

Intergenerational musical projects: benefits in learning, loneliness and educational values

Abstract

This article presents a mixed-methods research study currently in progress, evaluating the impact of intergenerational music-based projects on the interaction between older adults and adolescents. The primary objective is to analyze how joint musical activities foster cooperative learning, mitigate unwanted loneliness, and promote essential educational values. The methodology integrates standardized questionnaires and qualitative tools to assess social cohesion and socio-emotional competencies. Preliminary observations indicate that music serves as a critical facilitator in reducing social isolation while enhancing empathy in younger participants. The study concludes that these ongoing interventions provide a promising foundation for the design of inclusive public policies and educational programs.

Keywords: intergenerational relationships, music education, loneliness, cooperative learning, research in progress

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Introduction

Intergenerational interaction is a cornerstone for fostering cohesive and resilient societies. In contemporary contexts, the disconnect between generations has become a significant sociological challenge, often leading to the marginalization of older adults and a lack of social awareness among youth. While various intergenerational programs exist, those utilizing music as a primary vehicle for connection demonstrate unique potential for addressing these issues by facilitating emotional expression and cultural exchange.

This article is part of a larger, ongoing investigation that comprehensively examines the effects of intergenerational musical initiatives. It presents a specific phase of this work, focusing on the analytical description and preliminary observations of joint activities. By moving beyond a merely descriptive report, this study aims to provide a solid empirical and theoretical foundation for future research and the implementation of social policies.¹

Theoretical framework

The paradigm of intergenerational interaction as social capital

Intergenerational interaction is defined as an intentional and normative process designed to promote reciprocity and exchange between different age cohorts.¹ Beyond mere contact, these initiatives function as a form of social capital, where generational diversity is utilized as a strategic asset to strengthen the social fabric. The analytical shift required here is to view these projects not just as activities, but as bidirectional flows of benefits that address the systemic isolation found in aging societies.²

Music as a catalyst for emotional and social cohesion

Music functions as a unique educational and social conduit that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers.³ From an analytical standpoint, its efficacy in intergenerational projects lies in its ability to create a “shared emotional space”.⁴ Unlike other tools, music facilitates non-verbal communication and emotional synchrony, making it a critical facilitator for social inclusion and the improvement

of subjective well-being in populations that might otherwise remain disconnected.

Cooperative learning: socio-emotional and ethical dimensions

The theoretical underpinning of this research is rooted in cooperative learning, which posits that collaborative efforts toward a shared goal enhance cognitive and social development.⁵ In this study, cooperation is analyzed as an ethical dimension of learning. By integrating adolescents and older adults into unified musical tasks, the project fosters fundamental socio-emotional skills—specifically empathy, self-esteem, and conflict resolution.⁶ This framework moves beyond simple instruction to promote a transformative educational experience for both groups.

Unwanted loneliness: a critical public health framework

Unwanted loneliness in older adults is analyzed here not merely as an individual feeling, but as a significant public health crisis linked to detrimental mental and physical health outcomes.⁷ The theoretical justification for music-based interventions is their capacity to increase perceived social support and the sense of belonging.⁸ By systematically addressing social isolation through structured engagement, these projects serve as a protective buffer, aligning intergenerational interaction with broader social and health policies.

Methodology: a comprehensive mixed-methods framework

Research design and triangulation strategy

This study adopts a robust mixed-methods research design, currently in its implementation and data collection phase. This dual approach is strategically chosen to ensure methodological triangulation, combining the statistical rigor of quantitative analysis with the rich, contextual depth of qualitative inquiry. By integrating these perspectives, the research aims to capture a holistic view of the intergenerational phenomenon, ensuring that the findings are both valid and reliable.

Participant selection and contextual implementation

The project involves carefully selected generational cohorts: older adults (aged 65+) and adolescents (aged 12-16). Participants are engaged in structured joint musical tasks designed to foster cooperative learning and mutual respect. These activities are implemented across various pilot projects and case studies, allowing the researchers to observe interactions in diverse community and educational settings.

Quantitative instruments and variable definition

Social cohesion and belonging: Measured through standardized scales to track shifts in the perceived strength of intergenerational bonds and community integration.

Self-esteem and well-being: Evaluated using established instruments to quantify changes in individual confidence and emotional health resulting from the musical intervention.

Value acquisition: Assessed through tailored questionnaires focusing on the internalization of respect, solidarity, and responsibility.

These instruments facilitate a comparative analysis of baseline and post-intervention data, providing an empirical basis for evaluating the project's impact.

Qualitative inquiry and process analysis

Parallel to quantitative tracking, the study employs deep qualitative methods to explore the "how" and "why" of intergenerational interaction:

Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Groups: Used to delve into the subjective meanings and personal narratives participants attribute to their shared musical experiences.

Participant Observation: Researchers maintain detailed field notes to identify both enabling factors (e.g., musical synchrony) and hindering factors (e.g., generational stereotypes) during the collaborative process.

Current status and iterative refinement

As an ongoing investigation within a larger research framework, the current status focuses on identifying emerging patterns and refining the intervention protocols. This iterative approach allows for the continuous adaptation of the musical activities to better meet the specific socio-emotional needs of both generational groups, without presenting definitive statistical conclusions at this preliminary stage.

Preliminary results and observations: analysis of emerging patterns

While the full data set remains under rigorous analysis, initial field observations and preliminary data processing suggest that the intergenerational musical intervention is yielding significant socio-emotional shifts. To provide a systematic overview of these emerging patterns, Table 1 synthesizes the research indicators, their current status within the investigation, and the qualitative evidence gathered to date.

Table 1 Preliminary Observations and Research Indicators.

Dimension	Indicator	Current status	Preliminary observations
Socio-emotional	Empathy & Solidarity	Data Collection	Notable positive shift in adolescent perceptions regarding the elderly, characterized by increased patience and interest in shared history.
Psychological	Reduction of Loneliness	Analysis Phase	Increased sense of belonging reported in initial semi-structured interviews; older participants highlight a reduced feeling of social invisibility.
Educational	Cooperative Learning	Implementation	Successful collaborative task completion; musical settings facilitate a horizontal learning environment where both cohorts exchange knowledge.
Community	Social Cohesion	Monitoring	Qualitative strengthening of intergenerational bonds within trial groups, observed through sustained interaction beyond formal project hours.

To provide a systematic overview of the research indicators and the current progress of the investigation, the following table synthesizes the preliminary observations across key dimensions of the study. This mapping is essential to understand how the theoretical framework of intergenerational interaction is being manifested through the ongoing musical activities. The table categorizes the expected outcomes according to the methodological design, highlighting the emerging patterns identified during the initial data collection and participant observation phases:

The preliminary evidence summarized in Table 1 suggests that music acts as a versatile mediator for social development, fostering a shared emotional space that transcends generational barriers. The convergence of positive shifts in adolescent empathy and a reinforced sense of belonging among older adults provides a robust justification for the continued expansion of this research. Furthermore, these early

indicators underscore the effectiveness of the cooperative learning framework in promoting educational values and social cohesion, establishing a promising foundation for the eventual formulation of detailed policy recommendations and structured community programs.

Synthesis of findings

The convergence of these early indicators provides critical evidence that music acts as a versatile mediator for social development. Unlike purely verbal interventions, the rhythmic and melodic synchronization required in joint musical activities appears to foster a "shared emotional space" that transcends age-related barriers.

Preliminary qualitative analysis from participant observation indicates that the cooperative learning framework is effectively reducing the intergenerational disconnect previously noted in the

literature. Specifically, the acquisition of educational values such as respect and responsibility is being manifested through active solidarity during rehearsals. These findings, though preliminary, establish a robust framework for community building and justify the continued expansion of the study to provide more definitive empirical support for public policy integration.

Discussion: critical analysis and academic contribution

The preliminary findings of this ongoing research align with contemporary academic literature that identifies music as a powerful catalyst for empathy and intergenerational communication. As highlighted by Rozlan Asun (n.d.), music functions as a unique educational conduit that transcends linguistic and generational barriers, creating a “shared emotional space” where social bonds are strengthened. This is particularly relevant in modern societies characterized by an increasing intergenerational disconnect.

Addressing loneliness and social cohesion

Addressing the consequences of unwanted loneliness is essential for public health, as prolonged isolation is linked to significant negative mental and physical health trajectories. The preliminary observations in this study corroborate the assertions of Anthony Cirillo,⁸ suggesting that music-centered programs provide a necessary protective buffer by increasing perceived social support and a sense of belonging among older adults. The novelty of this research lies in evaluating these psychological shifts through a mixed-methods lens during the active implementation phase.

Educational values and cooperative frameworks

Regarding the adolescent cohort, the internalization of values such as respect, solidarity, and responsibility is consistent with the theories of cooperative learning proposed by Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec.⁵ As noted by López-Mondéjar and Tomás Pastor,⁶ cooperation in educational contexts not only improves cognitive performance but also bolsters socio-emotional growth by promoting empathy and constructive conflict resolution. Interacting with older adults adds an ethical and social dimension that enriches this learning process.

Critical challenges and power dynamics

However, a truly critical engagement with the literature requires addressing the inherent challenges of intergenerational interventions. Whear et al.² caution that without expert facilitation and adequate planning, intergenerational programs may inadvertently face power imbalances or generational misunderstandings. Therefore, the ongoing nature of this research is vital to understanding the specific mechanisms that ensure a respectful and equitable environment. This iterative analysis allows for the continuous adaptation of the methodology to maximize social and educational well-being.

Conclusions: future directions and strategic implications

The preliminary evidence gathered in this ongoing research suggests that intergenerational music-based projects are a highly effective and transformative strategy for strengthening social bonds and mitigating the adverse effects of unwanted loneliness. By creating a collaborative and inclusive environment, these initiatives not only improve the emotional well-being of older adults but also foster the development of essential educational values—such as respect, solidarity, and responsibility—in adolescents.

Music acts as a primary facilitator of cooperative learning, promoting a range of social and cognitive skills that yield bilateral benefits for both generational cohorts. The cultural exchange and shared emotional experiences documented in this phase of the project demonstrate that music can effectively dismantle generational stereotypes and foster community resilience. This research contributes to the field by providing a structured analysis of these interactions through a mixed-methods lens, addressing the need for empirical evidence in intergenerational studies.

Although this article presents only a portion of a more extensive, in-depth investigation currently underway, the results obtained thus far provide a strong justification for the continued promotion and expansion of these initiatives. Future stages of this project will focus on providing more robust statistical evidence and detailed longitudinal analysis to further validate these preliminary observations.

Policy recommendations

Based on the promising outcomes of this study, it is highly recommended that intergenerational music programs be consolidated within public policies and formal educational curricula. The integration of such projects should be viewed as a vital investment in social and human capital. By fostering more empathetic, supportive, and cohesive societies, these initiatives offer a scalable and sustainable model for enhancing the quality of life across the lifespan.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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