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Sustainable Arts and Health: The Role of a University in Facilitating an Intergenerational, Interdisciplinary Community Arts Project

Rachel Farrer, Louise Douse, and Imogen Aujla

Abstract

There is growing interest in the use of intergenerational practice in arts and health to support psychological well-being and community cohesion. However, little research has addressed the facilitation of such projects, or how higher education institutions can support them. Here we examine the role of the University of Bedfordshire in Generations Dancing, an 11-week dance and photography project for older adults and young people in Bedford. Focus groups were conducted with the older adults, young people, artists, independent living centre leaders, and schoolteachers involved. Inductive content analysis highlighted the university's role in brokering between community sectors, promoting the project, and offering resources. These factors appeared to play a significant part in enabling the project to develop beyond what smaller organizations working independently might have achieved, and in facilitating a sustainable model for its perpetuation.

Keywords: arts and health, intergenerational, sustainability, community arts

In recent years there has been growing understanding of how engagement with arts practices can supplement and support medicine and care in the context of public health. The term "arts and health" is used to define these practices, which are increasingly recognized and valued as multifaceted tools for supporting mental and physical health, well-being, and community engagement (Daykin & Joss, 2016; Gordon-Nesbitt, 2017; Varvarigou et al., 2016). Arts and health is a growing area of activity because it has the potential to play a significant role in supporting the challenging conditions of the UK public health and care service (e.g., limited access to funding, resources, and staffing). Often these kinds of activities offer more cost-effective ways of addressing issues such as fall prevention (Vella-Burrows et al., 2017), social isolation (Hawkley et al., 2003; Nordin & Hardy, 2009), well-being (Nordin & Hardy, 2009; Park, 2014), and particular diseases such as Parkinson's disease and dementia (McGill et al., 2014; Vella-Burrows & Wilson, 2016). The intersection between arts and health can create challenges, however, in terms of how the different working processes established in particular fields align. Multidisciplinary practices, relationships between stakeholders (Jensen, 2018), sustainability, and evidence-based evaluation (Daykin et al. 2013; Daykin et al., 2017; Stickley et al. 2016; Swan & Atkinson, 2012) are all competing factors that affect the quality, success, and viability of arts and health projects. There is limited literature that specifically examines the logistical and practical factors that facilitate collaborative arts and health projects of this nature. Partnership working is recognized as a tool for integrating fragmented landscapes of practice, bringing together multiple perspectives and utilizing resources and knowledge from different sectors (Angus, 2002; Jensen, 2018; Kendall et al., 2018; Lester et al., 2008). The role that cultural providers, including higher education institutions, play within the arts and health ecology can be significant in

terms of the multidisciplinary knowledge and expertise that they offer and their capacity for long-term project management. The aim of this study is to explore how a university can facilitate arts and health activity that connects diverse stakeholder groups in sustainable ways.

Within the field of arts and health there is a growing trend for intergenerational practices. Local governments increasingly promote the benefits of intergenerational activity to enhance social cohesion and community engagement, with many offering guidelines and toolkits for how best to deliver intergenerational projects (Carter, 2007; CIP, 2005; Granville, 2002; Springate et al., 2008; Welsh Government Association, 2012). These are generally informed by the Beth Johnson Foundation's (2011) definition of intergenerational practice and its subsequent guidelines and highlight how intergenerational arts and health projects can meet the expectations of public health bodies. For example, the Care Quality Commission, which independently regulates health and social services in England, specified that care should make a difference to a person's health and well-being (CQC, 2017); the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2013) advised that older adults should have the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities, including social participation and engagement; and Ofsted (2018) has stated that all schools must provide spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development opportunities for young people. These stipulations recognize not only the need to meet basic care or educational needs, but also the importance of enhancing quality of life in terms of the socialization and well-being of both younger and older people. As a result, service and educational providers increasingly look outward to the cultural sector to implement health and well-being projects, forming cross-sector collaborations with artists and arts organizations and drawing upon arts practices as a mechanism to connect participants from different sectors of the community.

The guidelines published by the Beth Johnson Foundation (2011) highlighted how the implementation of intergenerational practices can take many forms and that the higher the level of contact between participant groups, the greater the impact. They identified a seven-step scale that ranges from learning about other age groups as the simplest form of engagement, to creating intergenerational communities with opportunities for meaningful engagement embedded in social norms and traditions. The guidelines go on to identify the many practical and organizational demands of intergenerational practices, signalling the challenges that could prevent small organizations or providers, such as schools and care settings, from being able to establish this kind of work. Jensen (2018) stressed that although interdisciplinary work can offer valuable insights from different sectors, it also presents difficulties in terms of the often ambiguous roles and sometimes conflicting logics of those involved. Many projects have short timelines and therefore create only fixed periods of intergenerational contact rather than the kind of sustainable community cohesion that the Beth Johnson Foundation recommends. As a result, the integration of the different process and practices can be underdeveloped and prevent follow-on activity from taking place. Networking and brokerage to meet potential collaborators and funders, publicity, access to space, and advice concerning evaluation methods have all been identified as valued contributions that external agencies like local councils or higher education institutions can offer to support cross-sector partnerships (BOP Consulting, 2014; Jensen, 2018).

Understanding how collaborative partnerships between arts, care, and educational providers can be facilitated is fundamental to the sustainability of intergenerational arts and health practices. In response to the outlined concerns, this article explores the role of a university in managing an intergenerational, interdisciplinary community arts project called Generations Dancing. Themes such as institutional logics (Jensen, 2018), brokerage (BOP Consulting, 2014), and sustainability are considered in relation to the project, which used arts practice as a mode of engagement to connect school students with older adults living in Bedford.

About Generations Dancing

The University of Bedfordshire is a widening access institution with a civic mission to engage with the local community that is delivered collaboratively between academic faculties and the university's central Arts and Culture team and Access and Outreach team. Generations Dancing was a partnership facilitated by the university

between two artists, two older adult independent living centres (ILC) run by Bedford Housing Association (BHA), and two secondary schools. The researchers worked with the Access and Outreach team to build relationships with local schools who were part of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme, which aims to support and increase the progression of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education. The project was funded by Arts Council England as part of a larger bid to support the development of dance activity in the East of England.

The project had three goals: to foster artistic collaboration between different sectors of the Bedford community; to improve social inclusion and enable different sectors of the community to connect; and to improve participants' quality of life (outcomes relating to participant well-being and social inclusion are reported in Douse et al., 2020). The project also served as a pilot both to generate data and to develop relationships with various stakeholders to inform a larger project of activity in the future. Prior to project commencement, several local care providers and schools were contacted to seek out their interest, and the university recruited a dance artist and photographer. The artists worked outside the institution but were known to the researchers (for example, they had previously delivered guest lectures) and were thus informed about the nature of the project and the particular processes of the university. Led by the university, this group developed the aims of the project and created a plan to ensure the project would meet the varying needs of the participants. The artists in particular were consulted so that their expertise could inform the development of the project, but ultimately the researchers were responsible for coordinating and planning the project. In doing so the researchers were able to draw on their networks with schools, their student interns, and to capitalize on access to studio spaces and internal marketing teams. A launch event at the university was attended by staff from the various organizations, young people and older adults who would have the chance to participate, and various members of the local community. This event provided an opportunity to take part in a taster workshop, meet each other, see the university spaces, and hear about the research that would accompany the project.

The project took place over an 11-week period. In the first 5 weeks, artists worked with the group of older adults in their residential activity room and, separately, with the school students in their schools. The participants developed dance skills and recorded short films of themselves that were watched by the other group to establish an initial relationship. The artists were supported by four university student interns each week. The interns were dance students recruited from the university's undergraduate and postgraduate dance courses, each of whom had undertaken modules in community dance. The interns also received an afternoon of training and planning with the artists. The specific duties of the interns included keeping a register, engaging participants, assisting with travel and mobility where appropriate, joining in the workshops to offer practical support, communicating with participants to ensure their needs were met, and reporting back to the artists at the end of each session. The final six weeks of the project were delivered in a dance studio at the university. During this period, the older adults were brought to the university in taxis, supported by the interns. The sessions involved dancing together and photographing each other.

Over the 11 weeks, the dance artist created a 15-minute performance called Generations Dancing. It explored the experience of living in Bedford and drew upon stories and inspirations from the two age groups, who had both divergent and shared experiences. An accompanying exhibition documented their process and the photography skills they had acquired. The performance and exhibition were attended by over 150 people, consisting of friends, family, local Bedford community members, university staff, housing scheme leaders, and members of the schools' leadership teams. During Week 7 of the project the BBC filmed a short documentary that was highlighted on the Three Counties news page and later shared across the BBC's national news website page.

The academics involved in the project had dance and performing arts backgrounds and were active as practitioners and researchers focused mainly in the areas of contemporary dance, professional practice, and dance psychology. The project created an opportunity for the researchers to undertake evidence-driven research using sound research designs that drew upon established theories around health and psychological

well-being (for details of measures and outcomes, please see Douse et al., 2020). Consequently, they were able to contribute much-needed evidence-based research in the fields of arts and health (Daykin et al., 2017; Swan & Atkinson, 2012).

Methodology

In order to understand the operational factors and relationships that shaped this project, focus groups were held at the end of the project with the various stakeholders involved. This approach enabled the researchers to build an understanding of how the participants' various perspectives came together from a constructivist perspective (Guba, 1990; Lincoln et al., 2011). Prior to data collection, ethical approval was granted by a higher education ethics committee. Information sheets were provided for all parents and carers informing them of the nature of the project, and participants provided informed consent in order to take part in the research aspect of the project (young people under the age of 16 provided consent from a parent or carer). All of the older adults who took part in the focus groups were deemed to have provided meaningful informed consent (Sugarman et al., 1998).

Participants

Six separate groups of participants took part in focus groups: two artists (aged 36 ± 2.83 years), two schoolteachers (aged 32.5 ± 10.61 years), three scheme leaders (aged 58.33 ± 3.79 years), six older adults (aged 81.75 ± 11.48 years), four young people from School A, and four young people from School B (schoolchildren were aged 14.15 ± 1.21 years). The schoolteachers, students, older adults, scheme leaders, and photographer were all local to Bedford. The dance artist was from the West Midlands. Prior to embarking on the project, participants were informed about the research and invited to take part in focus groups at the end of it. Throughout the delivery of the project, the researchers engaged with the various participant groups through their organizational communications, on some occasions observing and participating in sessions. There is a growing body of literature about the engagement of service users and care staff in research projects and how building meaningful relationships between participants and researchers prior to data collection can promote genuine and high-level involvement that protects the needs and concerns of those taking part in a study (Frankham, 2009; Ray, 2007). In this project, researchers were present during the weekly sessions to familiarize themselves with the context of the project and the participants in order to support their needs during the focus groups (Ray, 2007).

Procedure

The focus groups took place during the week after the final performance at convenient times and locations for each group. They lasted between 20:22 and 1:12:27 minutes. Focus groups were undertaken by the first and second author and were recorded using a Dictaphone. Participants were informed about the nature of the research process and assured that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions asked. Participants were asked about their experience of the project through open-ended questions. The questions asked of the scheme leaders, artists, and teachers focused on why they took part, their experience of the organization and facilitation of the project, how they understood their role and the collaboration in general, and their perceptions of the young peoples' and older adults' experiences. The young people and older adults were asked about their experiences of the project, what they found positive and negative about it, their motivations to be involved, and how they felt a project like this could continue.

Analysis

The focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim, and NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software was used to code them. All of the transcripts were coded inductively by the first author, and the second author independently coded 15% of the transcripts to ensure parity and agreement between the researchers (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The views of the different groups were triangulated to develop an understanding of how the various operational elements of the project affected the people involved. We organized these views into a hierarchy and analyzed each theme in relation to thick descriptions and quotes that would give readers an informed understanding of the authors' interpretations (Patton, 2002). The participants are referred to using their roles within the project: artist, teacher, scheme leader, student, older adult.

Results

The key themes that emerged from the data were around organization, delivery, and sustainability. These are presented in Figure 1 and discussed in order throughout the following section.

Organization

Establishing the Project

Several housing associations in the area were approached to take part, and BHA was the only organization to respond. The lack of responses could be due to several factors, including limited time and capacity to commit to a project or lack of understanding about what it would entail or how it might benefit residents. BHA explained that although they had had visits from a local school group at Christmas time to sing carols, the residents had never been involved in a long-term exchange with an external group, nor had they worked toward a performance or event in an external location. When asked about their motivation to take part in the project, one scheme leader explained:

> I just thought it was a good opportunity to kind of, go out into the community a bit more. Something new, something interesting to see how it worked. Something that involved either end of the spectrum, which is always a good thing. Making younger people aware of older people's needs. (Scheme leader)

The housing association offered the support of their scheme leaders to inform and remind residents about the project and the use of the activity room in one of their centres to hold the first phase of classes.

The two schools were approached because of their proximity to each other, the university, and the care homes. They were both developing their dance curriculums and offering a dance GCSE (a subject-specific academic qualification) for the first time, and they described how this project provided them with an opportunity to highlight to both colleagues and students how versatile dance could be:

> Dance was going to be new on the curriculum next year. So, I was like, "Oh, this would be a really good project to get dance out there in the school," to be like, "This is why you've chosen it" and almost publicize it a bit more. (Teacher 2)

In addition to enhancing their students' understanding of dance, the teachers also noted how a community-focused project could support other areas of the curriculum and the students' awareness of local

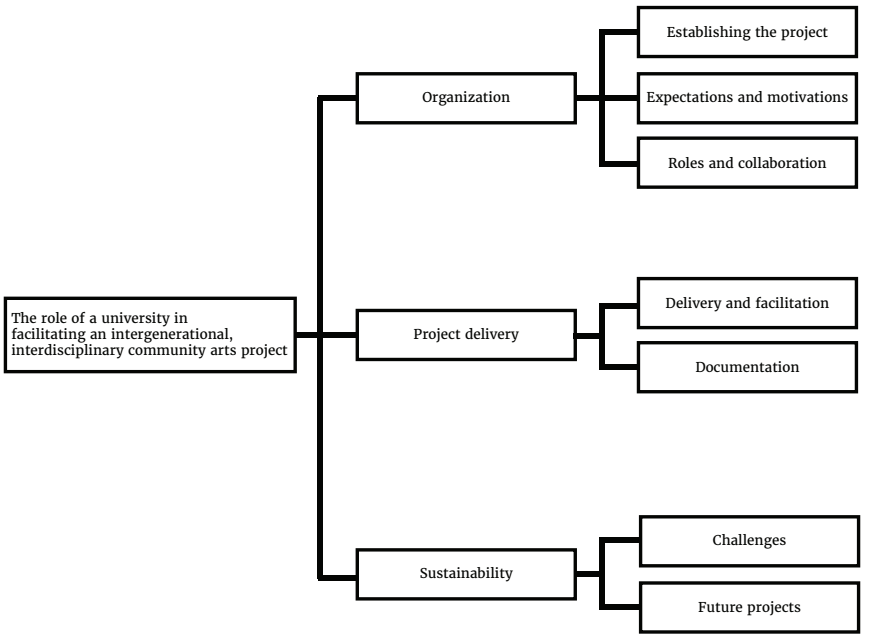

Figure 1. Key Themes Emerging From the Data

citizenship, which they explained had previously been only "very generic-type global community, and that kind of stuff" (Teacher 1).

Expectations and Motivations

Generations Dancing was described as a dance and photography project for young people and older adults. However, because this type of project was so new to both groups of participants, the teachers explained that it was difficult to know how to label it, which meant some young people who potentially could have benefited missed out:

> I didn't really know what it was going to look like from that first meeting and I found it hard to visualize what the end product was going to be—how to talk to the kids about that. (Teacher 1)

> In hindsight, knowing that's what had been produced, I would have gone, "Oh, actually the drama group might have been interested in this." (Teacher 2)

When the young people were asked about their motivation to be involved, they explained that they either "wanted to meet new people" (Student) or were "just excited to try something new" (Student). The older adults shared similar motivations:

> Out of curiosity and to meet young people, because people with families aren't necessarily able to see them frequently. And it was nice to meet younger children. (Older adult)

> I had never danced before so I just thought it was an opportunity. (Older adult)

Interestingly, the young people expressed that their experiences of the project and the performance outcome were as they had expected, perhaps because they had already experienced school or extracurricular events leading to a performance. In contrast, the older adults were surprised by the scale of what they had been involved with: "I just thought it was going to be keep fit . . . not on the scale we had" (Older adult). This contrast highlights the significance of how projects are articulated to participants from the outset, as their varying levels of experience appeared to affect their ability to envisage or understand what they were getting involved in.

Roles and Collaboration

The complexity of the project, which brought together several sectors of the community as well as two distinct artistic practices, was not to be underestimated. The university played a key role in bringing together the different groups and managing the project. The teachers and scheme leaders appeared to be very aware of the significance of this, noting that the extent of work that goes into a project of this nature was sometimes underestimated within their own organizations: "There's an expectation: 'Why aren't you doing that?'"; "Oh, it's really easy" (Teacher 1). Thus, they recognized and valued the coordination that the university offered in terms of securing funding, organizing timelines, recruiting artists and participants, and offering resources: "The pros are definitely that you're doing the hard work for us. We're reaping the benefits" (Scheme leader).

For the participants, connecting with a university appeared to be a significant factor of the project that enhanced their experience. For the older adults, having the opportunity to socialize with different people in a new environment gave them a sense of achievement and acceptance. When asked about how they found their visits to the campus to work with the young people, one explained: "I loved it. It was a real challenge and a real experience" (Older adult). The younger participants spoke positively of the professional standard facilities they were working in and were aware that this was not always easily accessible for them:

> The space where we danced was really nice as well, because we don't have that kind of space normally. (Student)

> It was nice seeing the facilities they have there . . . you're never going to get it again unless you go to university. (Student)

The teachers also commented upon the significance of the university's role in terms of promoting the project internally to their colleagues and senior leadership teams. They described working with a university as adding "gravitas" to the project, and

how important that was in relation to arts activities that were easily overlooked in favor of more academic subject activities. The combination of community activity, spending time at the university, being part of a research project, and press engagement all appeared to enhance how the project was perceived by senior leaders within the schools:

> They've been really engaged by it . . . they love the partnership, they love the glory of it all, they love the collaboration and the high-brow-ness of it . . . the idea that it's a broader community project. (Teacher 1)

> I think the BBC video helped because it was like, "That's an actual BBC video." (Teacher 2)

The teachers recognized that in addition to fostering positive relationships between the young people, having access to the university and other teachers also enhanced their own networks and provided them with new professional relationships that supported career development. Speaking of the relationship they had made with the university staff and other local schools, Teacher 1 said: "We've met . . . we've been able to link up, and now we can go on and do stuff together after this." Finally, the artists noted how the project shifted their perceptions of how a university could support the arts, bringing into question the role that educational institutions play in terms of civic duty.

> It's been weird because you see university as a place that lectures and researches, so it's the first time I've seen the university in more of an arts facilitative way. I know it's part of your research, but then you have been like arts managers, which has been exciting I think for a university. . . . Having the university name has been great and I think it's positive because then the community can see actually the university's trying to help its area. It's not just there for students. (Artist)

It became apparent throughout the project that the roles of the scheme leaders and teachers were also significant for ensuring a high-quality experience for the participants. Acting as gatekeepers, they played an important role in sharing information and reminders with the groups, and passing on their knowledge of how best to support and work with the various needs of the participants. This was particularly evident with the older adults who, despite living independently to some extent, did require additional support, and there were points during the project where this posed challenges to the artists and interns working with them. Initially, the scheme leaders were not present during the sessions; however, they noted afterward that greater involvement or more regular conversations between the different partners would have been beneficial, particularly with the coming and going of residents who took part:

> You'd mentioned people's care needs. Obviously it's been a learning curve for both sides . . . so possibly a bit more involvement certainly from my perspective, because I didn't actively involve myself with the project. . . . Where you have people dipping in and out, maybe that is where we could come into play. (Scheme leader)

For the teachers, establishing their role within the project was more challenging, and they commented upon how they felt like observers or a "taxi service," as they were primarily responsible for bringing the students to the sessions. Once they were there, the students were very independent, and the teachers realized that in hindsight they could have joined in and also supported the older adults rather than feeling they should only observe from the side. Despite the teachers' playing a crucial role in facilitating the students' involvement, this lack of connection to the activity meant they felt less ownership over the work: "I feel like a bit of a fraud. . . . 'You [the teacher] haven't really done anything, you [the teacher] haven't really engaged yourself'" (Teacher 1).

Project Delivery

Delivery and Facilitation

In response to initial consultation with the scheme leaders and teachers, it was decided that the project would be run over a short amount of time as a pilot. They felt that working toward an end point would engage participants more and change their perception of the project by encouraging them to

view it as something "unique" (Teacher 1) or "something that not many people can say they're involved with" (Student). The regularity of weekly sessions coupled with the sense of excitement and progression that was created by working toward a performance seemed to increase the older adults' engagement in a way that the scheme leaders felt was not achieved by previous fitness classes they had run: "I think it was a build-up because they had known they were going to do that [performance] yesterday. They were so excited today" (Scheme leader). Speaking of two residents who travelled each week to attend from a different home, one of the scheme leaders noted how their commitment had been a surprise: "It was good that they came up here, they just loved it. They were always ready to come up . . . they put it in their little diaries there ready" (Scheme leader).

In terms of facilitating the coming together of older adults with the schoolchildren, the artists recognized the different needs of the two groups and that although the school students might have adapted to the new environments very quickly, it was beneficial to allow the older adults to have more time to get used to the new artistic practices they were experiencing before they were introduced to the other group.

The delivery of the project allowed the young people to foster positive relationships with each other, as well as the older adults. They commented upon the noncompetitive nature of the activity and how this enabled them to take part without feeling self-conscious about their own background or ability:

> I learned that socializing with children our age isn't actually as bad as it seems . . . we'll miss each other and everything. (Student)

> It was cool to meet the [School B] people as well as the older adults, because you made new friends from the other school, which I didn't think you would. I also made friends with the older adults, which was just as much fun! (Student)

The teachers noted that working together toward a shared goal enabled the young people to feel part of something new, rather than only associating themselves with a particular school or age range: "Everyone can work together . . . they've lost that 'We're from this school, you're from that school' . . . they've almost formed a new community . . . they're the cast of Generations Dancing!" (Teacher 1).

Having an artistic output was also a significant feature of this project that differed from the previous experiences of some participants who had only engaged in weekly dance or art classes. They recognized the skills of the artists and agreed that it was a benefit to work with external practitioners who they might not usually have the opportunity to meet. For the young people in particular, exposure to professional artists raised their aspirations and understanding of arts in a professional context. Both participant groups noted that they enjoyed the final performance and felt this was a positive culmination of the project. Holding the performance in a professional theatre in the university again added to the artistic quality of the work and meant that many of the participants experienced something new. When discussing the performance, both participant groups appeared validated by having an audience witness and celebrate what they had worked on:

> My family thought it was quite impressive how they managed to organize that, the older adults and then the younger people joined together to do something. They didn't expect, like myself, that it would have been such a good thing that came out of the whole experience. (Student)

Documentation

The scheme leaders and teachers commented upon how evidencing the activity in ways that could be shared with friends, family, and senior management within the organizations was important. The university undertook a leading role in documenting the process through the weekly photography of the sessions and press releases and promotional films that were commissioned. BHA also made its own promotional film and press release, and the schools held special assemblies highlighting the project and shared information about it through their newsletters and social media channels. Although this activity did not directly benefit the participants, all parties agreed that it was a significant part of Generations Dancing in terms of raising awareness of

such a unique project and championing the positive impact of the arts:

> Absolutely, I think you've touched on something that I've never seen before. I've been teaching 16 years in dance schools and different schools, with really massive arts departments . . . never ever been involved in a project like this. (Teacher 1)

> It's sort of rehighlighted to my school, I suppose, actually the other side to arts. It's not just about going up on stage and learning a script. It's actually like, what it can do for the community. (Teacher 2)

The scheme leaders noted how having the photographs displayed in the foyer of the home had drawn lots of attention to the project. The residents were very proud of what they had been involved with and were very keen to show them off to visitors. This promoted the activity to family members, many of whom commented that they were positively surprised to see how much their elderly family members had achieved and were capable of. Similarly, sharing the promotional footage appeared to have a positive impact upon how the friends and family of the schoolchildren responded to the project:

> I think looking at the comments from that video on social media, people are like, "I would have loved to have been involved in this"; "Oh, can my school do this if you ever do it again?" I think that shows actually how unique it was. (Teacher 2)

Sustainability

Challenges

Bringing together so many community groups was a positive feature of the project; however, it was a complex and challenging process that had implications for its sustainability. It was recognized that working with a university created many positive opportunities, but also presented some challenges. For teachers, taking students off site regularly to visit the university campus added to their workload in terms of paperwork, and for the artists, having to respond to university procedures did not always align with their own artistic interests:

> There are lots of resources, but that's also one of the cons; they're there but going through the infrastructure of the university to get to them. (Artist)

The locations of the project caused challenges at times. For the young people, traveling between schools and to the university created time constraints and affected some of their rehearsals. For the older adults, coming to the campus was challenging in terms of travel from their home and navigating the spaces:

> We had the taxi, didn't we, which was very nice. But it was too far away from the hall and that's what I find difficult, to walk. I've got to walk across the hall and come back. That was very difficult and I didn't want to fall down. (Older adult)

> The only thing they commented on was how dark it was in the theatre, and they were conscious of it. (Scheme leader)

As a result, some of the participants who had been regulars at the care setting stopped attending when the rehearsals moved to the university. It is worth noting, however, that several of the participants who did continue to come to the university described it as a highlight of the project, and the scheme leaders felt that it was positive to see them getting out of the home.

In terms of delivery, the artists also commented upon some of the challenges they faced in trying to work with such a diverse group of people under time pressures. In particular, they found it difficult when the groups were together, as they had different demands in terms of the pace and focus of the sessions:

> I think I slightly lost their focus when we brought the young people in, even though they've enjoyed it. But I think it's been hard to balance focus between the secondary school kids and the older adults. I think the older adults thrived on having us focusing just on them. But I think they're still loving it, I'm not being negative, I've just noticed a shift in energy. (Artist)

The photography artist in particular found it challenging as they moved toward the final performance as the attention naturally fell toward ensuring that the participants felt confident for the performance.

> I think it's hard to balance. . . . I think it is that actually, ultimately there is a performance at the end so there needs to be a piece, which I think has probably impacted . . . because it's short sessions and to make a piece and teach them photography skills too . . . I mean there's been a massive compromise on that in terms of teaching them photography, because it's just not possible in that timeframe. (Artist)

The immediacy of the performance meant that the photography element was less prominent, and in hindsight the artists agreed that they needed to rethink how they facilitated two art forms if they were to find more balance in the future. However, it is important to note that all of the participants responded well to the final exhibition (many requested copies of the images), suggesting that good quality documentation of the process was valuable both in evidencing an otherwise transient experience, and in using it to share and discuss with friends and family.

The number of older adults who took part increased throughout the project; however, four participants stopped coming over the last few sessions as they felt vulnerable leaving their home. As indicated in the Roles and Collaborations section, the vulnerability of the older adults in relation to their independent living status posed some challenges, as although they had given their own consent to take part, there were instances where the artists and interns felt they also needed more information or support from the scheme leaders to ensure participants had the best experience possible. The scheme leaders recognized that this was a challenging situation for the artists and agreed they could play a role in terms of communicating the needs of the participants and sharing information about what they were doing with their families.

Future Projects

The final theme that was discussed in the focus groups was about future directions and how the project might continue in some capacity. The scheme leaders were very positive about continuing to deliver some kind of dance in the ILC and felt that it would be more beneficial for it to take place there so it was easily accessible to residents. They commented that being part of something so high profile to initiate the activity meant it would be easier to set up a regular class:

> I think if it was a regular thing you'd probably get more people trying and becoming involved because of the enthusiasm that's gone back to the scheme . . . we would certainly support and drum up business. (Scheme leader)

The scheme leaders also recognized the expertise of the university in facilitating this kind of activity and that it had enabled their home to connect with different sectors of the community in a way that would usually have been challenging to them. They expressed an interest in continuing a collaboration with the university and the schools in order to maintain the positive relationships that had been built.

The school students and teachers felt that they already had a lot of access to regular classes throughout their curriculum and existing dance classes, and that for them it was the uniqueness of the engagement with the university and care home that was special. When asked about how they would want to develop the project, several students spoke about expanding upon these unique elements to involve more age ranges and collaboration:

> Involve one school, then another, then another, then older people. It could involve loads of people and we all make dances and we all put it together in one big thing. (Student)

> It would have been cool if we'd added different abilities. Like our age group and adults working with us, like just normal adults that could volunteer. (Student)

The artists and teachers also appeared to recognize and value the sense of community that the project had created, suggesting that in the future it could move toward being less about separate schools coming together and more about forming a new group that could potentially be run outside school time

at the university. The teachers and students also all commented positively about wanting to visit the care home, and it was agreed that this could be a way of overcoming the barrier of vulnerable older adults leaving their home. Due to the positive response from participants, intergenerational dance activity has continued on a smaller scale (see the Discussion section). The university continues to support the activity in a brokering and facilitating role, while being less hands-on in order to empower the different community groups to continue working together.

Discussion

The aims of Generations Dancing were to foster artistic collaboration between different sectors of the Bedford community; improve social inclusion and enable different sectors of the community to connect; and improve participants' quality of life. Although the well-being outcomes of the project are reported in detail elsewhere (Douse et al., 2020), it is noteworthy that the older participants in particular reported high levels of enjoyment, enhanced confidence, an increase in meaningful social connections, and greater openness to trying new things. The project also served to address negative stereotypes and break down barriers between the different generations of participants involved.

Throughout the Generations Dancing project, the university played a key role in facilitating the activity, and it was evident that the extended reach and capacity of a higher education institution was significant in establishing such a complex program of activity. The university had access to funding streams, facilities and resources, artist networks, and public relations opportunities that enabled the scale and visibility of the project to move beyond what might usually have been facilitated at a local level in schools or care settings. Springate et al. (2008) explained that although intergenerational projects share many standard organizational features, they also present particular challenges. Springate et al. further observed that two factors—ensuring staff are skilled and experienced in working with both age groups and allowing time for the prepreparation of participants—have been identified as crucial in the success of intergenerational practice. Where these factors might have been challenging for the school or care provider to address independently, the university was able to draw upon its network of artists to ensure that those delivering the project were experienced in working with both participant groups.

In terms of promoting and delivering the project, the university was also able to drawn upon its resources to add value to the activities beyond what might have been accessible to the individual organizations. A launch event was held on campus, and the various stakeholder groups were invited together as an opportunity to meet each other and learn about the project. This event led to increased public awareness of the activity, as the artists involved were able to connect it more widely back into the community sector, and local residents, friends, and family members were able to learn about the project through the launch and subsequent press attention. The need to engage senior management and promote or "sell" the value of arts in what are often considered nonarts settings is often raised in the literature (Aston, 2009; Jensen, 2018). The university's capacity to hold this kind of event eased the process, as the teachers and scheme leaders felt they had tangible resources that they could use to promote the activity. During the weekly sessions and final performances, using the university's studios and theatre enhanced the experience for the participants and eased the pressure on the schools and ILCs, who would not have had the capacity to invite such a large audience to watch.

In addition to university resources, the experience of those working in a higher education institution was also valuable for this kind of partnership. Although schools and care providers function under very particular operational processes with one set of clearly identifiable beneficiaries, a university is well suited to work across sectors, with many academics assuming teacher/researcher/artist/outreach roles (Doughty & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Consequently, they are skilled in negotiating multiple stakeholder needs, a challenge regularly cited in arts and health partnerships (Angus, 2002; Jensen, 2018). Where different approaches to facilitation might have been favoured by the various stakeholders involved, the university was able to act as a mediator and support the negotiation of processes. Jensen (2018) wrote that in order to best share expertise and ensure safe practice, it is essential to understand stakeholders and their interactions, recognizing that they will make sense of circumstances based on the often

tacit assumptions, values, and logics that constitute a particular sector or institution. Within this project, it was evident that the artists, schools, and care homes worked at different paces and naturally had different priorities. Although the aim of the project was to foster awareness and understanding of these differences, it was also important to acknowledge them. By assuming an overarching responsibility for the organization of the project, the university was able to listen to the needs of the various stakeholders and propose models of work that supported the collective. It was also observable that the participation of student interns, who were not aligned to either of the community groups, had a unifying affect. The students built relationships with the young people and older adults that enabled a sense of trust and were therefore well placed to support their needs when they came together. They acted as a support network to interpret what the artists were saying, and they gave the artists feedback about any issues that arose.

This project also demonstrated how the university's flexibility enabled the project to grow and evolve in a way that made it more sustainable and resilient to the changing pressures of education and care. The Beth Johnson Foundation guide (2011) describes different modes of community cohesion that can be facilitated with varying degrees of intergenerational contact. Generations Dancing was able to transition between varying levels of contact in order to meet the needs of the different stakeholders while establishing longevity. In the early stages the regular meetings and exchanges between groups involved working together toward a demonstration and sharing, which was followed by termly visits and an annual summer sharing that brings friends and family to the care home with young people. The program of activities that the university now facilitates happens on a smaller scale, in order for it to continue to take place and create meaningful connections that are part of the functions of each stakeholder and tailored to their individual needs and capacity. Learnings from Generations Dancing were used to inform a further successful funding grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to support a regular class at BHA delivered by a dance lecturer at the university who embeds it within her teaching around community dance practice. She is supported by student interns and recent graduates who act as assistants in order to gain experience that informs their own careers in dance with the view that they can take over future delivery of the sessions so that the activity is sustainable. The number of older adults who attend has increased, and there are many new participants who did not take part in the original project. The classes take place in the ILCs to reduce resources required (such as taxi costs), but some visits to campus continue in order to retain some of what made the project special. The young people have also made termly visits to the care home with their teacher to perform to the older adults and take part in a shared seated dance class all together. The university is also working with BHA to host a summer tea dance that will bring together the schoolchildren and older adults with their friends and families for an afternoon of dance and celebration. This day will mimic the performance sharing that took place at the university on a smaller scale and is led much more by BHA. These activities create an intergenerational community (Beth Johnson Foundation, 2011), fostering a sense of connectedness between the different community sectors that is flexible and responsive to their needs. The university also utilized its access to support with bid writing in order to secure further National Lottery funding that will be used to continue the partnership and set up another project between a new ILC and school. Evidently the infrastructure that is in place within a higher education institution is significant in supporting the sustainability of this kind of activity. Access to structured support and resources, like bid writing, paid internship schemes, and specialist staff—with the flexibility and autonomy in their roles that enable them to undertake such work—has played a significant part in the continuation of the work, despite the ownership of it shifting to be shared more evenly among the partners.

In order to ensure their success and sustainability, intergenerational arts and health projects need to offer high quality, well-organized activities that are flexible and responsive to the varied needs of those involved. Universities have the capacity to promote and champion community arts projects in ways that may be challenging for smaller organizations and can play a significant role in mediating between different sectors of the community. The key to facilitating this project was finding a balance between raising the profile through engagement with established art-

ists and media engagement while ensuring it remained manageable and sustainable by drawing upon student interns, local artists, and the accessible resources of the university, schools, and care homes. The support structure of the university has enabled this intergenerational dance activity to continue. Given the criticisms that arts and health projects are often short term (Ings et al., 2012), this support seems particularly important and evidences how higher education institutions can play a role in ensuring the longevity of such activity. As the NHS moves toward models of social prescribing to bridge the clinical and social care needed within the UK public health system (Polley et al., 2017), this article highlights the potentially more formalized role that these sorts of projects could play and the roles that education institutions could have in sustaining them.

Intergenerational partnerships, particularly within the field of arts and health, can be greatly enhanced by the support and/or facilitation of a higher education institution. Projects should ensure that all stakeholders are involved in the planning stages and that there is discussion of the roles and expectations of each partner. Consideration should be given to how a project is labelled and described to prospective partners and participants, in order to ensure that it is accessible to those from a range of perspectives. During the delivery of a project, it is important to maintain communication across partnerships, particularly in sharing the needs of vulnerable people. Involving individuals with experience working across sectors can assist in negotiating these aspects in order to enable projects to develop in manageable but ambitious ways.

About the Authors

Rachel Farrer *is Associate Head of School for Enterprise and Innovation at Coventry University.*

Louise Douse *is a senior lecturer in dance at the University of Bedfordshire.*

Imogen Aujla *is a freelance dance researcher, lecturer and life coach at Dance in Mind.*

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