

## Intergenerational Suzuki Early Childhood Education (SECE) – Adding a New Layer

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Let's begin by meeting a few members of our Barcel Babies Suzuki Early Childhood Education (SECE)



Photographed by Katrina Janz

class held at **Congregational Home Retirement Community in Brookfield, WI**. First, let me introduce you to Nora and Agnes. As you can see Agnes is tenderly looking at Nora and gently trying to tame her beautiful curls. Nora is a typically active 18 month old. She

is very inquisitive and always on the move. Agnes is a feisty woman who tells it like it is. What I love about this picture is the demonstration of each generation's effects on the other. Spending time together every week has given Nora and Agnes a chance to get to know each other. When they are together Nora's energy slows down and Agnes sets aside her "feisty" behavior and finds her long forgotten tender side. The care demonstrated is lovely to witness!



Photographed by Katrina Janz

Now, let us meet Steven, Anne and Joan. Steven is a sweet, smiling nine-month-old who attends class each week with his mother, Anne. Anne excitedly shares with us that Steven loves the extra attention of the residents, including Joan, who he sees each week. Steven is eager to interact with Joan by reaching out to her during creative movement time with the shaker egg.

Joan clearly loves watching him and encouraging his efforts. Steven also enjoys welcoming other residents during the "Greeting Song"<sup>1</sup> through his big smile and kicking feet. He interacts with any resident who is present, regardless of their physical appearance, medical apparatus, or ability level. His smile never stops. As you can see, when care facility residents, SECE participants and SECE teachers work together a rich environment is created where the layer of intergenerational learning can flourish.

## **Where did this idea come from?**

We would like to say that it started with a very high minded desire to affect two generations. The truth is, like many good ideas, it was birthed from necessity. We were looking for a free space to hold class to make the budget work. The brainstorm to offer classes in a care facility seemed to fit our need for free space and a facility's desire for programming. Once the partnership was formed, we started piecing together the details of the class. We decided early on that our top priority must remain our SECE participants or in business terms, our paying customers. So all of our decisions moving forward kept that in mind.

We want to be clear. We are first and foremost running a SECE program for children ages 0 to 3 and their caregivers. As Suzuki Early Childhood Education teachers we utilize a rotating curriculum of songs and rhymes that is designed to use repetition as a vehicle towards mastery of musical and life skills. From the outside looking in, one might question how you keep the repertoire engaging and developmentally appropriate for a mixed aged group of children. The answer is a technique called layering. SECE teachers add layers such as creativeness, musical knowledge, new motor learning, language development and more to scaffold learning as children grow. We see the intergenerational component of our program not as the main focus but as an added layer of learning opportunity for all.

## **What is intergenerational learning?**

According to the Intergenerational Care Project (IGC) being conducted by Griffith University, Australia, "Intergenerational learning programs are planned ongoing activities that purposefully bring together different generations to share experiences that are mutually beneficial."<sup>ii</sup>

The Barcel Babies SECE class, held weekly at a senior care facility, embodies this definition beautifully. Each week the class of young children and their caregivers experience a planned curriculum with a group of residents in attendance. Shared musical experiences for everyone provide learning opportunities for the young students and stimulate memories for the residents while encouraging human connections for all.

## What are the benefits?

- Joy in music making is demonstrated. When everyone is participating together – child, parent, teacher and elders – the environment around music and learning can only be described as joyful.
- A multi-generational community is created. This community brings more people into the children's lives who celebrate their successes. You can see this demonstrated by the elders through smiles on their faces, reaching out to the little ones, gentle touches, clapping of hands and supportive comments.
- Connections between generations are built. These connections can help the children improve pro-social behaviors of sharing, helping and cooperating.
- Nurturing support for childrearing is experienced. Parents and caregivers feel this encouragement through the simple enjoyment and connections made with them and their little ones during class.
- Learning to see past differences is demonstrated. Parents report finding added value in involving their child in this unique experience, where everyone has worth and all are cherished. Our students meet residents every week who use wheel chairs, walkers, canes, oxygen and more. They see residents who have full physical capabilities and those with limited movement and posture. All of these differences could be frightening for a young child or provoke a barrier to connection with the older generation. Our students learn very quickly to see and connect with the residents regardless of devices being used and physical limitations.
- Respectfulness of every stage of life is demonstrated. The residents benefit by receiving a renewed sense of purpose, enhanced dignity, activated long term memory, and the normalization of their environment.
- Differing communities are linked together. The care facility gains weekly free programming for their residents and an expanding presence in the greater community.
- Admirable hearts are developed. SECE teachers gain a unique opportunity to develop in SECE participants admirable hearts through shared musical experiences with multiple generations..

## Are there any challenges?

As in any new endeavor, challenges exist. We found the challenges specific to running a SECE class with an intergenerational layer are small and worth overcoming.

- Finding the right care facility is of utmost importance. The physical space where class will be held has the same requirements as any SECE class. The space must be safe for babies and toddlers, free from most distractions, spacious enough to accommodate the class and the residents, as well as be a warm and inviting atmosphere.
- The staffing situation at the care facility should also be investigated. At least one staff person from the care facility, generally from the activities department, should be available to help residents at all times. The care facility staff will need to gather residents prior to the class, return residents after the class, and remain with residents during the class to respond to their needs. It is the SECE teacher's responsibility to work with the staff to help them maintain the focus of the class and to enlist their assistance in preserving a quiet atmosphere. A well-meaning staff member loudly exclaiming to a resident, "Look at how cute Rosie is playing the drum!" during the middle of class is never helpful.
- As a SECE teacher adding the intergenerational layer maintaining awareness of communication style is another possible challenge. Avoiding a style of communication known as Elderspeak<sup>iii</sup> is the goal. Elderspeak can be described as a specialized speech pattern used by younger adults when addressing older adults. It assumes that the speaker has greater control, power, value, wisdom and knowledge than the older adult listening.

"Good morning Marie! How are you feeling today?" – Respectful version

*"Good morning sweetie! How are we feeling today?" – Elderspeak version*

"Thank you for coming to class today. It makes the class special for the children when you are here." – Respectful version

*“You like coming to class because you get to see the babies. You’re sad when it’s time for the children to leave. We look forward to music class, don’t we?” -Elderspeak version*

Research shows that communicating with older adults using the patronizing style of speech known as Elderspeak is not just annoying to them, it actually has negative outcomes. Older adults exposed to Elderspeak show increases in depression and decreases in task performance. Persons with moderate to severe dementia are less likely to cooperate with their caregivers.<sup>iv</sup> Showing the residents respect through the way we communicate is fantastic modeling for the children and certainly boosts the residents’ feelings of worth.

In an effort to demonstrate respect, we deliberately acknowledge the residents’ presence each week, thank them for attending, and share with them how their attendance makes the class special. Offering the residents a choice to participate and never assuming that they will want to participate is another way to preserve the dignity of the seniors who choose to join the class.

- A challenge that was anticipated but never materialized was parents having negative feelings about being in a care facility with their children. For adults, care facilities may come with sad or otherwise negative associations based on past experiences with elderly relatives or even thoughts of future possibilities. Fortunately, only enthusiasm has been expressed by parent participants.

### **How do you add the intergenerational layer?**

When incorporating the senior adults into the class it is important to create dedicated moments of involvement and connection and not continuous participation. The residents who attend the Barcel Babies SECE class participate primarily by observing, listening, and occasionally singing along or keeping the beat. Direct involvement happens at specific points in the SECE curriculum<sup>v</sup> - introduction, creative and conclusion.

Introduction: The Greeting Song<sup>vi</sup> typically involves children, their caregivers, and the teachers freely



Photographed by Katrina Janz

moving around the room and shaking hands with each other while singing. When the intergenerational layer is added this is expanded to include the residents and staff. As this picture shows our class participants, like Bobby here, are encouraged to walk over and greet the residents. The residents clearly enjoy this time of emotional and physical connection with the little ones.

Creative: A child's creativity is expressed freely during free movement time in class. During this period



Photographed by Katrina Janz

the child and their caregiver move in a non-prescribed way to the music. Shaker eggs or lightweight colored scarves are used for this activity depending on the day. As you can see this activity is a perfect time for more direct and positive interaction between the residents and SECE participants.



Photographs by Katrina Janz



Conclusion:

Acknowledging our special guests presence is an important way to demonstrate respect and honor our elders. As the pictures show, we end each class by waving goodbye to each other and singing our goodbye song. The goodbye song added with revised words by Barcel Babies' teacher, Julia Murphy is sung to the tune of "Goodnight Ladies"<sup>vii</sup> attributed to Edwin Pearce Christy. The revised words are as follows:

*Goodbye friends, goodbye friends, goodbye friends, it's time to say goodbye.*

## In conclusion:

If you are interested in seeing exactly how our intergenerational SECE class looks go to [www.barcel Suzuki.com](http://www.barcel Suzuki.com) and click our Baby/Toddler page. A segment from our appearance on a local TV talk show is available to watch. Holding a SECE class in a care facility has proven to be an unexpected yet enriching experience for all involved with Barcel Babies. The intergenerational layer fits directly into our program's (Barcel Suzuki String Academy) mission to serve the greater community through our music and it is an important part of our school's community outreach. It is also clear to us that this is another way to bring Dr. Suzuki's philosophy to a greater audience and promote the SAA's desire for each of us to reach into our communities.

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<sup>i</sup> *Lullabies, Action Songs and Rhymes*, Sharon Jones (soprano), David Jones (piano), Rob Inch (percussion), Jones Partnerships, 1993, compact disc.

<sup>ii</sup> "About the Intergenerational Care Project," The Intergenerational Care Project, accessed August 30, 2018, <http://www.intergenerationalcare.org/about-the-project/>.

<sup>iii</sup> John Leland, "In 'Sweetie' and 'Dear', a Hurt for the Elderly," *New York Time*, October 6, 2008, [https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/07/us/07aging.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/07/us/07aging.html?_r=1)

<sup>iv</sup> Leland, "In 'Sweetie' and 'Dear', a Hurt for the Elderly".

<sup>v</sup> Dorothy Jones, Yasuyo Matsui, Emma O'Keefe and Anke Van der Biijl, *Framework for Suzuki Early Childhood Education* (International Suzuki Association, Suzuki Early Childhood Education (SECE) Committee, 2014).

<sup>vi</sup> *Lullabies, Action Songs and Rhymes*, Jones Partnerships, 1993

<sup>vii</sup> Fuld, James, *The Book of World-Famous Music: Classical, Popular, and Folk*. (Courier Dover Publications 2000), 255.