

Translating Knowledge: Promoting Health through Intergenerational Community Arts Programming

Abstract

Introduction: Intergenerational programs have been touted to address the generation gaps and isolation of older adults. Mutual contact alone has produced mixed results, but attention to the intergenerational program content demonstrates wellbeing benefits. This practice-based paper examines the benefits of creating and performing ensemble-created plays to older adults' and university students' wellbeing and the key processes that promote wellbeing.

Methods: This community participatory research project involved older adults as researchers as well as research subjects. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted by two trained interviewers with older adults (n=15) university students (n=17).

Results: Professional dramaturgical processes of storytelling, reminiscence, and playfulness were key elements in participants' generative learning. They augmented older adults' and university students' ability to understand their situations and try innovative solutions. Skills such as openness, flexibility, and adaptation transferred into students' and older adults' daily lives.

Conclusion: Participating in this intergenerational theatre group reduced ageism and improved intergenerational relationships. It increased older adults' and university students' wellbeing by building social networks, confidence, and self-esteem; and, developed a sense of social justice, empathy, and support for others.

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Introduction

The demand for evidence-based research regarding community-based population health programs is growing (Anderson et al., 2012; Bryant, Altpeter, &Whitelaw, 2006). Policy-makers increasingly regard interventions or programs delivered in community settings as routes to decrease costs and maintain older adults' wellbeing in spite of the onset of chronic conditions.

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Funders, however, want empirical results to demonstrate program benefits to individuals and communities (Currie, 2010; De Medeiros & Basting, 2014; Hancock, 2007). Program evaluations provide “local evidence” about the needs addressed by such programs, the generative processes, and their outcomes, but this knowledge is not often published in the peer-reviewed literature (Bernard, 2006; De Medeiros & Basting, 2014; Harrison, Legare, Graham, & Fevers, 2010; Henken & Butts, 2012; Noelker, 2006). Fewer than 3% of published knowledge translation studies pertain to older adults, 60 years of age and older (Bostrom, Slaughter, Chojecki & Estabrooks, 2012). Published evaluations of the health benefits of community programming are sparser (Anderson et al., 2012; Clift, 2012; Currie, 2010; Wilson, Lavis, Travers, & Rourke, 2010). This is unfortunate given the evidence that people of all ages benefit from participating in arts programming (Castora-Binkley, Noeleker, Prohaska, & DAtaiano, 2010; Cohen et al., 2007; Grossi, Blessi, Sacco, & Buscema, 2012; Patterson & Perlstein, 2011; President’s Committee on Arts & Humanities [PCAH], 2011). Arts programming includes visual art, music, dance, and sometimes crafts [PCAH, 2011]. Students engaged in creative arts programs in school have greater skills (problem solving, critical and creative thinking) and social competencies (collaboration, social tolerance, self-confidence) than those not enrolled in arts programs (PCAH, 2011). Older adults participating in a variety of creative arts programs benefitted from significantly higher morale, fewer medical encounters and falls, reduced medication use, and increased quality of life, than comparison groups (Castora-Binkley, et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2007; Patterson & Perlstein, 2011). Those in professionally-led drama programs had better word

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recall, verbal fluency, and problem-solving skills than older adults participating in comparison groups of professionally-led art or choir interventions (Noice, Noice, & Staines, 2004; Noice & Noice, 2006A; 2006B; 2008).

Among arts initiatives for older adults, intergenerational arts programming that involves older adults and students participating together has been endorsed as having greater potential benefits than programs exclusive to older adults (Henken & Butts, 2012). However, we found no published studies that evaluated health benefits of intergenerational drama programs, perhaps because they are evaluated in-house (Bernard, 2006) or because few intergenerational drama troupes exist (Thomson, 2009). Intergenerational programs were organized five decades ago to address the “generation gap” of youth disengagement and isolation of older adults. Mutual contact alone has produced mixed success, but attention to the intergenerational program content demonstrates wellbeing benefits including decreasing societal age segregation and increasing community capacity (Culp, 2013; Fried et al., 2013; Hopkins & Pain, 2007). The goal of this research was to examine the benefits to university students and older adults of participating in a professionally-led intergenerational community theatre company, and the key processes that promoted their wellbeing.

Professionally-led Intergenerational Theatre

In response to publicity about the benefits of professionally-led drama programs (Noice, Noice, Perrig-Chiello, & Perrig, 1999), the seniors’ association in a western Canadian city

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approached a university drama professor about initiating an older adult drama program. In 2001, the professionally-led older adults' drama performance group began. Six to ten participants regularly performed Shakespeare or fairy-tale inspired vignettes featuring well-known characters as older adults in settings such as a retirement residence. In 2006, university students joined the older adults.

Older adults and university students participate in weekly "rehearsals" that begin with theatre games, singing, and improv to create a playful atmosphere. Then, participants work together to develop ensemble-created plays. They reminisce about objects brought to the group by staff, and tell personal narratives. Vignettes from a number of stories are worked into a meaningful storyline. The group hones the plays in rehearsals and 15-20 performances a year. Play and social engagement are integral parts of the program. Participants are encouraged to find their inner child, have fun, and play with possibilities. As they reach into themselves for material and share their experiences to create their plays, participants gain knowledge of other group members. Information about the program is available on the Internet <http://www.geriactors.ualberta.ca>. University students can also enroll in a university credit course in community theatre for older adults. The intergenerational theatre group currently involves 10 - 15 older adults and 10 - 15 university students. They are directed by two professionals.

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Methods

This community participatory research project involved older adults as researchers, as well as research subjects (Blair & Minkler, 2009). Researchers and theatre group members collaborated to decide on the methodology, define and refine research questions, and collect data. After ethics approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Health Ethics Research Board, the research team (two investigators, two older adults, the research manager, and research assistant) participated in qualitative interview training (Olson, 2011). A graduate research assistant contacted all current and former older adults, university students, and staff at their last known telephone numbers or email addresses and invited them to participate in interviews. Over the next three months, in-depth face-to-face interviews (45 - 60 minutes) were conducted by two trained interviewers either in a university office or the participants' homes. Interviews were digitally recorded. In the semi-structured interviews, respondents were asked: "Tell me about the first time you took part in the theatre group", and "I understand that the group writes, rehearses and performs their own plays. Tell me about this process." Participants also were asked about their experiences of intergenerational relationships before joining the group, changes in the group over time, and the group's effects on their lives. Following the interviews, interviewers completed field notes, interviews were professionally transcribed, and transcriptions were verified by the key interviewer (Semi-structured interview guide is included in Supplementary Appendix 1).

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Data analysis

Field notes and verified transcriptions were imported into Nvivo™ 9.2 and then analyzed using thematic content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). We focused on respondents' experiences and perceived benefits of participating. Through a continuous, iterative, and comparative process, themes of participants' perceptions were identified and comparisons/contrasts were made between older adults and university students and the former and current members. To ensure dependability, we discussed coding decisions with the research team and kept memos of analysis decisions. On two occasions (near the end of data analysis) we member-checked our analysis by taking themes back to the theatre group to validate that our analysis resonated with group members.

Participants

There were a total of 32 participants in this study: fifteen older adults (current (n=13); former (n=2)) and seventeen university students (current (n=5); former (n=12)) participated in individual interviews. Participants were mainly Caucasian, but from a variety of cultures. About a quarter of the older adults and university students had immigrated to Canada (e.g., China, Mexico, Germany, Serbia). One older adult self-identified as Aboriginal. One current older adult participant declined to participate in an individual interview, but did participate in group member checking. One former older adult and two current university students agreed to interviews, but

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cancelled their respective appointments saying they were “too busy”. Participant demographic data is presented in Table 1.

Results

The primary reason older adults gave for joining the group was their belief that engagement in social activities would prevent or postpone common chronic conditions of aging (i.e., cognitive decline, isolation, dementia); the second was that they enjoyed drama. University students said they wanted to learn about older adults and about community theatre. Beyond these differing objectives, themes expressed by participating current and former older adult and university students were remarkably similar. To illustrate this, we have collated participant quotes into Table 2. In what follows, we present the processes contributing to wellbeing outcomes followed by the outcomes perceived by older adults and university students.

Intergenerational Drama Program Processes

Intergenerational exposure. Older adults and university students described the intergenerational theatre group as an engaging community space that encouraged university students and older adults to get to know one another, exchange resources, and cultivate deeper social connections. A former student characterized the group synergy from intergenerational mixing as “the perfect storm”. Older adults and university students believed that the processes of creating drama from participants’ stories and mixing young and old created a unique space that

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released participants from usual ways of thinking and interacting. (See selection of exemplar quotes Table 2).

Few intergenerational interactions. Prior to joining the intergenerational theatre group, these older adults and university students had not interacted extensively with other generations outside of their own families. Many of the older adults had no family members in the city, and others noted that their relatives were busy with their own work and families, so they had less contact with younger generations than they desired. Community contacts with younger generations were described as fleeting and insubstantial. Older adults noted that upon retirement, opportunities to develop new social connections became limited. Many felt that they were becoming increasingly invisible. They felt they were aggregated into a seniors' class, where others only saw them as older adult clichés. Participants spoke about the disengagement in their seniors' residences and how conversations with other older adults devolved to aches and pains or mundane activities, like grocery shopping. Some found it difficult to develop relationships with other older adults without feeling like they were gossiping. Even though they were with others, older adults characterized many of their relationships as superficial. Increasingly, they felt they were becoming passive spectators of activities. Those perspectives were echoed by university students. One, who was working in long term care, spoke about how older adults were placed beside each other, but they did not develop meaningful connections with fellow residents. (See quotes Table 2).

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Fun. Participants had fun. Play and a playful atmosphere is a core element built into the program (warm-up storytelling, drama games, and performances) by the professional team. Within this intergenerational space, all participants stressed that fun was the critical component. Older adults described it as the freedom to be childlike or open to the moment. Playfulness served as a safe training ground, allowing university students and seniors to explore and experiment without the usual worries about how they were expected to behave or risks to relationships. It released them from self-censorship, social expectations and programmed, traditional thinking. They shared ideas more freely and considered alternative approaches. All participants thought playfulness encouraged them to be open to new learning and different explanations, and to find creative ways to solve day-to-day problems.

Storytelling builds relationships. In this intergenerational drama group, productions are specifically built from older adults' and university students' reminiscences and storytelling. University students and older adults tell stories from their lives, knowing that others will listen. To create an appealing drama, vignettes from other seniors and university students are amalgamated. Participants explained that staff created an open, yet intimate atmosphere that nurtured development of dramatic storylines, as well as intergenerational relationships and the exchange of resources. They believed that the non-judgmental, open, and trusting atmosphere fostered by the professional staff was a critical factor in their positive experiences. It created a safe space that stimulated active engagement, encouraged participants to share, and promoted inclusion, while also challenging conventional thinking.

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Participants observed that being bullied in school, feeling lonesome or excluded, taking risks, and making life choices seemed to be universal experiences. Indeed, they recognized more commonalities with the other generation, than differences. Older adults and university students developed deeper insights into their own actions and motivations, and those of others.

Generational comparison enabled both age groups to recognize how their choices were influenced by socially constructed contexts and generational beliefs. Once these were exposed, they were able to talk intergenerationally about forbidden or hidden emotions and question assumptions, obligatory rules, and behavior imposed in their lives. University students and older adults gained new perceptions about their situations and possibilities for their life paths.

Participants thought the validation they received from the group was a critical element.

Storytellers' imagination, courage, and intelligence were recognized by their age group peers and by the other generation. They felt better about themselves and the group (See quotes Table 2).

Generative learning. Some older adults and university students called the group “therapy” and others regarded it as therapeutic. Our analysis suggests that what participants were describing as therapeutic is generative learning and transferrable skills. *Generative learning* is a learning style by which people incorporate existing knowledge with new ideas through experimentation and open-mindedness. Both older adults and university students recognized that memorizing lines and the quickness of drama improvisation challenged them mentally, but added that producing this drama was more generative. The possibility of play was encouraged throughout the intergenerational drama group's processes. Older adults and university students

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related that crafting story vignettes into drama productions and making changes within the storylines or the staging to increase audience appeal, enabled them to use skills such as brainstorming, reframing, flexibility, and tolerance. Those skills transferred into university students' and older adults' daily lives. They used these new skills to solve everyday problems.

Older adults and university students were teachers and learners at various times in the process. University students were proud of the ways in which sharing their experiences and drama knowledge changed the older adults. They recognized that not only were the dramatic performances better, they were also personally inspired by older adults' individual gains -- self-awareness, fulfilment, and newfound confidence. Older adults were equally as excited by what university students gained from them—knowledge of the past, equanimity about the present, and friendship.

Social Support. The intergenerational drama group was a significant source of emotional and informational support and to a lesser extent, practical support for participants. “Like a family”, “close connections”, and “community” were frequently used to describe support from the group. On the surface, participants benefitted from group activities. The group shared experiences through games and stories in sessions, and during the mid-session break there was dyadic affirmation, and food. At a deeper level, however, drama created what the university students called an altered attentiveness, so the storytelling and drama processes enhanced the effects of supportive behaviors. Through telling stories and creating plays, university students,

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seniors, and staff learned more deeply about each other. This increased compassion and created a more caring and supportive group.

Both seniors and university students felt profoundly listened to and heard by the other generation. University students thought conversations with these seniors were significantly different than those with their peers. They thought their lives at university were stressful and peers competitive, so they looked forward to the deeper, yet non-judgemental conversations with these older adults. Similarly, older adults valued university students sharing their lives with them (See quotes Table 2).

Intergenerational Drama Program Outcomes

Participating in this intergenerational theatre group reduced ageism and improved intergenerational relationships. It increased older adults' and university students' wellbeing by building social networks, confidence and self-esteem, and increased their empathy and support for others.

Reduced ageism/fear of aging. Contact with these older adults dispelled university students' pre-conceived notions about the inevitable declines of aging, but also changed these adults' views of the younger generation. All but a few university students admitted that before going to the intergenerational drama group, they harboured stereotypical, ageist views of older adults. The majority expected these older adults to be slower cognitively and physically. Several university students noted they had been worried about aging, but their fear of growing older was

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reduced through interactions with these seniors. Intergenerational contacts reduced older adults' fears that younger people were less responsible.

Increased social networks. The drama program helped to reduce university students and older adults' loneliness and isolation, and increased their social networks. All believed they benefitted from new friendships that developed within the group, but support within the group was especially beneficial for university students and older adults who lived alone, were new to the city, or had families outside the city.

Improved intergenerational relationships. University students' relationships with older family members and other older adults improved. Over two-thirds of the university students said they visited or telephoned their grandparents more often. Older adults believed their conversations with family, particularly grandchildren and friends, were more interesting. Both age groups thought they were more outgoing with other generations across settings. All participants believed drama performances helped to increase awareness of older adults' capabilities and decrease ageist stereotypes.

Built self-confidence and self-esteem. All participants gave examples of how new perspectives and relationship skills built into the program increased their self-confidence, and in turn, their self-esteem and overall wellbeing. Interactions with older adults gave university students a broader perspective and more equanimity about their own problems. University students said they were less stressed as they approached their projects. Older adults also attributed improved self-confidence directly to affirmation that their experiences had been

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credible, risky, or brave. Recognition of the value of their contributions increased self-esteem. Older adults and university students explained that everyday barriers seemed less onerous to overcome. Enjoyment in meeting other people increased.

Increased empathy and equanimity. Participants attributed development of sense of social justice, empathy, and tolerance for others directly to the drama production processes. They said they were “less selfish”, more prepared to listen to others in their workplace or seniors residence, learned others’ names, and cared more about what happened in their communities.

Discussion and Conclusion

This professionally-led drama program demonstrates the potential of intergenerational community programming to promote the wellbeing of both younger and older adults. Anecdotally, older adults noted benefits such as fewer aches and pains, positive affect, and cognitive quickness that are similar to earlier quantitative evaluations (Castora, Binkley et al., 2010; Noice et al., 2004; Noice & Noice, 2006B; 2008; Patterson & Perlstein, 2011). These participants, like those in studies by Noice & Noice (2006B; 2008), attributed cognitive gains to learning lines and role playing, but this research adds knowledge of the health promoting benefits of generative learning stimulated by the ensemble-created plays and playful atmosphere.

Embedded into this intergenerational theatre group, the professional dramaturgical processes of storytelling, reminiscence, and playfulness augmented these older adults’ and university students’ ability to understand their situations and try innovative solutions. Comparing their experiences enabled older adults and university students to relate to one another. The

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interactions changed older adults' and university students' attitudes about the other generation and increased their perception of their own tolerance of diversity. The group interactions and skills learned in professionally-led drama programs produced a broad range of transferable abilities that promoted both university students' and older adults' overall wellbeing. Older adults and university students in this group noted increased ability to solve day-to-day problems. Theoretically, improvements in participants' wellbeing can be explained through several health promotion theories including: the information processing paradigm, social learning theory, and social support (Goodson, 2009). **Drama and storytelling are persuasive communications which increased participants' attention to, and comprehension of messages (information processing paradigm). Participants learned new behaviors and gained self-esteem through acting and receiving feedback from staff, fellow GeriActors, and audiences (social learning theory). Belonging to the GeriActors group increased participants' access to information, guidance, validation, and the perception that other types of assistance were available if needed (social support).**

Participants related increased facility to the professional drama leadership's intentional use of the dramatic technique playfulness and ensemble-created plays through reminiscence. Participatory theatre, in particular creating drama through storytelling grounded in personal experience, transcends the objectivity/subjectivity divide (Cohen et al., 2007; PCAH, 2011). The drama technique, playfulness increases spontaneity, creativity, and expressiveness (De Medeiros & Basting, 2014). Along with reminiscence, it built trust that enabled university

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students and older adults to grapple with memories or events that might have been disturbing or shameful. In this group there was reciprocity between university students and older adults; they were invested together in risk and creation of ensemble-created plays. Intimacy, trust, and openness developed between older adults and university students and within the group as they shared stories.

We noted some similarities between processes in this intergenerational drama group and age-friendly community research. In age-friendly community consultations, older adults want opportunities to learn and contribute to society. They stress that genuine intergenerational interactions are important, but diminish as they get older (Bernard, 2006). There is evidence intergenerational contacts are decreasing (Lyyra, Lyyra, Lumme-Sandt, Tiikkainen, & Heikkinen, 2010; Putnam, 2000). Participants in this research, both university students and older adults, submitted that prior to this intergenerational drama group there were few opportunities for them to interact. Yet, few intergenerational drama programs such as this exist (Bernard, 2006; Thomson, 2009).

Medeiros and Bastings (2014) in their cultural arts intervention review made three recommendations for future research: 1) an understanding of mechanisms; 2) moving beyond individual evaluation to include staff and social networks; and 3) considering people's interests in cultural arts. We believe that this research contributes to this knowledge gap of the mechanisms by which cultural arts work and how intergenerational arts programming enhances social environments.

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There are limitations to our study. At the outset, it was suggested that the active ingredients were the professional leader's skills and the characteristics of people who would be attracted to and join such a group. Professional drama leadership skills unquestionably contributed to outcomes. As two former student participants are successfully replicating play and ensemble-created drama in other cities, it is likely the professional drama techniques rather than a specific leader's skills that are critical to attaining positive outcomes (De Medeiros & Basting, 2014). Many older adults expressed prior interests in drama. In this way, they are a select group. Given the nature of personal preferences associated with leisure pursuits, Medeiros and Basting (2014) recommend considering individual interests when offering and evaluating cultural arts interventions because results of intergenerational programs which merely bring generations together have been disappointing (Culp, 2013; Fried et al., 2013; Hopkins & Pain, 2007). In conclusion, participating in this professionally-led intergenerational theatre group promoted older adults' and students' wellbeing by building confidence, self-esteem, and social networks and increasing their empathy and support for others.

Implications for theory, policy, and practice

In addition to traditional exercise and lifestyle management, this research suggests that chronic disease management and health promotion programs could benefit from including intergenerational creative arts programming into their toolkit. Creative arts and intergenerational practice policy makers and community programmers could benefit from public health supporting

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knowledge translation of these promising community health promotion practices (Bostrom et al., 2012; Castora-Binkley et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2007).

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Table 1: Participant Demographics

	Older Adults	University Students
Participants	N= 15, (Females 11, Males 4) All older adults	N= 17 (Females 12, Males 5)
Average Age (Range)	74 years of age (68-85)	29 years of age (21-62)
Average years with GeriActors (Range)	3.97 years (4 months- 10 years)	1 year (4 months- 2 years)
Average years lived in city (Range)	37.86 years (1.5- 62)	10 years (1-36)

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Table 2: Exemplar participant quotes by theme.

Themes	Older Adults	University Students
Processes		
Intergenerational Exposure (Exemplars of the quotes of 11 older adults and 11 university students)	I suppose part of it is the common humanity of us all. It is so easy to think that this generation doesn't know anything. I mean even the names that they have now, Generation X and Y and all this stuff. I mean, we're all human beings. (Cecelia, current member) Obviously, I go in the tennis club and the young people playing. Well, we don't get chatting. We don't get to know each other too much. I go to the lake and swimming, and we usually chum around with other adults except for the family, of course. Dickens, current member)	I like the analogy of a "perfect storm." I think there's something really interesting that goes on with the intergenerational relationships in between the young and old. The young people would marvel at their ability to come up with solutions for problems or how to emotionally deal with a situation because they've dealt with everything, you know? I would look at the seniors and go: "Wow. Your friend just died. But they're just so emotionally mature in those situations that they overcome it. On the flip side of things, I think the seniors look at us young people and are like: "Wow; look at their youthful exuberance. Look at how they're able to physically do these things on stage." Well, we're all actors. (Gus, former student)
Few intergenerational interactions. (Exemplars of the quotes of 9 older adults and 11 university students)	I think that as you get older, you do get a little lonesome at times. Now, with my children, as they grow older, they have their own children and their grandchildren. They do come and visit, but it's not like – we used to have big family dinners and spend lots of time together, but it's really hard	Right now in our generation, we don't really have much connection with the older, the seniors. (Sarah former student) But there are older and younger people around you. So how do you get that connection with people? It's kind of hard to always talk to a stranger on the street because we're not really trained how to do that, unfortunately. (Lupus, current

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	to get everybody together now. (Esther, current member)	student)
Fun (Exemplars of the quotes of 8 older adults and 14 university students)	We have so much fun, and we laugh. Nobody minds if it isn't quite right because it's part of the fun. It just gives you that release that, you are allowed to be silly. You know, because a lot of older people have been brought up in a way that says, 'You don't do this'. Young people today are a lot less inhibited. I think a lot of older people have these: "We can't do." This releases you from that baggage. (Phoenix, current member)	I think that is one of the active ingredients, like feeling this kind of equality and feeling a part of the same group even if we're in age as well as in many other – I think it's the playfulness that it creates. (Miss Piggy, former student) At the same time, we're spontaneously telling stories that come out of this playfulness, that we're reminded of, and the actors are learning skills for how to act on stage. So it's a very, very multilayered kind of way of doing things. (Gus, former student)
Storytelling builds relationships (Exemplars of quotes of 10 older adults and 10 university students)	You just don't use masks. You just are who you are. Each one, there are different stories. It's a tapestry. We are always making collages of our ideas and the stories. Somehow, we are all one, is how I feel. We are together, and we are all still very alive and can contribute to society with our stories. (Tete, current member)	You know, even though their stories happened years ago, there are certain moments in the stories where us younger generations can really connect to. What we younger generations are doing right now are about the same. They have gone through the same thing, so they can really tell us their experience, and we as younger generations can learn from that. (Sarah, former student)
Generative Learning (Exemplars of quotes of 7 older adults and 14 university students)	When it has come up that somebody has shared their sadnesses as little children growing up and how it has left them today is very moving. Then you look at that person, and you have empathy and you have understanding and compassion, for what they went through. I guess it makes you feel like you do belong to humanity. (Drew, former member)	To hear yourself say it, I think, it gives value to the things that have happened to you. Whether that's good value or values that hurt or something that's painful, it still gives it something. It makes it real in the sense of just living here.I never would have thought that GeriActors would have affected the way I argue with people. It does because it makes me realize that there's not just one side to anything anymore. I'm open to two sides. (Pickles, former student)
Social Support	Anyway, I was adopted, so when	They're able to feel validated. They have

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<p>(Exemplars of quotes of 9 older adults and 11 university students)</p>	<p>I was young, my mother used to tell me that if I didn't toe the line, I was going back to where you came from. It really made me behave, you know, holy cow. But, others validate. (Josephine, current member)</p> <p>That youth, younger people would listen to you helps you a lot. (Drew, former member)</p> <p>When I'm sharing my story and it's pretty heavy, I've had students and the GeriActors come up and give me a big hug. It's very nice because you feel safe. (Irene, current member)</p>	<p>a community where they may be coming from, but they're living all alone at home, or they're in a seniors' place, or they're living with someone with an illness that keeps them isolated. (Suzanne, former student)</p> <p>They're really interested in making conversation, which is different from people my age because they want to learn about you. Where people my age, you don't get that same conversation, I guess, which is weird. (Carol, current student)</p> <p>I felt like it's a community. It was always a safe place. (Joanna, former student)</p>
Outcomes		
<p>Reduced ageism/ fear of aging (Exemplars of quotes of 9 older adults and 11 university students)</p>	<p>Well, I think the intergenerational thing is very good for me, but I also think it's good for them, that they come to see us as real people with lives and interesting hobbies and takes on things. I think it opens it up both ways to greater understanding and greater appreciation. (Geoffrey current older adult)</p> <p>They understand that people think you're invisible sometimes. All of a sudden you're an old lady, and they don't look on you as a person anymore. You're just not even there anymore. I just found that the messages were very powerful. (Esther, Current member)</p>	<p>I always figured that they weren't open to different perspectives. It sounds really negative now, but before I always thought about it as you grow up, you become an adult. Then as you age, you become an infant again. That perception is very different, thank God, but you don't know until you step in there. (Pickles, former student)</p> <p>I think it healed me in a way. I think: "Oh, God, I'm getting older. My life is half over. What have I done?" I was thinking, there is an end point. So when I'm 65, that's the end of the arts or something or the arts in me. Now I know, I will never stop acting and playing, right? There is no end. Play till you die. (Carrie, current student)</p>
<p>Increased social networks (Exemplars of</p>	<p>When I take the bus or take the LRT, I talk to people. You know, they're all like this [action of being closed in, ignoring others]</p>	<p>"I ended up sitting with [older adult], and it was really interesting to watch a play and then discuss it with him afterwards because we totally had such different</p>

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<p>quotes of 10 older adults and 14 university students)</p>	<p>or on this [action of listening to music on an iPod], but you find that they're delighted to talk with somebody. But if you dare to be open, wonderful things happen. I think that has a lot of what the GeriActors is, daring to be open and getting feedback. (Anne, current member)</p>	<p>opinions. It was really just interesting to sit there and have a different person's perspective." (Bernadette, current student) We've learned to really mesh. We're starting to share bits and pieces of our lives with each other, and you don't see them anymore as a senior. You see them as a friend, literally. (Julia current student)</p>
<p>Improved intergenerational relationships (Exemplars of quotes of 7 older adults and 11 university students)</p>	<p>The students, you know, they're fun because when they first come, you can see it. Well, they think: well, one of these could be my granny, my grandpa. Then by the end of the semester – yeah – we all know them, and we know what exams they're sitting and what they're worried about. You know, how things are going, and we really enjoy them. (Josephine, Current member)</p>	<p>I'm more direct with my great-uncle. He turned 90 last year in February. Again, as soon as you're direct with him, he's very direct with you. I appreciate him a lot more now because he's probably one of the most honest people I know, which I guess I wouldn't have figured out before. I would have figured he was just – well, I thought that he was very and doesn't move much out of the lines, but that's not the case at all. (Pickles, former student)</p>
<p>Built Self-confidence/self-esteem (Exemplars of quotes from all older adults and 14 university students)</p>	<p>"I think it's helped me get over barriers I put them myself, my comfort zone. I'm not so much in my comfort zone, like lots of times I think "Oh gosh, I don't know how to get the bus, So the first time I went on the bus, I thought, "You know, it's a whole new process." (Esther, current member)</p>	<p>Well, I've always had the inner respect for people, but it makes me be more polite, friendlier, I guess, to be more well-rounded as an individual or a human being would be the case in this situation. It made me realize, "Oh, yeah. Life can sometimes suck. But we're here to make the most of it. Go from there. Deal with it, and go from there." (JD, former student)</p>
<p>Increased empathy/equanimity (Exemplars of quotes from 9 older adults and 11</p>	<p>It really changed my life a great deal. Well, I was selfish person. By selfish I mean that I was not really that interested in other people. I went to work, came home and looked after my family, but the rest of the world I said:</p>	<p>Compassion, I feel a lot of what we do is about developing greater understanding for ourselves and each other. Actually I think Peter has been really inspirational in that sense because he's talked a lot about how close-minded he was before he joined the group and how open and</p>

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<p>university students)</p>	<p>okay; you do your thing. GeriActors changed that. I've become much more interested in making friends, and much more interested in what other people tell me. I may not like it, but it is important to them to tell their story. I've become a nicer person since GeriActors. I care more about other people than I did before. I'm less selfish. (Peter, current member)</p> <p>I live in a seniors' home, and there are a lot of people there who need help. At first, I sort of thought, well, I'm fine, so I don't have to – there are people here to help them. I don't feel that way anymore. You know, it's funny how it's hard to break into friendships. I guess I made a point of learning people's names and associating. (Esther, current member)</p>	<p>accepting he is now. In a lot of ways I feel the same way. It's really neat to see somebody transform like that and it's neat to feel that same transformation for myself. I think empathy comes in when you try to act out a part that you're playing because you can feel for that person whose story you're acting out. Maria, former student</p> <p>It's really interesting that this group has really made me kind of examine my life and accepting aging at 22. You know, in some ways starting to accept the process, that I'm grappling with aging at 22 but in, exactly what I was saying before, different but same ways as people who are 60, 70, 80. I'm figuring out how to go into the world and get a job. But one of them is figuring out how to go into the world without a job. So it's really interesting, just kind of looking at it saying: wow, I have the same problems at 22. (Bernadette, current student)</p>
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