I still treasure those days and nights as some of my favorites. My baba taught me all kinds of card games when I was younger because, as she liked to say, "It will keep your brain smart". It was always an adventure too when I got to walk to the local diner with my Baba to meet up for lunch with all her friends, and sometimes we even stopped at the store so I could pick out a treat on the way home. My Nana, too, could always be counted on to keep the freezer stocked with my favorite ice cream and fudge pops, which, although she was not supposed to have very often, I made sure to sneak her on occasions when I was older. As I grew up, too, my Nana and I loved dancing to the Polka channel or sometimes spending quieter afternoons dressing up in her fancy jewelry. As I grew up, my grandmothers were two of my favorite people to spend time with and two of my best friends.

Spending so much time at my grandmothers' homes had more perks too, such as teaching me the importance of family. I not only got to see them, but they always had visitors when my parents and I would stop by and so I got to spend

time with my aunts, uncles, and cousins often as well. My uncle, godfather, and my mom's older brother, Rich was one of the most frequent visitors there, coming to read my grandmother the newspaper every single day since she could not see. Rich always made sure to spend time with me as well. He played with me, let me practice reading to him, taught me how to garden, and many more things, but most of all he made sure my memories and experiences would never be forgotten by using his photography and video skill. As I grew up his support only became stronger. He never missed a year of field hockey I competed in and was there to support me in my track and field victories, again documenting them along the way. When I reached the end of high school and with my wonderful family and uncle Rich by my side at graduation, I felt blessed. When I found out after that Rich was sick, one of the memories that still makes me smile and I will never forget is hearing the story of how he put up a fight to make sure he made it to my graduation party, his last public outing, despite the objections from others to stay home and rest. Although both of my grandmothers and my uncle Rich have passed away, every day I carry along the positive experiences we shared together. Growing up I learned that although many of the most important people in my life were older, not a second went by that I couldn't learn from them and count on them. I grew up with this sense of family pride and love for my elders because of the positive experiences I shared with them as a child.

As a first grade teacher now, my students and I often start our days off in a large circle sharing about our weekends, evenings, or exciting things happening in our lives outside of school. I love seeing how excited they are to share their adventures with me. Too often, though, my students have little to say, or share the same special story of an exciting experience over and over, such as a trip to the local water park they went on “last night” when in fact it is January, the water park has been closed for the season, and there is snow on the ground. Many of their typical evenings involve going to day cares where they sometimes sleepover, and weeknights and weekends, sitting in front of televisions and Ipads watching shows or playing video games for hours. They are getting interactions outside of their technology, but the people they seem to spend the most time with are others their age such as their siblings, or friends at their before and after school care programs. My students do not seem to share the interactions amongst generations that I had as a child, instead sharing that their parents and grandparents are often too busy, at work, or live far away, with some being out of the state or even out of the country. Without this intergenerational contact they seem less aware of the differences among age groups. I have also noticed that my students’ likes and the activities they participate in are very centered in the here and now and that they know little about things their parents and grandparents did as a children that may interest them. My guess is that if I asked

my students if they'd ever danced to a polka, they might look at me like I'm from Mars.

I worry that society is changing and family ties are being lost, and with the loss of family ties comes the loss of the ties that make different generations close. I want my students to be familiar with these experiences like I was as a child and having that knowledge of the world around them and those in it will make them more well rounded adults one day. It will also teach them compassion for others. How is it that I can teach my students compassion for others while building intergenerational connections?

When I look back at my time in elementary school, I struggle to remember some of the lessons I learned, but of all the years I went through school some of my best and strongest memories were from Kindergarten, surprisingly the grade most distant in time. So why is it that those Kindergarten lessons were so memorable and strong? I believe it was because I was lucky enough to have a teacher who made every lesson a positive experience and also a teacher who took the time to create experiential learning opportunities both in and out of the classroom. One of my favorites of these experiences was when we learned respect for those with disabilities and how to best assist them, something rarely taught in schools today. Not only did we participate in lessons during school hours that helped us to expand our knowledge in these areas but my teacher created buddies with disabilities that we would rotate taking home for the

weekend, taking care of, and journaling our experiences throughout the duration of their visit. These were not just any buddies though, they were in fact life size dolls that included their own duffel bag full of clothing, and any items we would need to assist them such as a hearing aid for the hearing impaired, glasses for the visually impaired, and my favorite of all, the doll that could not walk, so came with a wheelchair.

Having a teacher who took the time to go above and beyond the everyday curriculum of ABC's and 123's by incorporating these lessons into the curriculum in a fun creative way using dolls, is what made me grow up to have compassion towards others and strive to be the best teacher I can be each and every day. Too many teachers today are not given the choice to, or choose not to implement programs like this into their own classrooms, but instead teach a curriculum that follows a list of scripted prompts and programs. Our curricula lack these opportunities and offer few experiences outside the everyday workbooks used to teach strategies.

Just like the experiences I shared with my grandmothers growing up, it was again the positive experiences that my Kindergarten teacher created that I believe led me to the memories and feelings I have today. If positive experiences were what brought me to feel this way, then I knew I wanted to create a positive experience to share intergenerational learning with my students.

After researching, I discovered an organization called Forever Friends Inc (“Forever Friends Inc”, 2010). This program, founded by teacher Sherry Power, started as a small intergenerational program in her classroom and incorporated monthly visits between her second graders and local nursing home residents. Information about how she promoted discussion with her students about their feelings toward the elderly were shared, along with activities the elders and students participated in, and some quotes from participating students about their feelings involving their experiences in the Forever Friends program. The idea for my study was modeled and build from the Forever Friends program, which is now popping up in schools all over.

In teaming up with a local independent living facility, I hope to offer monthly experiences for my children to experience positive interactions with the elderly too. With this idea in mind, I came up with my research question: *How do students’ attitudes about the elderly change when engaged in a curriculum that incorporates the elderly?* Television shows and books these days can sometimes portray the elderly in only a negative light, but rarely do they shine the light on all their positive attributes. Spending time with the elder members of my family growing up, allowed me at a young age to learn appreciation for their needs and how to help them, but also taught me that they were much more capable than one would think, especially my blind grandma who lived alone and not only took care of herself, but me too all day long. By building positive interactions with the

elderly into my curriculum, I hope my students too will enjoy the time spent with a generation new to many of them, and learn that the biases seen on the TV shows they watch are not always the truth. I hope they will also learn that that many of the elderly around them are not only capable, but have a lot to teach them and can be a lot of fun.

At the end of my study, I hope to have developed an intergenerational program that teaches students a variety of important life lessons. I hope that by not only giving the students learning experiences involving the elderly through literature and videos, but by providing actual positive and engaging interactions with the elderly, students will show a greater appreciation for others and have improved views of the elderly and their importance in society. I hope to see the changes in attitudes and perceptions my students display when sharing their experiences about their time with the elderly as well.

Literature Review

Introduction

Children are like sponges in that they soak up everything around them. Whether those droplets of information be positive or negative environmental factors, they are absorbed and become a part of that child's world and views. Unfortunately some of society's views, such as views on the elderly, are views we do not want our children to absorb. According to Ragan and Bowen (2011), the term "ageism" was coined by gerontologist Robert Butler, more than 30 years ago, "as a kind of discrimination, similar to racism and sexism, directed toward elderly people" (p. 511). Since then, ageism has been defined variably, but each version shares the similarity that ageism is a form of stereotyping against the elderly. For example, people have reported being insulted or considered "too old" (Ory, Hoffman, Hawkins, Sanner & Mockenhaupt, 2003, p. 166) for a particular type of medical treatment; whereas, milder forms of ageism have been exhibited through jokes or birthday cards. "The U.S. Census Bureau (2000) estimates that by the year 2030, the number of people over age 65 will double.... and for the next 20 years, the U.S. will experience an unprecedented shift in its population" (Nelson, 2005, p. 218). In just a few years, senior citizens will become a much larger portion of the American population. If ageist attitudes are what we are teaching our children to feel and believe, then we need to begin to turn our

thinking around before negative outcomes such as isolation, unnecessary institutionalization, and suicide of the elderly stem from these beliefs.

One way to bridge the intergenerational gap is by implementing intergenerational learning programs in our schools, which have shown positive results in reducing ageist views. These programs offer the chance for students and seniors to get to know each other on a closer level and no longer associate others as just an age bracket (Hannon & Gueldner, 2007). Holmes (2009) similarly shared that children's societal views and connections toward the elderly grow when they have the opportunity to directly engage in contact with healthy elders, in positive situations. The curriculum I have developed in my classroom combines intergenerational contact with positive experiences in hopes to attain these benefits for my students. The following review will discuss the history of ageism, its impact on society, and how teachers and schools have tried to address it in their classrooms.

Ageism

Since Robert Butler introduced the first definition of ageism, it has grown to encompass many meanings. "Referring to discrimination against people because they are old" and "prejudice or discrimination against or in favor of an age group" (Ory, Hoffman, Hawkins, Sanner, & Mockenhaupt, 2003, p. 165) are just two of the definitions of ageism in a study reviewing what is known about ageism up to that point. Other definitions describe ageism as, "Negative attitudes

or behaviors towards an individual solely based on that person's age" (Bousfield & Hutchison, 2010, p. 451). Ageism had also been referred to in multiple studies as the "Graying of America" (Nelson, 2005 & Ory et al, 2003) as the baby boomers become senior citizens. Furthermore, "Ageism often results in the attitudes that older people are unproductive, sickly, depressing, and that cognitive impairment is normal" (Ragan & Bowen, 2001, p. 511), resulting in a fear of aging and creating "negative feelings toward the elderly" (Blunk & Williams, 1997, p. 233). What all these have in common is that ageism is another form of stereotyping, directed toward the elderly.

History. Researchers seem to have mixed ideas on exactly what key historical foundations started the decreasing respect of our elders. Branco and Williamson (1982) blame the invention of the printing press for the elderly's loss of status. Historically, society learned through stories told by their elders and passed along generation to generation, but with the ability to put these stories into print, the elderly were no longer needed to repeat them year after year, losing their role as storytellers. Ignoring the effect of the printing press, Nelson (2005) instead notes that the industrial revolution introduced more jobs oriented toward manual labor with longer hours, in which the younger workers excelled. Job mobility became a key driving factor to attain work during the revolution too, and "the extended family structure (with grandparents in the household) was less adaptive" (p. 208) leading to a shift in the make of the household with

grandparents left behind. Overlapping with these views, Holmes (2009) attributes the start of ageism to the loss of traditional family structure. Nelson (2005) also proposes the idea that medicine could be to blame based on its advances and the outcome of extended life expectancy, just as Branco and Williamson (1982) expressed society's inability to deal with the larger elderly population, creating a feeling of burden towards elders. It is unknown if one of these ideas really started societal discrimination of the elderly or if perhaps it is a combination of a number of incidents building off each other. Despite their differences, all of these suppositions show that ageism has been embedded in our culture for generations.

Growth Unconfronted. In the past several years ageism has grown, yet its growth continues to go somewhat unrecognized by some members of society. Recognizing this indifference, Butler (1993) believes many elderly members of society do not see ageism for what it is, but instead blame other causes for their problems, such as sexism or outdated skills, and do not believe themselves to be victims of ageism. Redirection of blame can be caused by such factors, listed by Ory and colleagues (2003), as a deficit in real information about the elderly, an insufficient amount of time spent in contact with the elderly, or a fear of getting old turning into the need to separate oneself from that fear. The previous deficits are not only affecting adult views, but children's views as well. Kupetz (1993) believes children have less interactions with older adults than with others their

age. Due to lack of interaction, and unable to build their own elderly schema, McGuire (1993) indicates that children seem to take on society's views of the elderly. By addressing the redirection of blame of ageism, and addressing the youth before their ageist views increase, society may be able to begin to curb the societal effects ageism is creating.

Societal Effects. Unfortunately, ageism has already created negative effects for the elderly. These effects, listed by Ragan and Bowen (2001), include "isolation from the community, inadequate housing and income, unnecessary institutionalization, untreated mental and physical illness, and suicide" (p. 511). Likewise, Nelson (2005) describes the mistreatment of the elderly as elderly abuse, which includes neglect, violence, fraud, and exploitation. Society, including medical professionals, admit to having little education when it comes to elderly abuse. Surveying emergency room physicians, Jones, Veenstra, Seamon, and Krohmer (1997) found that while 63 percent of participants had training on spousal abuse, and 87 percent had training on child abuse, only 25 percent of emergency room physicians had training on elderly abuse. If society is uneducated about elderly abuse, there is a good chance they will not recognize problems involving such abuse, allowing abusive situations to escalate.

Meanwhile, ageism has created another societal problem affecting the elderly that Nelson (2005) calls "infantilization" (p. 210), or the act of talking down or treating someone as an infant or young child. After being talked down to for so

long, the elderly begin to truly believe what they hear, and take on their negative stereotypes, having detrimental effects on their self esteem (Nelson, 2005; Palmore, 1999). Some of these effects range on the mild end, while others are more extreme, but they all have one thing in common, they all negatively affect the elderly.

The Importance of Changing Youth's Views

Youth may be the key to changing society's ageist views beginning now and for future generations. Since the population of senior citizens will rise in the next decade, society needs to be ready for this change so they can make accommodations for the growing number of the elderly or, as Nelson (2005) points out, ready to make arrangements as the baby boomer generation become the elderly. With proper accommodations in place, the elderly will be taken care of instead of causing stress, were accommodations not put into place. The population shift will directly affect today's students since they will be society's decision makers in a few years, and as Bousfield and Hutchison (2010) share future policies affecting the elderly and any associated financial connections will be voted on by our current youth as a part of the future working class. Isaacs and Bearison (1986) found that as children age, their negative views of the elderly increase. If students have ageist views, and recognize the elderly as sick or incapable, Holmes (2009) also believes their thinking may affect the decisions they make about future care for the elderly. Similarly, Bousfield and Hutchison

(2010) believe students with ageist opinions may not want to be a part of the challenges these changes bring. They go further to say that not only are the elderly affected by this, but the youth are creating a negative world for themselves to one day transition into (2010). Ragan and Bowen (2001) put it best when they wrote, "Ageism needs to be confronted and overcome, as the problems faced by elderly people are problems for our grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and other older people in our lives, as well as ourselves" (p. 511). By addressing student views early on, there is the chance that bias may be eliminated before they become the future voters and determinants of the outcomes of society's elderly.

Changing an Ageist Society. In order to begin to reduce the negative effects ageism is having on society, we need to begin to create opportunities for intergenerational social interactions. Due to past events changing society's structure, there is a lack of interactions between the elderly and the youth, children know little about the elderly. Due to lack of knowledge of the elderly, students take on the stereotypes of those around them, but by offering children intergenerational experiences, we are allowing children to form their own views of the elderly. Holmes (2009) believes "the development of an intergenerational program is a positive move toward the goal of promoting a community atmosphere in which both children and elders develop positive values and attitudes" (p. 114). Several theories and hypotheses recommend the best way to

do so. Ragan and Bowen (2001), explain one theory, “The Theory of Reasoned Action” (p. 512), as the likelihood to alter behaviors due to positive feedback and support for that specific behavior. According to this theory, if we provide intergenerational experiences for students, while giving them positive feedback for their positive interactions, students may begin to change their behaviors for the better, to receive praise. Subsequently, Ragan and Bowen (2001) explain another theory, “Cognitive Dissonance Theory” (p. 512), as the idea that providing truthful information about a topic may cause enough conflict and confusion in the mind of the receiver of the information, that they will be willing to take another look at their beliefs and attitudes. According to this theory, if we provide students with all the information about the elderly, stereotypes and not, those non-stereotypes may be enough to make them reconsider their previously formed ageist views. Interventions aligned with Cognitive Dissonance Theory have been reported to have effective results, and McGuire (1993) reports, students form positive attitudes involving aging when presented with a curriculum involving the elderly. A last theory, “Contact Hypothesis” (Bousfield & Hutchison, 2010, p. 453) is explained as the idea that by just having appropriate contact with an individual outside the usual group, the usual group will begin to gain improved views of said individual and decrease their prejudice toward them. However when research was done on Contact Hypothesis in a study by Allport (1954), there were no findings to indicate that frequency of contact had any effects on group

views. Instead, quality of contact, not quantity, was cited in improving views of outsiders. All three theories and hypothesis have positive evidence to back up their claims for successful outcomes. When reviewing successful past intergenerational studies, their programs seem to have a combination of the three and involve an honest curriculum about the elderly, quality interactions with the elderly, and positive feedback and praise to back up each experience.

An Unsupportive Curriculum. Unfortunately, the current Wonders reading curriculum, the curriculum our school has chosen to teach, incorporates little about the elderly; the few times senior citizens are included in pictures and readings, they are portrayed as helpless. By creating a program, beginning during children's primary schooling and highlighting both the truths and tales of aging, Ory and colleagues (2003) believe we can change our curriculum for the better. A contrasting view is shared by Seefeldt (1987), who instead places a stress on focusing the curriculum on the positive aspects of aging instead of looking at the negatives. Regardless of which avenue the curriculum leans toward, there seems to be agreement that a curriculum built to correct ageism should focus on at least three things: a) providing precise information b) ensuring that it is also unbiased, and c) helping children to evaluate their own ideas about the elderly, as a way to make them aware of what stereotypes exist in their views and how to change them (Blunk & Williams, 1997). The following studies show examples of the successes intergenerational programs, incorporating an

unbiased and precise curriculum that offers opportunities for children to reflect on their views, can have in discouraging stereotyping of the elderly in students.

Development of a New Curriculum and its Effectiveness

Intergenerational programs come in a variety of forms from pen pal programs, to reading buddies, to age-diversified groups learning together. The following programs all offer an honest, precise, and unbiased curriculum about the elderly, quality interactions with the elderly, and opportunities for students to reflect on their views while receiving positive feedback.

“Forever Friends” (Dallman & Power, 1996), developed by Sherry Power in Brookfield, Wisconsin in 1986, is one of these such programs. Her program links second graders to residents of a local independent living retirement home for elders, by incorporating activities into the regular curriculum, in which students and elders can jointly participate. The program was introduced through brainstorm sessions and discussions about the students thoughts of being old, and lists several children’s books that deal with aging in a positive light, which were read at least once a week. It also outlines a schedule of intergenerational activities completed with elder buddies, on a monthly basis, for example: visits to both the school and independent living retirement home took place, field trips during which the intergenerational group was able to visit and learn together, and reading, writing, and singing to practice skills and just have fun together was commonly seen. Power’s program went from a single classroom experience to a

global non-profit organization supporting over 30 intergenerational programs nationwide (“Forever Friends Inc”, 2010). Not only has it impacted schools all over, but Dallman and Power (1996) share some intergenerational buddies from the program have stayed in contact for more than ten years, showing its ability to reach individual students as well.

Similarly, two more intergenerational studies teamed up students and seniors for a year of intergenerational learning. Both writing intensive studies, one by Fair and Delaplane (2015), teamed up second graders and seniors from two local retirement homes, while another study from Kiernan and Mosher-Ashley (2002) focused on an intergenerational pen pal program between first graders and seniors. During both studies, students met with elders monthly to participate in joint crafts and discussions, with Kiernan and Mosher-Ashley’s study distributing visits between school and retirement home, and Fair and Delaplane’s study having students solely travel to one of the two local retirement homes. Both studies showed similar results of improved contact and views of the elderly for example, Kiernan and Mosher-Ashley (2002), shared instances of students and their families inviting elder pen pals over for the holidays. Sharing similar findings, Fair and Delaplane (2015) focused on students’ monthly journal entries along with pre and post student interviews, as a measurement of success. After being coded for similar themes, Fair and Delaplane (2015) found that journal entries and interviews were more detailed than before and responses showed students

had gained a positive and more realistic understanding of others' needs and differences. Students from the study also expressed feelings of warmth and happiness about spending time with their "grandfriends" (Fair & Delaplane, 2015, p. 21), and expressed that they think all children should spend time with older adults.

Two more studies focusing on intergenerational learning, with younger students, the first by Blunk and Williams (1997) focused on four to five year olds, and the second by Holmes (2009), focused on three to five year olds, went about attaining their findings in different ways. Similar to the previous three studies, the teachers in the study by Holmes (2009) took a whole-class approach, and after meeting with nursing home staff to coordinate activities began teaching about the elderly through discussion and sensory learning experiences, such as placing cotton in their ears to simulate a struggle to hear. The whole group of students discussed by Holmes (2009) met monthly at the nursing home for a year, with small groups visiting the nursing home in between monthly visits, and groups participating in joint learning experiences from elders able to visit the school. Intergenerational groups in this study took place in activities such as pastry making, sewing, or learning about antiques, all led by the elders visiting the classroom, to showcase their talents (2009).

On the other hand, Blunk and Williams (1997) focused their intergenerational experience by taking part in a much shorter study of eight

weeks, and chose to not incorporate any face to face interaction with the elderly, but to instead focus on the changes the exposure to a planned eight week curriculum on perceptions of the elderly could have. This new curriculum included but was not limited to creating collages of students extended families, the use of dramatic play props that simulated aging, elderly puppets, and flannel boards with stories that included the elderly (1997).

The two preschool studies, although run very differently, attained similar results. Although both studies gathered data by having students take a pre and post study interview or survey, teachers in the Blunk and Williams (1997) study compared data between their experimental and control groups, while the teachers in the Holmes (2009) study compared data on the same student from the beginning to the end of the study, and collected additional data by surveying parents in a take home questionnaire. Both studies Holmes (2009) and Blunk and Williams (1997) found that when presented with an honest but positive curriculum about the elderly, children's views of the elderly had grown and were much less biased. The following Table 1, shows examples of some of the before and after views of students in the previous studies and intergenerational learning programs.

Table 1

Children’s Attitudes About the Elderly: Before and After Intergenerational Learning

Before Intergenerational Learning	After Intergenerational Learning
Elderly are sick, dying, slow, wrinkly, worn out, tired, grouchy, in nursing homes, have canes (Dallman & Power, 1996)	“Mr. R has the coolest cane I’ve ever seen. In just seventy years, I can have one just like it!” (Dallman & Power, 1996)
Elderly buy presents, hug kids, are poor, ill, just hang around (Holmes, 2009)	Elderly love to sing, are good readers, make good playdoh, have cool ice skates (Holmes, 2009)
“Um... they can’t move as fast as um, little kids because they get really, really slow- and they use canes that make them go slow. Or wheelchairs.” (Fair & Delaplaine, 2015, p. 22)	“Some of them can’t walk for too long of distances... and some of them like don’t have trouble walking and some of them are really speedy and they have lots of energy left.” (Fair & Delaplaine, 2015, p. 22)

Note. These findings were selected as a representative sample of the larger pool of research.

Other studies conducted on intergenerational experiences included a 14 week study from Dunham and Casadonte (2009) which focused on introducing elderly volunteers into science classrooms in both the elementary and junior high classrooms, and a four week study by Ragan and Bowen (2001) which focused on testing cognitive dissonance theory and the theory of reasoned action in college students. This study split students into one of three groups: a) the information only group, responsible for watching a video on the elderly, b) the

information reinforcement group one, who watched the video then received positive feedback for comments showing reduction of ageist views during discussion, and c) the information reinforcement group two, who watched the video then received feedback for comments involving staying on task. Both of these studies shared results of positive attitude change toward the elderly. Observation and discussion with students on both sides of the Dunham and Casadonte (2009) intergenerational science study concluded that by working with elderly volunteers to achieve a common goal, student' negative attitudes about aging were reduced. Similar positive results were seen after pre and post testing each group, when Ragan and Bowen (2001) found that participants with negative views of the elderly had improved attitudes after a 30 minute video about the elderly, however although attitudes were improved, the only group that retained these improved attitudes was the group who not only watched the video, but also received positive discussion feedback toward the elderly.

Studies ranged in the age of participants, amount of time taken to find results, and implementation of materials, but all shared the desire to seek a change in adjusting ageism by introducing some aspect of curriculum and reflection to spark a change. Various methods were also used to calculate results from interviews and surveys, to journal entries and observations, but an apparent theme comes from the results of each study; the introduction of some aspect of

elderly curriculum seems to prompt positive views of the elderly and may be what we need to begin to work toward eliminating ageism.

Summary

Stereotyping of the elderly creates consequences such as untreated mental and physical illness in the elderly, isolation, and more that affect each one of our futures as we age. The youth today are the next generation responsible for making a change. Yet, children and elders, two valuable societal groups, are being isolated from one another, though they have so much to offer each other. A curriculum that incorporates the elderly through intergenerational learning may begin to solve the problem of ageist stereotyping by reaching students while they are still young, and allowing them to carry more positive views as they age. Thus, my research question will aim to explore: How do students' attitudes about the elderly change when engaged in a curriculum that incorporates the elderly?

Research Design and Methodology

Research Goals

First graders are naturally a loving bunch. The beginning of the first day of school often involves students missing parents or being scared to make new friends. The end of the first day of school, however, often looks much different with students waving goodbye to new friends and classmates. It appears first graders are generally care free and at ease with making new friends. So why is it that when another adult comes in the classroom or an older student the class does not know, many go silent, avoid contact, or just do not know what to do? It seems that being with others their age is no big deal, but students sometimes struggle to interact with other generations or age groups. When asked why, many students share feelings involving that these others are scary. If they do not know them, how do they know they are scary?

With trends to promote growth and development in students, the curriculum often focuses on children that are the same age as those in the class. They share stories about children like them doing different things and stories about the things they know all about. What the curriculum fails to do is show children like them having intergenerational interactions, especially when it comes to the elderly. Furthermore the volunteers that come to our classroom are never elderly, but parents and older students. How are students going to learn that the elderly are not scary, and in fact often have just as much in common with them

as their new friends they met on the first day of school, when they know nothing about them and have no opportunities to interact with them? In order to build connections and change views of the elderly in the young students I teach, my action research focuses on offering these missed experiences to my students.

Setting/ Participants

My study took place in a public charter school in Allentown, Pennsylvania. At this time, the school is in its fifth year of operation, but its first year as a school hosting grades K-12 in one building. The school serves 1,301 students total, from 14 different districts, with 525 of them making up the elementary school population. Within the school, 71 percent of the population is Hispanic, 18 percent is Black, 7 percent is Caucasian, and 4 percent is Mixed. Our population also allows for 100% of our students to receive free lunch through the Community Eligibility Program, since well over the required 60% of our students qualify for free lunches.

The students in my study are currently enrolled in my first grade class. They spend the entire day with me at school from 8:00 - 3:15, except for their hour special period which rotates between computers, art, Mandarin, and physical education. There are currently 25 students in this class, five of which have IEP's. Of those 25, 12 students are female and 13 students are male. At the start of the study, 26 students were enrolled in my class, but unfortunately a family move out of state caused one of my male students to leave our class

mid-study. Students range from ages six to seven, but the majority of students are age six.

Our classroom is one of four first grade classrooms about half way down a long white and blue hallway. On either side of the hallway you can see samples of student work and class sets of hooks for students coats and backpacks. When you walk into the long rectangular classroom, through the door on the far left side, you enter into a jungle-themed world. There is a writing center, a pocket chart with students journals, and a sink on the left side, and to the right our guided reading area. Straight ahead is where my desk sits, hidden from view by students' mailboxes, homework bins, and shelves of manipulatives neatly organized in colored bins. As you walk in further the middle of the classroom is composed of six groups of desks in the shape of a half circle, opening up to a large white board, with a carpet area in the middle. Each desk holds a green supply bin filled with scissors, glue sticks, pencils, erasers, and crayons for students to use freely and share. Further back is a second even larger carpet area with an easel, calendar area, and large word wall. Next to that in the very back is a large library under a giant palm tree with hanging leaves and monkeys and a listening center with six headphones. Along the long side of the room is a full wall of windows with a ledge halfway down.

Data Collection Methods

The Field Log.

Throughout my study I used a journal to record student observations and reflections. Any important things I witnessed the students doing, quotes I heard, or feelings they shared with me during our visits with the elderly were added. I included observations the students made in the classroom and around the school that related as well. After each entry I included my view of the observation and any important thoughts or reactions that came to mind. Participant observations were also something included in my field log. When we did whole group discussion I would pose questions to the students and record their answers along with my reactions and thoughts.

The field log was organized by date so entries could easily be found and accessed. This helped me to go back and see where the students needed more guidance and what activities I could change to improve future interactions with the elderly.

Parent Survey.

A parent survey (Appendix E) was also sent home the first week of school. The survey consisted of four short answer questions pertaining to students interactions with the elderly outside of school and their feelings from the parents' perspectives about these interactions, if any. This survey allowed me to see which students were familiar with the elderly already and which students had

never had interactions with them prior to the study. The survey also asked parents about their feelings toward the study and the idea of intergenerational activities and learning. What were their preconceived biases at home toward the elderly or would they not have a view at all?

Pre and Post Writings.

Prior to any new elderly curriculum implementation, students were given a writing prompt. (Appendix F) that simply asked them: How do you feel about the elderly? Students were given as much time as they needed to write their thoughts. Afterwards they were asked to draw a picture depicting what they wrote about and to show how they feel. Students were given no more interpretation or guidance so were able to simply and honestly share exactly what came to their mind. At the end of the study, students were asked to complete the same writing prompt and picture depiction of their feelings. Again they were given as much time as they needed and no guidance besides the prompt. Through this writing I was able to compare data as well as find trends in patterns in the students' ways of thinking.

Pre and Post Interviews.

Multiple interviews were conducted individually with each student during the study. An initial interview (Appendix G) was conducted at the start of the study to give me a baseline of what students knew about the elderly and to see how they felt about them. It also allowed me to see how they viewed themselves

in comparison to the elderly. Since I met with them individually they were able to share with me their true feelings or express the amount of knowledge they had in privacy. These gave me ideas of the things I needed to focus on during the study. Following the completion of the study I again individually met with all of the students. Students were asked the same questions as their pre interview so results could later be compared to check for changes in views, opinions, and knowledge pertaining toward the elderly.

Student Artifacts.

Students completed various activities and assignments throughout the course of the study. Written responses sheets (Appendix H & I) following each visit with the elderly served as a way for me to evaluate if the students viewed the visit as something they would like to continue or not and exactly what activities from the visit they did or did not enjoy. I also collected journal entries the students completed, sharing about some of the things they talked about with the elderly and how it made them feel. Most of the student artifacts were completed in written form, however photographs and videos documenting some of the student reactions and experiences were also taken and served as an additional data collection.

Trustworthiness Statement

To ensure that my study was both valid and trustworthy, I followed several ethical guidelines before beginning. Prior to the start of my data collection, I

outlined the objective, design, and procedures it would take to carry out my study along with the steps I would take to reduce risk to all participants involved. Materials used in the study, such as videos the students would be watching were also listed. This information was submitted to Moravian College's Human Subjects Internal Review Board and I was granted approval (Appendix A) to carry out the study as planned. My chief elementary school director, chief academic director, and my supervisor were also informed about the study and a signed principal consent form was attained (Appendix B) giving approval to carry out the study with the First Graders at Executive Education Academy Charter School.

After meeting approval to carry out my study, parent consent forms (Appendix C) were sent home to gain approval for student participation, since all student participants are minors. These forms explained activities the students would be participating in and how the curriculum would tie into the study, along with the fact that student's identities would remain confidential through the use of pseudonyms. It also explained that students would be able to leave the study at any time with no consequences and shared my contact information, along with my professor's, should parents have any questions or concerns. These consent forms were obtained from each individual student before collecting data for the study. Similar to the parent consent forms, student assent forms (Appendix D) also explained, in a more student-friendly and age-appropriate language, activities that students would participate in and asked for permission to share the

data gathered in class. Student assent forms were also obtained from each individual student before collecting data for the study.

After attaining the required permission, I began my study with my students. According to Hendricks (2017), the true results of research are much more often seen when data is collected over longer periods of time. This can be seen in my study, which ran from September to December, allowing time for students' true views to emerge. The longer time also allowed for a greater amount of data to be gathered. I collected multiple forms of data which included: parent surveys, student pre and post interviews, student pre illustrated depictions and opinion writings, journal samplings post visit, conversation transcripts, and observations. By collecting multiple forms of data, I was able to compare my findings from different sources and search for similar themes in each. Both the extended length of my study and the triangulation of data served to increase the credibility of the information I gathered.

When collecting data, I used low inference descriptors on any data that involved conversational accounts or observation data. By doing so I was able to depict these interactions with a precise account of what happened rather than a summary of what I believed to see and hear, eliminating the chance to incorporate my bias into these interpretations. Member checks with my students were essential to ensure my data was accurate as well. Hendricks (2017), shares that respondent validation serves as a test for honesty by giving participants a

say in whether or not their feelings were accounted for accurately. This allowed for results that were tangible and truthful. I also evaluated my own biases toward my research through critical reflection, which allowed me to be open to making any necessary changes for the benefit of the study. Extremely helpful in this area, were the peer debriefing sessions conducted weekly with my coworkers, supervisor, and other graduate students at Moravian. Through discussion with them while gathering and analyzing my data, I became more aware of multiple points of view and open to more unexpected findings in my research. "Critique is, however, essential for ensuring high quality scholarship, so actively look for this and welcome it." (McNiff, 2017) This critique allowed me to enhance my interventions, data collection strategies, and analysis in my study along with bring to my attention details from an outsider's perspective that may have been overlooked.

Lastly, throughout the study, accurate descriptions of my participants, setting, interventions, and research methods were given. According to Hendricks (2017), illustrating information in this way supplies the reader with the data necessary to replicate the study, increasing generalizability and making the study more useful to an audience. Confidential information was kept in a locked folder on my computer and following the completion of the study said data was deleted from the computer, and papers were shredded.

My Story

When It Rains, It Pours

All summer I had been going back and forth, debating if I should just introduce elderly concepts into my classroom through books and videos, or if actually teaming up with an elderly facility to give my students in person interactions was the way to go. They both had their pros and cons for sure, but in the end, and after much debate, I believed that actual intergenerational interactions would be more beneficial for my students...at least I hoped. Now I can't say this didn't come with its many challenges, and I knew going this route would definitely be more work. I also can not say things started off great when I returned back to school. It was day one of inservice training, less than a week until a new group of first graders arrived, and I still had yet to get in contact with an elderly facility. I had reached out to a few, multiple times even, and left messages, yet none of them returned my phone calls, and I started to feel a bit discouraged. Had I made the right decision?

They do say when it rains it pours though, and this rain was a warm, refreshing, summer rain, because after the stress and struggle all of a sudden I had multiple interested facilities within a week. I was now on my way to investigating the outcomes of intergenerational learning.

The facility I decided to team up with was a local one, and one that the grandparents of one of our schools staff members resided. They had multiple

buildings, a multitude of elders, and even a bus to take them on trips, one of which I hoped would be our school. One of the other first grade teachers and I decided to team up and make this a joint venture, and I knew that having another teammate to collaborate with could only make things better. The staff at the facility seemed just as thrilled as us to get started. Our first visit to their facility was set up for October, and after a few emails back and forth a plan of action was in place.

Not everyone gets excited about the same things though, and I was unsure if my students' parents would feel as happy to let me jump into this opportunity with their children as I was to do so. I typed up a parent consent form (Appendix C) and added a new slide going into more detail to my typical Meet the Teacher Night powerpoint. I wondered what parents would think of this idea. Would they support it or not see the potential benefits? When the slide popped up during my presentation that night, I took a deep breath and gave myself a two-second pep talk in my head, then began to share. As I looked around while I spoke, it seemed the more I talked about it, the more my excitement seemed to rub off onto the parents. I was immediately greeted with smiles, some faces showing indifference, and a few questions about the Masters program I was a part of. After my presentation I had many parents come up to me interested in my research and a few offered up other elderly facilities they knew of trying to help. Some turned in their parent consent forms immediately, while others took their

forms home. I was excited to see my collection of signed consent forms growing and by the end of the week I had a full class set. I was ready to get my students involved.

Parent Views

I was rather impressed with the amount of support I received from the parents at Meet the Teacher Night, and decided to get an idea of how they felt about the study. I know they were all more than willing to let their child be a part of it, but I wanted to know what their feelings toward the idea were. Furthermore I wanted to know what experiences each child was coming into this study with, and who better to ask than the students' parents.

I sent home a four-question survey (Appendix E) that would give me information about the frequency of interactions, if any, students had with the elderly outside of school. Again, parents were quick to respond and send back the forms, and I received all but two turned back into me.

All but three parents said their child knew someone over the age of 65, however only 10 students saw someone this age at least once a month, and only six students saw someone over the age of 65 at least once a week. It appeared although many of my students knew someone that was elderly, they did not have a lot of contact with them. When asked if and what feelings students had expressed toward the elderly at home, parents shared mixed responses from their children. Minimal to no feelings shared about the elderly was the top

response from parents, with nine of 24 students experiencing these feelings. Happiness relating to the elderly was the second largest response with seven of 24 students experiencing these feelings. The rest showed mixed feelings pertaining to the elderly that ranged from care and love, to fear or questions related to death and dying.

I went even further to ask parents what their views on an intergenerational program between first graders and the elderly would be. Parents overall were very supportive. Except for the parent who did not respond, two shared they were fine with the idea and the other 21 shared words such as great, wonderful, and how much they loved the idea or thought it would be interesting. A few of these parents went into further detail saying the program would:

- Benefit both the first graders and the elderly
- Help students to gain respect and appreciation for one another
- Help one another to learn and grow
- Help students learn how to care for the elderly
- Teach students about something forgotten about this century

Overall I appeared to have a mixed level of experiences relating to the elderly and a large amount of parent support, growing my curiosity for the results I would receive and the interactions that would take place.

You Have Homework Too?

The last day of the first week of school was when I decided to tell my students about our chance to work with the elderly. I had consent from all their parents for them to participate, but I wanted this to be an experience they would enjoy as well and something they wanted to be a part of.

We sat down on the carpet at the back of the classroom together and when everyone was ready I began. "When I leave here at night, I don't always get to go home. Sometimes I go to school, but not this school. I go to a school for grown ups, and just like you have homework at night, I get homework too".

This automatically sparked their interest. Many of them looked at each other and one of the girls asked, "Wait Miss H, YOU have homework?!"

"I do." I said. "And the homework I have now is homework that I need your help on..."

I went into more detail about the intergenerational learning experience of which we were going to be a part. I shared that we would be reading books and watching videos that not all of the other first graders were going to watch. I also shared with them that we would be going on some field trips to visit some elders that lived nearby and that other times they might come to visit us. This brought on some quiet, but excited cheers. I had said the magic words: field trip. At this point I do not think the students really cared what the study was about or where they

would be going. They had two things in mind. One, they were going to get to help me do my homework, and two, they were going to get to go on a field trip.

Back at the students' desks, I had placed a student assent form (Appendix D) at each seat. I directed students to head to the desks and choose a seat, a task they were quite familiar with since I do not have assigned seats in my classroom and I try to include student choice in everything they do. As students chose their seats they looked over the form. Many of them, not yet fluent readers, glanced over to me waiting to hear more. I read students the top of the form, again explaining about the study we would be taking part in. I reminded them that no matter what they would get to participate in all the stories, videos, and trips, but the form was to determine if I could share their thoughts, pictures, and the work they created. I shared that they were to color their choice on the sheet, write their name at the bottom in their neatest handwriting, and then put it in the turn-it-in basket face down so only I would be able to see it later. After that I let them get to work.

It was not long before students were whispering at their seats to each other, coloring in their selection, and signing their names. The basket filled with forms as students moved onto their next activity. As I glanced around I noticed one boy sitting at his desk without a choice made, unlike much of the rest of the class. I knelt down next to him and asked if he had any questions about anything and what he was thinking. He shared with me that he wasn't sure what to choose

since sometimes field trips made him tired. I told him he did not need to rush and could take as much time as he needed to think about it, and if he changed his mind at any point over the next couple months he could let me know as well. We agreed to put his paper over by the writing center so it was out of the way and he could go back to it and fill it out when he was ready.

The rest of the day went on like normal and students packed up and headed on their way home. When I walked back into the classroom after my bus duty was completed the first thing I noticed was the writing table in front of me was empty. I checked the turn-it-in basket and right on top, face down was the paper from the writing table, with a colored in smiley face and a signed name showing the boy had decided to participate in the study. I flipped over and counted the rest of the papers... 26 brightly striped and colored smiley faces looked back at me, with pencil written signatures, all agreeing to be a part of the study.

Lack of Prior Knowledge

Before going into any discussion of the elderly, I wanted to talk with the students and see what their opinions of the elderly in general were and what they already knew about them. I was also interested in seeing if they had any preconceived notions of them to start off. The best way for me to learn everything I wanted to know was by asking students a series of questions (Appendix G), so I decided to individually interview each of my students. Unfortunately the

interviews were a much longer process than anticipated, especially at the beginning of the year when students were still learning routines. To me they were worth it though because I was able to gain a lot of valuable information.

Before even looking over the interview information and compiling my interview data I remember giving the interviews and the thing that stood out to me the most was that students had no perception of age. The very first question asked students what age they believed someone who is elderly to be, and of all the answers only two students answered within a normal range saying 60 and 70. Of the 26 interviewed students, 12 gave answers in the teens or single digits with five being the lowest age, an age younger than the student herself was. On the flip side, four students gave answers over 100 years old with 1,050 being the oldest age. One student did not even have a guess.

Some students expressed knowledge when it came to knowing when someone was elderly, but others were unable to find the right words. Some responded with generalized statements about the elderly and others still shared that they did not know anything. Answers focused a lot on looks talking about their gray or white hair, small bodies, and old, dry, soggy faces, a word they found closest to wrinkled. Answers also talked about their slow movement or lack thereof movement, and needing help to walk or they would get hurt.

Students also shared some surprising results when it came to their feelings about the elderly, especially compared to what their parents had shared.

Twelve students stated that they would like to be around the elderly for various reasons. These reasons included loving the color gray (like their hair), liking new people, and loving their grandparents. Ten students took the opposite stance and shared they would not like to be around the elderly. Their reasons included the fact that the elderly steal, fight, are mean, and have no fun. The rest of the students were unsure of their answers. They either did not know or shared answers that showed a mix such as liking elderly women but not men. When asked if they would like to be around students their own age though all but one said yes, two specifying because they are who he knows or because they are her friends. The last student said only sometimes, because other times they made him too tired.

When students were asked if they knew anyone elderly, again answers varied greatly from the parent survey sent home. There were 11 students who said they did not know anyone elderly, six students that did, and the rest of the students were unsure or thought they might. Students that had shared they did know someone elderly all named their grandma or both their grandma and grandpa as the person or people they knew, with one saying their parents.

When students were asked if elderly people were all the same or if they were different answers varied. The majority of students, 16 to be exact, shared that all elderly people were the same. Of the remaining students six believed they could be different, two believed they were kind of the same, and the others did

not know. When students were asked if the elderly were like them, they were much quicker to answer. Although four students were unsure if they were like us or believed they were sometimes, 22 students believed they were not like us at all. The students who said they could be like us were unsure why, but the 22 who believed they were not like us had a number of reasons. Several talked about visual reasons such as the difference between their hair color and ours or how they had soggy skin and we did not. Some students talked about age and simply said they they were not old or that they were still kids and not grown ups. Other reasons varied and included that the elderly do not clean their teeth and kids do, the elderly are slow and kids are fast, the elderly pee themselves and kids do not, the elderly are shy and kids are not, the elderly do not like toys and kids do, and the elderly do not need a babysitter and kids do. It is funny how easily students could name the differences between themselves and the elderly, but not a single students could name a reason the elderly were like us.

“Students were then asked more specific questions about the elderly such as, what do they eat?” Three students were unsure, but eight students responded with the most popular answer of healthy foods. Almost all of the rest of the foods named were very specific except for some students who did not name a food but stated, “They can eat only soft things because they have weak teeth.” The foods named oddly enough were almost all soft things as well though. These foods included: pasta, beans, mashed potatoes, bread, eggs, and oatmeal. The only

additional food responses included chicken and cookies, and one student who looked at me strangely and shared, "They just eat regular food." The last student shared that they did not eat but simply just drank water. I was really starting to get a good picture of the array of knowledge students were coming into this study with.

When asked where the elderly lived ten students did not know, and the rest named random places with only three believing they lived in their own homes. When asked how they got around students were a bit more sure and only three did not know. The top answer from nine students was that they simply move slowly. Many of the rest shared that they needed things to help them walk, but only a few were able to name those specific things like canes and wheelchairs. Four students believed however that the elderly walk normal or like us. My personal favorite answer was that each time someone elderly needed to move a truck drove them around, even inside. I wonder how that truck fit into buildings.

When asked how elderly people often feel students again had a variety of answers with a few students sharing multiple feelings. In total there were 32 feelings given and two students who were unsure. Of the 32 feelings, 24 shared negative answers such as angry, mad, or nervous to die, with sad being the top answer from ten students. The remaining eight shared positive feelings such as happiness or feeling ok.

The last two questions received very similar answers. Students were asked to name things the elderly could do and then to name things the elderly liked to do. Again there were a few students who did not know, but most students were able to answer. The majority of the class gave stationary answers such as sleep, lay around, sit, relax, rest, or simply stated, "They don't move". The few single remaining students had other ideas with some of the most varied answers being that the elderly like to wear robes, take dogs to the bathroom, wash dishes, watch the news, and play tag.

The individual interviews gave me a whole new perspective of the elderly from my students' points of view. Some of the answers were not surprising to me but others were very surprising. Overall it felt great to really have a start and get a chance to work with and talk with the students about the elderly.

A Picture Says It All

With individual interviews taking so long to complete, I was craving some kind of data to see, without the parents' input, what the students truly had to say about the elderly. As interviews were going, I decided to have students complete a pre-writing about the elderly (Appendix F). This was something that would only take about half a class period, could be in place of their normally scheduled writing, since in fact it was a writing, and the whole class could do at once.

I printed out a double sided paper, primary lined, with a big empty box for a picture at the top. I wanted this to show not only their opinions, but where they

all were academically when it came to independent writing as well. I had my paper passer, one of our many class jobs, pass the papers out around the room, and students automatically knew to take one and write their name neatly at the top. Once everyone had their paper I read the prompt: How do you feel about the elderly? I reminded them that elderly meant an older grown up. I told them to be honest and share their opinion, that again only I would see it, and when they finished in their neatest writing and checked their work, they could draw a picture to go along with what they had to say. I also told them that I could not help them, so to just try their very best and use their word wall as a resource and their alphabet chart to stretch out those words about which they were not sure.

As students began to work I set the mood, as I like to do with some quiet classical music. Students quietly worked at their seats, trying to earn their writing stamina cubes for hard work and great focus. As they completed their writing, they brought their work over to me to check. I had students read to me what they wrote and describe their picture, and although I feel I would call myself a professional when it comes to deciphering “kid writing”, there were a few that even stumped me. As students read and talked about their pictures, I noticed most students included a simple sentence sharing how they felt with a few students adding a bit more. Their pictures also seemed to match up rather well with what they were saying.

When I looked through their work at home later that night, I was able to sort their work into four main groups, or feelings. These groups included students that did not like the elderly, students that had mixed feelings about the elderly or were unsure, student that did like the elderly, and students that did not share their opinion one way or another but instead shared things they felt they knew about the elderly.

The largest group of 10 students all shared negative feelings revolving around the elderly, with seven of the 10 saying flat out that they do not like the elderly. Other words included in their writing were: mean, sad, boring, and mad while phrases included were: I feel bad for them, they are not fun, I don't like them. The next most popular group of students were categorized as liking the elderly. These six students included words in their writing such as: sweet, fun, kind, cool, and amazing. The third group of five students were unsure about their feelings toward the elderly and shared that they did not know about them. Others shared mixed feelings pertaining them. These students shared things such as: They are nice but slow, they are only fun sometimes, old ladies are nice but not old men, or they are sad instead of happy but still ok. The last group of five students did not share how they felt about the elderly, but instead shared things they believed to be true about the elderly. These included a wide range of descriptions. Three students shared things the elderly liked to do during the day naming sleeping as the number one thing, but also cooking, eating, and watching

TV. Another student focused on feeling, naming sad and lonely as how they believed the elderly felt. The last student focused on appearance and shared that he knew elderly people had white hair.

Overall students had very mixed views when it came to their opinions of the elderly. There were negatives, positives, and a wide range in between. The students' work that stood out to me the most though was depicted this way: "I d no h th are" or as the student translated, "I don't know who they are". This stood out to me so much because it seemed to represent discussion I heard amongst students as they worked. They may have a preference toward their opinion of the elderly, but many of them did not have a lot of knowledge about elderly people in general. My next step was to finally discuss with them as a group.

Is Scales The Right Word?

"I love how nicely you all walked over to the carpet today," I said to my students as they finished finding seats on the carpet in the back of the classroom. They are little professionals when it comes to their routines, however today they knew they were finally going to help me with my thesis. I began by explaining how we would be spending a lot of time learning about the elderly. I shared with them that we would read books about the elderly, and get to visit them and have them visit us as well. I shared that each month we would do something special with the elderly and learn a little more about them as we did. As I shared I

glanced around. Similarly to when I had students sign their assent forms, some students seemed indifferent and said nothing, while other students cheered and smiled at both me and their friends as they heard more.

“I’ve been using the term elderly a lot as I talk and I wanted to make sure you understand what it means. Elderly basically means the same thing as older, and refers to a group of older people. Saying elderly is a nicer way to talk about someone older though.” Students nodded in front of me like they understood. “Yeah because old isn’t very nice.” one student shared out loud. “Not always.” I agreed.

“Before we visit the elderly, I want to know if you guys know anything about them. Do you?”, I asked.

“Oh we do!” many of them said together.

“So, what is elderly?” I read as I pointed to the title at the top of the chart paper I had hanging on the easel.

Student hands shot up all across the carpet. As they shared out ideas, I wrote them down on the chart paper (Figure 1) for them to see, and we discussed some of the things they said in more detail.

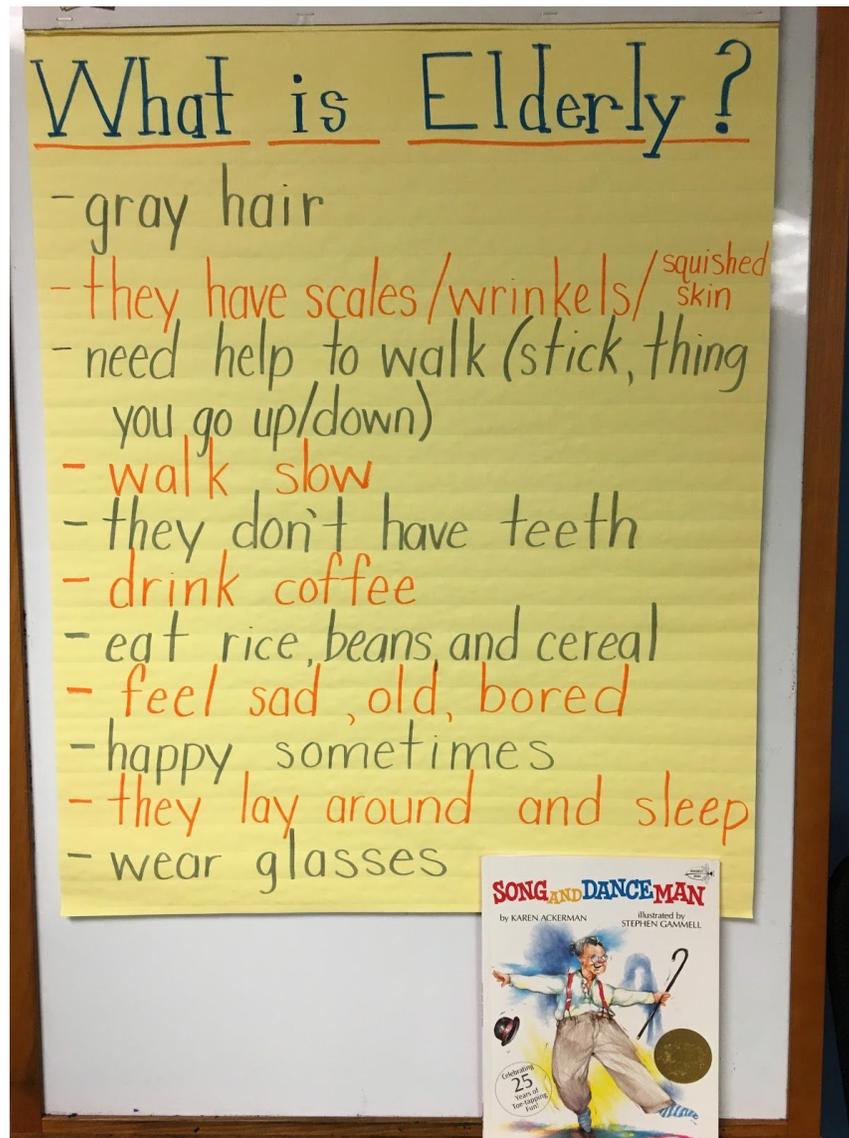


Figure 1. What is Elderly Class List

Gray hair was the first thing students seemed to agree on, and from there they shared other things pertaining to their appearance naming that the elderly wear glasses, and that they have, something they were unsure of what to call.

“Well you know Miss H, they have (pause), you know skin, that has like (pause) scales.” one student responded.

“Scales?” I questioned. “What do you mean?”

This was clearly something understood by the others, because multiple students started to grab their hands and arms and pinch their skin together, or put their hands on their faces, again pushing their skin to create folds.

“Like this” a few showed me, referring to their pushed together skin folds.

“Oh. I see. What is that called though?”, I asked.

“It’s like squished skin,” one shared.

“Yeah”, a few more agreed with nods.

“Skin like that has a name”, I shared. “Does anyone know?”

One boy raised his hand with a smile as others looked quizzically at him.

“I think I know. They’re called wrinkles,” he said. The students looked questioningly from him to me, almost asking without saying it, well, is he right?

Impressed, but not completely surprised, since he often came to the rescue with his array of knowledge I responded, “That’s right! Wrinkles!”

From there students moved onto a new topic: how the elderly move around. They all seemed to be in agreement when one student shared simply that they walk slow and another shared that they need help to walk.

“What do you mean they need help?” I asked. Again, students seemed unsure and struggled to come up with the vocabulary to explain what they meant.

“Some use a stick,” a few agreed, but none of them could name it as a cane. Others shared that they used other things to walk, too, but again could not give me names. A few stood up and tried to show me what they meant. One little girl explained, “You hold your hands in front of you like this, and then you pick it up and put it back down to help you walk.” which she showed in her movements as she talked. Again, they were unable to name what it was they were referring to, even though they had a visual of these helpful items. When this seemed to stump them one student offered, “I think they just lay around and sleep.” So I added it to the list.

Another discussion revolved around their general agreement that elderly people have no teeth. They agreed that all elderly people drink coffee as well.

“So they all drink coffee, but what do they eat?” I asked.

Stumped faces stared back at me. One student offered up rice, and students seemed to accept that answer. Another offered beans and again students accepted that answer, so we added them to the list.

“Cereal?” a third student offered. This answer was followed with immediate laughter as I wrote it on the list. “Nooooooooo!” many students called out. “What do you mean, no?” I asked. All of a sudden I was met with silence so I waited. Finally a student shared simply, “They just can’t eat cereal”.

Their last big discussion came when students started sharing emotions they believed the elderly to have. “They feel sad.” one student shared.

“Do they all feel sad?” I asked.

“Some feel old,” another shared.

“Some are bored,” yet another stated.

“Why do you think they feel this way?” I questioned.

Students seemed stumped, then finally one of the girls shared, “Well they can be happy sometimes.”

I smiled and said, “Well that’s good. What might make them feel happy?”

“If they have a family.” one boy called out, to which another boy responded, “They don’t have a family.”

If there were any questions about my students having some biases toward the elderly, this list gave me a good idea of what they had perhaps heard or seen before our talk. Some of the things I was not surprised about while others I did not quite expect. One thing was clear though, although students had some ideas and knew some things about the elderly, they lacked the vocabulary to go along with what they had to say. I had a long road ahead of me.

Fiction Means Fake

The next day when we went back to our class list, I had one goal in mind for the day. I wanted to get my students to see that some of the biased opinions they had shared the day before were not true for all elderly people, and that just like kids, all elderly are different. In doing so I also hoped that perhaps by

questioning a belief or two they would be more open to believing that some of the others things could possibly also not be true of all elderly.

I began by reading the list again with them to remind them of the things we had talked about the day before. “Do these things all make sense?” I asked the class, and they agreed with nods.

I then asked, “Well do you think ALL elderly people are like this?” to which I got mixed answers. A few students said yes right away, others said nothing at all. When I did not respond one student shared, “Well not ALL.” and a few students nodded in agreement to that.

With questions in the air about our list, I felt now was a great time to introduce the fiction story I had picked out to read to the class. “Today we are going to read a story called *The Song and Dance Man* by Karen Ackerman. This book is about an elderly man, and as I read I want you to look at the pictures and listen to the story to see if you think our list matches what the character in the book does and feels.” Then I began to read.

About halfway through the book I said, “Your list says the elderly need help to walk, they go slow, and they are sad. Does this man seem that way?” The kids started to yell out at once, something they normally do not do, saying “NO!” Some offered additional comments with smiles on their faces, “He’s happy.”, “He can dance.”, and “He can walk.” This is exactly what I was hoping for, I thought to myself. These were the answers I had wanted. I had wanted them to see the man

in the story may have been elderly but he could dance and sing along with his grandkids as easily as they could.

Feeling good about where we were heading in our discussion, I prompted them further, "So can elderly people really do this?". There was a slight pause and almost in sync two students responded, "No its ffffake because it's ffffiction!" Then all of a sudden it was like a chorus of students agreeing, "FFFiction means fffake." Hmmm I thought to myself. This is NOT where I saw this going.

I was in a bit of shock. I thought that by reading them a book about an elderly man who could do different things like dance, sing, and perform magic tricks, they would start to change their views. Instead they immediately shut it down saying he could only do those things because the book was fake. I did not expect that response at all, although was a bit impressed they could recognize a fiction text and put two and two together, since realistic fiction was not something we had talked about yet. I finished the book and thinking on my feet decided to have students go back to a desk.

Once settled I immediately pulled out my laptop and hooked it to the projector. I had students reflect on the book and make comparisons to the list we created as a class, at their tables, while I pulled up YouTube to find some more concrete evidence to back up the book. Maybe that would convince students... I hoped.

I turned on the projector to a video entitled "*Dance Boogie Woogie Rockabilly-Jive Nellia & Dietmar danceschool horn*". It showed a still shot of an elderly man and woman dancing on a large dance floor with the lights dimmed. In the background you could see them surrounded by a large audience of people smiling and holding their hands together in what appeared to be a clapping position.

"Now you told me that the elderly can't really dance, and the man in the book could only dance because it was fiction. I wonder what you'll think of these two elderly people?" I stated, and then simply started the video.

Immediately the class was greeted by the sound of an upbeat jive song with cheering and clapping in the background. On the screen the couple was dancing to the beat, and oh were they dancing. They did spins, dips, and even added a bit of comedy as they danced through a whole choreographed routine and the crowd went wild in the background. The students were quiet at first but then it was like a switch flipped. One student yelled, "Whoa!" during one of the dips, and a few started to cheer. The next thing I knew the students were clapping along to the music, laughing, and cheering the dancers on. When the video ended I asked, "So was that fake?"

The class all shouted mixed versions of, "No! They were real! They were real people!".

"So I guess some elderly people can dance!" I exclaimed.

Pumpkin Jack

Apparently some fiction books can get a point across though, and this one wasn't even planned, making it that much more exciting. Two days later during science we were again sitting on the back carpet in the classroom. I had picked a book to do a last minute review on pumpkins since the following day our class was going on a field trip to the pumpkin patch and the workers are always impressed when my students can rattle off all they know about pumpkins.

In my hands I held the story, *Pumpkin Jack* by Will Hubbell, one of my favorites for teaching the pumpkin life cycle. Before I began I reminded the students to pay particular attention to the different steps the pumpkin goes through as it grows, then I started to read. Expecting no surprises, since I have read the book many times before, I read page by page as the students and I discussed the different ways they saw the pumpkin changing.

All of a sudden I heard gasps, students' eyes got big as I read one of the pages and hands shot up all over the carpet. Never having had this reaction before from students previous years, I paused and looked back over the page a bit confused at what had happened. Ahhhhh I thought to myself as I spotted what must have been the reason for their excitement, I did not expect to get a lesson out of this, but here one was waiting for me. I played along with their excitement and called on one of the girls with her hand up questioning what had made them

all gasp. “Wrinkled!” She shouted, “We learned that when we were talking about grandmas and grandpas.”

On the page we just read the words were, “Every time Jack looked different. He became wrinkled and his fierce smile began to look silly.” It used the actual word wrinkled to describe the pumpkin in the story as it was getting older. I’ve read this book every year to my class and have never taken notice of this word, yet as soon as I reread it this year, I caught myself thinking what a coincidence. I was also proud that my students had remembered a new vocabulary word, and that after teaching it to them, it now had meaning.

“You’re right! We did learn that word! Do you remember what it means?”, I asked. They reminded me that it dealt with your skin and it means that your skin is squished up, and sometimes your skin gets like that when you get older. I asked them to show me as well, and they did so by pinching their hands and scrunching up their faces to make wrinkles, just like the pumpkin in the story, Pumpkin Jack.

A Pirate Comes to Visit

In my baby shark costume, representing one of my student’s favorite songs of the year, I instructed the class to start cleaning up their current Halloween center to get ready to rotate. They got right to work, putting papers in mailboxes, stacking bins, and hanging up headphones amongst other things. As they did this I peeked into the hallway, having just got the word that our visitor

had arrived, and knowing she would be at our room any second. She quickly handed me her things to put in the room as she walked by and I pointed her in the direction of the bathroom to change into her costume.

As students started their last Halloween center rotation, I told them that the special elderly visitor I told them about would be here in any second, and as I spoke, in walked our guest. An old brown tricorne hat sat on top of her head, a brown and white top attached to a long flowing red and brown striped dress covered her body, and tall old brown boots covered her feet. "Whoa! Cool!", yelled some of the students at the center closest to the door. Students started to pause in every center. "Class!" I announced, "I'd like to introduce you to our special guest, my mom!"

Students struggled to hide their excitement as they rushed up to her, asking questions, complimenting her, and trying their best to each be the one in the spotlight. Once the excitement died down a bit it was time to get ready for our quickly approaching Halloween parade. Students rotated between finishing their last center, changing into their costumes in the bathroom, and getting to spend time with my mom as she helped them with masks, shoes, and additional little pieces of their costumes they could not get on alone. "Do you like my costume?" one student asked. "How about mine?" another added. They wanted her opinion and wanted to hear that she liked and noticed them. With the added help, we flew through getting into costumes. As the class lined up for the parade,

I did not hear one mention of their excitement to go march for their parents. Instead the only thing students seemed to be concerned about was making sure my mom was also coming out and would be marching in the parade with them, and she did. Two laps around the barricaded in parking lot and some tired from waving hands and we were back inside the classroom and ready to party.

Students gathered on the middle carpet in front of the white board to watch a short Halloween cartoon. As they did students who had brought in class treats passed them out along with my mom and I, onto plates and napkins at each seat. Once the cartoon ended and desks were piled high with treats students stood up to find a seat. However, this normally simple and quick task was far from that. Students always picked their own seats, however now their only concern was to be near my mom.

“Where are you going to sit?” a few asked.

“Can you sit with us?” a few more asked.

A swarm followed her around the room, until finally she promised that she would come visit and sit with each one of them for a little bit. Students began to eat, the party music went on, and there were smiles and laughs all around the room. That, along with a lot of messy icing covered faces and sprinkled covered desks. As she rotated around the room, the students faces lit up all around her. “You can have one of my cupcakes!” one little girl offered, holding her cupcake

out to my mom. Although the offer was politely declined, students upon student offered her sweet treats from their plates as she joined their table.

Looking back at the moment, my mom later shared a reflection of some of her thoughts. *“It seemed the kids automatically gravitated toward someone new. They could sit anywhere they wanted to sit, so they all wanted to sit where I was standing. They all offered me their food, or wanted me to try THEIR cupcake. They were so welcoming and warm to be around. They all wanted attention and wanted to be recognized as special.”*

After juice boxes were cleaned up and crushed chips picked up off the floor, students headed into the hallway for a class picture. Again as they lined up their main concern was that my mom was coming. Their concern was quickly eliminated though when they found out she wouldn't be coming because she was staying behind to put something special on each of their desks. She assured them she would still be there when they came back, and students filed out for their picture.

On their return to the room, the only sound that could be heard was a chorus of “Thank yous!” that grew as students checked out their new Halloween erasers. But there was still one activity to go. As students compared their new erasers, others passed out blank BINGO boards, and halloween clipart. I explained the directions, to cut out the clip art pictures and glue them in any blank BINGO square they wanted to, then students grabbed scissors from their

center supply bins and got to work. The music went back on and sticky little fingers created their own Halloween Bingo boards.

Again, looking back at the moment, my mom was able to offer some insight as she walked around the classroom. *“When they were doing their BINGO sheets, I would compliment a student on their work and immediately the rest of the students near them would ask, “Well did you see mine?” or “Look how many pictures I got on.” They wanted that positive reinforcement from me that THEIR work was great.”*

Unfortunately with all the excitement of our special visitor, we ran out of time to try our new boards. Since our class party had been held early this year due to some upcoming events, we still had plenty of time to play BINGO another day now that the students had finished their boards. As they grabbed their backpacks and coats from the hallway, and got ready for dismissal they again bombarded my mom with questions, asking if she would be coming with them to dismissal. When it was finally time for for everyone to head home they left her with hugs goodbye and the hope that she would come back again.

The students were so open to meeting someone new and welcomed my mom into the classroom without a question. They wanted so much attention from her and reassurance on everything to make them feel special. They never wanted to leave her unless they had the reassurance they would see her again too. Although I questioned at first how students would react to a newer stranger I

think the fact that they knew she was safe, and that they were in a safe place made it ok. They knew their setting, their classmates, me, and the only new thing to offer them was her. This support made the experience a comfortable and easy one.

The Trick-or-Treat Hotel

After a morning finishing up several rounds of BINGO on their custom created Halloween boards, the students again took shifts changing into costumes to get ready for round two of trick-or-treating. This time things would be much different though, because for the first time students would be leaving the school to visit the elderly. As I collected my bag, with all its field trip essentials, I thought to myself, they have all met someone who is elderly. Someone who had given them presents, helped them with their costumes, and shared a fun afternoon with them. Someone who had made them smile and who they had not wanted to leave. This would be great! But one person coming to visit them in their classroom was completely different than visiting a whole group of elderly people they did not know out of the comfortable environment they were used to.

As we rode the bus to our destination I talked with several of the students around me, and asked them how they felt about going to visit the elderly.

“I’m so excited, because I love older people!” the little girl across from me said.

The boy in front of her chimed in saying, "I'm happy we get to go on a field trip, but I'm kind of scared because I don't know the older people."

"Yeah," another little boy exclaimed, "I'm happy about the field trip too, but I don't know what they'll be like. I'm nervous."

"Sometimes they could steal you," the boy in the seat next to me exclaimed. After reassuring the students that no one would be stealing them, and listening as they went back to their conversations, I thought to myself. Where would he have gotten an idea like that, never even having met them?

When we reached our destination, students stared at the building in front of them as they piled off the bus and lined up outside. A long and light colored brick building, with a gray roof, maroon shutters, and white awning above large doors stared back at them. Students stood with their bus buddies, grocery bags waving in the wind, for the trick-or-treat they were about to take part in, and as the bus pulled away, we walked into the first building.

Inside there were about 20 elderly men and women sitting around in a large living room type set up. The students were all dressed up for Halloween and as they came through the door I had them unzip their coats to show off their costumes. They followed in line, slowly, one after another. Many of the elderly seemed excited. They were waving, asking questions, and guessing what the students' costumes were. None of the students said anything, even my more outgoing students were speechless as they walked by. They were straight faced.

They were almost silent. They did not wave back. Although I expected them to be shy, I did not expect them to be speechless. Thinking back to our previous week in school, special visitors from the local police department came in and talked with the students about strangers. I wondered if the earlier comment on the bus about being taken and the shyness the students displayed were due to the elderly being strangers to them. This was just a theory though and it could have been a combination of reasons that caused their overall lack of response.

If this was going to be how the whole visit went, it was going to be a long and not very worthwhile day. I needed to break the ice somehow and show the students it was ok to open up. I started to talk with some of the elderly, referencing certain students and almost putting them on the spot to have to respond. I reminded the students they could talk to them, wave, and smile. When we got to the back of the room a few elderly women had pre-made up candy bags for the students to get as they walked by, but toward the end of the line, and with about 6 students to go they ran out.

Oh how would my students react to this, I wondered. Then when I saw the worry on the women's faces I felt even worse. Luckily, one of the staff members flew to the rescue saying, "We have more in the kitchen.", to which he quickly took off. But then something amazing happened. As we stood there waiting, surrounded by the residents on either side, one of my students finally opened up.

“What’s your costume?” an elderly woman asked one of the little boys, refusing to give up, and determined to get one of the students to talk with her.

Pulling his mask over his face he looked at her and said, “I’m a Transformer.” Silence followed and then the boy in front of him chimed in and shared, “I’m a Ninja Turtle.”

Although hesitant, others started chiming in about their costumes, and then some started sharing with other residents around the room. As they got a little more comfortable some offered to show off their masks, while others held open their jackets to help residents get a better look. The best part was when smiles started to appear. Finally stocked up with a fresh box of goodies from the kitchen, the women filled up the last couple bags. I can’t help but look back and think it’s a good thing that candy ran out!

We followed along with some of the residents on a trick-or-treat tour of two of the buildings. After our initial stop, we heading through a dining hall where a group of elderly men shared an afternoon lunch. “Are you off from school today?” one of them asked as the others waved. “We do have school today” I shared, “But we came here to visit you instead.” This got some smiles from the men at the table as we continued our tour.

“Miss H I need to tell you something!” the transformer from earlier shared.

“What do you need to tell me?” I asked.

“Man this house is beautiful!” he gawked.

“It is beautiful isn’t it!” I exclaimed.

We paraded down a long hallway, into another large lobby area where the elders sitting around waved and cheered as we walked by. Our tour continued into another dining area and by this point the students were starting to really smile as their arms waved from side to side. This dining room was packed with chatty residents, some with visitors as well. This time as we stopped to talk, students were sharing about their costumes on their own. They were posing for the elders and telling them about their costumes, and of course stocking up on more candy. As our tour wound through the building all of the students, that I could see, were smiling and laughing. Two of the girls, dressed as a unicorn and a kitten, asked for me to take a video, which they loved to do, to post to our parents when we got back to school. The girls talked about how much they loved it there, how they were having so much fun, and after giving the camera the thumbs up, had a friendly debate over who wanted to come back more. In case you are curious, the winner won with wanting to come back and visit every single day.

I felt like I was in a real parade at this point as students waved to residents in the hallway, and to more residents riding bicycles in the physical therapy room. The next hallway we walked down was filled with mirrors and students admired themselves dancing and posing as they walked past each mirror. As we continued, the students saw a pool through one of the glass doors.

“This looks like a hotel. It even has a pool.” the same boy who had been worried about getting stolen shared out, clearly having forgotten his bus ride worries. “It iissss a hotel.” his friend informed him as they kept walking.

Moving outside we headed over to the third and final building to finish our trick-or-treat parade. Sitting outside the main entrance on one of the patio chairs was an elderly woman by herself. As we got closer I saw her sit up, and start waving with enthusiasm. When we made it to the entrance, our line leader walked right up to her and gave her a big hug and not wanting to miss out so did every other student as they walked by. A few hugged her and moved into the building, while others talked to her about their costumes and told her how much fun they were having. I noticed one of my students toward the middle of the line eyeing her up and I wondered why, however when he approached her he walked right over, gave her a big hug, then walked off to her side. No worries I thought. The hug line continued, shared some discussion, then went inside, but the boy still stood off to the side just watching her. All of a sudden, he walked back in front of her and said, “Are you a girl or a boy?” A moment of panic set in as I stared, most likely horrified at the boy, but with his eyes still focused on the woman, he was unaware of anything else. When she didn’t seem to hear, I let it go and figured I would discuss it with him later, but not one to leave curious he raised his voice and said again “Are you a girl or a boy?” I think I might have gone into slight shock as I stood there speechless, however was brought back

when she responded with a chuckle, “I’m a girl, but if you don’t know if I’m a girl or a boy I must be doing something wrong.” Another student chimed in, “Can’t you see her lipstick!”, and the woman gave him a big smile, laughed again, and as he returned the smile, he leaned back in for another hug (Figure 2). Looking back, I would have to say it may have been one of my favorite interactions of the day and I couldn’t have asked for a more wonderful resident to model the kindness, patience, and I must say wittiness the elderly have to offer, all with a huge smile on her face.



Figure 2. Hugs Brings a Smile

Once inside the students made their last candy stop, then it happened again. When the last two students walked up to the elderly man handing out candy, he realized he was short. He looked a little upset and didn’t know what to

do so I told him not to worry about it, since my students had so much candy at this point anyhow. They both smiled and handled it very well, however, two other residents said they had candy in our rooms we will go get, then turned down the hallway and quickly rushed off, not taking no for an answer. As my two students waited patiently, they stood looking around and noticed a pumpkin sitting on a nearby piano.

“A pumpkin!” the first said pointing.

“We know all about pumpkins.” The others said.

They continued on, filling the three elderly people still sitting there in on what they knew about the pumpkin life cycle. The man who had the candy applauded them on how smart and impressive they were, and both students beamed with happiness. When the two women returned from around the corner their hands were filled with bags of Swedish fish and Reese’s peanut butter cups from their rooms. I was so overjoyed with the thoughtfulness they had shown, giving their own candy supply up willingly so none of the students would be left out. One of the women pointed out, “I brought you each back two, since you waited so long.” The students both said thank you and gave her a big hug (Figure 3) , and as we walked away one of the students shared rather matter of factly, “I love this place!”



Figure 3. Hugs Also Mean Thank You

After a successful trick-or-treating tour, we met the other students in one of the giant dining rooms in the last building. The residents had a craft laid out on all of the large round tables, and students were already sitting around the tables getting comfortable. Each student had their own brown foam rectangle with slits in it and long multi-colored foam strips to weave in and out of the rectangular mat in front of them. As we listened to the directions, I yet again worried a bit,

something I do often if you haven't noticed, but this time about the craft. I knew not all the students had the best motor skills and I wanted so badly for everything to go perfectly, I was hesitant about a craft that would be too hard. Yet again, the students put my stress at ease, and worked on their project to make a fall placemat for almost an hour, and if you know the normal attention span of a first grader, you know that is rather impressive. As they worked, a few residents walked from table to table, helping the students out (Figure 4). Residents talked with students and shared stories about their lives. One of the residents having an especially great time shared that she had been a teacher in the local school district for years before retiring. She shared how excited she was to have the students come and visit and was already questioning when they would be coming back to visit again.



Figure 4. A Demonstration of Something New

I too walked around assisting students. As I admired crafts and complimented all the hard work I saw, one of the students called me over. "Miss H, are you having a great time, because I'm having a great time!" she said, and as I looked around the room it was pretty clear that they were having a great time. Students were struggling as I expected, however not one student complained. They all tried it, and to my surprise, even those struggling or those who often got frustrated, seemed to be having fun anyhow. I was so impressed with the effort they put into it, and how they didn't give up even though it was a bit tough. I also felt proud because after some of the students finished, instead of acting out they offered to help other students finish and were so positive with each other and supportive.

As the majority of the students finished working on their crafts and we started getting ready to leave, I started bathroom trips for those who needed to go. The bathrooms nearby had two doors next to each other, each with a sign outside of them with the normally seen boy and girl outline, but also showed the outline of a person in a wheelchair. While one of the students was waiting outside for the bathrooms, he asked, "Miss H, what does that sign there mean?"

"These two pictures here show that both boys and girls can use these bathrooms", I started to explain.

"But, what does that other thing mean? What is it?" he interrupted.

"What do you think it is?" I asked him.

“...It looks like a transformer”, he offered with a shrug.

I laughed a little, and explained that it was actually a wheelchair. We talked about how if you have a wheelchair you need more space, and these bathrooms have that.

“Oh! I get it!”, he exclaimed.

As we rode back to school on the bus, many of the students fell asleep, exhausted from an eventful afternoon. I was lucky enough that the student sharing his seat with me shared his feelings, before falling asleep as well. “That was the best day ever Miss H! We got to trick-or-treat in three houses!” he said, and what could be better than that?

The First Review

After our visit with the elderly, we returned to the classroom. Students hung up their jackets as they filed back in the classroom found a desk and sat down. A few students passed out papers (Appendix H) and I instructed students to put their name on the top of their paper. The paper in front of them asked two very simple questions. The first, would you like to go back and visit Country Meadows and the elderly who live there again? To this students simply had the option to circle either yes or no. Following that was the word, why?, and a bunch of blank lines. After reading the questions to the class, the students got right to work, their recent adventure still fresh in their minds.

The whole drive home from work all I could think about were their answers. The second I got home I put my bag down on a chair and pulled out the stack of papers. After a quick glance through the stack, I counted 25 papers with the word yes circled in pencil or crayon. For a first visit 25 was only one short of a full class of happy kids.

But surprisingly the paper that I most wanted to read was for the student that circled no. As I pulled the paper out I noticed it was one of the little boy who after the initial ice breaker had been extremely vocal the whole time. His answer under why simply read, "I do not like it because they didn't see me". I was so confused by this answer. What did he mean they didn't see him? I remember him talking to multiple residents, pulling his mask on and off, and smiling at them as they shared their love of his costume with him. I decided to let the pictures do the talking and glanced back at them. Sure enough there he was in two of the first pictures, one with his mask on and one with it off and a giant smile on his face as he looked at her. This didn't look like someone unnoticed to me. As I got to the pictures of the craft though I noticed he was back in one of the corners working. I wondered if maybe this is where he was referring to? So I made a point to ask him in the morning, and as expected when I asked him about it he said that he did not get any help with the craft even though they came to his table. It all made sense now. With the craft being hard my guess is he struggled a bit. When this happens in the classroom and he is not perfect, he gets very upset at everyone

and everything, very quickly, and often has a hard time getting back on track afterwards. When the craft got hard and he had no guidance I am sure this was the case. I peeked into his mailbox and sure enough although he had a very nice mat, the pieces were not weaved together perfectly and some were a bit loose. I was sad that this had ruined his experiences but it gave me all the more reason to make it even better next time.

When I got to the rest I was amazed at the wide range of answers students shared. Some students shared only one or two answers. Four shared that they wanted to go back but just simply said because they liked the place. One wanted to go back solely because he liked trick-or-treat. Two wanted to go back solely because they liked the candy. Two more wanted to go back solely because they liked the craft, and another two wanted to go back solely because they liked the residents or people and thought they were nice. Three students shared two reasons and wanted to go back because they liked both the candy and thought the elderly people were nice. The rest of the students, nine total, shared a whole list of reasons why they wanted to return, which included:

- Gave us candy
- Getting to trick or treat
- Doing a craft
- Got to play
- They cheered for us in our costumes

- The residents were nice
- The best part was their hugs
- It was fun
- They had snack (which they didn't)
- They got to meet them all
- I love the furniture
- I love the elderly

In addition to their answers, two more students, one male and one female had circled yes to wanting to go back, but are both struggling writers and were both unable to legibly write a sentence to answer their question. I touched base with both of them in the morning. The female student shared simply that she liked the people there, while the male shared that they liked to see him and he made them smile. Both their answers said a lot about their personality, one short and to the point, and the other always one to bring a smile to everyone's face around him.

Another Try At Fiction

When I first started to plan my study, a lot of my teaching about the elderly involved around reading students stories where the main character was an elderly man or woman. However after my previous attempt at a fiction reading I was not so sure this was the way to go. Despite my gut telling me this may not

be the best approach, I had picked out so many great books so decided to give it another try.

Lunch had finished a bit earlier than usual and instead of my students going to their normal elective class, the teacher was pushing into the classroom today, but texted me she was running a bit behind. With a bit of time to use I decided now was a great time to give those elderly fiction stories another go. This time the story I read was *Emma* by Wendy Kesselman.

After a simple introduction, “We have been learning a lot about the elderly lately. This story is about an elderly woman, like many of the women you met on our field trip.” I began to read.

As I read students learned about the main character, Emma, who is 72 years old. On page four of the story it talked about how Emma, climbs a tree to get her cat who is stuck, but how she doesn’t mind because she loves climbing trees. I paused and asked, “Do you think the elderly we know could do that?” Students shared mixed answers of both yes and no, however overall they seemed unsure. Most of them looked at me to try to read my reaction to see if the elderly could climb trees or not. Ok, I thought. Although they are not convinced, this is already an improvement from our last fiction story. They are unsure, but that means they are questioning the fact that it could be possible, instead of shooting the idea right down like they did last time. I continued to read.

On the next page, the story shared how when Emma's family would come to visit they would laugh at her and say she must be getting old. Many of my kids got upset at this part, gasping and making angry faces.

"That was not very nice of them to say and do." One of the girls stated.

"Calling her old was rude. They should say the word elderly instead because that's a nicer way of say old." stated another boy. Many students nodded in agreement at this statement. Now my thoughts went back to when I first introduced the term elderly. I had shared with students that elderly meant another way to say older, but was a much nicer way to say it. My students had not only remembered, but were becoming sensitive to the feelings of others, even if just an elderly character from a book.

The rest of the book focused on Emma's paintings. It talked about how her children did not want her to hang some of them, and again my students got offended, calling out, "They aren't very nice." "They should let her hang them." When the book finished the students talked about how she really was a very good painter, almost as if they were defending her feelings and sticking up for her. Despite this, they still seemed unsure if real elderly people could be such good painters. Although this fiction story had gone much better than the first one, and students were now considering that it was possible an elderly person could actually do these things, I still questioned if fiction stories were the best way to get the point across that the elderly are capable.

Photos Around The Room

Based on the fact that the students were open to more views of the elderly after the last fiction book, I decided to incorporate some photographs around the room that showed realistic pictures of some intergenerational interactions. I incorporated posters into our normal classroom decor, of students around the age of those in the class so they were relatable, working with the elderly. In the library I hung up five different pictures of a variety of elderly people reading with students. In the writing center there were three more pictures of the elderly working with students to write. Some of the pictures were only elderly women and children, some of the pictures were only elderly men and children, and some included both elderly men and women. Ethnicities of the people in the photographs varied as well. All of the photographs had one thing in common though, and that was that in all the pictures both the children and the elderly looked happy.

A Thanksgiving Service Learning Visit

At this point the study had been going exactly how I had hoped. Students were beginning to ask about the elderly and after our October visits, were becoming excited for their next chance to see them. I wanted to offer a different opportunity and so instead of us traveling to them, I talked with the staff I had arranged my first visit with, and got approval for the elderly to come on a trip to our school.

About a week before the visit I told students about the visitors we would be having. I told them that since they had given us so much delicious candy when we went to visit them, I thought we should do something special for them this time. Right away a few of my student shared ideas such as offering for us to give them candy or for us to sing to them. I thought about these ideas and decided although candy may not be the best choice some sort of treat was not a bad idea. I also loved the idea of singing to them or even having a few students do a readers' theatre. With Thanksgiving quickly approaching I decided to focus all the activities around this. The other first grade teacher and I found thanksgiving songs and a readers theater about the first Thanksgiving. We also worked with cafeteria staff and they offered to prepare various pies, juice, and coffee for the students and elderly when they arrived.

That afternoon we took both of our classes down to our big assembly room. We explained to them what would be happening and started to split the students into groups for the songs and readers' theatre. As we started to assign parts to the students I made sure to share with them that they would not only need to learn their lines, but would be reading them individually in front of a lot of others. I know I have students that are very shy, however every single one of them told me with confidence that they wanted to do it anyhow. One little boy told me that although he was a little afraid he was going to talk as loud as he could to make the elderly visitors happy. Although the songs were not too tricky and my

class loved singing, they only had a week to not only learn all the verses but to also memorize the movements we made up to go with each song. The play however was not very easy at all. It included lines with multiple sentence and some tricky words for even older students. Looking back my students had enjoyed even the tricky tasks, eased my stress multiple times, and proved they were more than capable of a challenge, so I felt confident this time that they could learn these challenging words and put on a good show.

With a week to practice I was feeling good. We practiced as a whole group on Monday, then on Tuesday and Wednesday had students start to practice their lines and moves individually with a little help. The students were really starting to look and sound good, but were still stumbling over the big words, speaking up, and remembering the moves for the songs, but with two more days we still had time. We never had our two more days of practice though, because as a storm blew through we quickly packed up the students belongings and sent them home early before our afternoon practice. I had them bring their scripts home and told them to practice, and it's a good thing they had them because the storm caused a cancelation of school on Friday as well. With the visit Monday, and no time left to practice, it was all up to the students now. Work at home was something they often forget, but when it came to things they really wanted they had pretty good memories. As I shoveled my driveway that weekend I hoped this would be one of things they remembered to do.

Monday morning rolled around and as the students entered the classroom I had many proudly sharing with me that they had practiced that weekend and knew their whole part! We spent the morning making Native American vests in the classroom out of big paper grocery bags. Then students created matching feather head pieces to perfect their look. As students created their vests I got word that many of the residents who were supposed to be coming could no longer make it on the trip. In need of some elderly visitors I made some quick phone calls to my mom and aunt and they excitedly agreed to join the event later.

When one o'clock rolled around the students lined up fully dressed in their Native American attire with scripts and songs in hand. One student confidently assured me that he did not need to bring his script because he had memorized his lines. Impressed I told him, "If you are sure you know them and do not think you need your paper you can leave it behind", and he did.

As we walked down to the cafeteria I got word from the office three guests had arrived for the event, my aunt, my mom, and one of my mom's best friends, and were on their way to the cafeteria. The other first grade classes joined us heading down to the cafeteria as well to enjoy the show and some treats. Students filed in excitedly chattering and as my extra visitors arrived they spread out amongst the students. I made particular care to have my mom sit next to a certain boy in my class. This boy was the only one who had answered negatively

about our past visit and I wanted to ensure he got the attention that he had wanted last time to make a more positive experience for him.

Our real guests of honor were still yet to arrive though and as we got word they were running late, I quieted students down and read some Thanksgiving stories to the group. When the visitor's bus pulled in outside the students wanted so much to impress them and be on their best behavior. With eyes glued to the door anticipating their entrance any second the whole cafeteria was quiet, a vast change from its normal lunch hour chatter. As the doors opened five elderly guests entered the cafeteria. Students remained silent and just watched as two active elderly residents effortlessly walked in and plopped down in between students. Closely following, three more slowly inched across the room with their walkers and sat right up front close to the action. Once all the visitors were situated it was time for the show.

The group doing the readers theatre grabbed their papers and lined up in front of their patient audience. Once introduced the first student began. I quietly tip toed behind them as they read their parts in order down the line. I quietly whispered to a few students to speak up, but I did not need to remind many, and had a few even shout their parts, which they later told me was to ensure everyone could hear them. I did not need to tell a single student when it was their turn, because they were all following along and ready. I only had to whisper tricky words to three students, and even those three were able to read the rest of their

lines perfectly. And when it came to the last reader, the boy who not only had the hardest line, but the boy who had told me before leaving the room he did not need his script, spoke loud, clear, and perfectly remembered his entire three sentences! The audience, including myself, went wild with claps and cheers, and the students shuffled back to their seats, only one lacking a smile.

The little girl who did not leave smiling looked a little upset. I know she had been having a really hard time remembering one of the words in her script, and was also one of the students who I had to whisper to during the performance to help her remember. I was going to check in with her, but when she sat back down she ended up sitting right next to one of the elderly women there to visit so I left her go. When I looked over at her less than a minute later she was talking with the woman, who happened to be my mom and had a smile on her face again. My mom had told her what a wonderful job she had done and how she was so impressed with her reading and the big words she had said. The little girl, much happier after the feedback, admitted that she messed up one word. Instead of still appearing upset about it though, she said, "I messed up one word, but it's ok because I remember it now". It was so exciting to me that she had gone to feeling sad for the mistake she had made, but with a little encouragement from a new elderly friend her attitude had changed. She not only was now ok with the mistake that had previously made her upset, but now even recognized that the

mistake had helped her learn something new, a skill that even adults sometimes fail to notice. What a big achievement!

The other half of the students were split into three groups and performed different songs with motions to go along. They were all amazing, in my opinion, and I couldn't have been a more proud teacher at that moment. All of the students seemed proud of themselves afterwards as well. They spent the rest of the week teaching the song words and motions to their classmates. When that week ended I think I was singing the songs in my sleep I had heard them so many times during centers and recess.

As the last group sat back down, the cafeteria workers placed 5 different flavored pies out with plates, napkins, forks, and different kinds of juice for the kids. Coffee was also placed in back of the cafeteria for the visitors. The students nearby took orders from the elders, then with a little help pouring the coffee, brought back fresh coffee and pie to all the guests (Figure 5). When all the guests were served the students lined up and got their pie and juice as well, then went back to their seats to talk with the visitors. The visitors stayed to talk for an entire hour, and you could easily spot where each visitor sat by the huge crowd of students surrounding them.



Figure 5. Service Learning

Each guest had their own special charm. One of the women at the end of the front table was not very mobile and had a caretaker visiting along with her. She was surrounded by students though and it was clear that she was extremely sharp, cracking jokes and challenging the students to trivia questions, while answering theirs as well. Another women, completely mobile and moving around the cafeteria with ease also seemed to draw a lot of positive attention. She was the only one who was a participant at our earlier visit as well and shared with the students stories of when she use to be a teacher. She had a smile on her face the whole time and the fact that she came again to participate showed that the first visit had meant something to her. The extra three guests I had invited last

minute, were all mobile and witty and spent the time telling stories about themselves and playing games with the students as well.

Another elderly woman and man up front seemed to struggle to talk with anyone. The woman was getting many students coming up to her, but due to a speech problem was very hard to understand, so after long many students gave up and left. The man nearby was shy and not many students even tried to approach him. I remember one student shared in his initial writing that he liked elderly women but not men. Although he was the only one to write that, it seems that other students may have shared his opinions. Not one of the women had trouble with students approaching them, but many students stayed clear of the man as he ate in silence. Luckily, the students were resilient and both elders had a friend by the end of the visit. Although many were getting discouraged by their lack of understanding with the woman, one boy was not bothered by this minor setback. He stood in front of her talking and laughing for hours and finally having someone to talk to, her smile went ear to ear. One of the little girls in my class was the first to finally sit next to the man when she saw he was alone. She was very shy and did not say much, but stayed put talking to him in short simple sentences. As they both became more comfortable with each other it was like a switch had been flipped (Figure 6). They ended up hitting it off so well that she referred to him on a first name basis for the rest of the year. She shared how great he was and how they had so many things in common like their favorite

food, color, and sometimes even watched the same movies. When it was time for the guests to leave the students said their goodbyes, involving lots of hugs, and after they were gone we headed back to the classroom.



Figure 6. First Name Basis

Our Visitors Share Some Insight

After the visit and having made some great connections with some of the guests, I asked them to share thoughts from their point of view regarding the visit. I told them to send me anything they observed, enjoyed, or thought about during and after coming.

Here was the feedback I got from two of the guests (Figures 7-9).

The kids were very excited and the noise was extreme, but when asked to quiet down and sit well to impress the elder guests they all immediately did as requested – I think this showed how much they wanted to please the visitors.

When I sat down you could tell the extroverted kids as they just started firing questions at me – what is my favorite activity, how old was I, do I have a job, what is my favorite color. I asked the same questions back and they were more than happy to give me details about their lives. After sitting quietly by, some of the more reserved kids started to contribute to the conversation. It was a safe space and I was a safe person so they felt at ease.

The kids that were performing all wanted me to know what their parts were and after they were done, how they did. They were all proud even if they messed up a word they said I messed this up but I know the word now. They all wanted that approval of what they had done. I think approval from a grown up is valued and important to all kids.

I noticed the kids approached some of the really older people and I don't think they knew how to interact so after the kids tried and may not have gotten a rich response from the elder person they moved on to interact with another person. I think there has to be a two-way interaction to keep the connection.

Many of the girls wanted to show their nail colors or earrings, but many of the boys wanted to talk about sports.

There were so many kids wanting attention that it was difficult to reach them all. They did take turns when asked to so they understand their turn will come. Since I've met many before they seem to have put me in their "friend" group and were very open. I think in a more targeted environment they could get more individual attention. I think it was a positive event, as many of the kids wanted that hug when we left. Once I got one hug.. they all wanted one. It shows how much the kids want that connection with a grown up whether they have a strong or not so strong home life. They have an abundance of love to give and share.

One of the women from the home was thrilled to talk with the kids. She was a former 4-grade teacher so she knew how to reach the kids and ask questions they would understand. She talked to them about her teaching. It was something they could understand and process. Her enthusiasm got the kids engaged.

Some of the kids were very excited that they picked the same pie as my friend – cherry. I selected coconut, which made most of the kids wonder what it was. It was not the typical apple, pumpkin, cherry they were used to. We talked about trying new things and even if you don't like them, they may a few years later. They seemed open to the concept of change in tastes.

Figure 7. Thanksgiving Guest One Feedback

When I sat down at the table, they asked me if I was one of the elderly visitors. I said, "Yes I am one of the old people." They quickly corrected me, telling me that it's not nice to say OLD, that it's insulting. You're supposed to say elderly.

They were proud of their Native American vests and headpieces and explained the names on them were their Native American names. Then they showed me their real names written inside the headpieces.

They were also proud of the program they were going to present. There were 2 different groups at my table - the buffalo hunters and the five turkeys group. They were eager to sing their parts to me. After they "taught" me their parts, they told me that now I could go up and sing with them. I told them I'd need a little more practice, because practice helps you get better and better at doing things. I would not want to mess up their performance.

I stood up when they performed so I could see them better when they performed. And they were looking back at me for approval.

I was surrounded by some very talkative kids. _____ was extremely outgoing. _____ was very quiet. I had to initiate conversations with her to include her in the group. She didn't smile much at first.

I initiated talk about families. First, they wanted to know my name. I told them and explained to them that I was Miss H's aunt and that I've known her since the day she was born. I showed them a picture of me holding her when she was a baby. They LOVED seeing that. I asked how many brothers and sisters they each had. One girl said she had two - a sister who lives with her and a brother who doesn't. I said that's alright because he's still her brother. Another said she had 5. And yet another said 12. I think she was simply trying to have the most. But I said wow! You have a big family. —This might be one of the best youth/elderly interactions we had.

_____ noticed my crooked index finger. Then they all wanted to know why it was crooked. I explained and demonstrated how using a computer mouse for many years made it bend. I also explained that some people when they get to be elderly (I used the right word) get a disease known as arthritis that can hurt the joints in their bodies. And sometimes that damage makes it harder for them to do things. For me, the crooked finger made it harder to pick up things. _____ was playing with my finger and saw that she could straighten it. Then everybody had to try straightening it. She and the rest also noticed that it went back to being crooked. I laughed and told them I'd have to take them with me everywhere I go so they could keep my finger straight! Perhaps the most astute observation was made by _____. She noticed a big bump on that joint of my finger and decided it was why it wouldn't stay straight. (Definitely a cause and effect moment - pretty smart for a little one). That was again when I explained how arthritis makes it hard to do things they can do easily - like walking . They brought my attention to one of the other elderly visitors who was using a walker. I asked them if they have any elderly people at home. We talked about how it's nice if we can find ways to help elderly people who have trouble doing things, like opening doors and picking up things for them.

Most of kids were very social. And they were thrilled to have a visitor at their table.

Figure 8. Thanksgiving Guest Two Feedback

I walked over to another table - at the opposite end was the woman with a walker. I chose them because they were looking over at us. So I went over to compliment their headpieces - they had glitter in them. They broke into smiles and were thrilled that I noticed them. Then we discussed what kind of pie we liked.

Of course, everyone talked at once. Kid across table called me Miss, when he wanted my attention, which I thought was respectful.

Little boy across from me showed me that he's a good dancer. He just volunteered it for no particular reason. Then I asked him if he could floss. Well he and all the others had to demonstrate!

When we did fist bumps, he decided he wanted to thumb wrestle. Then everyone wanted to do it. When I was giving everyone a chance, a couple of them went over to the aid that drove the other "elderly" there. She was nice enough to oblige. They must have thought she was elderly too.

Overall, they were a lovely batch of students who were eager to please and eager to be liked. And I really enjoyed spending time with them.

Figure 9. Thanksgiving Guest Two Feedback Continued

It was interesting to see how many of their observations matched up. They both highlighted the excitement the students had while they were there and the manners that they expressed. They both observed the students connecting with them and feeling safe to let go and have fun. They both also observed the students need for recognition and how special that was to them. And overall, they both expressed that they too had a great time on their visit.

Plays and Pie: Another Review

After what I thought to be an even more successful visit, despite its earlier setbacks, I was interested to see what the students had to say on their surveys. This time the survey looked very similar to before, so as the paper passer for the week began to pass them out to the class they already knew to put their name at the top. Those who were getting better at reading were even able to read the

directions out loud, so we read them together as a class. The first question asked, Would you like the elderly residents at Country Meadows to come visit the school again? Again students had the option to circle yes or no, and began to do so immediately. I reminded them that the lines were where they could write why they choose their answer, and again students got right to work.

With the snow storm the week before, unfortunately two students had missed the visit due to being out sick. Another had moved away the week before leaving only 23 students to fill out their surveys and again turn them face in to the basket when they were finished. This time after the students left, I could not wait till I got home to read their answers. Pulling the stack of papers out of the basket I skimmed through the 23 papers to find 23 papers with the word yes circled. That means every single one of my students had shared that they wanted the elderly to come back and visit again, including the student who had circled no last time.

When I went back and looked at them more slowly answers varied greatly again for their reasons why they wanted the elderly to come back. The top response of five students, was that they wanted the elderly to come back because, they liked singing to them and performing their play for them and wanted to perform for them again. Two more wanted them to come back because they thought they were nice, one because she liked getting to talk to them, and two more because they liked the juice and pie they got to eat with them. The rest

of the students, 12 total, shared a whole list of reasons why they wanted the elderly to return, which included:

- Just talking to them in general
- Talking to them about movies
- Singing songs and doing a play for them
- Helping them get pie, coffee, and juice and eating it with them
- Thought they were the best, nice, and fun
- Liked making them excited
- Liked that they smiled at them and liked them
- They made new friends with them
- Liked that they had the same interests as them such as movies, fruits, and colors

This time there was only one student who was unable to complete the writing portion of the paper due to academic reasons. The boy who struggled earlier in the year, had improved a lot in his writing and was able to write a sentence for his answer. The girl although she attempted to write this time, her answer was not legible, but again she was able to articulate her answer in person. She shared she would want them to come back because she learned about them, got pie with them, and thought they were the best. Her answer gave much more information than last time, showing that although her writing was not quite where it needed to be, her verbal skills were developing over time.

Later in the week during writing I had the kids write about their visit. I told them they could write about anything they wanted from the visit such as how they felt, how they thought the elderly felt, things they talked about, things they noticed, etc... I tried not to prompt them too much and just let them write since writing is overall still a struggle for my class. Even more so, they especially struggle with expressing their own ideas when not given much of a prompt.

Glancing over the writings I noticed a few recurring themes and things that stood out. A lot of the students pointed out that they were happy and also that they made the elderly feel happy. Two students commented on the ages of the elderly saying they were 74 and 90! Age was something students had struggled with overall during the post survey so it was great hearing them identify some realistic numbers. One student made a comment about the appearance of the elderly woman she talked to, but saying that she had brown, not gray hair. I also noticed one of the students made connections to the visitors saying they lived in the same place, and liked some of the same things. It was neat to hear about some of the things they talked about and what their thoughts were about the experience.

Not One to Follow the Trends

It seemed the students were really starting to make connections to some of the things they had learned, seen, or done with the elderly and more connections were being formed each day. There were times we would be in the

hallway and something would spark their memory. Other times it was while reading that a topic or word they had learned would appear and cause excitement. One such instance took place one morning during literacy while discussing our story for the day, *The 3 Little Dassies* by Jan Brett.

After reading *The Three Little Pigs* like tale, the class and I were reflecting on the materials the dassies used to build their huts. Having remembered them all from the book, I prompted the students to think which of the materials they would have chosen and why, had they been in the dassies situation. Students turned and talked with their neighbors on the carpet around them sharing their views and challenging each other with questions. After a class survey it was determined that had the students been the dassies they would have built their houses out of stone since it was the strongest and would keep them safe. Students were pretty unanimous about this decision, having talked it out, however one boy shared another opinion when I asked if anyone disagreed or would build their house out of something different.

“What material would you choose if you were one of the dassies building a house?” I asked curiously.

“I would use grass like the first dassie did” he shared.

“I see” I answered, “and why would you choose to make your house out of grass?” I questioned, wondering what benefit he saw in using grass since the

dassie in the story who had used grass had been the first one to get her house blown down.

“I like weaving” the boy shared with the class.

“Weaving” I announced. “That’s a big word. Let’s look back in the story to see how the dassie was weaving and what he means.” I paged back to the grass hut in the story and read out loud, “She went to work cutting, twisting, braiding, and bundling” (Brett, 2010). Then I held up the picture which showed one of the little dassies weaving together grass to create her house. I discussed how braiding meant a similar thing and pointed to the picture and how the grass went over and under other pieces to hold it together.

“That’s like when we went to visit the elderly and we made the placemats and had to weave. I liked that so would want to make a house like that.” he shared after I showed the picture to the class. Recognizing the connection, a few students changed their answers and shared that they would also like a grass house so they could weave. Their houses may not be the most sturdy I thought, but at least they had a reason to backup their choice, which was mainly what I was hoping they would provide.

I was so impressed that he had made the connection to when we had visited the elderly and created placemats. Even more impressive was the fact that the story had not even used the exact word weaving, but that he was able to use his picture clues to make that connection and come up with the word on his

own from memory. It was also a little shocking to me though that of all the students he was the one to say this. He was the only one who had circled that he did not enjoy the first visit to meet the elderly, the same trip we had done the weaving, yet it was clearly something he had enjoyed. On the flip side I was not surprised because I have noticed he often likes to go against the grain and pick the opposite of everyone else. He surprisingly is mostly always able to back it up with a reason why though. I had questioned his reason for circling no after that first visit and now wondered whether it could also have been simply that he just wanted to be different from everyone else in his class. I was interested to see what he would say for his final visit to see the elderly. Would he continue to go against the grain just to be different whichever way that might go, or would he be ok going along with the views of the rest of the class if it is what he really wanted?

Even Kids Use Wheelchairs

Excited to continue to build new vocabulary with the students I recognized a chance to do just that one afternoon when a few minutes of free time opened up before dismissal. Having remember the confusion over the wheelchair bathroom sign on our field trip to see the elderly I decided to discuss it with the students and make them aware of it for future appearances.

Students cleaned up their centers and found a desk as I turned on the projector to show a picture of a bathroom sign (Figure 10) with a wheelchair on it.



Figure 10. Bathroom Sign

“What do you see on this sign?” I asked the class.

“A boy.” one student said. “A girl.” another offered.

“How do you know there is a boy and a girl on this sign?” I followed up.

“Well that one is a girl because she has on a dress and that one is a boy because he has a shirt” one of the students answered, pointing as she spoke.

“Great. That’s how we tell the difference between the boys and girls bathroom sign, but do you see or notice anything else?” I urged.

There was a bit of a pause and then one student offered, “Well that means the elderly can go in too because of that thing” one of the boys shared while pointing to the wheelchair on the sign.

“The elderly can only use the one with that thing” another offered, as two students nodded in agreement.

“No they could use other bathrooms too.” one argued.

“So you think that this part of the sign has to do with someone elderly, but what is it? What does this part show?” I asked pointing to the wheelchair on the sign. Students looked at the picture, but were quiet.

“Well what do you think it could be?” I asked.

One student offered that it could be someone sitting in a chair, then another finally said it could be a wheelchair. I told the class that it was in fact a wheelchair and that this sign meant you could go into the bathroom with a wheelchair. Overall the class did not seem too impressed by this. Did they not understand or did they just not care I wondered, so I prompted them further and asked what they knew about wheelchairs. When students didn’t have anything to say besides that old people use them to move I decided to pull up a video since they had loved the one of the elderly couple dancing earlier in the year. This time the point I wanted to make was not about the elderly though, so I pulled up the video that showcased what I wanted students to take away from our talk.

On the screen was a video titled *Kid Engineer: Walker Wheeler Design Squad*, and showed a little girl in a wheelchair. The little girl talked about how she was born with cerebral palsy and because of this could not use her legs, so needed a wheelchair to move around. I think this was shocking to the students. I paused the video and as they shared out many of them seem confused that a little girl there age could not walk and was born that way. We talked about how this can happen sometimes, and to all different people at all different ages. As the video continued it gave the students a lot of information about wheelchairs, what they look like, and taught them information about how they help people to move around. After the video we talked more about what a wheelchair could be used for and they shared how you could also use it if they broke a leg or sprained an ankle. They seemed to have a much better understanding of wheelchairs.

Following our discussion, I showed them the picture of the bathroom sign again. They nodded and talked about how they could see it was a wheelchair now. I reminded them how much room the wheelchair took up in the video and how the little girl and her dad had even talked about how much space they took up when they moved around. I continued to share that this is why some bathrooms have this wheelchair sign, because it means the bathroom is bigger so a wheelchair can fit, and people with wheelchairs would know where they can go. As they lined up to leave they talked about how anyone could use a

wheelchair and how they might need it if they got hurt too. I smiled, knowing my point had been received. Wheelchairs were not just for the elderly.

Spreading Holiday Cheer

This time when we had planned the visit we decided to work with a specific building so all the elderly residents would be in one place and we could interact with a good number of them. When I shared with the students that we would again be going back to the home to visit, they were so excited. With the holidays coming up I decided what better way to spread holiday cheer than having a sing along. My coworker and I decided that we would do a mix of songs. Some that everyone, including the students would already know and some older classics by Dean Martin to impress the residents. The song list we ended up going with for the show was:

1. A Marshmallow World by Dean Martin
2. Let it Snow by Dean Martin
3. Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer by Dean Martin
4. All I Want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth
5. Jingle Bells
6. O Kwanzaa by Music K-8
7. We Wish You A Merry Christmas (in Mandarin) with help from our mandarin teacher

When students mentioned some of the songs they had never heard of, I explained that *A Marshmallow World* and some of the others were older songs and that is why they did not know them. The next day one of the boys in my class shared, "It's good we're doing older songs, because the people at Country Meadows will know them and be excited". This is exactly what I was hoping would happen.

Each afternoon we practiced the songs with all of the students, and when they were getting so good they were singing the songs for fun, we started motions for some of the words as well. When it was time for our field trip the students were ready.

The day of the trip many of the students wore holiday hats to add some festivities. Again we rode the bus over, but students did not seem as nervous. The bus ride was not as quiet and students were chatty, smiling, and practicing their songs as we drove. Once we got to Country Meadows, students again filed off the bus and lined up outside, looking at the now familiar building from before and being much more prepared for what they could expect.

As we walked single file through the large doors, we were greeted with smiles from a much larger group of elders than before. The room had been rearranged and additional chairs brought in to accommodate the almost 40 spectators inside. I was excited to see the large amount of elders that had piled into the room to come and see the students this time. The students lined up in

rows in the middle of the room, where an empty space had been cleared, and after I made a short introduction, and I gave students the nod, they began to sing.

Song after song the students sang and song after song they received cheers and claps. They grew louder and more confident with each new song and their faces were covered with large smiles as they did their dance moves. Of course some got more into it than others, but overall the students appeared to be much more comfortable than they were during the first visit.

The elderly too seemed to be having fun. They sang and clapped along to the songs they knew and even stated they were highly impressed when students began to sing some of the older classics and knew every word. Their favorite of all was when the students sang in Mandarin though. I explained to them that we had a Mandarin program at school and the students were learning a bit of the language as well.

After their last song, students took their final bows to the roars of the crowd. With time still left on the clock we gave the students and elderly time to interact. Most of the elderly stayed seated as students traveled around the room visiting with them. At first most of the students moved around slowly in groups, but as a few ventured off on their own, chatted, and hugged residents around the room, others were quick to do the same. Some conversations revolved around the songs while others ventured into holiday plans, and others yet ventured into completely random topics of interests. The elderly men seemed to be getting just

as much attention as the women this time as well. In fact one man was a huge hit and was surrounded by students. As I approached the laughing group to see what was going on two of the girls asked me to take a picture of them with the man. They leaned together and smiled, then did another showing funny faces (Figure 11). After that other students nearby with two elderly women also wanted their picture taken, and after that students were requesting their pictures taken with their elderly friends all over the room. When it was time to go, students and residents all over the room hugged and as we lined up to leave they waved goodbye with smiles on their faces.



Figure 11. Funny Faces

Feelings of Appreciation: The Last Review

I had 23 students go on the field trip this time. One student had been out sick all week and his parents reached out about how sad he was that he could not go. They asked if we could send pictures, and they shared he was so excited to receive them at home. Another boy was also unable to go because his parents never returned the field trip permission slip, and we could not get ahold of them.

As soon as we returned from our bus ride students hung up their coats and headed into the classroom for their surveys. This time the students knew exactly what to do. They each received a piece of paper, started to write their names, and before I could even give directions they were circling their opinion for going on another visit. Many even went right into writing their answer. Just for clarification purposes I read the question out loud, "Would you like to go back and visit Country Meadows and the elderly that live there again? And why?"

Students were hard at work by this point. As I looked around their heads were down writing in quiet focus. I noticed as the rest of the class worked, one boy sat at his seat staring at his paper. I think he was debating between the yes and the no because he did not have anything circled. He finally circled an answer, then continued to sit a while longer before finally starting to write his reason for his choice. He was the one student who had been hesitant about it from the beginning and was the student that was not sure if he wanted to be a part of the study or not. I recalled when we were there he seemed to have a good

time. I have videos of him singing and a picture of him talking with some of the residents and smiling, but I remember as he was talking to them he was shy and didn't seem to know exactly what to say. He has a very shy personality though so I did not think much of it. Curious about his hesitation I walked by and glanced at his paper. He had circled no, he did not want to go back. For his reason why he wrote that he had a headache. Although I was sad that this had affected his trip and he was not feeling well it made me feel a bit better to know that perhaps his answer was not related to a dislike or discomfort with the elderly, but simply the fact that he did not feel well.

Later as I looked over the rest of the paper, the other 22 out of 23 students circled yes. Overall it seemed the list of reasons why students wanted to go back grew more extensive each time. A few students shared that they thought going there was cool and fun. Others shared that being there made them feel happy and that they liked or loved the residents there and thought they were nice. Others shared all the things they liked about visiting there including: visiting them, talking to them, hugging them, singing to them, making them smile and laugh, and taking pictures with them. Three more student answers touched me the most. They wrote about the how they liked going there because they made the residents smile and they liked to make other people happy. One even wrote that she noticed that they appreciated her being there. Wow what a vocabulary word I thought excitedly! All of the answers were so positive too.

The last student had shared simply “I would like to come back.” in writing. She did not write a reason, just that she wanted to go back, but she is the same student that was not able to academically write anything for the last two writing prompts. I was so proud to see the academic growth she was making and thrilled to see her independently write a complete sentence. Although the study was coming to a close, students made sure it was not the last lesson we completed, and never missed an opportunity to continue to show their growth.

The Lunch Line Commotion

Not only were the students beginning to recognize the feelings of happiness they are passing on to the elderly, but I was beginning to recognize how very far they had come and how very proud I was of how much they had grown and learned. I felt this especially during unexpected times when they reminded me they were always learning, such as while we were walking to lunch one afternoon.

As we joined the line to get lunch, which extended out of the cafeteria and into the hallway, I silently waited with students thinking about my lunch for the day. As I surveyed the line, I noticed a few students talking and starting to get excited. I watched and soon they were whispering to more students and actually beginning to cause a bit of a commotion amongst themselves. What could have them so worked up I wondered. As I walked toward that part of the line, some of the students saw me coming and started calling my name. As I got closer the

whole group of students pointed up at the sign outside the bathroom door. It was the same sign they had confused them at the nursing home. The sign with the wheelchair.

“Look Miss H!” They said almost in unison, “It’s the symbol!”

So they noticed the sign I thought. A sign that we pass every single day and to be fair, even I had not taken notice to before. Interested to see if they would remember the importance of it I said, “You’re right. What does that mean?”

Answers started to fly from mouths. I heard mentions of the word wheelchairs and more stating about it’s size, “It’s big!”

Putting it altogether one of the boys explained, “That means the bathroom is big. It means a wheelchair can fit in there”. The students were visibly excited about this. They acted like it was so cool and another student commented with excitement, “Now the elderly can come to our school some more!” For me, that small time waiting in line painted a pretty good picture of how far my students had come since the beginning of the year.

Changing Views

A few days before the holiday break, and with several visits, stories, discussions, and videos about the elderly in the past it was time to see if students had learned anything. I again began pulling students one by one during the special holiday events of the week to ask them the same list of questions they had answered before. Right from the start there was a difference. Hardly any

students started at me in confusion. It was rare for a student to tell me they did not know, but instead interviews were more of a struggle to get everything down students had to say. The students were filled with so much information and a few changed opinions to go along with it.

A big struggle at the beginning of the year was the students understanding of age. Originally, they had no concept of age and believed the elderly to be around the same ages as them. In post interviews however their idea of age was much more accurate than before. Guesses of age ranged from around the age of 22 to around the age of 55, with many stating ages of actual elderly friends they had made. When asked, "How do you know if someone is elderly?" students views revolved much more around their experiences, drawing from the memories of visits or class discussions that had taken place. Here are some of the students answers.

"Some have tubes in their nose to help them breathe. Some have sticks to walk and some don't need them. They have bumpy skin. They are just cool."

"They can have gray, black, or white hair. I learned that from pictures at the carpet."

The amount of students who liked being around the elderly grew drastically, as well as the amount of students who now knew someone elderly. Another big change was every student agreed that not all elderly people are the

same. Furthermore, the majority of the class believed the elderly are in fact like them. Here are some of the students responses highlighting how the elderly are like them, or others their age.

“They are like us. Bob likes cherries a lot and I like cherries and we both like blue, purple, black, and green. We both like slushie juice and when we visit each other.”

“We both walk, we both talk, and kids can use wheelchairs too.”

Students were also more aware of what sorts of things they eat, where it is they live, and how exactly they get around. Students had various responses to what the elderly eat such as those listed below.

“They eat the same kinds of things we eat, but sometimes not hard stuff to hurt their teeth.”

“They eat soft foods because some have no teeth, but some do have teeth and they can eat like me.”

“They can have milk at breakfast like me, or even oatmeal like me.”

Overall their responses indicated that they believed the elderly mostly ate like them. Similar responses showed they believed the elderly could live anywhere, and that they all move around differently.

Students' views were based much more on their interactions with the elderly than just pure guesses and assumptions like before. When asked how the

elderly feel, their thoughts changed, and the majority of feelings listed now were positive feelings. Students also had more more specific answers of what the elderly like to do. Several named specific elderly people they knew or residents they had met and shared the things that they enjoyed. Others talked more in general from videos or books we had read. One student shared about a resident she had befriended, "He like cars and he like to play Monopoly".

After reading through the students' answers it was impressive to see how much their views had changed over the few months the study had taken place. Although the study was technically over, I had hoped the interactions we had experienced with the elderly were only a start to something more.

Methods of Data Analysis

During the study I collected various kinds of data to analyze the effects of intergenerational learning on my first grade class.

The Field Log

My field log was where all my thoughts and observations were recorded. I often kept my laptop nearby with my field log open for easy access when students were discussing, or I was sharing something new with them. Sometimes when my laptop was not near, I found myself immediately jotting down notes into my phone to later transfer onto my computer then delete from my phone. Other times I would go back and reread my field notes or important quotes students had shared and comment on them with thoughts or events that happened later that relate. My field log was also a place I could easily sort through data. I compiled data from surveys, writings, and interviews here as well to comment and reflect on. If I needed information or had questions about my study, the field log was my place to look. All of this data and the comments I added on the data, were later sorted and this is where the codes for my theme bins and statements, discussed later, came from.

Parent Survey Data

A beginning of the year parent survey was another method of data collection I used. The survey included four questions and was sent home prior to

the study to gauge the amount of contact and comfort students previously shared with the elderly outside of school. Of the 26 surveys sent home, 24 parents returned them mostly filled out.

The first question asked: Does your child know any adults over 65?

All but three parents answered yes to this, meaning of the 24 students, 21 knew an adult over the age of 65. However when asked: What kind of contact and how much contact does your child have with adults over 65 outside of school?, there was an upward trend toward limited to no contact with them (Figure 12). Although many of the students knew someone elderly, they did not often get to see those people.

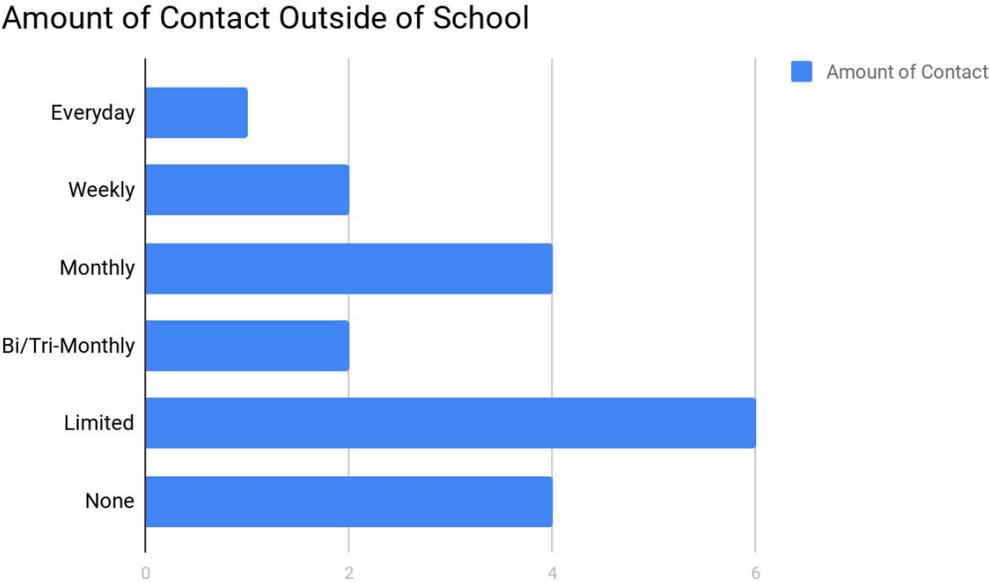


Figure 12. Data chart showing the amount of contact students had with the elderly outside of school according to their parents. Numbers along the horizontal represent the number of students who have had contact at various times.

Parents were also asked: What feelings if any has your child expressed about the elderly?, to which parents shared mixed responses from their children (Figure 13). The top response was that prior to the study students had shared minimal to no feelings about the elderly outside of school. This answer was given by nine of the 24 students. Happiness relating to the elderly was the second largest response with seven of 24 students experiencing these feelings. The rest of the students showed mixed feelings pertaining to the elderly, expressing views on both the positive and negative spectrums.

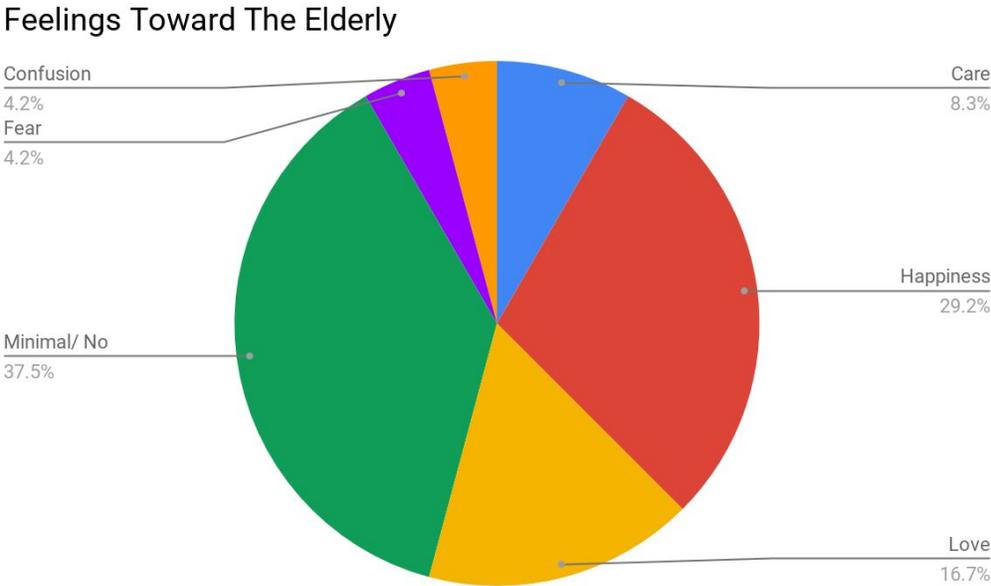


Figure 13. Data chart showing students expressed feelings toward the elderly outside of school according to their parents

The last question asked: What are your feelings on an intergenerational program, of first graders and the elderly working together?

Parents overall were very supportive. Except for the parent who did not respond, two shared they were fine with the idea and the other 21 shared words such as great, wonderful, and how much they loved the idea or thought it would be interesting. A few of these parents went into further detail sharing their positive feelings related to the benefits they could see happening.

Pre and Post Writing Assessment

Unfortunately due to time constraints and moving to a new role in the school I was unable to get completed post writings from the students. All 26 original students completed a pre writing and students' pre writings shared the following results (Figure 14). Six of the 26 students shared positive feelings relating the the elderly, these being: sweet, fun, kind, cool, amazing, and just liking them in general. Five of the 26 students shared mixed feelings relating to the elderly, these being: they are nice but slow, they are only fun sometimes, old ladies are nice but not old men, they are sad but ok, and the last did not express an opinion but simply wrote, "I do not know them". The largest number of responses included ten of 26 students who shared negative feelings relating to the elderly, these being: mean, sad, boring, not happy, not fun, mad, a student who felt bad for them, and in total 7 who said, "I do not like them". The remaining 5 student responses were not able to be categorized into a feeling. Instead of sharing their opinion of the elderly, these students instead shared things they believed to know about the elderly. These students shared: the elderly watch tv,

cook and eat food, sleep, are sad, are lonely, and have white hair.

Pre Writing: Feelings About the Elderly

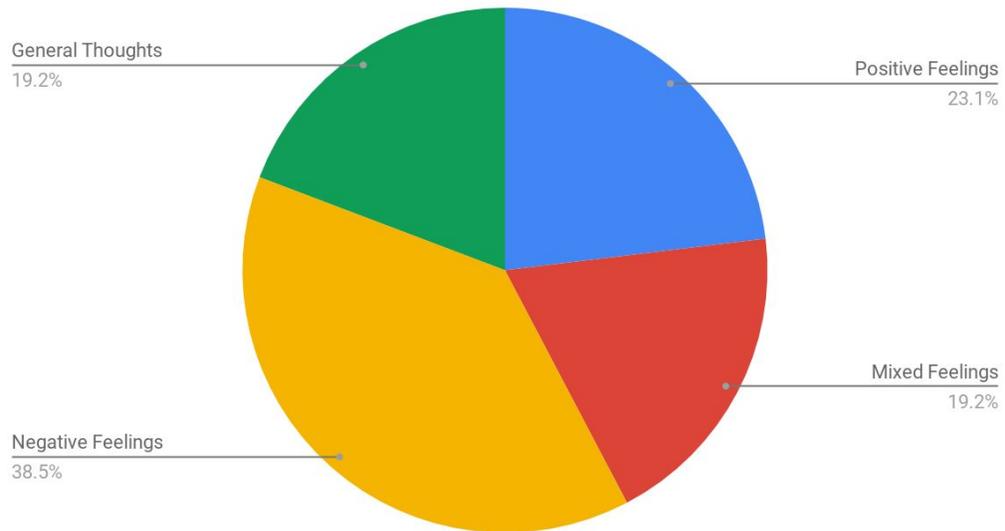


Figure 14. Data chart showing students expressed feelings toward the elderly during pre study writing prompt

After looking over student views of the elderly I was surprised because many of them did not match up with what their parents had shared they thought their views or feelings toward the elderly were. More than half of the parents had expressed that their child felt positive feelings when asked about the elderly, yet when viewing students own responses negative feelings were the most common response. Even some of the general thoughts and mixed thoughts leaned more toward the negative spectrum of beliefs. This made me wonder if parents had actually asked their children or really observed the behaviors they were saying their child displayed. I speculate that if students had limited interactions with the

elderly outside of school their parents may have just guessed what they thought their child would feel. Since their child is comfortable around them they may have thought they would be comfortable around the elderly too, although this was not the case, when students were asked directly.

Pre and Post Interviews

Interviews showed a vast difference when it came to students' thoughts pre and post elderly interactions (Table 2), similar to what teachers in the Holmes (2009) study found when they compared data on the same student from the beginning to the end of an intergenerational study. Prior to interacting with the elderly the median age of students' guesses for what age someone elderly is was 22 years old, but following the study the median age rose to 55. Although the median guesses were still not quite right, many more students than before were in the right range and the median guess went up 33 years. Overall this shows that students were grasping concepts of age and realized someone elderly is much older than they are.

Observations of the elderly changed as well. When asked prior to the study how students could tell if someone was elderly their top responses involved the elderly needing help to walk. A discussion of their appearance followed this and students described as old faced, soggy, and dry. Only one student was able to identify the terms they were referring to as wrinkles. After the study students' top responses focused purely on looks with nine students being able to identify

the term wrinkles. Other students shared discussion of their hair, but shared it could be brown, black, white, or gray. This time only one student shared needing help to walk as an identifying factor.

Students were then asked simply if they liked being around the elderly and why. Although both times the top answer was yes, during prior interactions with the elderly only 12 students shared they liked being around the elderly closely followed by ten who did not. Of those, nine students were unable to explain why. Following the study however 24 of the 25 students remaining shared they enjoyed being around the elderly, with only one sharing at times it made her nervous. This time all the students were able to explain their reasoning with the top answer being simply that the elderly were nice. Both times all students but one shared they like being around young people.

Students were also asked if they knew a lot of elderly people. Prior to the study the top answer of 11 students was no, with students naming only grandparents and parents as elderly people they knew. Following the study the top answer rose to 17 students, this time sharing that yes they do know a lot of elderly people. This time along with grandparents students were able to list residents, some even by name, from the facility we partnered with. Others were able to list neighbors and all were able to understand that their parents would not be considered elderly. Students were also asked prior to the study if all elderly people were the same to which 16 students responded no they were not, with a

few saying they were, and some a bit unsure. Following the study the top answer was still no the elderly are not the same, but this time with all 25 students agreeing.

One of the biggest flips I saw was when students were asked, “Are elderly people like you?” Prior to the study questions were followed with laughs, and 22 students agreeing no, elderly are not like us. Students shared many reasons but the top two reasons again dealt with appearance. Six students believed the elderly were not like them because they could go fast and the elderly can only go slow. Six more shared that the elderly were not like them because they have different hair. Following the study this question oddly was again greeted with laughs, but this time for a different reasons, when 18 students responded that the elderly are like them. This time students were able to share similarities they had learned from their monthly interactions with the elderly. Students shared their love of games, food, and singing and dancing with the elderly among many other things.

When students were asked what the elderly eat, where they live, and how they get around it was evident students had gained a lot of real world knowledge from their intergenerational learning experiences. Prior to the study, when asked what the elderly eat, eight students named healthy foods and vegetables and specified that the elderly needed to eat these so they could stay alive. Other foods listed mostly all involved soft chewy items. The top answer of, “I don’t

know” was shared by ten students when asked where the elderly live. Students seemed equally as unsure when asked how the elderly got around prior to the study. Nine students believed they walked slowly because they hurt and six more believed they needed help, but could not identify what it was that helped the elderly walk. One student confessed, “They’re the slowest people, but don’t tell them, because it’ll hurt their feelings”. Following the study the top answer were all around double what they were. When it came to eating, 19 students agreed that the elderly, just like anyone else, ate the same things that they did. When students were asked where the elderly live 18 agreed they could live anywhere and named places such as houses, apartments, hotels, nursing homes, and more. Furthermore, 16 students felt that all elderly people get around differently and were able to name the specific tools they used to help them move or the fact that they might not even need help at all. Here are some of the responses students shared following the study.

“Some use a wheelchair, and some don’t, they use the thing that looks like a candy cane. Some get help, but not everyone needs help because some walk by themselves.”

“Some walk around with a cane, but some can do cart wheels, and some just walk.”

“Some have the same thing as (named a teacher at our school that uses a walker) or some just walk.

Students views on the emotions of the elderly was reversed as well. Prior to the study the top answer of sad was shared by ten students when asked how the elderly feel. One students stated, “Sad, because they are almost going to die”. Following the study though, happy became the new prominent feeling, shared by 16 students. Another student shared, “Happy, like how my dog makes me feel.” Another rather perceptive student showed his understanding that the elderly are not much different then him shared, “They feel, happy, medium, and sad. All things. Like us”. Lastly when students were asked what the elderly can do and what the elderly like to do answers were rather similar. Prior to the study the top answer was sleep for both questions, however following the study the top answer for both questions changed to play.

Table 2

Children’s Pre and Post Elderly Interview Data

Questions	Pre Interview Responses	Post Interview Responses
At what age would you say someone is elderly?	5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15 (2), 16 (2), 17, 18, 19, 25, 30, 34, 40 (3), 50, 60, 70, 100 (2), 106, 1,050, not sure (1) (Median Age: 22)	17, 18, 25, 27, 29, 34, 50 (4), 55, 57, 60, 80 (2), 90 (2), 91, 99 (2), 1,000, not sure (4) (Median Age: 55)
How do you know if someone is elderly?	Something to help them walk (9) Old face/ wrinkles/ soggy/ dry (8)	They have wrinkles (9) Have brown, black, white, or gray hair (7) They have squished, soggy, lined, skin (6)

	<p>Gray/white hair (7) Didn't know (6) They can't walk/ are hurt (2) They have a mustache if they're a boy (1) They are small (1) They walk slow (1)</p>	<p>Sometimes they have a stick or walk slow (2) Smile (1) Smell good (1) They might have glasses (1) Can have all different kinds of skin (1) They sometimes need help (1)</p>
<p>Do you like being around the elderly?</p>	<p>Yes (12) No (10) Sometimes (1) Only ladies, not men (1) Kids more (1)</p>	<p>Yes (23) Yes, but I sometimes get nervous (1) I feel sad (1)</p>
<p>Why?</p>	<p>Didn't know why (9) They can't play/ not fun (3) They may steal/ kidnap me (2) I don't like to see them (1) They fight (1) They're mean (1) Grandma and grandpa love me (1) I like meeting new people (1) I like the color gray like their hair (1) They're cool (1) They can play (1) Make me happy (1) Hug people (1)</p>	<p>They are nice (10) I like singing/ performing for them (4) I feel happy (2) I can make them happy (2) They're helpful (2) They are fun (2) They gave us candy (2) They say hi (2) They smile (2) They clap for us (1) They give hugs (1) They smell good, like flowers (1) We are friends (1) Because they are old, but I still like them (1) We get to go on a field trip to them (1) We weaved with them (1)</p>

	They get help from us (1) Because my grandma is old (1)	They give kisses (1) It's good to meet new people (1)
How do you like being around young people?	Yes (25) Sometimes (1)	Yes (24) Sometimes (1)
Do you know a lot of elderly people?	No (11) Not many (6) Yes (6) Didn't know (2)	Yes (17) Not a lot/ Some (4) No (3) Didn't know (1)
Who?	Grandma (16) Grandma (8) My mom and dad (1)	Grandma (16) Grandpa (10) One from home we visited (9) Four specific people by name from home (2) People I live by (1)
Are all elderly people the same?	No (16) Yes (6) A little (2) Didn't know (1)	No (25)
Are elderly people like you?	No (22) Sometimes (2) Didn't know (1)	Yes (18) Yes, just older (1) A little of both or sometimes (5) No (1)
Why?	I speed walk, they can't/ I'm faster (6)	We both like to play games and have fun (5)

	<p>Different hair (6) Different skin: wrinkly, soggy (4) I'm not old (4) They're big/ grown ups and I'm small/ kids (3) They don't clean their teeth (1) They pee themselves when they walk (1) They are shy and I'm not (1) I play with toys and they don't have toys (1) They don't get babysat and I do (1) I don't know them (1)</p>	<p>We like the same fruits, popcorn, milk, pie, lemon meringue pie (5) We both dance (3) We all sing (3) We all like hugs (2) We like clothes (2) We sit and relax (2) They can do what I do (1) We like the same movies (1) We both like church and jesus (1) They have the same feelings as us (1) We like coloring (1) They smile too (1) They can eat (1) We both watch tv (1) We play on phones (1) We both like to clean (1) We both like to weave (1) They can't back flip, but they can eat cereal (1) They have different skin, but we're both happy and can sit (1) They can't play like us (1)</p>
<p>What do elderly people eat?</p>	<p>Healthy food to stay alive: salad/ vegetables/ fruits (8) Spaghetti/ macaroni/ rice (4) Hash browns/ mashed potatoes, fries (4) Beans (3)</p>	<p>They eat like us, same foods, eat everything (19) They eat healthy (4) They can eat snacks, cakes, pie (3) Some like coffee, I don't (2)</p>

	<p>Didn't know (3) Bread (2) Regular food (1) Chicken (1) Cookies (1) Eggs (1) Water (1) Oatmeal only (1) Soft things because they have weak teeth (1)</p>	<p>Didn't know (2) Cereal (1)</p>
<p>Where do elderly people live?</p>	<p>Didn't know (10) Far (4) At their house (3) Old houses (2) An old person house/ nursing home (2) Specific places like: St. Louis, New York (2) Apartments (1) Live with someone they trust to take care of them (1)</p>	<p>They can live anywhere: place we visited, houses, hotels, apartments, nursing homes, with us, all different states, barns (18) Some live at place we visited (3) Didn't know (3) Local towns (2)</p>
<p>How do elderly people get around?</p>	<p>They walk slow because they hurt (9) Use a thing to help them walk, but did not know the name of it (6) Walk like us/ normal/ nicely (4) Didn't know (3) Wheelchair (2) Use a cane (2) Use a walker (1)</p>	<p>Some walk with walking sticks/ canes, crutches, some use a wheelchair, some go slow, some walk normal, some take taxis, some have people drive them (16) They move slowly (3) They walk (2) Some hold things to help them walk and some don't need them (1)</p>

	<p>They use a staff to walk (1)</p> <p>Call a truck to drive them around (1)</p>	
<p>How do you think elderly people feel?</p>	<p>Sad (10)</p> <p>Happy (4)</p> <p>Old (2)</p> <p>Angry (2)</p> <p>Mad (2)</p> <p>Bored (2)</p> <p>Good (2)</p> <p>Didn't know (2)</p> <p>Bad (1)</p> <p>Sick (1)</p> <p>Pain/hurt (1)</p> <p>Frustrated (1)</p> <p>Confused (1)</p> <p>Ok (1)</p> <p>Nervous they might die (1)</p> <p>Excited to meet new people (1)</p>	<p>Happy (16)</p> <p>Happy and excited (3)</p> <p>Good (3)</p> <p>Love (1)</p> <p>Happy, medium, and sad (1)</p> <p>Sad when alone, happy when with people (1)</p>
<p>What kinds of things CAN elderly people do?</p>	<p>Sleep (8)</p> <p>Sit around (4)</p> <p>Eat (4)</p> <p>Walk (4)</p> <p>Rest/relax (3)</p> <p>Didn't know (3)</p> <p>Stay home (2)</p> <p>Watch tv/ the news (2)</p> <p>Nothing (1)</p> <p>Walk with hurt legs/ fall (1)</p> <p>Don't move much (1)</p>	<p>Play (5)</p> <p>Talk (4)</p> <p>Watch tv/ movies (3)</p> <p>Eat, or eat pie (3)</p> <p>Dance (2)</p> <p>Walk (2)</p> <p>Hang out with kids (2)</p> <p>Sleep (2)</p> <p>They can do lots of stuff (1)</p> <p>Run (1)</p> <p>Cook (1)</p> <p>Throw a ball (1)</p>

	<p>Watch their phone (1) Read books (1) Take dogs to the bathroom (1) Go outside (1) Plant flowers (1) Clean (1) Wash dishes (1) Drive a car (1)</p>	<p>Drink coffee (1) Drive a car (1) Weave (1) Sing (1) Make clothes (1) Swing on a swing (1) Go outside (1) Sit (1)</p>
<p>What kinds of things do elderly people LIKE to do?</p>	<p>Sleep (7) Didn't know (6) Watch tv/ the news (5) Lay down (3) Just sit around/ sit down (3) Eat (3) Cook (2) Walk (2) Play/ hang out with kids (2) Look at their phone (1) Just stay home (1) Wear a robe (1) Stay with family (1) Don't like toys (1) Can't cook (1) Play tag (1)</p>	<p>Play games like rock paper scissor shoot, hide and seek, tic tac toe, chess, checkers, monopoly, or play outside (14) Watch tv/ movies/ the news (8) Eat or make food like PBJ, dinner, or ice cream (6) Read (4) Go on the phone Do crafts, draw, color (4) See family or visit people, kids (4) They do what I do. The same as me. (2) Dance (2) Run (2) Go out (2) Help us (2) Sleep/ Nap (2) Show people around their house (1) Play sports (1) Play tennis (1) Golf (1) Jump (1)</p>

		Walk (1) Sing (1) Hug (1) Smile (1) Talk (1) Got to church (1) Work (1) Some drive, Some ride in cars (1) Hang out (1) Learn or talk spanish (1) Do word searches (1) Play with toys (2) Watch races (1)
--	--	---

Note. The first set of answer was taken prior to any discussions, learning, or interactions with the elderly. The second set of answers was taking after all three occurred.

Pre and post interview data showed the changing views students experienced about the elderly during the study.

Student Artifacts

Student artifacts were compiled mostly of monthly post surveys following visits with the elderly. After the hesitance students expressed toward the elderly from their post interviews and writings, I wanted to see if their views changed upon actually meeting them. After the first visit all but one student wanted to go back. He did not want to go back because the elderly did not see him, and he did not get enough attention from them. After the next visit every student wanted to spend more time with them. At the last visit students seemed very excited about wanting to continue interacting with the elderly, however again one student

shared he did not have fun, but because he did not feel well. Below is the graph showing the comparison of the number of students who did and did not want to go back to visit the elderly again (Figure 15).

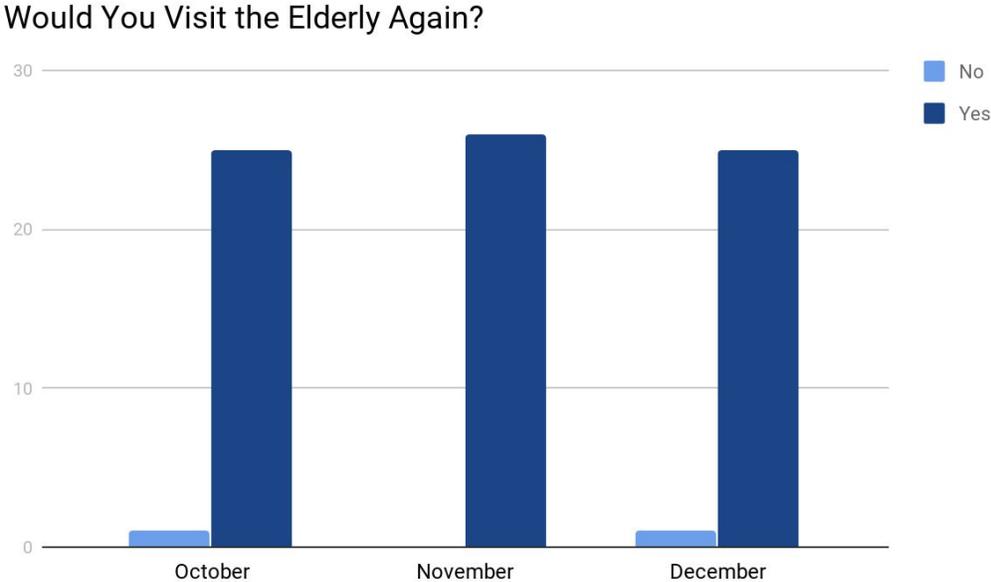


Figure 15. Monthly Visit Surveys

The writing section of the survey also allowed me to see the growth in writing students had made in just the short two month window from their first survey in October to their last survey in December. Below is an example of one boys work from my class. He is one of the struggling writers in my class. He was able to complete a writing all three times, and although he did not show as much progress as some other students there is clear improvement in his work. In his October writing (Figure 16) he struggled with sentence conventions including

spaces and punctuation. He also got easily frustrated and had to verbally tell me the rest because the bit he had sounded out so far was very hard for him.

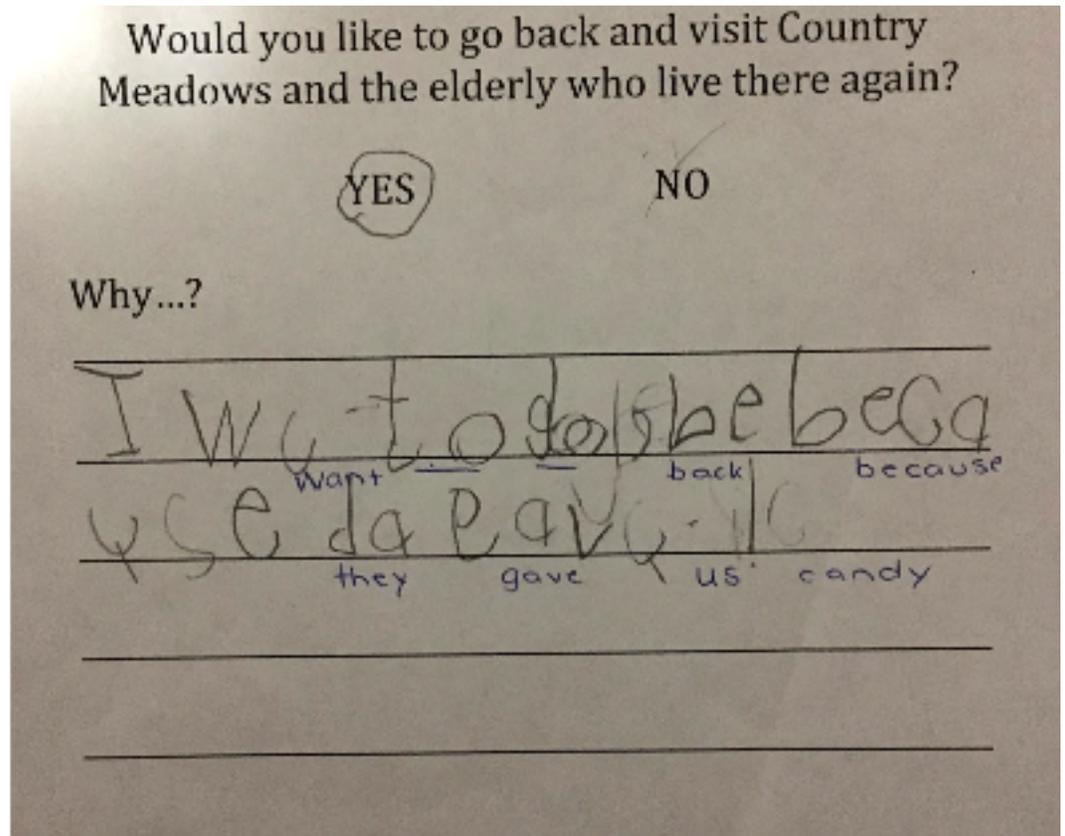


Figure 16. G's October Writing

In his December writing (Figure 17) his sentence conventions are great and include the spacing and punctuation he was missing before. He also was able to finish the sentence and stretch out all the words easily on his own.

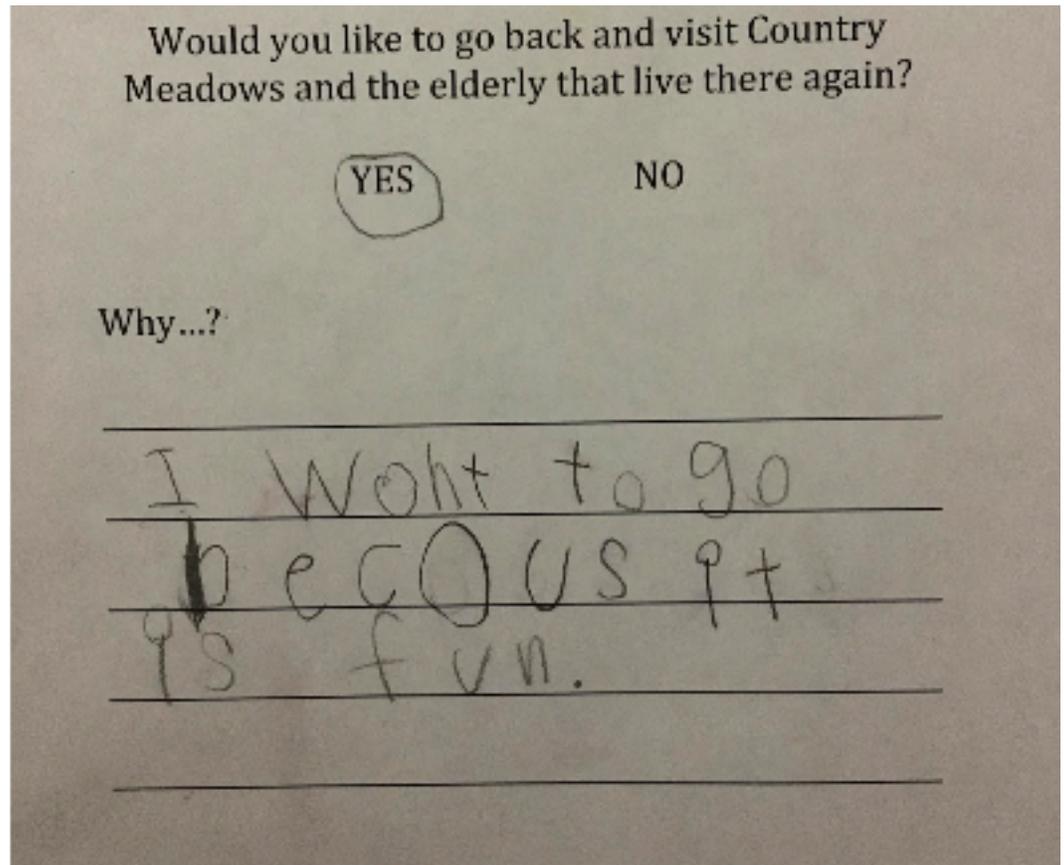


Figure 17. G's December Writing

Following one of the visits students also completed a free writing on their thoughts. These expanded on some of the things they had included in their post visit surveys. Artifacts also included the videos and pictures filling up my field log. These videos allowed me to assess students' thoughts that I may have missed or to look at the reactions captured on their faces during events that may have been a little more hectic.

Coding Bins

Once I had gathered all of the data from the field log, parent survey, pre and post writing assessment, pre and post interviews, and student artifacts I was able to analyze the data. I searched for reoccurring themes then I developed a list of code words related to the research in my literature review and recorded page numbers where these codes occurred. These codes were then further sorted into bins by similarities and main ideas were generated from each. After coding I had four theme statements.

Theme Statements

These themes were developed using what I learned from my study. The following theme statements are based on these findings:

- Through exposure to and interaction with the elderly, students' biases were broken down and positive attitudes began to emerge. Their perspectives of the elderly have changed and they now show excitement, comfort, compassion, and happiness when discussing the elderly.
- While students were able to learn about the elderly through books, many students perceived what they were hearing about the elderly to be fiction when there was disparity with prior beliefs. Media were able to first bring truths about the elderly to reality. During

these experiences, students' curiosity lead them to have new and positive experiences improving their elderly schemas.

- Through active engagement with and curiosity about the elderly, students exponentially gain skills such as communication, confidence, manners, and respect, to make them into more productive citizens. Active engagement with the elderly can also contribute to an increase in scholarly skills such as vocabulary building, the ability to form connections, and higher level thinking, which coincide with the increase in effort, motivation, and participation students have when they receive positive attention from the elderly.
- Developing an intergenerational program positively impacts the elderly as well as the youth.

Research Findings

Positive Feelings

Through exposure to and interaction with the elderly, students' biases were broken down and positive attitudes began to emerge. Their perspectives of the elderly have changed and they now show excitement, comfort, compassion, and happiness when discussing the elderly.

At the beginning of my study I wondered about the effects of intergenerational learning on my students' attitudes. A study I had read by

McGuire (1993) indicated that due to lack of interaction, and unable to build their own elderly schema, children seem to take on society's views of the elderly. After interviewing my students (Appendix G) it was clear that this was true of my class. Many of my students admitted to knowing little about the elderly, and not knowing many actual elderly people, yet the majority of the students had negative views toward the elderly despite their lack of interactions. When asked their thoughts about the elderly prior to the study students shared feelings of sadness, fear, confusion, dislike, nervousness, and pity most often. Furthermore when asked if they liked being around the elderly, less than half the class, 46% to be exact, shared that they did.

A study by Hannon & Gueldner (2007) on intergenerational learning programs shared that these programs offered the chance for students and seniors to get to know each other on a closer level and no longer associate others as just an age bracket. Students shared they believed the elderly were sick, in pain, mean, angry, sad, slow, and needed help. I wanted students to get to know the elderly and see for themselves that many of the stereotypes they had named to be true were in fact not true at all.

After learning about the elderly through books and videos, students had the chance to meet monthly with a local elderly facility. By way of field trips to their facility as well as hosting elderly visitors at our own school, the students were able to gain the interactions with the elderly many of them shared they had

not previously had often. The things they shared during class and in their post visit writings showed that their views were beginning to change and although some of the things they previously believed to be true just might have been, not all elderly people were the same and many in fact were very different than what students had expressed.

During students' post interviews 96% of students shared that they liked being around the elderly. They shared they were excited when they got to see them and they liked being around them because they made them feel happy. These results were similar to others I had researched, such as Fair & Delaplane's (2015) intergenerational study, where students expressed feelings of warmth and happiness about spending time with their new elderly friends. When asked their thoughts on the elderly, students now answered with smiles, recalling previous positive encounters and sharing their stories of these. Opposite their previous believes that the elderly needed help, they now believed the elderly could help them. Students also shared that the elderly were happy and fun, and in many ways a lot like them. This led me to believe that intergenerational programs have a positive effect on students' attitudes.

Methods for Teaching

While students were able to learn about the elderly through books, many students perceived what they were hearing about the elderly to be fiction when there was disparity with prior beliefs. Media were able to first bring truths about

the elderly to reality. During these experiences, students' curiosity lead them to have new and positive experiences improving their elderly schemas.

When I originally began planning out my thesis, Dallman & Power (1996) shared the stories about the elderly they had used in their study with second graders participating in intergenerational learning. With the Wonders reading curriculum being one of the main things that lacked materials involving the elderly, I was excited to implement supplemental elderly books into the classroom. They showed elders who are able to do all sorts of neat things, and I thought for sure this would gain my students' attention. My students love books, and the quietest time every day was when I read to my students on the carpet. What I didn't anticipate when starting my study was that these books were all fiction books, and although I teach students the difference between fantasy and realistic fiction, my students took one main thing away from fiction stories, and that is they are not real.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory can be described as conflict between thoughts. According to a study by Ragan and Bowen (2001) a result of Cognitive Dissonance Theory (p. 512), is the idea that by providing truthful information about a topic, enough conflict and confusion about the information may emerge in the mind of the receiver, that they become willing to take another look at their beliefs and attitudes. Students had many biases about the elderly coming into the study, so the books I choose were ones that purposely challenged those.

However when they were read, although students showed a brief pause and the quizzical looks on their faces showed their brains spinning... *could the elderly really be this way...*, when one of the student brought up that fiction is fake, the books, although enjoyed like always, were never taken seriously as evidence again. Videos however challenged students to see things differently for the first time and begin to question the biases they had believed to be true. In the videos students could see the elderly people shown were real and really doing things they did not think they could.

The videos however seemed to only serve as the first step in breaking down students' biases, and although they left them with questions, they still did not seem to be enough to change their thinking completely. The real moment connections breaking down biases began to click was during students' moments of physical interaction with the elderly. These moments left them surrounded by elders who were not all the same as they what they had described. These elders looked differently, moved around differently, and acted differently than what many of the students had pictured. Not a single elder fit their main view of the gray haired, sad, sleeping, old person who needed help. These elders were wide awake, many of them could walk just fine, they ate sweets, and most of all they laughed and seemed happy.

Students showed great curiosity toward not only them, but the things around them that were new to them as well. Each time they questioned the

elderly, the elders were eager to share and teach the students more, and these positive experiences left the students wanting more. Although Cognitive Dissonance Theory (2001) played a part in the changed youth views regarding the elderly, I believe “Contact Hypothesis” (Bousfield & Hutchison, 2010) played a larger part in these changed in biases. Contact Hypothesis is explained as the idea that by having appropriate contact with an individual outside the usual group, the usual group will begin to gain improved views of said individual and decrease their prejudice toward them. The face to face interactions were what taught the students the most and showed them that the elderly were much different than they had envisioned.

This led me to believe that although there is the potential to learn about the elderly through literature, students best learn through real life situations and actual interactions with the elderly. It also led me to believe that there is not one theory to explain the way students learning takes place, but instead a combination of multiple theories. Findings showed that based on the conditions that existed, Cognitive Dissonance Theory may have occurred in many students and resulted in the students’ growth. When students’ pre interviews about the elderly said one thing, and their readings, videos, and interactions showed and told other things, I can imagine students brains beginning to question, due to the flipped views many of them showed in their post interviews. Contact Hypothesis Theory also showed evidence for student growth. Prior to the study many

students shared little to no interactions with the elderly, but when offered positive interactions with this group biases began to dissolve and again almost all negative views disappeared from students post interviews.

Student Gains

Through active engagement with and curiosity about the elderly, students exponentially gain skills such as communication, confidence, manners, and respect, to make them into more productive citizens. Active engagement with the elderly can also contribute to an increase in scholarly skills such as vocabulary building, the ability to form connections, higher level thinking, and reading practice, which coincide with the increase in effort, motivation, and participation students have when they receive positive attention from the elderly.

Intergenerational learning not only reduced students' biases about the elderly, but helped them to grow in a variety of other areas as well. Having the elderly to perform for and to motivate them gave them confidence in themselves. It gave them confidence to know that it was not always about right and wrong, but effort. When students made mistakes they were not upset with them because they had tried and were still rewarded and praised by the elderly watching. That praise from the elders was something the students wanted badly. Ragan and Bowen (2001) explain one theory, "The Theory of Reasoned Action" (p. 512), as the likelihood to alter behaviors due to positive feedback and support for that specific behavior. This theory can be seen clearly in my study. That praise and

positive feedback coming from the elderly, rewarded them for their efforts. It made students want to be around the elderly, and many of them shared that they liked making the elderly happy. Because of that, effort and participation increased in students as well. All of the students wanted to be involved because they had a new found motivation to be successful or to at least try. Students that were scared were even stepping out of their shells to participate in things they never would have before such as reading a line in a play alone in front of over 100 people.

Students also gained respect. They encouraged their peers who were nervous, they helped each other to learn their lines and songs, and they praised each other when they did well. When it pertained to the elderly they showed respect as well, both when they were and were not around them. They corrected people who used the term “old” saying it was nicer to say “elderly”. In front of them they spoke up and used their best manners. When receiving gifts they were sure to say thank you, and if they needed help on a craft they were sure to ask by saying please. Their manners were noticed around school as well in places such as the cafeteria, where the staff commented on how our class had the best manners when getting their lunches.

By the end of the study students had not only gained a wide range of life skills to help them succeed, but they had gained a variety of academic skills as well. When first deciding to exchange the curriculum with the elderly resources I

had compiled I was hesitant and concerned that students would not meet the academic expectations I had for them. This situation could not have been further from the truth though. Students' interests of learning about the elderly had them forming questions and searching for answers all around them. It had them questioning things in their everyday environment they had never noticed before, such as the symbols on the bathroom signs. It had them making connections to tasks like weaving that they learned from the elderly, to class stories that discussed weaving as a way to use grass to build a house. It had them building vocabulary for words like wrinkles, that could be found on a person's skin or on a dried up pumpkin. It even had them doing additional reading outside of school when they were challenged to learn tricky lines in a short amount of time for their Thanksgiving play. Intergenerational learning pushed students to develop individual skills they may not have without it.

This led me to believe that a curriculum that offers not only supplemental resources about the elderly, but actual positive interactions with the elderly can be key to students successes both academically and behaviorally.

Benefitting the Elderly

Developing an intergenerational program can positively impact the elderly.

As my literature review states, Holmes (2009) believed "the development of an intergenerational program is a positive move toward the goal of promoting a

community atmosphere in which both children and elders develop positive values and attitudes” (p. 114). During my study I found that my students were not the only ones who had changed, but that the elderly involved were impacted in a positive way as well.

I had focused solely on the impacts the study had on the children originally, but forgot about a key factor, the benefits it had on the elderly. The elderly who took part in my study did so on a volunteer basis and chose to take time out of their days to interact with the students. They chose to participate in fun activities that would make the students smile and to visit the students at school as well as in their residence.

Elders not only took time to be with the students, but went out of their way to try to make them happy. During the Halloween visit they complimented students on their costumes and made them smile. Multiple residents were also able to act quickly when boxes of the nursing home supplied candy ran out and there was not enough for all students. Instead of letting a few students without any, they immediately rushed off to their rooms and brought back their own candy and treats to give to the leftover students. Visitors at the school brought their own contributions as well. On Halloween our elderly visitor dressed up to impress the students and even brought a holiday treat for each. She left with the promise she would be back to visit again, and was sure to keep that promise when she showed up a month later for the next event, this time with friends.

Besides going out of their way to do nice things, the impacts the students had could be seen in the smiles and sparkling eyes of the elderly, when the students interacted with them. During the visits the elders were smiling, laughing, hugging, cheering for students, and having conversations about anything and everything. As visits wrapped up, every elder to whom I talked, had nothing but positive things to say about how wonderful the students were and how much fun they had with them. The elders thanked me numerous times for arranging the events and inviting them to be a part of them, and many already questioned when the next visit would be so they could make themselves available.

Elders also seemed to feel the sense of importance. A few shared they were surrounded with students, all who wanted their attention, were willing to take turns to interact with them, and all who wanted to make them feel special. These observable and shared benefits intergenerational learning had on the elderly were only a few of the many I can guess they experienced during their visits.

Next Steps

While writing my thesis story I was able to reflect on a lot of things that had happened during the study. Through this reflection I was able to determine what I had learned from my study and in what ways I could continue to build on intergenerational learning and grow our new program.

There are a lot of things I loved about my study, but with intergenerational learning there are so many great ways to expand and develop an even better program year after year. With the amount of elderly interest increasing and the students feeling more comfortable, I would love to make intergenerational learning a whole year, grade wide experience. It would be a program the kindergarteners moving up to first grade in our school got to look forward to every year. Elderly visits to the school would include all first grade classes participating in activities with the elderly and instead of monthly field trips visits could occur twice a month since classes could rotate between visiting.

With the time constraint of my study and the time spent figuring out what methods worked and which did not work quite as well, I did not get to build background knowledge about the elderly in my students as much as I would have liked. Students' attitudes toward the elderly improved but their knowledge of other things relating to the elderly were not touched upon in detail. Moving forward, I would like to research and include more videos. I would not only like them to

enjoy each others company, but to learn about each other, like the students did when they learned about wheelchairs. Having students watch videos then reflect upon their learning through discussion and writing would be a great way to not only teach them new knowledge about the elderly, but to again incorporate those academic skills of discussion, higher level thinking, and writing.

I would also like to expand the service learning aspect by having students end the year doing a fundraiser for the home with which we partnered. Students would interview residents, asking for things they need or want, then students would work together to make flyers and collect donations during a school wide fundraiser with those donations then going toward their elderly friends.

After a year or two, and with the elderly participation hopefully continuing to grow, I would also love to incorporate a pen pal portion between the students and the elderly residents. Students could write to elderly pen pals in between their visits with them throughout the school year. They could even have the option to continue after the school year ends, should both participants agree.

Surprisingly, a few weeks after my study, I ended up moving into a new role in my school, as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for Middle School. Although I still have the opportunity to visit my students I am no longer working with the intergenerational program. With that being said I have passed on my many ideas and the role of further developing this program to those who worked alongside me as my thesis took place, and to the other first grade teachers who

will now join in on the fun. Who knows? There may be the potential to expand it even further and incorporate the middle school students and teachers I now work with into the program or one of their own as well.

References

- Ackerman, K., & Gammell, S. (1999). *Song and dance man*. New York: Knopf.
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.
- Blunk, E. M. & Williams, S. W. (1997). The effects of curriculum on preschool children's perceptions of the elderly. *Educational Gerontology, 23*(3), 233-241.
- Bousfield, C. & Hutchison, P. (2010). Contact, anxiety, and young people's attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the elderly. *Educational Gerontology, 36*, 451-466.
- Branco, K. J. & Williamson, J. B. (1982). Stereotyping and the life cycle: Views of aging and the aged. In A.G. Miller (Ed.), *In the eye of the beholder: Contemporary issues in stereotyping* (pp. 364-410). New York: Praeger.
- Brett, J. (2012). *The 3 little dummies*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Butler, R. (1993). Dispelling Ageism: The cross-cutting intervention. *Generations, 17*(2), 75-78.
- Dallman, M. E. & Power, S. (1996). Kids and elders: forever friends. *Teaching PreK-8, 27*(2), 52-54.
- Design Squad Global. (2018, December 19). *Kid Engineer: Walker Wheeler Design Squad*. [YouTube]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5hJZA-TNqo>

- Dunham, C. C. & Casadonte, D. (2009). Children's attitudes and classroom interaction in an intergenerational education program. *Educational Gerontology, 35*, 453-464.
- Fair, C. D. & Delaplane, E. (2015). It is good to spend time with older adults. You can teach them, they can teach you: Second grade students reflect on intergenerational learning. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 43*(1), 19-26.
- Forever Friends Inc. (2010). *Forever Friends*.
<http://www.foreverfriends.org/index.htm>
- Hannon, P. & Gueldner, H. (2007). The impact of short-term quality intergenerational contact on children's attitudes toward older adults. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 5*, 59-76.
- Hendricks, C. (2017). *Improving schools through action research: A comprehensive guide for educators*. (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education
- Holmes, C. L. (2009). An intergenerational program with benefits. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 37*(2), 113-119.
- Hubbell, W. (2000). *Pumpkin Jack*. Morton Grove Ill: Will Hubbell.
- Isaacs, L. W. & Bearison, D. J. (1986). The development of children's prejudice against the aged. *Intergenerational Journal of Aging and Human Development, 23*, 175-194.

- Jones, J. S., Veenstra, T. R., Seamon, J. P., & Krohmer, J. (1997). Elder mistreatment. National survey of emergent physicians. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 30, 473-479.
- Kesselman, W. A., & Cooney, B. (1999). *Emma*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books.
- Kiernan, H. W & Mosher-Ashley, P. M. (2002). Strategies to expand a pen pal program from simple letters into a full intergenerational experience. *Educational Gerontology*, 28(4), 337-345.
- Kupetz, B. N. (1993). Bridging the gap between young and old. *Children Today*, 22, 10-13.
- McGuire, S. L. (1993). Promoting positive attitudes through aging education: A study with preschool children. *Gerontology and Geriatrics Education*, 13, 3-11.
- McNiff, J. (2017). *Action research: All you need to know*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Moran, K. J. K. (2006). Nurturing emergent readers through readers theater. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(5), 317-323.
- Nelson, T. D. (2005). Ageism: Prejudice against our feared future self. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61(2), 207-221.
- Ory, M., Kinney Hoffman, M., Hawkins, M., Sanner, B., & Mockenhaupt, R. (2003). Challenging ageing stereotypes: Strategies for creating a more active society. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 25(3), 164-171.

- Palmore, E. B. (1999). *Ageism: Negative and positive*, 2nd ed. New York: Springer Publishing.
- Ragan, A. M. & Bowen, A. M. (2001). Improving attitudes regarding the elderly population: The effects of information and reinforcement for change. *The Gerontologist*, 41(4), 511-515.
- Seefeldt, C. (1987). The effects of preschoolers' visits to a nursing home. *The Gerontologist*, 27, 228-232.
- Soslau, E. G. & Yost, D. S. (2007). Urban service-learning: An authentic teaching strategy to deliver a standards-driven curriculum. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 30(1), 36-53.
- SwingNellia. (2018, October 15). *Dance Boogie Woogie Rockabilly-Jive Nellia & Dietmar danceschool horn*. [YouTube]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgtiVCsZOj4>

Appendices

Appendix A: HSIRB Approval Letter



July 19, 2018

Dear Ms. Stephanie Hutzayluk,

The HSIRB has completed its final review of your proposal and is granting approval of this proposal. Please note that if you intend on venturing into topics other than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics. Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this email notification, you will need to file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB and receive approval of the changes before implementation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Good luck with your research!

Sincerely,

Jean L DesJardin, PhD

Jean L. DesJardin, PhD
HSIRB Chair
Moravian College
1200 Main Street
Bethlehem, PA
desjardinj@moravian.edu; (610) 861-1317



Department of Education | 1200 Main Street | Bethlehem, PA 18018
610 861-1558 | depteducation@moravian.edu | moravian.edu/education

Appendix B: Principal Consent Form

5/7/18

Dear Ms. ~~Klas~~,

As a teacher and also a graduate student, I am currently finishing up my Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction with my Reading Specialist Certification at Moravian College. As one of my graduation requirements Moravian requires that I conduct a study of my own teaching practices. To fulfill this requirement I will be conducting an action research study with my First Grade students from September to December looking at what happens when students work together with the elderly to eliminate age bias and improve their motivation for learning.

The purpose of this study is to engage students in building respect for others and their differences using positive interactions with the elderly. Students will have the chance to view a variety of texts and videos providing them with new knowledge, while enhancing their reading skills. Creative lesson plans will offer students the opportunity to learn along side their elderly buddies, and encourage partnerships and bonds while interacting through readers' theatre performances, letter writing, and hands on learning. Students will also be participating in fun opportunities such as a field trip, thanksgiving feast, and holiday concert. Throughout the next couple months, I will be gathering data to support my research using teacher observation, student surveys and interviews, and student work samples.

All of the areas covered in the study including: oral language development, information recall, reading, and writing narrative and opinion pieces are all a part of the First Grade curriculum and for this reason all of the students will be participating in the activities and completing the same work whether they are participants in the study or not. Only data collected from participants will be used in the research study. Children's names will be replaced with pseudonyms, and all items pertaining to the child's identity will be kept confidential. I am asking for your permission to use the data gathered involving student work, however this is a voluntary study. Furthermore, a child may be withdrawn from the study at anytime without penalty by contacting me using the information provided below.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding my research, please feel free to contact me at shutzayluk@ee-schools.org. You may also contact my Moravian College advisor, Dr. Joseph ~~Shosh~~. He can be reached at 610-861-1482 or by e-mail at shoshj@moravian.edu.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Hutzayluk
First Grade Teacher

[Redacted Signature]

Executive Education Academy Charter School

Please check the appropriate response below and then sign and date the form.

I give permission for this research study to take place.

I do not give permission for this research study to take place.

Principal's Name: Tamara Klus

Principal's Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Date: 5/8/18

Appendix C: Parent Consent Form

9/4/18

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As a teacher and also a graduate student, I am currently finishing up my Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction with my Reading Specialist Certification at Moravian College. As one of my graduation requirements Moravian requires that I conduct a study of my own teaching practices. To fulfill this requirement I will be conducting an action research study with my First Grade students from September to December looking at what happens when students work together with the elderly to eliminate age bias and improve their motivation for learning.

The purpose of this study is to engage students in building respect for others and their differences using positive interactions with the elderly. Students will have the chance to view a variety of texts and videos providing them with new knowledge, while enhancing their reading skills. Creative lesson plans will offer students the opportunity to learn along side their elderly buddies, and encourage partnerships and bonds while interacting through readers' theatre performances, letter writing, and hands on learning. Students will also be participating in fun opportunities such as a field trip, thanksgiving feast, and holiday concert. Throughout the next couple months, I will be gathering data to support my research using teacher observation, student surveys and interviews, and student work samples.

All of the areas covered in the study including: oral language development, information recall, reading, and writing narrative and opinion pieces are all a part of the First Grade curriculum and for this reason all of the students will be participating in the activities and completing the same work whether they are participants in the study or not. Only data collected from participants will be used in the research study. Children's names will be replaced with pseudonyms, and all items pertaining to the child's identity will be kept confidential. I am asking for your permission to use the data gathered involving student work, however this is a voluntary study. Furthermore, a child may be withdrawn from the study at anytime without penalty by contacting me using the information provided below.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding my research, please feel free to contact me at shutzayluk@ee-schools.org. You may also contact my Moravian College advisor, Dr. Joseph Shoshj. He can be reached at 610-861-1482 or by e-mail at shoshj@moravian.edu.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Hutzayluk
First Grade Teacher

[Redacted Signature]

Please check the appropriate response below and then sign and date the form.

_____ I give permission for my child to participate.

_____ I do not give permission for my child to participate.

Child's Name:

Parent's Name:

Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Student Assent Form

9/4/18

Dear First Grade:

Just like you go to school each day, I too go to school. For one of my homework assignments I will be studying how I teach and seeing if it is working to make myself a better teacher. I am asking for your help on my homework.

Our reading books do not include many stories about the elderly, so we will do some investigating as a class to learn a little bit more about them. We will do this by reading and listening to books, watching videos, and writing about the elderly. We will also get to meet some elderly people and spend time with them doing different activities and getting to know them both here at the school and by going on field trips to where they live.

All of our experiences and the information you share with me about what you learned and how you feel I will be sharing at my school. I would like your permission to share what we have learned together with others so they can learn from you as well.

Please color the appropriate face below and then sign and date the form.



I agree to be a part of this study.



I do not agree to be a part of this study.

Child's Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Parent Survey

Parent Survey

Dear Parents/ Guardians,

This year our first grade class will be part of a learning experience amongst different generations, the youth and the elderly. The youth being our first graders and the elderly being members from a local nursing home our school has teamed up with will be working together to learn and grow. Before we begin I wanted to get an idea of how many of our students already get to spend time around the elderly. Please fill out the survey below to help share about your child's experiences. If you have any questions feel free to email me or message me through Remind or via my contact information below. When you are finished please return the completed form.

1. Does your child know any adults over 65?
2. What kind of contact and how much contact does your child have with adults over 65 outside of school?
3. What feelings if any has your child expressed about the elderly?
4. What are your feelings on an intergenerational program, of first graders and the elderly working together?

Thank you for your time.

Miss Hutzayluk
First Grade


shutzayluk@ee-schools.org

Appendix F: Elderly Pre/ Post Writing

Name _____

How do you feel about the elderly?



Appendix G: Elderly Pre/Post Interview

Children Interview

This year we will be learning about the elderly and I wanted to get an idea of what you already know about the elderly and how you feel about them before we begin working with them. Will you help me get to know your thoughts by answering a few questions for me?

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. At what age would you say someone is elderly?
4. How do you know if someone is elderly?
5. How do you feel about being around elderly people
 - a. Why do you feel this way?
 - b. How about young people?
6. Do you know a lot of elderly people?
 - a. Who?
 - b. How do you know them?
7. Do you think all elderly people are the same?
8. Do you think elderly people are like you?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - b. What kinds of things might be the same or different? (ex. What do they eat?, Where do they live?, How do they get around or move?)
9. How do you think elderly people feel?
10. What kinds of things do you think elderly people CAN do?
11. What kinds of things do you think elderly people LIKE TO do?

Thank you.

Appendix H: Country Meadows Field Trip Survey

Name _____

Would you like to go back and visit Country Meadows and the elderly who live there again?

YES

NO

Why...?

Appendix I: Country Meadows Visit Survey

Name _____

Date _____

Would you like the elderly residents at Country Meadows to come visit the school again?

YES

NO

Why...?
