

Chapter 7

Generations of Learning: A Professional Learning Experience



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Abstract *Generations of learning*, as a research project, sought to extend the professional experience learning of pre-service teachers by pairing them with retired teachers. This was pursued with the express purpose of extending student experiences in their initial teacher education course and as an additional strategy to further support pre-service teachers in the quest of becoming a teaching professional. This chapter reports on the intergenerational learning that characterised the learning that occurred between pre-service teachers and the retired teachers in the research. In the intergenerational spaces of this research project, conversations between the paired retirees and the pre-service teachers moved fluidly between the theoretical and the practical, using the stories of the retiree and the wonderings of the pre-service teacher as the guide. This chapter focuses on the experience of one pair of participants to reveal how the learning that occurred between the pre-service teachers and the retired teachers was generative and reciprocal. The generative nature of the exchanges that occurred between the retired teachers and the pre-service teachers centred on a shared respect for and responsibility towards the teaching profession, where developing relationships was recognised as a key element of the professional experience of being a teaching professional.

Prologue

“I run a project,” my (Kristin’s) next-door neighbour, a pharmacist, continued, “where medical students meet with elderly doctors in nursing homes.” We were talking across the fence, learning about one another’s work in short snippets, whenever our schedules aligned for a few moments. “They have these fascinating conversations. The young learn from the old; the old learn from the young.”

It seemed like such an elegant idea: pair someone at the beginning of their profession with someone whose professional life was complete, and provide them with space to learn from one another. As a teacher educator, I was intrigued. Teaching has always been

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about intergenerational learning, about one generation teaching the next, and yet, we have rarely thought this through with any conscious intention in teacher education. How might the concept of intergenerational learning extend pre-service teacher education beyond the classroom? If the medical profession has found a way to encourage intergenerational relationships, why not the teaching profession? There would be value it seemed, for the pre-service teachers, the retired teachers, and the profession itself.

I mentioned the idea one afternoon, as a footnote to another conversation, to my colleague, John. He immediately grasped a facet of such a project that had escaped me – how such intergenerational conversations could highlight the historical dimension of the teaching profession and its work, and the continuity and change that define teachers' work and schools. Such conversations, John thought, would provide a way for pre-service teachers to explore the profession of teaching by considering how it has been, how it is, and how it could be. We called the project: 'generations of learning'.

Introduction

Becoming a teacher involves the formation of a professional identity. The profession itself has changed and continues to change through time, so that what constitutes a teaching professional is always at once contested and understood differently in particular cultural spaces and in specific historical times. Robson (2006) explains that rather than a description of an actual occupation the idea of a profession provides 'a way of thinking about occupations' (p. 10). Thus, being inducted into the profession of teaching requires an induction into ways of knowing, thinking about and being a teacher. Teachers, both pre-service and qualified, take time to craft pedagogical practices, developing content and relational capabilities, and understanding what it means to be a teacher. *Generations of learning* provides a way for pre-service teacher education students to partake in this activity with teachers who have come before them. We (Kristin and John) implemented *generations of learning* in 2017, as a pilot project that we anticipate expanding over the next few years. Our aim is to enrich the professional learning experiences of pre-service teachers by complementing the traditional practicum that takes place in schools.

The participants in *generations of learning* in 2017 included seven final year pre-service teachers in Monash University's Faculty of Education paired with eight retired schoolteachers from across Melbourne (one pre-service teacher was paired with two retired teachers who are married). The *generations of learning* project was a voluntary undertaking for all involved. It was presented to pre-service teachers as an opportunity to engage in a unique professional learning experience aimed at deepening their understandings of the teaching profession. Retired teachers were recruited from our own professional and personal networks and the project was presented to the retirees as a way to share their stories and wisdom. The project took place before and during the pre-service teachers' final professional experience placement of their teacher education degree and involved three whole-group meetings, facilitated by us. Partners then connected with one another in their own time, via phone, email or in person. Some of the retirees also visited and observed their pre-service teacher partner

during their teaching placement. Participants were involved in the project from July to October 2017. *Generations of learning* involved a re-imagining of professional experience where the profession is explored and encountered through intergenerational relationships. Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015) identify that teacher education programmes should create spaces for ‘robust professional discourse about teaching and the wider purposes of education’ (p. 638). *Generations of learning* is research that deliberately provides an exploratory space connecting pre-service teachers with retired teachers to engage in a series of interactions to develop an appreciation of what it means to be and to become a teaching professional.

Intergenerational Professional Learning

Sachs (2003), in writing about teaching as a profession, states ‘It is paramount that whatever meaning of professionalism is circulating, its meaning is generated and owned by teachers themselves in order that it should have currency among teachers’ (p. 17). Connecting pre-service teachers with retired teachers provided a way for those entering the profession to understand and appreciate what it means to be a teaching professional in a different way from what they might encounter in lectures and tutorials, or in their professional experience placements in schools. Teachers entering the profession, as a new generation of teachers, do not break from the past but are connected to past generations of teachers and teaching whilst at the same time possessing an orientation to the future. Teachers who have since retired from the profession are a relatively untapped and underutilised resource for preparing future teachers. Retired teachers in the context of *generations of learning* demonstrated that they do not ‘just shuffle off and disappear’ (p. 149), in the words of Boyer, Maney, Kamler and Comber (2004) but retain and, if opportunities present, contribute to an understanding of the profession that shaped their work lives.

Teaching work is by its nature intergenerational, where one generation teaches another, so this project built upon well-established cultural patterns in education where mentoring and the transfer of knowledge and wisdom occurs from one generation to the next. Generations represent a particular kind of identity of location, with different age groups embedded in different socio-historical processes (Mannheim, 1952). By connecting future teachers with retired teachers, the research in the *generations of learning* project was informed by the depth of intergenerational learning and the enduring historical and future-oriented character of the profession. In meeting one another, the narratives of those who have spent their professional lives as teachers and the narratives of those anticipating a work life in teaching highlighted the continuities, changes and meaning of being a teacher.

Teaching is public, social and ethical in its professional conduct. Biesta et al. (2015) name the difficulty for teachers in understanding what ethically informed practice can look like, given the ‘confused mishmash of competing and vague ideas’ (p. 636) that constitute discourses of modern schooling. They argue that ‘in the absence of opportunities for systematic sense-making in schools, teachers

are regularly left confused about their role' (p. 636). In concert with Biesta et al. (2015), opportunities for sense-making can begin to happen—in perhaps surprising ways—before teachers are even in schools, through intergenerational experiences. The intergenerational encounters between retired teachers and future teachers in *generations of learning* revealed that sense-making about teaching and being a teaching professional can constructively and generatively occur outside professional experience school placements and the lecture halls and tutorials of their teacher education course.

According to Mannheim (1952), the phenomenon of generations is one of the basic factors contributing to historical development. The profession of teaching has changed through time and these changes have been mediated by social and cultural transformations. These differing social and cultural changes become solidified, as the prevailing *Zeitgeist*, a fictive imaging of the times in which one generation lives with other generations, and are made up of perceived differences within and between generations. Pre-service teachers inhabit a time of professional education at universities, in contrast to the retirees in this project who undertook 'teacher training' at Teachers' Colleges. The relationships established between the retired teachers and pre-service teachers provided a basis for historically conscious encounters, not so much for decoding the respective *Zeitgeist* of their different generations but rather as a collaborative exploration of the cultural heritages of being a teaching professional, publically, socially and ethically.

The *generations of learning* project is further conceptualised through frames of generativity (Erikson, 1950; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004). Erikson (1950), in writing about stages of human development, suggested that midlife and beyond was a stage of generativity—creating and caring for the next generation so as to ensure a positive future for the world. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) saw this commitment to future generations expressed through such activities as parenting, teaching, mentoring and leadership. Adults, write de St. Aubin et al. (2004), 'express generativity in social contexts and through social institutions' (p. 5) and seek to pass on the most valued traditions of culture, skills and approaches. *Generations of learning* was conceptualised as a generative project in that one generation of teachers expressed commitment to the next generation of teachers, as well as to the next generation of students and the profession of teaching. McAdams and Logan (2004) highlight that generativity is not just about replication of norms, traditions and practices, but also of movements and rhythms to different and or refigured social arrangements. Generativity can be expressed both in the 'conservation and nurturance of that which people deem to be good in life and in the transformation of that which people believe to be in need of improvement' (McAdams & Logan, 2004, p. 16). Conversations between pre-service and retired teachers in *generations of learning* focused on narratives of the ethically 'good' in the past and present, allowing the participants to name what has in their view improved, what has been lost and what needs to change within the profession.

Generations of learning, as a project, provided an intergenerational space in which to engage in another sort of learning and the very nature of these intergenerational interactions were reciprocal. This reciprocity was a finding of similar

intergenerational research between teachers (Boyer et al., 2004). *Generations of learning* provided a different learning space to that usually encountered by pre-service teachers; it was a learning space free from assessments and measurements. The relationships formed in this space were more concerned with Erikson's ideas of generativity, establishing and guiding the next generation (de St. Aubin et al., 2004). Hence, within this intergenerational space, the learning is generative—in that it is reciprocal in its historically conscious explorations of what it means to be a teaching professional yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Researching Intergenerational Relationships

The initial phase of the project involved all 17 participants being interviewed individually by either John or Kristin. The interviews with the retired teachers focused on narratives of their teaching careers and their reflections upon the profession. The interviews with the pre-service teachers focused on their professional aspirations and their insights into what is involved in being a professional teacher.

The pairing of the student with the retiree was based on perceived shared personal characteristics and shared occupation areas of the teaching profession (see Table 7.1). The initial meeting of all the participants in their pairs involved them spending an hour in conversation with each other. This was a mid-morning event organised and lead by John and Kristin, involving coffee and a light lunch. During this hour, retired teachers talked with the pre-service teachers about their work lives as teachers and their reflections of the profession. Directly following these conversations, a focus group of all the pre-service teachers was carried out to collect data about the insights they developed about changes within the teaching profession.

A second meeting was convened two weeks later, by John and Kristin, where all the pairs spent an hour in conversation. This time the retired teachers were asked to focus their discussion with the pre-service teachers about the beginning teachers' aspirations and initial experiences of the teaching profession. Directly afterwards, we conducted a focus group with the retired teachers about how schools and teacher work has changed based on their conversations with their pre-service teacher. These focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed. As researchers with an interest in student experiences in teacher education courses, these meetings provided a way to foster structured conversations about teaching and being and becoming a teacher. As a consequence, these conversations became intergenerational exchanges and, for Kristin and John, provided a way to understand how the intergenerational connections enriched the learning of students and of those who have retired from the profession.

The other stages in the project involved some of the retired teachers attending their partner's placement school to observe the pre-service teacher teaching, as well as non-facilitated conversations held between the partners in their own time. Data was collected from the first three interviews and from a final phase in the research, which involved John and Kristin interviewing the pairs together about what they

Table 7.1 The participants

Teachers (retired)	Details	Teaching experience	Teachers (pre-service)	Course	Basis of pairing
Len	Susan and Len are married. Both are in their 80s and began teaching in the 1950s	Primary Teacher, Primary School Principal	Yvette	Bachelor of Early Years and Primary Education	Allie’s aspiration to be a primary school teacher
Susan		Primary Teacher, Primary School Principal			
Paula	Paula was schooled in far East Gippsland and did a 3-year Trained Infant Teachers Certificate	Trained Infant Mistress, Director of Middle School, Director of Learning, Education Consultant	Tara	Bachelor of Primary and Secondary Education	The two shared similar schooling history as both were schooled in same region in rural Victoria
Lee	Lee received her science degree and then was employed at a country technical school	Secondary Science Teacher, Technical Schools	Binh	Bachelor of Secondary Education and Science	Science teacher paired with aspiring science teacher
May	May completed her 3-year Trained Infant Teachers Certificate and then moved into special education	Trained Infant Teacher, Primary School Teacher, Remedial Teacher at a Speech Clinic, Curriculum Manager for Victorian TAFEs	Mick	Bachelor of Secondary Education	Shared interest in disengaged students and students who experience learning challenges
Joanne	Joanne started her degree in primary but quickly decided secondary school was for her. She was a secondary science teacher	Secondary School Teacher, Teacher at the Correspondence School in Victoria	Peter	Bachelor of Secondary Education and Science	Both shared the identity of secondary mathematics and science teachers
Kath	Kath obtained her primary teaching course and first taught in a two-teacher country school	Primary Teacher, Primary School Principal, Education Historian	Nina	Bachelor of Early Years and Primary Education	Aspiration on Nicole’s part to become a primary school teacher
Fran	Fran first taught while still in high school, then completed her Trained Infant Teaching Course and worked in Victorian schools over four decades	Primary Teacher, Current Volunteer in Primary Schools	Aisha	Bachelor of Primary and Secondary Education	Anh had an interest in the history of schooling and aspired to be either a primary or secondary teacher

learned from participating in the project. This final interview highlighted the shared experiences and mutual understandings the participants generated about the past, present and future of the teaching profession.

Participants in the Project

Pre-service Teachers

The seven pre-service teachers engaged in the *generations of learning* project were all enthusiastic about becoming teaching professionals. Some were focused on primary teaching and others on secondary with a range of specialist subjects. All of them, when asked about their decision to become teachers, mentioned the influence of past teachers. For most of the pre-service teachers, the influence was a positive one: they had been inspired to become teachers by their former teachers and were now seeking to *be* the teachers that lived in their memories.

Four years into their degrees, feet planted firmly on the pathway to their career of choice, and the pre-service teachers were now considering the realities of becoming a teacher. Although having participated in school their whole lives and now near the completion of their formal teacher preparation, the pre-service teachers had decidedly partial understandings of what it means to actually be a teacher. When asked this very question, pre-service teachers responded with either ideal notions, ‘To educate, to influence, inspire, to shape the next generation to be in accordance with society’s values and to shape children for what we want them to be for the future’ (Nina); or with a sense of teaching as what you do to/with students as an individual teacher within classroom walls, ‘To know everything about content, and how to explain content in an engaging way’ (Peter). Pre-service teachers did not convey a sense of joining a profession nor did they discuss the multiple social contexts within which teaching occurs. To be a teacher was seen to be an individual endeavour—whether in inspiring the next generation or in the context of their personal classroom.

Retired Teachers

The eight retired teachers, in their 70s and early 80s, met with and formed relationships with the seven beginning teachers who were in their 20s. The retirees had all been retired for over a decade. Their continuing relationship to teaching and education involved volunteer tutoring and continuing personal relationships established as professionals; one remained an active participant in the field through her committee work at a local vocational college. All of the retirees completed their teacher training at Teachers’ Colleges except one who did her teacher education at a university. The retirees undertook their teacher education in the 1950s and 1960s, and they had little

experience or understanding of contemporary university teacher education and its conditions.

Each generation lives through and transforms the society and world that defines them as a distinct generation. The teaching profession itself has been redefined through the ages and, with each age, how the profession is valued also changes. The retirees were interested in working with beginning teachers because of their commitment to the profession, still seeing themselves as teachers teaching or having something to offer the pre-service teachers. Details of the retirees and their respective pairs are in the following table.

Introducing Paula and Tara

In this section, we focus in on the narratives of two people who were paired together, Paula and Tara. John introduces and narrates Paula's story, while Kristin narrates Tara's story. As a pair, Paula (retired teacher) and Tara (Final year student in a Bachelor of primary and secondary education) provide an example of the generativity of generational learning. The exchanges between all the pairs allowed retired teachers and beginning teachers to consider afresh the importance of teaching as a profession. In looking at one pair, Tara and Paula, we see what it means to be and become a teacher through the relationship they developed in *generations of learning*.

Paula's Story

All I (John) really knew of Paula was that she was a retired teacher. As a member of a Technical and Further Education, Higher Education Committee I had worked alongside Paula for the previous few years but was largely unaware of her professional history and her experiences in the profession. When Kristin talked about doing an intergenerational project, I immediately thought of all of the retired teachers I knew and how in turn they would know of other retired teachers who may want to be involved in the project. Paula agreed to participate in the project without hesitation. It was the initial interview with Paula that was a revelation. As fellow committee members, we had a very cursory knowledge about each other. What I subsequently learned was that Paula had not only worked as a teacher, initially completing her Trained Infant Teacher Certificate, but had an extensive career in government and non-government schools as a Director of Curriculum, Director of a Middle school, along with high level and strategic leadership roles in education administration. Yet, it was her story of getting into teaching and the value of teaching as a profession that was a revelation.

Paula did not really know what she wanted to do when she was at school in remote country Victoria. Through Vocational Guidance, Paula was informed that her options were either a 'herd tester' or a 'teacher'. Paula thought,

Well, I come from high plains cattle country; I don't want to be slopping around South Gippsland in gumboots, with dairy herds, so I ruled out being a herd tester, which only left teaching. So, I went to teachers' college - not because I was inspired to go to teachers' college - because I'd actually had a pretty awful education myself. I had eight teachers in two years. Not many people wanted to go to Swifts Creek High, or Elementary 1460. I didn't have a great education. I did not read until I was in grade three. Lots of teachers.

Paula's first 'posting' upon her graduation was in country Victoria, because she wanted to go back to the country to 'provide what I thought I hadn't really had'.

After a stint in the country, Paula taught in several Melbourne primary schools. One school in which Paula taught early on had a high proportion of newly arrived Southern European migrants, who spoke little or no English. Paula talked about the educational importance and value of using a multisensory approach to language learning with the newly arrived children. Paula's work as a teacher moved from country schools to city schools and then into professional roles as a Director of Studies at a prestigious private school. Paula ended up assuming leadership, policy and curriculum roles in schools and for the Victorian Education Department. Paula's career as a teacher was varied, characterised by ongoing learning. Paula expressed that as a teacher she was always driven by finding out what students know. From there, Paula would work with students to challenge and extend their learning. For Paula,

teachers are incredibly important,yet teachers who think that what they experienced in school is what they are going to give the next generation is not always relevant.

In becoming what can be described as a leading professional, Paula believes leadership and administrative roles in schools involve developing a culture of ongoing learning and a culture of giving. Entering the teaching profession for Paula was all about having a go and growing:

When you're in there learning and growing, you're taking- you're giving, but you're taking a lot in those early years. And when you move to knowing what you know, and what you don't know, then it's time to start giving. And I can't always see a lot of educators giving back. I think there should be more of it...

Tara's Story

As a pre-service teacher, Tara was excited about graduating and becoming a teacher. Tara is a self-described 'country kid', who grew up knowing that teaching was always an option; not necessarily the first choice, but a constant 'fall-back'. In response to the question all kids get about what they want to be when they grow up, Tara would respond 'Oh, a park ranger or a teacher. Or a firefighter or a teacher. Or a *this* or a teacher'. Once the time came to choose, she decided to settle for teaching, a career choice that seemed achievable, if ordinary. Tara enrolled in the Primary and Secondary Education specialisation, which would qualify her to teach students aged 5–18 years old.

At the time of the *generations of learning* project, Tara was in the last semester of her 4-year degree and teaching was no longer her fall-back: it was now her passion. I (Kristin) did not conduct the initial interview with Tara, but in reading the transcripts of her interview and later meeting her in person, Tara's enthusiasm for teaching and for students was palpable. Her new-found love and passion for teaching had emerged during her experiences in her teaching placements where 'you learn how to deal with difficult kids, difficult teachers; all of the things that actually occur in a school'. She found that teaching was, somewhat paradoxically, about learning and it was her love of learning that she had tapped into. Tara was constantly learning in her teaching placements, particularly her placement in a school with a high number of refugee students and her international professional experience placement in a school in India: 'I've learned a lot about respecting people and valuing others' opinions through teaching'.

While she named teachers on placements as influencing who she was becoming as a teacher, Tara returned to a Year 12 teacher who was the most influential in the formation of her own professional identity. This particular teacher, she said, did not impose his opinions on the class but 'let us form our own judgement, which I think is a huge thing for students to be able to do'. Tara's identification of this particular teacher and this particular quality echoed in her definition of teaching: 'What is teaching? Building a relationship, imparting knowledge, learning from the students'. This definition speaks to a nuanced understanding of teaching as about far more than content provision; Tara spoke of teaching as a reciprocal activity. She later expanded on her definition:

Students have as much to teach teachers, as teachers have to teach students, if not even more, because everyone has a different story, everyone has a different background, different life experiences and you can learn a lot about the world by learning about different people's experience.

As Tara spoke of her experience in the teacher education programme and her growing understanding of what being a teacher means, she continually circled back to the idea of relationships. When speaking of the type of teacher she wants to be, Tara declared,

I want to be a teacher that respects my students, builds relationships with each and every one of them. I want to be a teacher that knows my content as well, even though I honestly now, after four years of my teaching degree, I think that's a secondary thing to relationships - I think that is more important than the content knowledge, to be honest. But I just want to be a teacher that kids can look back on in 20 years' time and go 'she made a difference'. I don't want fame or fortune or any of that stuff - but I'd like to know that I made a difference to at least one of my students' lives.

During an international professional experience placement that Tara undertook in India, it caused her a lot of pain when, since the classes were so big in the school she was placed in, she found she could not form relationships with her students. As Tara said:

I just tried to learn some names, but as well with the different phonic structure, I just found it so hard to pronounce a lot of their names; so I would go 'yes'. But across all of my classes, we had 430 students; so it was very much just 'yes', like 'yes', which killed me a little bit.

Tara's focus on relationships extended beyond those formed with students to other teachers and the families of students, as well. She recognised that not all families would have had positive experiences at school and suggested that again the answer lay in 'building a relationship, so they don't see you as just another teacher, or whatever, because of their past'. It was also the possibility of further relationship that drew Tara to *generations of learning*. In her expression of interest for the project, Tara wrote that she was attracted by 'the concept of a unique mentoring opportunity, as I feel I have been lucky enough to have some of these already!'

The Learning of Paula and Tara

Pairing Paula with Tara was automatic; both having been schooled in country Victoria, it seemed from the interviews that they shared a similar inclination towards teaching as a profession. It is the commitment to a culture of giving and ongoing learning that drew Paula to the *generations of learning* project. Paula thinks that 'What's really important, when you enter a profession is being supported by amazing people and then also taking on the role of supporting other people'. Teaching and entering the teaching profession are about being a classroom teacher but, as Paula explained in her interview, in the focus groups and through her conversations with Tara, as a teacher you impact on 30 students, but as an administrator and leader you can impact on 350 students in a school. Paula really expanded Tara's appreciation of the opportunities afforded in the profession of teaching and through being a teacher. Tara learned that it is about:

... professionalism. It's not just about being a teacher and standing up in the classroom. It's about having all that extra professional knowledge. So going out and joining the union, joining this, joining that, being part of everything. You're not just a teacher for the students in front of you, but you're a teacher for your colleagues, you're a teacher for the school, the wider community.

For Paula and Tara, there was little doubt that participation in this project was time well spent. Tara expressed it to Paula this way: 'I think every pre-service teacher should have this opportunity... the amount that I've taken on board, that I've learned, that I feel like I've grown, just from having you there, is just huge'. That phrase—*just from having you there*—is key: two professionals engaged in conversation about what it means to be a teacher with no agenda and no outwardly obvious external gain. Tara had learnt so much from Paula, especially when Paula came to watch her teach. Not only had Tara sent her lesson plans to Paula but they discussed how the lesson might go. Tara felt that being paired with Paula caused her to think about her techniques, and it was in the area of questioning that Tara really developed. Tara referred to a coffee session after Paula saw her teach, when Paula encouraged her to think about

my questioning. That questioning can lead to differentiation. So, it can be questioning to extend gifted students or it can be questioning to allow all students to participate in the task.
... Questioning that provides for a breadth of teaching and learning.

Paula felt that what she got out of participating in *generations of learning* was a pivotal relationship that contributes to the profession. Paula's participation was motivated by her belief that you are always learning, and meeting Tara was no exception. Paula described Tara as a 'gutsy broad', and felt that a 'gutsiness', a confident robustness, is what makes a good learner and forms the basis of a teacher who can do great work. Paula expressed that she wished she would have known what Tara has learnt and knows when she began teaching. For Paula, being confident makes a 'good teacher' because confident teachers are not self-centred and are secure enough to give and to be willing to learn.

Paula explained what good teachers do: they look to the students they are working with and see what they know and what they need and they work to challenge and extend those students. In Paula's own experience of schooling, she felt her own personal learning was not a priority, as a result of attending a country school where teachers changed every year or so. She relayed her first teaching experience, at a primary school with a diverse student body, as a way of revealing her own teaching philosophy:

We had 700 kids on a tiny plot of land. Every time a boat came into the wharves, off would come all of these wonderful Greek families that had come to give their children an education. And we'd look out the door, and hear all these kids who couldn't speak English. Anyway, as a trained infant teacher, I'm in the preps, and then I became coordinator of the prep classes. In 1971, I had 44 preps; eight spoke English. Because of my background of not being catered for, I was always determined; you've got to look after the individual, even when you've got 44. Also, I came from a family where my mother was so organised that I'm actually quite organised. So, I had individual reading programs for every child, and I had three groups for maths. At the start of the year, the kids couldn't speak English, and they couldn't read and write; by the end of the year, they could.

The whole idea of the "good teacher" being organised and responsive to student needs was the basis of many of the interactions between Tara and Paula, where they both recognised the importance of being prepared and knowledgeable. Yet, they also both arrived at an appreciation that student grades are not the sole indicator of good teachers; rather, they saw the measure of a great teacher as the ability to change, to adapt to changes in students and situations. Being ready to change meant for Paula not being blinkered, bringing experiences to the classroom that challenge students to grow and learn. Paula emphasised the need to not just teach the curriculum but teach *the students* the curriculum, which involves knowing them well. For Tara, this was pivotal as she realised she was overly focused on being 'classroom ready', intent on grasping the content and getting through that content. She recognised through her interactions with Paula the significant importance of working with and learning about and from students. Tara identified a 'massive' lesson she took from Paula: 'if there's something that students aren't understanding, in the middle of your lesson, you can't just go on to the next thing. You've got to make sure that that's understood. You can't just keep the ball rolling'.

The relationship that developed between Tara and Paula was generative in that both Tara and Paula felt they had learnt by participating in the project. Paula said Tara was like her daughter because she challenged her and expressed disagreements.

Tara and Paula as a pair, like the other pairs in this project, felt they had grown from meeting and working with each other, for both of them had gained from listening to each other, something they both agree is essential to becoming and being a good teacher: questioning and then listening. Paula loved what she experienced with Tara because, in her words, ‘you see someone learning’.

Together Across Generations

In the intergenerational space of *generations of learning*, conversations between the paired retirees and the pre-service teachers moved fluidly between the theoretical and the practical, using the stories of the retiree and the wonderings of the pre-service teacher as the guide. The conversations were not limited by external mandates or institutional constraints; they were, as pre-service teacher Binh expressed, about ‘everything else that there is, so dealing with the big goals and the big practical things’. Binh continued, ‘I think university has been all about the theory. My mentor teacher in the school is all about the practical’. She felt that the *generations of learning* project spoke to a different space—a space that encompassed both the theoretical and the practical, about both the being and the doing. Pre-service teachers felt they were drawing on the retirees’ ‘wealth of information’ (Nina) to learn practical strategies such as time and behaviour management, as well as to hear stories of experiences, challenges and enjoyment. Pre-service teacher Yvette found that questions could be asked, such as ‘What really can I expect when I go out into the teaching profession?’ The conversations between the intergenerational partners were generative of professional identity, both explicitly and tacitly. Explicitly, the pairs engaged in conversations about what it means to be a teacher. Through her conversations with Paula, Tara’s view of being a teacher expanded from having a job as a classroom teacher to being a member of a community of professionals. A phrase from Paula resonated with Tara: ‘If you’re not born a teacher, you can be trained to become one. But you die one’. The sense that the pre-service teachers were embarking on a life-long journey as part of a collective, as part of a community of professional teachers, was made explicit to the pre-service teachers through stories shared and words expressed by the retired teachers. Retiree Fran told her partner, Aisha, ‘I absolutely miss being a teacher every day now that I am retired’. These conversations were explicitly generative of the pre-service teachers’ professional identity and the sense that teaching is a life-long commitment.

Professional identity, however, was also generated through tacit means. The relationships formed in the *generations of learning* project, between retirees and pre-service teachers, stood in stark contrast to the relationships formed in other components of the pre-service teachers’ university programme. As pre-service teacher Peter noted, between university lecturers and mentor teachers, there were few professional relationships in the university programme with any longevity. Although he has appreciated his mentor teachers, ‘after placement is done, it’s like, okay, bye bye’. The relationships formed in *generations of learning* have the

potential to be long-term and were not obscured by the need for the pre-service teacher to perform to a certain standard; they were not altered by a mandate that the retirees gather sufficient evidence through which to judge the worth of the pre-service teacher. In many ways, it was the first time for the pre-service teachers to be in a relationship throughout their pre-service education in which they were not considered a student. Pre-service teacher Mick described that what he was taking away from the experience was a different type of learning that included,

Just learning about pedagogy and stuff, and how to teach. It's all well and good at University to have your theory subjects, but you learn more from talking to people, and also doing. That's what I found. It's great to have Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, but to learn from somebody's who's actually been there and talk about aspects of your pedagogy that you want advice on, and learn.

Generations of learning was simply about two teachers meeting—from opposite ends of the professional experience continuum—to discuss shared passions. The retirees valued highly the beginning teachers' keenness, realism, assuredness, enthusiasm and commitment, believing that from meeting the beginning teachers that 'education is in very, very safe hands' (Lee). Some retirees, however, expressed protective concern with what was in store for these beginning teachers in the schools and communities they were about to enter. As Fran commented,

I guess everyone has now expressed how impressed they are with the enthusiasm and all that, but I do worry. Well, they are going into an environment where they're not valued for those things, both by parents and by kids. And there are huge pressures on them to sort of meet the reporting and all those sorts of requirements that it can sort of be overwhelming and demoralising for them. So, you've got these enthusiastic kids going into an environment that could easily knock that out of them.

Relational theory reminds us that 'meeting and learning are inseparable' (Bingham and Sidorkin, 2004, p. 5) and that relationships are formative to who we are and what we can become (Llewellyn, 2011). As relationships were formed between the retirees and the pre-service teachers, a sense of care, from one teacher to the next, was expressed. These were relationships of generativity, of one generation helping to form the next generation of teachers. An understanding of professional identity was generative through the retiree/pre-service teacher relationship. The mere presence of the retirees—there on a voluntary basis and for no obvious personal gain—expanded a sense of what it means to be a teacher for the pre-service teachers. Tara identified this lesson from seeing Paula's engagement in this project and other endeavours: 'There is no end goal to being a teacher. You don't just be a teacher and then that's it. You're always trying to improve, you're always trying to learn'. Importantly, it was also the quality of the presence of the retirees that spoke to the pre-service teachers. Mick noticed that his retired partner, May, was 'very willing to engage and talk, and you could tell that she wanted to be here'. Peter remarked about his partner, Joanne, and the other retired teachers that 'the fun thing is that they are as curious as we are'. Pre-service teachers began to see their retired partners not only as retirees but as teachers engaged in a life-long practice of learning and educating. Professional identity expanded beyond the individual, beyond the here and now, to a shared identity shaped through continuities and changes.

Conclusion

Although conversations in the *generations of learning* project centred upon the profession of the past, and the present, they usually ended up by discussing the profession of the future. As McAdams and Logan (2004) point out, generativity is a complex process of seeking to preserve what is good from the past in order to benefit the future. Peter, in reflecting on his time with Joanne, remarked that discussions of change in the profession had taught him that education is in a constant state of change and progress. Mick and his partner, May, engaged in a reflective process at the end of their final conversation, asking questions related to the future of the profession: How can we increase job security, stop teacher burnout, improve public perception of teaching and promote good teachers without removing them from the classroom? Binh and her partner, Lee, discussed the changing nature of support for teachers by other professionals, government policies, teaching unions and colleagues. They also identified areas that they were pleased had not changed, such as a focus on ‘making pathways for all students to succeed’ (Binh). The pre-service and retired teachers were engaged in the activity of collective generation of what being a teaching professional means—in the past, present and future. Such a generation means that pre-service teachers are more likely to understand, own and relate to notions of professionalism (Sachs, 2003).

Biesta et al. (2015) have critiqued teacher education for becoming too instrumentalist, where it has become focused on ‘getting the job done—and has been steered away from a more intellectual engagement with teaching, school and society’ (p. 638). Part of this instrumentalism involves teacher education courses becoming increasingly reshaped and organised in response to compliance with government policy professional standards, to produce ‘classroom-ready’ teachers. The Teacher Educational Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), involving the Australian Federal Minister of Education with all the State and Territory ministers, has now set in place more rigid quality assurance, and regulatory requirements to lift the quality of teacher graduates. In several ways, these well-meaning ‘reforms’ overemphasise measurement of prospective teachers’ literacy, numeracy and personal qualities. This emphasise on measurement risks undercutting the interpersonal relationship building skills and the dispositions required by teachers to build rapport and know and understand students to address their increasingly different learning needs. To ensure compliance to these sorts of requirements, pre-service teachers are measured in classes by lecturers, assessed during teaching placements by mentor teachers and, in Australia, judged as sufficiently literate and numerate to be teachers by the Australian Council for Educational Research. In this age of measurement and compliance, generative spaces for conversations that are about meaning-making and relationship building are squeezed out by the focus upon credential-making.

For the participants in *generations of learning*, the generativity of teachers and of the teaching profession was explored. They engaged in what Biesta et al. (2015) would name *robust professional discourse about teaching and education*. For example, together, Paula and Tara explored ‘classroom readiness’ as being connected to

being ‘up for the challenge’. This was not a focus on ‘tips and tricks’ of being a teacher but rather an ethical disposition of being gutsy enough to be willing to learn. According to Paula and Tara, it is this willingness that shapes teachers’ identity. Through *generations of learning*, Tara, as a pre-service teacher education student, was challenged by Paula to really think about all that is involved in teaching students, not just the curriculum. The generative nature of the exchanges that occurred between all the retired teachers and the pre-service teachers centred on a shared respect for and responsibility towards the teaching profession. The intergenerational learning was a reciprocal concern for the teaching profession and a responsibility to further its ongoing respect. The participants learned and landed upon the idea that bringing students along with you as a teacher is central to your identity as a teacher who makes a difference. It was the ability to foster generative relations with students that allowed them to see themselves as teachers. This ability was second nature to all the retirees who participated in *generations of learning*, a part of their identity as teachers and an invaluable source of learning for the pre-service teachers.

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