Intergenerational Contact and Children's Perceptions of Seniors

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Intergenerational Contact and Children’s Perceptions of Seniors.

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the Award in Bachelor of Social Science (Human Services) Honours

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ABSTRACT

The exploration of issues relating to intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors has received little attention in the area of gerontology. This study employed a survey research approach, utilising a questionnaire to explore this topic. This survey was given to a group of one hundred and six students in Year Six and Seven in a metropolitan Western Australian primary school. The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between intergenerational contact and the perceptions held by primary school aged children about seniors.

Previous findings demonstrate that there was either no relationship between the variables or only a weak positive relationship between these two variables (Green, 1981). Moreover, measures of the frequency of contact used in these studies have typically been vague. Studies did not examine or take into account factors such as the duration of the contact, the type of contact, the quality of the contact or the context in which the interaction takes place (Thomas, & Hallebone, 1995).

These results demonstrated that there was no correlation found between the amount of contact a child has and the perceptions that they hold. However, the results from the perception scale indicated that children in the particular sample contained very positive views about seniors and ageing. The results obtained, from both the quantitative and qualitative data, indicate that there was no correlation between participants' perceptions and the number of seniors with whom they have contact. Thus, implications for further research in this area concerning intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors should focus on factors including the type of contact, the frequency and the quality of the intergenerational experience.
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

Background

Australia's senior population, in the 1990s, is one of the most rapidly growing proportions of the population. With improvements in technology and other factors such as public health, there has been an increase in numbers in the sixty plus age bracket, as individuals are living longer than in previous decades. Despite this fact, many seniors are finding themselves increasingly isolated from the younger generation because of factors such as distance, divorce and separation (Rowland, 1991). Thus, many of the younger generation are likewise being deprived of the wisdom, knowledge and enjoyment of this intergenerational experience.

Complementary to this is the fact that youth today are expected to live longer than previous generations and will live out their lives in a progressively ageing society. Moreover, evidence demonstrates that children's attitudes concerning aging and elderly people are strongly associated with their intergenerational experiences (Chamberlain, Fetterman, & Maher, 1994).

Over the years, our age-separated society has generated myths and misinformation about old age. Such a lack of knowledge concerning ageing is found to be common among all age groups (Peterson, Hall, & Peterson, 1988). Research demonstrates both the existence of positive and negative stereotypes of older adults by children. Over the years, several studies have detailed the negative attitudes that children have demonstrated towards older people (Falchikov, 1990; Zandi, Mirle, & Jarvis, 1990). Moreover, not
all studies have perceived seniors in this manner, with currently a more positive view of ageing emerging (Chapman, & Neal, 1990).

Details of the Study

Research Design

An exploratory survey research design was employed, utilising a questionnaire as a means to gain understanding of upper primary school aged children's perceptions and interactions with seniors. A total of one hundred and six participants took part in the research from Year Six and Year Seven at a metropolitan Western Australian school. Informed consent was gained from the participants' guardians prior to the filling out of the questionnaire. Respondents completed the questionnaire in one sitting. The responses were then compiled and analysed.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between the frequency of contact with elderly people and the perceptions that children hold about elderly people. An understanding concerning the types of contact that children have with elderly people is also sought. Through the interpretation of children's responses a greater understanding of children's constructions of the role that intergenerational contact plays in the perceptions or views that children possess is obtained.

Significance of the Study

It is important to examine intergenerational contact because, as already stated, many children and seniors are increasingly finding
themselves isolated from each other and the experiences that this interaction brings. This study aims to provide information about the issue of intergenerational contact and discuss whether there is any relationship with the perceptions that children possess about seniors. Thus, there are outcomes for both social policy and further research.

Research Questions
This study has five main research questions which ask:

- What perceptions do these children hold concerning elderly people and ageing?
- How many seniors do children have contact with and is there any relationship between this factor and their score on the perception scale?
- What is the children's relationship with the seniors they have contact with?
- How often do these children have contact with a senior and does this have a relationship to their score on the perception scale?
- What is the type and quality of contact that these children perceive they have?

Theoretical Framework

Defining Theoretical Frameworks

In social research, just as the purposes and methods utilised in the research vary, so too does the theoretical and ideological structure. Much of these frameworks originate through philosophical inquiry (Hollis, 1994).
The philosophical position, or paradigm, is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Denzin, & Lincoln, 1994, p. 99). It encompasses three elements: epistemology, ontology and methodology. Sarantakos (1993) elaborates further describing a paradigm as a set of propositions which explains how the world is perceived. Methodology is the model which incorporates the theoretical principles as well as a framework which provides guidelines for how the research is done in the context of a particular paradigm (Sarantakos, 1993).

There are three philosophical questions to ask when examining a paradigm. The first is the ontological question, which asks what is the form and nature of reality and what is there that can be known about it. An epistemological question examines what is the nature of the relationship between the knower to would-be knower and what can be known. Finally, the methodological question asks how can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known (Guba, & Lincoln, 1994).

Sarantakos (1993) believes that there are three main competing paradigms in social research, the positivist, the interpretive (or naturalistic inquiry) and the critical theory paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that there are four major paradigms, positivism, post positivism, critical theory and constructivism. However, on closer examination, these perspectives appear to be more similar than first thought, with the main difference being the division of positivism and post positivism. The interpretive paradigm widens to incorporate other theories, one of which is constructivism.
Theoretical Perspective

There are two dominant paradigms which appear to address the theoretical position of this research, those being the constructivist (Guba, & Lincoln, 1994) and the interpretive paradigm. Proponents of such paradigms aim to understand "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994). Furthermore, this paradigm assumes that to understand the world of meaning one must interpret it (Trusted, 1987). Thus, through the critique of these two paradigms, a framework for the exploration of intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors will be developed.

Interpretivist Thinking

Historically, interpretivists have argued the uniqueness of human inquiry. For empiricists, social reality comprises of a set of social facts that include the behaviours, beliefs and motivations of individuals that can be defined (Schwandt, 1994). Interpretivist propositions are predicted based on the assumption that the empiricist picture of social reality omits an important fact, that of 'inter subjectivity' or common meanings (Schwandt, 1994). Furthermore, the constructive and interpretive focus concerns the processes through which these meanings are created, negotiated, sustained, and modified within a specific context of human action.

Interpretivists perceive that reality is not 'out there' but in the minds of people. Reality is internally experienced, socially constructed through interaction and interpreted through the actors (Sarantakos, 1993). Moreover, reality is based on the definitions that people attach to it. Reality is not objective like positivism, rather subjective in nature (Hughes, 1990).
Human beings are believed to occupy a central position within the interpretivist paradigm, whereby reality and the social world is created by the actors through assigning meanings to events (Hughes, 1990). The interpretivist paradigm is the basis for explaining social life and social events and for understanding people (Sarantakos, 1993). The interpretivist approach is inductive, whereby ideas proceed from the specific to the general and from the concrete to the abstract (Hughes, 1990). Thus, the interpretivist perspective provides a useful guide for the interpretation of research data.

Constructivist Thinking

The constructivist paradigm is proposed by Ego Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (1994) and assumes an idealist philosophy where it is assumed that what is real is a construction in the minds of individuals.

Constructivists are committed to the view that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of one’s perspective. Moreover, knowledge and truth are not discovered, but created by the human mind. Constructivists emphasise the "pluralistic and plastic" nature of reality (Schwandt, 1994, p.125). It is pluralistic in the sense that reality is expressed through a variety of symbol and language systems and plastic because reality is stretched and shaped to fit purposeful acts of "intentional human agents" (Schwandt, 1994, p.125).

Schwandt (1994) also remarks that we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge. Moreover, he goes on to say that human beings do not find or discover knowledge, so much as they construct or make it. In such cases, concepts, models, and schemes are invented to make sense of our experiences. These
constructions are continually tested and modified in the event of new experiences.

Social Constructivism

One branch of the constructivist paradigm is social constructivism. This is based on the assumption that "the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people" (Schwandt, 1994, p.127).

Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches

Quantitative Methodology

This research has utilised aspects of the quantitative and qualitative approach in its methodology. The quantitative methodology is based on the positivist philosophy, where reality is objective, simple and consists of "sense interpretations", whereby there is only one reality which is in nature and there is only one truth (Sarantakos, 1993). Facts should be kept apart from one's values in the quantitative perspective (Phillips, 1987). Thus, the quantitative methodology relies on statistical measures to produce an objective view of 'reality' (Phillips, 1992).

There are many arguments which have raged between these two approaches. Historically, each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of the quantitative approach concern the ability to ensure precision, through quantitative and reliable measures, and control, through sampling and design of the research data. Furthermore, experimentation leads to statements about causation, which is a focal point of quantitative research.
Quantitative research is viewed as denigrating human's individuality and ability to think (Agnew & Pike, 1994; Charlesworth, 1993; Hollis, 1994). Its "mechanistic ethos" (Burns, 1994, p. 9) appears to exclude notions of freedom, choice and moral responsibility. Moreover, this approach also fails to take account of people's unique ability to interpret their experiences, construct their own meanings and act on these. Another weakness is the fact that quantitative research appears to be "too restrictive and superficial" (Royse, 1991, p.225) because of its tendency to investigate only those aspects that can be operationally defined and measured.

**Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative methodology, on the other hand, assumes that the social world is always a human creation not a discovery. Consequently, the interpretivist and constructivist paradigms aim to capture reality as it is, namely as it is seen and experienced by the respondents. Thus, reality is captured as human interactions are occurring (Strauss, & Corbin, 1990). Moreover, the purpose of a qualitative inquiry is to interpret meaningful human actions and interpretations that people give themselves and others (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991).

There are strengths and weakness to this approach, just as there are for the quantitative approach. The strengths of the qualitative inquiry are based on the fact that the researching of individuals occurs in natural settings, a deeper understanding of the participants' world is achieved and it is believed to produce a more realistic view of the world (Burns, 1994).

Many of the weaknesses of this approach are due to problems with ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent from participants. This approach is also widely criticised by the quantitative
perspective because validity and reliability of data cannot be assured (Black, 1993). Furthermore, the replication of the research, as a way of verifying the data, is impossible to achieve. Moreover, for human based inquiry, the qualitative approach provides respondents with the opportunity to express their ideas in their own way (Strauss, & Corbin, 1994). This was the main reason why it was incorporated in the research instrument in this study.

Approach Undertaken in this Study

Some writers (Krathwohl, 1993; Royse, 1991) have expressed the notion that both approaches can be used simultaneously in research design. Thus, this research has combined both approaches to achieve a complete understanding of the topic of study. The first section utilises quantitative techniques to examine quantifiable data on the number of seniors with whom children have contact, the frequency of contact, the type of contact and children’s perceptions on a Likert based scale. Moreover, this section provides the statistical data for the survey.

Thus, because of the limitations of quantitative research, open-ended questions were added to the research instrument to allow the respondents to 'tell their story'. This technique also assisted in providing clarification and expansion of some of the research issues. Therefore, through the combining of quantitative and qualitative methodological procedures, a more complete picture may be gained in the area of intergenerational contact and children’s perceptions of seniors.
Summary

Thus, this chapter has provided a summary of the foundations of the research. As mentioned, an exploratory survey approach utilised a questionnaire as a means to examine the five research questions. These questions explore two main areas, that of children's perceptions of seniors as well as that of intergenerational contact. Children's perceptions are to be ascertained through responses on a Likert based scale and supported with the responses to open-ended questions. The intergenerational contact section will examine facets such as frequency of contact, relationship to the seniors and the number of seniors with whom the children have contact. Thus, an Interpretivist / Constructivist theoretical paradigm has been adopted as a way of compiling the children's responses.

Looking Forward

Chapter Two will utilise current and past literature to provide a background setting for this research. The literature will examine issues pertinent to children's perceptions of seniors such as attitudes, stereotypes and 'ageism'. Other areas to be investigated include intergenerational communication and programmes, as well as delving into methodological issues related to the study. Thus, this coming chapter will also provide the foundation for the discussion section.
CHAPTER 2
Literature Review

Background

Intergenerational issues are a relatively recent area in the field of Gerontology. Basically, gerontology is concerned with the study of old age and the process of ageing, as well as special problems associated with this process such as elderly abuse and intergenerational issues. The chapter will introduce information relating to the research questions about children's perceptions, intergenerational communication and intergenerational contact. Thus, this chapter aims to provide the background information necessary to gain an understanding of the research topic and the research questions.

Gerontological Theory

Demography of Ageing

Ageing in Australia has become a focal research area because of the significance in the increase in numbers and proportion of older persons in our society. Such a demographic event has sometimes led to the defining of 'old age' as a 'social problem' (Minichiello, Alexander, & Jones, 1992). Issues researched range from the economic and social implications of ageing to the role seniors take on in the community and family life (Binstock, & George, 1990; Sax, 1993). Moreover, attention has also focused on the effects on Australian society, specifically, of an ageing population.
Demographic trends reflect the changing composition of Australia's population. Some projections include that over the next four decades Australians will witness the continual increase in the 'greying' population. With the increase in the average life expectancy set to continue, it is projected that there will be more people aged sixty-five and over in our society. This also demonstrates, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1994, p. 2), "increasing proportions of elderly people and decreasing proportions of children". Therefore, demographic trends provide some vital information concerning the composition of our society.

Stereotyping

In exploring intergenerational issues, one needs to investigate the issue of stereotyping, especially the role it plays in the maintenance of values, attitudes and beliefs about old age and ageing in our society (Levin, 1975). Values and attitudes provide the foundations for the beliefs that shape and guide our perceptions of and responses to others (Biggs, 1993). Attitudes towards ageing are formed through one's childhood, youth and middle age, and "lay the essential foundations for successful ageing" in later years (Powell, 1992, p.41).

An attitude is a relatively stable opinion containing a cognitive element, such as one's perceptions and beliefs about a topic, as well as an emotional element or feelings relating to the topic (Wade, & Tavris, 1990). Many of our attitudes are connected to deep-rooted values that we hold. Furthermore, our attitudes influence how people see the world and the attributions we make to explain events (Zimbardo, & Leippe, 1991). Attitudes can range from trivial, changeable opinions to deeply held, inflexible convictions.
A stereotype is a summary impression of a group of people in which a person believes that all members of that group share a common trait or traits. It is one of the cognitive schemas by which we map the world (Wade, & Tavris, 1990). Stereotypes may be negative or positive.

The fact that everyone generates stereotypes is in itself neither good or bad. Moreover, a stereotype is viewed as a way of organising experience, of making sense of the differences among individuals and groups, and of predicting how people will behave. Although stereotypes do help us to put the world together, they result in three distortions of reality (Wade, & Tavris, 1990).

Firstly, stereotypes accentuate differences between groups, emphasising the ways in which groups are different, not their common features (MacNeil, Ramos, & Magafas, 1996). This results in the view that the stereotyped group may seem odd, unfamiliar or "not like us". Secondly, stereotypes underestimate differences within older groups, whereby people realise that their own groups are made up of all kinds of individuals. Thus, stereotypes create an impression that all members of other groups are the same. Finally, individuals have a selective perception of people, whereby they tend to see only what fits the stereotype and to reject any perceptions that do not fit (Wade, & Tavris, 1990).

According to Thomas and Hallebone (1995, p. 3) "stereotypes are usually based on some element of truth, which is often unrepresentative of the entire group, and they are employed as generalisations about all members of the particular group". Stereotypes do not always present a view of reality that is 'wrong'. Many stereotypes, as stated above, have 'some element of truth' to them, capturing with some accuracy something about the group.
Shaw (1991) believes that stereotypes arise out of a fear, which is believed to be based on an individual's unwillingness to accept a characteristic or quality in someone, which they personally reject. The problems occur when people assume that the particular grain of truth represents everyone within that group, and they interpret an observation in a negative way (Wade, & Tavris, 1990). In the course of growing up, children are subjected to a series of experiences which may assist in the acquisition of stereotypes. This mainly occurs through interaction with parents, family members, other individuals and the media (Peterson, 1989).

Ageism

Stereotypes, beliefs and attitudes concerning senior members of our community, have over many years developed and evolved (Radford, 1987). Our society enforces rules about the penalties and privileges of membership in particular age groups by punishing deviants from these 'age norms' with ostracism and ridicule (Bytheway, 1995; Hughes Schneewind, 1994; Peterson, 1989). This is one view concerning the concept of 'ageism', which was developed by Robert Butler (1969) to describe a form of bigotry, like racism and sexism, which unfairly limits an individual's access to valued opportunities and priorities on the basis of an irrelevant criterion (Bytheway, 1995; Peterson, 1989). Ultimately, however, discrimination on the basis of age is something which we all will face in our lives at some time (Australian Council on the Ageing, 1987).

The term Ageism was defined as "prejudice by one age group toward other age groups" by Butler (as cited in Job, 1983, p. 6). Butler, furthermore, examines the issue of ageism as one of a power imbalance between younger and older persons. Thus, ageism is now established,
amongst researchers and gerontologists, as a starting point for many of the investigations into ageing and seniors (Biggs, 1993).

Writers (Dittman-Kohli, 1990; Donow, 1994) do have differing opinions concerning the composition of ageism. For example, Biggs (1993 p. 85) believes that ageism is a "... particular form of oppression arising from the social construction of older age". Furthermore, Job (1984, p. 3) states "ageism, like racism and sexism, creates its own self-fulfilling prophecies and promotes lifestyles that damage individual potential".

Ageism is a set of beliefs originating in the biological variation between people and relating to the ageing process (Bytheway, 1995). A consequence of ageism is it generates and reinforces fear and denigration concerning the ageing process.

**Impact of Language**

The means by which our stereotypes are communicated is within language. The vocabulary of age is particularly varied. It is not difficult to recognise the 'ageist' notions inherent in terms of abuse such as 'silly old fart'. The word 'old' is widely associated with scorn, fear and vilification (Bytheway, 1995). The repeated use of the word 'old' in such abusive language reinforces the negative associations of age. In recent times, the word 'elderly' has acquired a certain predominance in gerontology, and in social policy and care literature (Howe, 1990).

The term 'elderly' has certain appealing ideological connotations. The word 'elder' carries with it a sense of respect and dignity. Through its loose association with respect, a positive view is presented by this term (Bytheway, 1995). Thus, language is a significant tool in assisting and limiting our views on ageing. Moreover, further research needs to be done
into the relationship between terminology, the categorisation of people and the production of positive stereotypes.

**Children's Perceptions of Seniors**

Research examining children's attitudes towards seniors has found in many cases that older people, as a group, are generally regarded in a negative manner. However, some studies offer evidence to the contrary, in that they believe that not all children hold universally negative attitudes towards old age (Valeri-Gold, 1996). There are a variety of reasons why inconsistent findings have occurred (Thomas, & Hallebone, 1995).

**Formation of Attitudes - Theories**

In studying children's formation of attitudes towards seniors, Isaacs and Bearison (1986) propose that the assimilation of negative stereotypes may begin as young as four years of age. Their research concluded that the development of ageist prejudice occurs along with the development of other prejudices such as sexism and racism.

Children as young as four years were capable of reliably distinguishing between aged and non-aged individuals... By six years, there was significant prejudice expressed against the aged individuals in attitude scale scores and behavioural measures. The difference between six and eight years was a more differentiated basis for their discrimination against the aged in terms of abilities, personalities, and sex of aged individuals (Isaacs & Bearison, 1986, p.191).

Moreover, in reviewing research, it is important to note literature concerning children's awareness and understanding of their social world (Grieve, & Hughes, 1990). In recent research a new picture of what children
understand about themselves and other people, as well as information on
the extent of their interest in and sensitivity to other people, has been
gained. It is known that from their second year of life, children are
increasingly articulate participants in discussions of their own relationships,
those of others, and more generally of the rules and expectations within
their own social worlds (Dunn, 1993).

A central argument is that this view of children's social understanding has major implications for their nature and development. One factor is the significance of communication, perception, and cognition in children's relationships and finally, the contribution of differences in children's individual characteristics (Dunn, 1993).

The theme of children's social understanding of their world focuses
on the significance of language and communication, perception, and
cognition in children's relationships (Smith, & Cowie, 1988). Children from
their second year, talk about feelings, their own and those of other people.
They enquire about and debate why people behave the way they do and,
over the preschool years, they develop an increasingly firm grasp of the
links between people's behaviour and their intentions, desires and beliefs.
By the age of three, children refer to social rules and expectations that are
the currency of the wider world (Dunn, 1993).

Another theory, which attempts to examine the development of
children's perceptions and attitudes is Kohlberg's Theory of Cognitive
Development. This theory views that a set of rules should be learned and
observed rigidly at first by children. This is followed by the acquisition of
more rules and then more sophisticated rules. The child then modifies the
existing rules to take into account new data and exceptions to these rules.
Finally, a looser and more flexible attitude towards the rules appears after
they have been completely mastered (Peterson, 1990).

Psychologist, Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development proposes five stages of cognitive development. The first is the sensory-motor stage which occurs between birth and two years, where individuals learn through concrete actions such as looking, hearing, touching. This is followed by the pre-operational stage, which witnesses the accelerated use of symbols and languages in play and the imitation of adult behaviour which occurs between two and seven years of age (Wade, & Tavris, 1990).

The third stage occurs between six years and eleven years and this sees the concrete operations in a child. This stage concerns the nature and the quality of children’s thought which changes significantly during this period. According to Piaget, during these years children come to understand the principles of conservation, reversibility, and cause and effect. They understand the nature of identity, that a girl doesn’t turn into a boy by wearing a boy’s hat. They also learn specific mental operations, such as addition, subtraction, and categorisation not just of numbers, but of people, events and actions (Wade, & Tavris, 1990).

Children’s thinking at this age is called “concrete” because it is still grounded in concrete experiences and concepts. Children at this age do not have the ability to understand abstract ideas or to think deductively (drawing a conclusion from a premise). They can use their imaginations to try to solve problems but not in a systematic and logical way (Wade, & Tavris, 1990).

The fourth stage involves the development of a child’s formal operational skills. This process occurs from twelve years and continues into adulthood and this marks the beginning of abstract reasoning in an individual (Wade, & Tavris, 1990). Thus, these final two stages are of
particular importance, with these age groups being involved in the study.

Development of Attitudes Towards Ageing

Research concerning children's perceptions of seniors has been important in understanding the development of their attitudes towards ageing. Although, children have limited contact with seniors in general, they are probably more aware of and interact more often with family members (Ponzetti, & Folkrod, 1989). Moreover, recent research has reported that familiarity between children and seniors influences children's attitudes towards elderly persons (Dellmann-Jenkins, Lambert, & Fruit, 1991; Van Ranst, Verschueren, & Marcoen, 1995; Yamazaki, 1994).

Intergenerational Communication

A number of factors contribute to intergenerational misunderstandings. Firstly, there is the possibility that age differences will influence communication depending upon the degree of overlap between younger and older persons (Kendig, 1986). Thus, this allows mutually constructed meaning and action to emerge.

Secondly, the degree to which individuals are organised into cohorts, may affect the barriers of understanding between the generations. Here, a cohort refers to a group of individuals who share certain life-experiences by virtue of having a similar age (Shaw, 1991). Thus, the issue is raised concerning how much contact occurs between generations. Biggs (1993) further illustrates the point that if there is little contact, then it is easier for communication to become stereotyped.

A third factor concerns an individual's ability to have experience of
an older age’ (Biggs, 1993). It would be impossible for someone of twelve years to have the experience of a seventy-five year old. However, through interacting with individuals of this age, it may increase one's understanding of the experiences that they may face (Luszcz, Paull, & Fitzgerald, 1985; McGowan, & Blankenship, 1994). Moreover, each of these factors has an influence on intergenerational communication, through determining how close one can get to another person and how messages are interpreted (Biggs, 1993).

**Affect on Attitudes Towards Seniors**

Research demonstrates that the frequency of contact with an older person is not a significant predictor in determining whether individuals have more positive attitudes. Moreover, the nature and quality of the experience, or the contact, appears to be the critical factor in determining the outcome. Research emphasises that an individual’s direct experience with an older person, in controlled settings, appears to be more effective in changing attitudes, than information or discussions on attitudes and facts about ageing (Couper, Sheehan, & Thomas, 1991).

**Intergenerational Programmes**

Over the last decade there has been a tremendous expansion in intergenerational education and service programmes. The first programs emerged in the 1960s due to a concern over the growing number of older persons in the population, the diminishing amount of resources for all ages and the effect of age segregation of the young and the old (Ames, & Youatt, 1994).
Intergenerational programmes, basically, are defined as "activities that bring old and young together for their mutual benefit" (Angelis, 1992, p. 318). Such programmes have the view to develop meaningful contacts between seniors and young people (Short-De Graff, & Diamond, 1996). Intergenerational programmes aim to provide interaction, cooperation and exchange of skills, knowledge or experience between generations to "span the generations and enrich the whole community" (Feeney, 1986, prologue).

**Types of Intergenerational Programmes**

Feeney (1986) states that interaction occurs on three levels. The first, occurs where young people provide services to older persons, the second, where older persons provide services to young people, and the third, where the older and younger generation work co-operatively on an activity or project.

**Why are these Programmes Needed?**

There are several reasons why there is a need for intergenerational programmes. Firstly, with the increase in the mobility of the population, there has been an increase in the geographic separation of many families. Movement of families away from extended families because of career or other reasons results in the reduction of contact between family's older and younger generations. Reasons such as separation, divorce and the limitations of one parent families are all factors which influence intergenerational activity. Furthermore, added to this is the movement of seniors into homogeneous communities, such as retirement villages or nursing homes (Pilpel, 1986).
Secondly, social separation has caused its own problems, where increased feelings of loneliness and rejection among seniors, as well as the decline in their self-esteem and worthfulness, has contributed to the situation (McGowan, & Blankenship, 1994). Moreover, for young people, social separation highlights a growing fear of seniors and the ageing process. Finally, social separation among the generations is based on stereotypes and myths (Pilpel, 1986).

**Benefits of Intergenerational Programmes**

Several benefits have been identified due to the evaluation of intergenerational programmes. Firstly, there is a breakdown of age related myths and stereotyped attitudes of different age groups (Berkson, & Griggs, 1986; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1995). A second benefit is that such programmes promote the acceptance of ageing as a natural process (Bailey, 1991; Strom, 1988). Thirdly, these programmes provide the initiation of oral histories, providing a rich source of a living social history (Strom, & Strom, 1995). Finally, intergenerational programmes provide the basis for the maintenance of individual's sense of worth, purpose, and service to the community (Binks, 1989; Feeney, 1986).

Thus, it can be asked what are the benefits of intergenerational programmes for both seniors and young people. Firstly, they provide young people with more information and a greater understanding of ageing, in particular old age, as a vital component of the life cycle. Secondly, programs assist youth in gaining a better understanding of older people and hopefully, in the process, dispel any myths or negative stereotypes that they may hold about seniors.

Moreover, programs endeavour to provide seniors with opportunities
to make use of any spare time and energy, through involving them in meaningful roles. The process may also enable seniors to develop new relationships in such a setting that can provide them with support and friendship. Finally, the process may assist in destroying many of the myths and stereotypes that the seniors involved may possess about young people (Pilpel, 1986).

In accounting for an increase in the negative attitudes of children after interacting with seniors in an intergenerational program, Corbin, Kagan and Metal-Corbin (1987) suggest that the children had little previous experience with seniors and that the physical differences became more profound upon exposure to them. Thus, although they knew about some health problems of older adults, they were unaccustomed to seeing them so closely. However, a number of positive outcomes were also achieved in this study. The children started to think of their elders in active rather than passive terms, became more familiar with, more comfortable in the company of older adults and consistently displayed an interest in obtaining information about older visitors.

Methodological Issues

Levels of Research

Research into perceptions towards seniors has been conducted on two main levels, on a societal or cultural level and an individual or subgroup level within a society (Thomas, & Hallebone, 1995). Societal research employs a variety of methodologies including interviews, participant observation, ethnographic records and national sample surveys (Abel, & Sankar, 1995; Lincoln, 1995). The second level, individual or sub-
group research, has relied on studies where attitudes are assessed using a variety of measures, which are then analysed (Holstein, 1995; Intrieri, von Eye, & Kelly, 1995; Lincoln, 1995).

Methodological Issues

Methodologies used in previous studies, measuring perceptions or attitudes towards seniors, have had a number of problems as many have measured attitudes as a single dimension, either positive or negative. However, many researchers argue that perceptions that individuals hold towards seniors are complex and multi-dimensional (Thomas, & Hallebone, 1995). Thus, in the present study, a multi-dimensional approach has been adopted as a means of exploring issues towards seniors further.

Methodological problems, which have been associated with previous survey research into perceptions of seniors, include the lack of generalisation of research findings. This is specifically the case in relation to the nature of the samples used and the selection of measurement instruments. Research findings need also to make an important distinction between perceptions towards seniors in general and to a particular senior (Corbin, et al., 1987). Other issues also concern the distinction between perceptions towards seniors and perceptions towards ageing (Berkson, & Griggs, 1986; Corbin, et al., 1987).

Summary

When evaluating literature over the last few decades, the issue of intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors, specifically, has emerged only recently. However, during previous decades researchers
have shown interest in issues such as stereotyping and how people develop their attitudes. There is also now greater recognition of the role that personal experience plays in the development of such stereotypes, as well as the impact that this experience may have for the future.

Looking Forward

Chapter Three details the methodology employed in this study. This includes information about the research participants, the research design, instrument design and the procedure used. Ethical considerations were also important and the measures taken are detailed in this chapter. Thus, the following chapter will examine how the research was conducted to address the research questions.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

Background

This chapter describes the research techniques utilised in this study. It details how the participants were selected, what type of research is being undertaken, how the research instrument, the questionnaire, was designed, and its subsequent implementation. The chapter will provide a background to the data analysis which follows.

Participants

The research population was drawn from Western Australian, metropolitan, primary school aged children from upper school, Years Six and Seven. One hundred and six (106) students, in Year 6 and 7, took part in the research from one metropolitan primary school. Fifty-eight (58) of the students were female and forty-eight (48) were male.

Sampling

The process of non-probability sampling refers to the selection of cases other than by random means (Singleton, Straits, & Straits, 1993). Non-probability sampling techniques are used in situations when probability sampling techniques are either impractical or unnecessary (de Vaus, 1995). Samples which are based on non-probability principles are usually selected because of availability, convenience or economic reasons.

There are however, two acknowledged weaknesses of non-
probability sampling. Firstly, these techniques cannot control the researcher bias in the selection of participants and secondly, their pattern of variability cannot be predicted from probability sampling theory. This makes it impossible to calculate the sampling error or to estimate the sample precision (Singleton, et al., 1993).

However, in many research studies this form of sampling is both more practical and more appropriate than probability sampling. Some studies where non-probability sampling techniques have been utilised include situations where only a few cases can be included in the sample and when studying past events, whereby only a fraction of relevant material can usually be accessed (Oppenheim, 1992).

There are several types of non-probability sampling techniques which include convenience sampling, purposive sampling and quota sampling. The technique adopted in this study is convenience sampling, whereby the researcher selects a requisite number from the cases that are conveniently available (Luborsky, & Rubinstein, 1995). This type of sampling method is easy, quick and inexpensive. However, according to Singleton, et al, (1993, p. 160) this form of sampling is a "catch-as-catch-can" method where there is no way of determining to whom, other than the sample itself, the results can apply. The sample was chosen for this study because of the geographic closeness of the school, and the willingness and availability of the school and staff to participate.

Thus, one issue considered was how to increase the response rate of the participants. Oppenheim (1992) suggested several factors which may increase response rates, such as providing advanced warning of the survey taking place, notifying how the participants were selected, giving reminders and an insurance of confidentiality and anonymity.
Furthermore, the appearance of the questionnaire and length plays an important role in the response rate. The topic should also have some degree of importance or interest to the participants and rapport can be developed between researcher and participants. Despite a researcher's best laid plans, there are always those who do not wish to participate and thus, this study acknowledges these in the data.

Sample Size

One hundred and forty-nine (149), Year Six and Seven students were asked to participate in the study. One hundred and eleven (111) agreed to participate, which ended in one hundred and six (106) completing the questionnaire. The drop out rate which occurred between those who agreed to participate and those who actually completed the questionnaire was due to students being away on the day the questionnaire was delivered.

Research Design

A survey approach has been adopted in this project. Survey research, as defined by Royse (1991) can be thought of as the portraits of attitudes, beliefs or behaviours at one point in time. Using a predetermined set of questions or issues, surveys reveal what a group of respondents is thinking, feeling, or doing at the time during which it is conducted.

There are two main types of surveys, these being descriptive and explanatory. Descriptive surveys aim to estimate as precisely as possible the nature of existing conditions of a population, while exploratory surveys seek to establish a cause and effect relationship (Burns, 1995; Royse,
The method being employed in this research is an exploratory (or causal) survey, whereby the researcher collects data in an attempt to show that some stimulus (independent variable) caused or had an effect on something else (dependent variable) (Royse, 1991).

Limitations of the Research Design

Limitations of surveys can be divided into two main categories, philosophically-based and technique-based.

Philosophical Restrictions

It has been argued that surveys cannot establish convincing causal relationships or connections between variables (Agnew, & Pyke, 1994). Also, surveys have been viewed as being incapable of getting to the meaningful aspects of social action. This is based on the belief that actions of conscious people who make choices have values, goals and attitudes which motivate behaviour (Black, 1993). Thus, research must take into account these when evaluating why people behave and think as they do.

Surveys also look specifically at particular aspects of people's beliefs and actions. Misunderstandings are likely to occur if one's behaviour is taken out of the context in which it occurred (de Vaus, 1991). One assumption made sometimes by survey research is that human action is determined by external forces and this may neglect the role of human consciousness, values and intentions as sources of action.

Furthermore, survey research has been equated with the rigid models of science, which centre around hypothesis testing and significance testing, which do not rely so much on creativity or imagination (Shippman, 1988). Survey research is a product of empiricist thought, where a mass of
statistics and facts are collected and according to de Vaus (1995, p. 8) provide “nothing of theoretical value”. Finally, not everything in our world is measurable by surveys and that is why other methods should be employed when appropriate.

**Technique Restrictions**

Surveys have also been criticised because of the techniques employed. Firstly, highly structured questionnaires are too restrictive because they provide responses which are too narrow to gain an understanding of the total situation (Judd, et al., 1991). Moreover, surveys are viewed as being ‘too statistical’ and reduce interesting questions into “incomprehensible numbers” (de Vaus, 1995, p. 9).

**Research Instrument**

One of the main survey techniques or instruments utilised in survey research is the questionnaire. Researchers are divided as to what the term ‘questionnaire’ actually means. The term has been used by some researchers to cover a variety of different methods such as self-administered and postal questionnaires, while others believe it includes interview schedules (administered on the phone or face to face) (de Vaus, 1995).

Moreover, ‘questionnaires’ employ a range of techniques from a set of open-ended questions to more rigidly constructed scales or tests. Many of these techniques mentioned above, are used in combination by researchers to provide answers to their research questions. However, despite this conflict as to what a ‘questionnaire’ is, it is still an important tool
within the research process, with its main function being that of measurement (Babbie, 1990).

There are advantages and limitations with the use of this method when compared with others such as interviews. Firstly, this method is less expensive to use and it is also less time consuming, especially, when compared to interviews (Burns, 1994). Each respondent also receives the identical set of questions, whereas an interview cannot have guaranteed this (Royse, 1991). Errors resulting from the recording of responses by interviewers are also reduced with this technique. Finally, a questionnaire can guarantee confidentiality and elicit more truthful responses from respondents (de Vaus, 1991).

Oppenheim (1992, p. 107) believes that the structure of the educational system has a "ready-made sampling frame" in place, in terms of components such as age, sex and geographical area. Moreover, if access is obtained to whole classes then data can be rapidly obtained by means of self-administered questionnaires completed in the classroom. However, ethical considerations must be a high priority for the researcher during this process.

Thus, the questionnaire employed in this research made use of the group and self-administered methods. The research design section will further examine the individual techniques concerning make up of the questionnaire. These include a set of questions, some of which are closed-ended and others open-ended, and the use of a Likert scale.

**Questionnaire Design**

A three page questionnaire (Appendix V) was formulated as a means to elicit information relating to the research questions. The first
section of the questionnaire examines demographic information about the respondents. Information collected in this section concerns the year at school, gender, number of elderly people with whom they have contact, their relationship to them, along with frequency and type of contact.

The second section evaluates the children's perceptions of seniors and utilises the Likert scale technique eliciting responses of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'undecided', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree', in response to statements about elderly people. Statements of perceptions were developed in consultation with children (outside the research group) aged eleven and twelve years and previous literature.

The Likert Scale, is a composite scale developed by Rensis Likert, in 1932, which is a simpler method of attitude measurement (Burns, 1994). Rensis Likert's primary concern was with the uni-dimensionality or homogeneity, which involves making sure that all items measure the same thing (Moser, & Kalton, 1989). In Likert scales, the procedure involves the researcher selecting a set of attitude statements. The respondent is not asked to decide just whether she or he agrees or disagrees with a response item, but rather to choose between several response categories, which indicate various strengths of agreement and disagreement (Moser, & Kalton, 1989). The categories are assigned scores and the respondent's attitude is measured by his/her total score.

Five categories are normally employed for each item, although three and seven categories have sometimes been used. The five categories are 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'undecided', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. As stated, a participant's score is tabulated by the assignment of a numerical value to each of the answers, ranging from zero (0) for the alternative at one end of the scale to four (4) for the alternative at the other, and then the
summing of the numerical values of all the responses to the statements (Burns, 1994; Moser, & Kalton, 1989; Oppenheim, 1992; Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 1983).

There are several advantages with the use of a Likert scale. This method allows for greater ease of preparation and it is based entirely on empirical data regarding the participant's responses and produces more homogeneous scales. This increases the probability that a unitary attitude is being measured, and ensures that the reliability and validity of the data is reasonably high (Burns, 1994). Furthermore, Likert scales make only a few assumptions which generally are plausible and the success of the scaling can be evaluated through standard techniques of item analysis, reliability analysis and factor analysis (Rossi, et al., 1983).

Limitations of the Likert scale include the fact that the scale does not claim to be more than an ordinal scale, which makes possible the ranking of individuals in terms of the agreeable degree of their attitude toward a given object. It does not provide a basis for saying how much more favourable one is to another, nor for measuring the amount of change after some experience. Furthermore, the total score of an individual has little clear meaning, since many patterns of response to the various items may produce the same score (Burns, 1994).

Moreover, Rossi, Wright and Anderson (1983, p. 255) believe that the success of Likert scales depends heavily on the original set of statements used. If these are poorly designed items, it is unlikely that any "mathematical mastication" will produce good measurements. Another criticism of Likert scales is their lack of reproducibility which refers to the point that the same total score can be obtained in a variety of ways. Despite these facts, the Likert scale still remains a widely used technique for the
exploration of an individual's attitudes.

Table 1

Perception Statements and their Literature Source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Literature Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people are loving towards children.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people like spending time with their family.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a person gets older they get more frail.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people are dependent upon others to live.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people can teach us a lot about our community.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people keep very active.</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people live lonely lives.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people are grumpy towards children.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience is a characteristic that elderly people possess.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people contribute little to the community.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people are happy with their lives.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people behave like children.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people enjoy activities with children.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people share wisdom with children.</td>
<td>8, 5, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people don't like children.</td>
<td>8, 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Davis (1994)
2 Fennel, Phillipson, & Evers (1988)
3 Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm (1995)
4 Job (1984)
5 Kogan (1981)
6 Levin (1988)
7 Parker (1995)
8 Stremmel, Travis, & Kelly-Harrison (1996)

1 These statements are discussed in the sources.
The statements on the questionnaire, which are presented in Table 1, were formed after an investigation of the literature on the research topic. Some of the statements were taken, with minor modifications, from the referenced articles, other statements were referred to within articles, while the questions without a direct source, were alluded to within general literature.

The initial list of statements consisted of approximately twenty statements about seniors, ageing and children’s contact with seniors. This list was narrowed down to the fifteen presented in Table 1. The selection process took place with the consultation of two significant focus groups. The first was a small group of five eleven and twelve year old children, and the second a group of four primary school teachers who teach years six and seven. Both the children and the teachers assisted with the suitability and clarity of the research statements. Areas evaluated included assessing the suitability of language for these age groups and the ease of comprehension of the tasks by the children. From this feedback, the list was narrowed to the fifteen statements presented.

**Statement Analysis on the Questionnaire**

A reliable scale is one on which individuals would obtain much the same score on two different occasions. Thus, a test for the reliability of the total score of items was performed. The procedure adopted is a coefficient alpha, which measures the internal consistency of the item scores.

Analysis of the fifteen statements was performed through the use of item analysis. This looks at the consistency of a person's response on an item compared to each other scale item. Thus, this provides a measure of the overall reliability of the scale. The index of this is given by a statistic
called 'alpha'. This value ranges from 0 to 1. The higher the figure the more reliable the scale.

The coefficient alpha value is 0.621. This result suggests that the scale is only moderately reliable and some of the items or statements are not as reliable as others.

The third section of the questionnaire, asks for qualitative responses to questions defining the term 'elderly', describing the activities that they do with elderly people and their feelings about these activities. The questions are open-ended and provide an avenue for the children to 'tell their story' (Coupland, Coupland, & Grainger, 1991). Thus, the final section of the questionnaire aims to gain responses from the participant, that can provide a background and further enlighten what has already been stated.

**Limitations of the Research Instrument**

Several limitations have been identified, mainly to do with the instrument employed for this study. Firstly, there is the difficulty of securing an adequate response rate when using a questionnaire (de Vaus, 1991). The way that this has been addressed, is by delivering the questionnaire in person, rather than mailing it out. Moreover, the questionnaire is non-flexible in design and there is a possibility of misinterpretation by respondents (Royse, 1991). To counteract this later point, open dialogue was established with the respondents and if there were any problems, then it is hoped that this may have assisted with their clarification.

Issues are also raised concerning the respondents' motivations for answering the questionnaire (Moser, & Kalton, 1989). Furthermore, ambiguous, incomplete or inaccurate information cannot be followed up on. Moreover, several writers have acknowledged the role that social
desirability plays in the responses to questions, whereby rather than give the answer that they feel is 'true', they give a socially desirable one instead (Oppenheim, 1988; Royse, 1991).

Procedure

There were three main stages involved in the implementation of the research. The first was the development stage which involved the researching of background information on the topic and the development of the questionnaire. The second was the permission stage which involved the seeking of permission by stake-holders which included the primary school principal, the classroom teachers, the guardian/s and the children. The final stage was the implementation. This involved the collection and subsequent analysis of the data gathered.

Development Stage

During this stage background reading was done concerning the research topic as well as the methodological considerations. This study evaluated which research design, sampling technique, instrument and delivery would best allow maximum results to be obtained.

Permission Stage

Permission was sought from all the key participants who were involved in this research. Written contact was made with both the Principal (Appendix I), classroom teachers (Appendix III) and parents (Appendix V). A full proposal was presented to the primary school Principal and written consent to take part in the research was obtained. It was vitally important to
gain the written consent from the parents as the children who were partaking in the research were under 18 years.

Implementation Stage

Data Collection

Following school, parental and university approval, collection of the research data took place. This comprised of a single sitting of approximately thirty minutes duration. It took place in the participants' classroom, at a time suitable with the classroom teacher. Participants were informed about why the research was being conducted, and what the research was about, as well as any ethical considerations. Finally, it was outlined as to how the questionnaires were to be filled out.

There are several different ways of administering questionnaires. These include mailed out questionnaires, standardised interviews, self-administered questionnaires and group-administered questionnaires (Oppenheim, 1992). The questionnaire delivered in this research study was done through using the group-administered format, where the questionnaire is given to groups of respondents assembled together. This was utilised because the participants were children in Year Six and Seven of a primary school. Participants of a particular class were given the questionnaire at the same time, in their own classroom. The group size ranged from seventeen to twenty-six, depending on the class. Five classes in total were surveyed.

There are many strengths in the use of this approach. Firstly, it ensures that all respondents answer the questions in the same order and they all have the same amount of time to do so (Singleton, et al., 1993).
Moreover, this technique has the added advantages of the self-administered method, which ensures a high response rate and minimum interview bias, while permitting interviewer assessments, providing necessary explanations and giving the benefit of a degree of personal contact (Oppenheim, 1992).

During this stage (and throughout the session), the participants were encouraged to clarify any concerns or problems that they had. Participants were then asked to complete the questionnaire. In closing, the participants were thanked for their co-operation and asked if they had any feedback on the process.

Data Analysis

The quantitative information collected was analysed using a statistical computer package, Edstats, an Edith Cowan University developed program. Analysis involved the use of both univariate and bivariate data analysis. The analysis of many of the statistics utilised descriptive techniques, whereby mean score, and standard deviation scores were used to assess the data collected. Other statistical procedures included the use of the Pearson r correlation coefficient to assess the correlation between perception scores and the number of seniors with whom the children had contact, and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures to assess the relationship between perception score and frequency of contact.

Evaluation of perceptions was to be done through totalling up scores on the scale. Those with high scores were considered to possess negative views and those with low scores considered to possess positive views. Further analysis of the perception results included the use of a two-factor
factorial ANOVA to evaluate whether there was a significant difference between the means of one group over another. The groups used were year at school and gender.

Analysis of the qualitative data was completed by compiling and sorting the children's responses into categories and an overall picture was obtained. The qualitative data were used to complement and clarify the results from the quantitative section.

**Ethical Considerations**

Research is a dynamic process with the relationship between researchers and respondents based on mutual trust and cooperation. Researchers enter their field of study with relatively few limits and many options for action. This freedom of action has been thought to offer the best opportunities for answering the research questions (Sarantakos, 1993).

Moreover, research practice has demonstrated that this freedom can have adverse effects, creating problems for participants and the rest of the community (Babbie, 1990; de Vaus, 1991). Often uncontrolled freedom violates directly or indirectly the rights of those involved in the research process (Jecker, 1990). Thus, such concern has witnessed the development of codes of ethics worldwide (Gay, 1997; Patton, 1990). Ethics concerns not only issues related to research but also areas such as business, medicine, science, education, psychology and life or personal issues (Charlesworth, 1993).

According to Homan (1991, p. 1), "ethics is the science of morality: those who engage in it determine the values for the regulation of human behaviour". Morality is concerned with the distinction between the good and
the bad and, the right and wrong of one's character or disposition (Jenkins, 1992). Furthermore, it is described as a philosophical discipline which is "primarily concerned with the evaluation and justification of norms and standards of personal and interpersonal behaviour" (cited in Homan, 1991, p.1.) Although these two terms are linked together with values, they are two separate ideas (Nuttall, 1993).

In relation to the research topic, when exploring intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors, three spheres have been identified which cover many of the ethical issues pertaining to the research. The first is the individual level, the second is 'the body of knowledge' level while the third discusses the societal level (Kimmel, 1988).

The first level includes social research and the part played by individual participants, and suggests that special attention should concern the nature of the relationship between the investigator and the individuals who provide the research data. On the second level, there are numerous ethical concerns surrounding the collection, analysis and reporting of the research data which needs to be addressed. Finally, in the societal sphere or third level, special attention must be taken to protect the rights of the community at large, so that they are not jeopardised by the social consequences of research discoveries or by the publication of results (Kimmel, 1988).

**Individual Ethical Sphere**

At an individual level, ethical issues raised can be divided into two main areas, those which concern participants and those which concern the researcher. Ethical issues concerning participants include the assurance of complete confidentiality and privacy of respondents' identities and
responses (Allan, & Skinner, 1991). Secondly, informed consent of both participants and 'gatekeepers' or 'stake holders' needs to be obtained and thirdly, issues relating to the use of specific groups explored. For the purpose of this research, the special group is children (Cavahan, & Jennings, 1983).

For the researcher, issues can be divided into two categories, these being personal and professional issues. Issues of concern can include anything ranging from the researcher's values and attitudes on a sensitive topic, to the relationship between researcher and participants, and organisations or professional bodies (Adams, & Schvaneveldt, 1991). In the case of this research, the Education Department of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University placed professional ethical requirements upon the research process.

One of the most important relationships in the research process is that between the researcher and the respondent. The consideration of issues such as the welfare of the respondents, free and informed consent, the right to privacy, right to anonymity and the right to confidentiality are important in the conduct of the research.

**Informed Consent**

According to Homan (1991, p. 69) the basic presumption behind informed consent is that "human subjects of research should be allowed to agree or refuse to participate in the light of comprehensive information concerning the nature and purpose of the research". Furthermore, there are two elements which constitute the words 'informed' and consent. 'Informed' refers to the fact that all aspects of what is to occur and what may occur is disclosed to the participant. The participant should be also able to
comprehend the information. 'Consent' refers to the issue of the participant being competent to make a rational and mature judgment and that the agreement to participate should be voluntary, free from coercion and undue influence (Homan, 1991).

Such definitions sound good in theory. However, their application in reality poses several problems for researchers, especially with research relating to children. For the purposes of argument, individuals under the age of thirteen will be referred to as children. Thus, the expectation that an eleven or twelve year old is able to make a "mature" decision is questioned by many (Reece, & Siegal, 1986). Furthermore, there are issues concerning how much participants should know prior to undertaking the research as well as what they should know especially since there is a high probability that this will affect the data findings.

In this research, participants were informed concerning both the research process and their rights to withdraw, if they saw fit. However, even before this took place, because of the children's age parental consent needed to be obtained, and this took the form of a signed permission slip.

There are many reason as to why researchers should obtain participant consent which range from the rights of participants to those of the professional interests of the researcher and the researching community. Firstly, many arguments exist concerning the importance of individual's rights to know what is happening to them. This has been no more evident than in the development of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 12, "No one shall be subject to arbitrary interference with his privacy" (cited in Homan, 1991, p. 71).

Permission also needed to be obtained from the 'gatekeepers' or 'stake holders'. This is an important consideration in the research process.
According to Homan (1991) gatekeepers are those who exercise control over access to data and to human subjects. The granting of access implies consent to conduct the research and this varies according to the gatekeeper and the situation. The main gatekeeper in this research was the primary school Principal. Permission to access students was attempted through personal contact and discussions during the early stages of the proposal, with a full proposal and consent form being presented for approval.

According to Homan (1991, p. 84), the use of gatekeepers is "barely countenanced" in professional organisations, except when applied to research on children, where there is the possibility of diminishment of their capacities of judgment. Moreover, the issues of confidentiality for both the participants and the school being accessed are also of concern.

In the research concerning children's perceptions of seniors, questions arise concerning the parent or guardian's ability to consent for a child, especially since many would be able to consent themselves. Furthermore, this issue may have wider implications concerning the responses given. If the child did not want to participate and the guardian said that s/he should, then it could elicit negative responses and comments from the child. Also there is a possibility that the child could become distracted through the course of the process. Through allowing the children the option to pull out at any stage of the research if they felt uncomfortable, this issue was adequately addressed (Homan, 1991).

There are several criticisms concerning the use of informed consent. Firstly, there has been criticism surrounding the practicality of consent. One such problem is to what degree can the 'ideal' position on informed consent, as written in codes, be translated and implemented during the
research. Thus, this was established primarily in respect to the protection of individual's privacy (Homan, 1991).

Another issue concerns a participant's right to refuse versus a researcher's need to obtain valid results, such as a high response rate. This issue explores the notion that 'consenting subjects' have a sufficient awareness of what they are disclosing. This is of significant importance when research utilises children as the assumption is made by the researcher that the participant has the control over his/her perceptions (Homan, 1991; Lewins, 1992).

Furthermore, another issue is the researcher's motivation to fulfil ethical obligations concerning informed consent. This serves to protect the subject's supposed right to know that s/he is participating in research. However, for the researcher, what is of importance concerns not only awareness that research is taking place, but also the moral responsibility for the safety of all participants (Cavanaugh & Jennings, 1983; Homan, 1991). Finally, it has also been reported that subjects who are not, prior to the investigation, properly or completely informed of the nature of the process feel alienated or betrayed when discovering this (Gay, 1987).

**Body of Knowledge Ethical Sphere**

The second level includes ethical issues in the methodology of the research, such as choice of subjects, data collection and analysis techniques. Questions to be addressed include whether the participants are volunteers and can be assured that they will not be able to be identified (Gonsalves, 1989). Furthermore, other issues surround the publication of the material and the topic of the research (Shippman, 1988).

There are several professional issues which must be considered by
the researcher prior to the conducting of the research. Firstly, the researcher needs to be able to ensure accuracy in data collection and data processing. Secondly, the study must employ relevant research methodology and appropriate data interpretation. Moreover, the researcher should ensure accurate reporting, in "an unbiased manner" (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 23).

Many research organisations require that their members follow ethical codes and practices which they have set down (Kimmel, 1988.) In the case of this research, the Education Department of Western Australia and Edith Cowan University are the main organisation bodies. The Education Department requires that informed consent or permission to proceed with the research is given by the principal of the primary school as well as the guardians of the children. The University requires the researcher to satisfy such conditions before research can be undertaken on participants. Furthermore, at a wider level it is argued that, through the use of an open and honest research process, a more positive view on researchers and the researching process will be provided for (Black, 1993; Gonsalves, 1989; Hughes, 1990).

Societal Ethical Sphere

The final level, societal, explores issues concerning the 'public's right to know' and freedom of information (as required by law) (Lewins, '992). However, one should note that there are many issues to be considered when taking on research. Thus, a specific ethical issue has been chosen for evaluation. The issue, informed consent, is believed to play a major role in the research process, both in early and later stages (Royse, 1991).
Summary

In summary, the questionnaires were delivered to the one hundred and six participants with relatively few problems. All ethical issues were addressed prior to the beginning of the data collection sessions. The questionnaires were analysed using the procedures which have been detailed.

Looking Forward

The subsequent two chapters will explore the findings which have been elicited from the children's responses. The first explores the research topic of children's perceptions where children's responses on the perception scale, as well as their written comments were analysed. The following chapter then looks at the issue of intergenerational contact, including aspects of the frequency of contact, the relationship of the children to the seniors and examples of intergenerational experiences.
CHAPTER 4
Children's Perceptions of Seniors

Background
This chapter will examine the perceptions held by children concerning elderly people and ageing. Firstly, descriptive data will be provided about the demographic characteristics of the survey population. This is followed by an analysis of the quantitative data from the perception scale and qualitative responses.

Descriptive Data

Demographic Characteristics
One hundred and forty-nine (149) students were asked to participate in the questionnaire. From this initial sample, one-hundred and six (n=106) students actually participated. Thus, forty-three students did not participate from the initial sample of Year Six and Seven students from the primary school. The breakdown of the initial sample and the participating sample is demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2
Initial Sample and Participating Sample According to Year Groups.

| Year 6 | 68 | 50 |
| Year 7 | 81 | 56 |
| N=149 | N=106 |
Table 2 demonstrates that the greatest non response of students occurred in the Year Seven group, with twenty five students not participating, while in the Year Six group, only eighteen did not participate. There were many reasons for this occurrence. These included students being away when the permission notes went out as well as when the questionnaire was delivered; there were parental objections to them participating; and forgetfulness to bring the permission slip back on time.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year at School</th>
<th>Year 6</th>
<th>Year 7</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>N=106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The breakdown of students in the participating sample according to both gender and year at school is demonstrated in Table 3. The responses to the questionnaires, which are indicated in the table, demonstrate an uneven distribution of male / female participants, with 55% being females, which leaves males making up 45% of the sample (Figure 1). Table 3, also reflects that in the Year Six group, there was equal male and female participation. The Year Seven group, however, showed an uneven distribution with more females (59%) taking part in the research.
The percentages of participants, according to their year at school, demonstrate that the majority were in Year 7 (53%). However, there are no significant differences between the numbers in each group. Thus, this is demonstrated in Figure 2.
**Background**

The second part of the data analysis involves the examination of the section relating to the perceptions or attitudes held by the participants. This was elicited through the use of a Likert scale. Fifteen statements were provided and respondents were provided with the options of ‘Strongly Agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘Undecided’, ‘Disagree’ and ‘Strongly Disagree’. The individual statement responses were then cross-marked with a scale, whereby ‘0’ was a positive perception and ‘4’ a negative one. Each statement score was added and a total score was recorded.

**Perception Scale Scores**

The distribution of total scores from the Likert scale of all participants is demonstrated in Table 4. Scores range from six (6) to thirty-three (33). The median scores are seventeen (17) and eighteen (18). The mode, or the single most common value is seventeen (17). Participants were perceived to view seniors positively if their score was in the range of six to sixteen. A score of seventeen and eighteen is neutral (median scores) and scores between nineteen to thirty-three are perceived as being those of negatively viewing participants in this sample.

Moreover, the two main groups, positive and negative, were further divided. It was identified that there were few individuals spread at both ends of the scale. These individuals are perceived to possess extreme views within the sample group. Those who score between six and eight have extreme positive views, while those who score between twenty-eight and thirty-three have extreme negative perceptions. Thus, it should be noted
that these extreme scores specifically apply to this sample group only. If a different population was assessed, then the variation may be different.

Table 4
Separation of Perception Scores into Positive and Negative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Number of Participants (N=106)</th>
<th>Perceive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 - 8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Extremely Positively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - 16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Positively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 - 18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 - 27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Negatively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 - 33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Extremely Negatively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3
Distribution of Respondents According to their Scores on the Perception Scale.
The statements have elicited the data featured in Table 5, which examines the results according to the children's year at school and gender. The numbers of participants in each group are represented by 'N', the mean and the standard deviation are also given for each.

Table 5
Results of the Perception Scale According to Year at School and Gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sum of X</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>5.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>16.24</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>19.33</td>
<td>5.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>17.74</td>
<td>5.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>106</td>
<td>1852</td>
<td>17.47</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average score (mean) on the perception scale for the sample (N=106) was 17.47. The standard deviation (SD) or the measure of the spread of scores was 5.47. This indicates how far the scores varied from the mean. Comparison of means based on year at school and gender indicates that Year Six females recorded the lowest score (16.00), while Year Seven females recorded the highest (19.33). Moreover, Year Six males had the smallest standard deviation score (4.95), while Year Seven females recorded the most variation between scores (5.65).
Year at School

The results from Table 5 can be further broken down into year at school (Table 6) and gender (Table 7).

Table 6

**Results of Perception Scale According to Year at School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year at School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sum of X</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>16.12</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1046</td>
<td>18.68</td>
<td>5.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table is able to demonstrate that the Year Six group, on average, performed better and held more positive views with a mean of 16.12, while the Year Seven group scored higher at 18.68. The Year Six group also had the smallest standard deviation (SD) which reflects that there is only a small variation in scores recorded in this group (SD = 5.04), whereas the Year Seven group has a larger standard deviation (SD = 5.61). This demonstrates that there is a much greater variation or spread of scores from the mean.

Gender

Results from Table 7 indicate that males had a mean of 16.96 which indicates that they held more positive views than females (17.90). There
was also only a slight variation between the standard deviation for the males and females.

Table 7
Results of Perception Scale According to Gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sum of X</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1038</td>
<td>17.90</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>16.96</td>
<td>5.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Year at School and Gender

A two-factor factorial ANOVA (analysis of variance) was performed to examine the effects of the two nominal independent variables, year at school and gender, on one interval or ratio dependent variable, the Likert score. Year at school is divided into Year Six students and Year Seven students, while gender is split into female and male.

The p value is a measure of the probability of a chance occurrence of findings for the sample. The probability level is 0.05 or five (5) chances in one hundred (100). Thus, if 'p' is less than 0.05 then the result is statistically significant.

Results obtained demonstrate that the p value for the 'year at school' was 0.016. This indicates that there was a significant difference in the means of the Year Six and Year Seven students on the Likert Perception scale. The overall mean for Year Six was 16.12 and the Year Seven group was 18.68 (Table 6).
Table 8
Two-Factor ANOVA of the Children's Perceptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F ratio</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>172.92</td>
<td>6.003</td>
<td>0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23.119</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>0.372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year x Gender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.047</td>
<td>0.418</td>
<td>0.519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>28.807</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The p value for the gender variable is 0.372. This indicates that there was no significant difference between female and male scores on the perception scale. The overall mean for the female group is 17.90 and the male group is 16.96 (Table 7).

A test for significant interaction effects between the two main effects, year at school and gender, was subsequently performed. The p value is 0.519. Thus, there were no significant interaction effects between these two values.

The above results are also reflected in the F ratio scores, where any score above one (1) is deemed to be statistically significant. The F ratio for the children's 'year at school' is 6.003, while for 'gender' the ratio is 0.803 and, 'year at school' and 'gender' is 0.418 (Table 8). This indicates that among the groups involved, there are statistically significant differences in the responses based on the participant's 'year at school'.
Children's Perceptions - A Qualitative Analysis

Through the examination of responses given, it was found that the descriptions fell into four main categories or themes. The first is termed "later life". This category has the more simple and straight-forward answers such as "older generation" and "getting old". The second category is "age", and in these cases, participants described the term, elderly, according to biological age. Category three defined elderly people by their "personal characteristics". This included physical attributes such as "wrinkles" and "grey hair" and, emotional attributes such as being "loving", "caring" and possessing "wisdom". This was done by either listing the characteristics of an elderly person, providing a physical description, describing their emotional value, or the wisdom they offer or information about their lives. The final category has seniors defined as "grandparents".

Later Life

Many of the respondents were 'short and sweet' to the point as to what they thought the term elderly means. One child remarked "Elderly means to me Old", while others were a little more subtle describing an elderly person as someone who is "getting older" or someone from the "older generation". Another participant remarked that "elderly to me means someone who is getting into the older stage of their life". It was also stated that "elderly means a healthy person but old".

Many children felt it was important to explain exactly what they meant by the definition that they had provided. This was achieved through explanations such as "elderly people are older but it doesn't mean they are meaner, or weaker or stupider". Some respondents, however, were a little
unsure as to how to explain the term but responded by saying “I’m not sure! Older than I am” and “an older person than you, that’s growing up”.

**Age**

The second way the participants described the term ‘elderly’ was in terms of a senior’s age, either in comparison to themselves or someone else, or according to chronological age. One individual remarked that an elderly person is “someone who is older than me”, while another said it is someone who is “a lot more older than me (about 50 to 60 years older)”. A number however, stated that an elderly person is someone “older than you”. Thus, the majority of the children appear to associate the word ‘elderly’ with the word ‘old’. However, they did not appear to view it in a negative manner, rather they viewed ‘old age’ as something unique and special.

Despite the fact that on the first page of the questionnaire an elderly person was defined as someone sixty years and over, there were still considerable variations in the chronological age stated by the children as to who is an elderly person. Other responses were as follows:

- When someone has reached the age 40+;
- ‘Elderly’ to me means a person 50 or over or a grandparent;
- Older people, 50 and over, people who live in retirement homes, pensioners;
- This term means to respect and to be polite and they are over the age of 50; and
- Elderly means to me normally grandparents or people that are older than 70 or 80.

Therefore, even ‘young’ forty year olds were considered to be elderly in the
eyes of these children, as were those over eighty years of age. It is unknown why there is such a considerable variation in the ages presented by the children. However, it is suggested that because we each perceive aspects of our world differently, so do the children in their perceptions of chronological age. Also it may be that the actual age of the seniors with whom they have contact with may influence this perception.

**Personal Characteristics**

There were several themes which appeared under the heading of personal characteristics. Children's responses in this category described an elderly person in terms of the different attributes or characteristics which they possess. One of the ways this was done was through the listing of both physical and emotional characteristics of elderly people. Examples from respondents include:

- Old, wise, intelligent, smart, caring, loving;
- Old, over 60, kind, caresome, friendly, loving;
- To me, elderly means old, kind, caring, possibly sick in some way and always knowledgeable;
- Caring, love, doing activities with grandchildren; and,
- A person who is older and sometimes needs help, and a nice person (sometimes).

Of these responses, there were several terms which appear to be common among all respondents. These terms are 'old', 'loving', and 'caring'. The majority of respondents mentioned the word 'old' within their response. These are not assessed as negative perceptions, more as statements of fact, whereby the children are distinguishing between 'young' and 'old'.
The participants who listed characteristics of an elderly person in this fashion tended to perceive the emotional attributes that elderly people possess, such as being kind, caring, loving, friendly and wise. Others focused on physical attributes such as being frail, having grey hair, being short, or wrinkled. These responses demonstrate the respondents’ knowledge about the physical ageing process and how we change as we get older.

Moreover, there were other participants who dwelt on the issue of an elderly person’s physical appearance. One said that an elderly person is “someone quite old with wrinkles all over their body”. Another participant remarked:

Older than my mother and usually friendly. To me it means they are the same people with older bodies and slightly fragile and a lot of fun.

Thus, the children perceived that the word ‘elderly’ refers to a series of different characteristics, both physical and emotional.

Another interesting theme, which emerged in the responses, was the notion of ‘elderly’ meaning ‘wisdom’ or the knowledge which is imparted to children by a senior. One respondent stated that:

[I]t doesn’t mean a lot. It just means that the people are older, wiser and smarter than anyone. They have been alive for more years and anyone who calls them stupid, cranky and old is completely and utterly wrong.

Others remarked that an elderly person is “an older person with the wisdom of an owl”. Moreover, wisdom was perceived as an interactive process whereby “you share things with them and they share wisdom with you”. Thus, the children perceived that wisdom is a characteristic that elderly people possess. Furthermore, it was also remarked that an elderly person
is someone who is "respected... by a younger person" and "someone who you can usually rely on".

How elderly people lived their lives also emerged as a theme in responses. The answers ranged from describing how "independent" elderly people are to how active they are:

When people become more independent, and they always lose their memory and [are] sometimes grumpy.

To me it means that the person can't do as many things as they used to but some things they can.

To me it means that someone may not be as lively or active as they once were.

Elderly to me means someone who is quite old and not as active and fit as they were when they were a child.

Somebody old who tries hard to stay happy and to enjoy the rest of their lives.

Thus, another way that children define the term 'elderly' is according to the physical and emotional characteristics that they perceive the senior to have.

'Grandparents'

The final theme that emerged in the data concerns the association of the term "elderly" with notion of a "grandparent". Many children referred to elderly people as "grandparents" and the relationship with them. Comments included:

Elderly I think to me means old grandparents. People who would do anything for their grandchildren.

Elderly to me means an older person usually grandparents, older people who have lived a long life and are very caring for children.
I think of my grandad, he is like a big teddy bear, he loves children and doing things with them.

Elderly means to me grumps.

Thus, the comments made demonstrate the role that grandparents play in the development of children's concepts, such as the traits of an elderly person. Moreover, it is evident that grandparents are perceived in a loving and caring manner.

The participants provided interesting responses concerning the defining of the term 'elderly'. As demonstrated, responses fell into four main categories. Each story was unique in its own way and assists in the understanding of what children perceive as an 'elderly' person. No one conclusion could be made from the responses, as each definition is different and obviously based on different experiences with seniors in the community.

Summary of Findings

As stated, one hundred and six students from Years Six and Seven from a primary school took part in this survey. Analysis of the children's perceptions was undertaken through the use of quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative data were collected through a Likert based perception scale. Results from this scale reveal that children viewed seniors positively. Further analysis indicated that, on average, Year Six students perceived the seniors more positively, as did the males in the sample. The qualitative data demonstrated a far more diverse, yet positive interpretation of ageing and seniors. Children were asked to respond to what the term 'elderly' meant to them. Responses were varied, but fell into four main
categories, describing seniors in terms of 'later life', 'age', 'personal characteristics' and as a 'grandparent'. It was obvious that children's personal experiences play a significant role in how they define ageing and seniors.

Looking Forward

The following chapter will look to further examine children's perceptions in relation to the issue of intergenerational contact. Issues to be explored include the number of seniors with whom the children have contact, the relationship of the seniors to the children, the frequency of the contact and the types of experiences that the children have. A relationship will also be investigated between the children's perception scores and the number of seniors with whom they have contact and the frequency of contact. Thus, as this chapter explored the issue of children's perceptions of seniors, the following chapter aims to see if there are any links between this and intergenerational contact. The aim is to see if there are one or more significant factors which play a role in affecting the way children perceive seniors and the ageing process.
The previous chapter has provided an understanding of the perceptions which children hold concerning seniors and ageing. Thus, this chapter endeavours to determine whether defined factors have an impact on the children's perceptions of seniors. Such factors to be investigated include frequency of contact, type of contact and the number of seniors with whom children interact. Research suggests that variables such as these play an important role in children's development and maintenance of attitudes.

**Number of Seniors with Whom Children have Contact**

Children were surveyed on the number of seniors with whom they have contact. The research questioned further whether there was any relationship between the score on the perception scale and the number of seniors with whom the children had contact.

The questionnaire asked the participants to respond whether or not they had had contact with a senior. The respondents were given the choice of 'yes' and 'no'. A 100% 'yes' response was recorded, with every child saying that they had contact with a senior.

Analysis of the frequency distribution presented in Table 9 reflects that the majority of students had contact with one to nine seniors. The mean of scores indicated that the children had contact with 5.5 seniors. Two
participants did not respond to this question. One respondent stated that they had contact with sixty seniors, with this value being the most extreme in the sample.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Seniors Seen</th>
<th>Number of Survey Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 3</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 - 9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 100</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=106

Correlation Between Perception Scores and the Number of Seniors with Whom the Children have Contact

A Pearson $r$ correlation was performed using participants' scores on the perception scale and the number of seniors which they stated that they had contact with. Pearson $r$ correlation coefficients can range from -1 to +1. The mean of the perception score is 17.47 (Table 5). The mean for the number of seniors with whom they had contact is 5.50. The Pearson $r$ value recorded is -0.0517. A value near '0' indicates that there is no or little 'real' relationship between the two variables. Thus, there is no relationship between the number of seniors with whom the participants had contact and their score on the perception scale.
The children’s relationships with the seniors that they have contact with is the focus research question for these survey data. The students were asked to describe their relationships to the seniors. There was a variety in the way the children responded to this question. The majority of respondents simply listed “1) Grandparent, 2) Grandparent, 3) Friend, 4) Neighbour”. Through doing this, these respondents matched the number which they had stated exactly with the relationship.

Others however, made statements like:

They’re my grandparents.

My mum works at a nursing home I sometimes go there.

Family- Friends- Relatives- Sporting Groups.

Grandparents, relatives, friends and neighbour.

In these cases, it was harder to exactly know the ratio which made up the number that they had given. Despite this, such responses still gave a good indication of their relationships to the respondent.

Thus, what the responses yielded were in several categories, these being, grandparent, which included step-grandparents and great-grandparents; relative, which included aunt, uncle, and great aunt or uncle; friend, which included grandparent’s friends, family friends and parent’s friends; neighbour, which also included a neighbour’s grandparent; and others such as shopkeeper and nursing home residents.

Only two respondents did not answer this question. Of those who answered, ninety-seven (97) responded that at least one of those seniors with whom they had contact was classified in the grandparent category. Of
those who did not have contact with a grandparent, respondents stated the relationship was with a relative (3), a friend (1) and nursing home resident (1).

Overall, the responses favoured the grandparents, as to the majority of seniors with whom the children had contact. The next popular category was that of relative, followed by the friend and neighbour category.

**Frequency of Intergenerational Contact**

The research question required responses as to how often the children have contact with a senior and whether there is any relationship between their score on the perception scale and the frequency of contact. Respondents were asked to select the option which most applied to the senior with whom they had most contact.

![Figure 4: Frequency of Contact](image)

- More than once a week 29.2%
- Once a week 21.7%
- Once a fortnight 17.9%
- Once a month 14.2%
- Once every 6 months 8.5%
- Once a year 8.5%
- Never 0%

**Figure 4**

**Frequency of Contact**
Figure 4 indicates the composition of results for student responses to the question of how often they had contact with a senior. The data revealed that 50% of those surveyed had contact with a senior once a week or more than once a week. The results also demonstrated that 83% of the children perceived themselves as having contact with a senior at least once a month.

**Relationship between the Frequency of Contact and Perception Scores**

Table 10 demonstrates that children who have contact with seniors "more than once a week" scored lower, and perceive seniors more positively than those who have contact "once a year". The mean for the "more than once a week" was 15.87, while the "once a year" group scored 20.56. Thus, there is a substantial difference in the scores found in each group.

**Table 10**

*Results of Means of Frequency of Contact based on Perception Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than once a week</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15.87</td>
<td>4.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.35</td>
<td>5.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a fortnight</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.95</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.67</td>
<td>5.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once every six months</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18.56</td>
<td>7.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20.56</td>
<td>6.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=106
The table also reflects that the mean of the "once a week group" does not follow the pattern of increasing value on the perception score, with decreasing amount of contact (frequency). Despite the fact that their contact is very frequent, the individuals scored quite high on the perception scale. From this data, it is clearly evident that there are other factors, beside the frequency of contact, that have an impact on the way children perceive seniors.

**Correlation between Frequency of Contact and Perception Score**

A one-way ANOVA was used to assess whether there were any differences in the means of the frequency of contact groups. The following table (11) was elicited.

Table 11

**One-Way ANOVA based on Frequency of Contact and Perception Scores.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>ms</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3046.46</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>199.04</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39.81</td>
<td>1.398</td>
<td>0.2315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>2847.43</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>28.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The p value is found to be above the predetermined alpha level of 0.05. This indicates that there is no significant difference in means between the groups. Thus, from the results obtained, it can be concluded that there is no real or significant difference in the mean scores between the frequency of contact groups.
Types of Contact Experienced in Intergenerational Exchanges

The research question to be examined concerns the type and quality of contact that children perceive they have with seniors. Participants were asked to consider the types of contact that they have with seniors. They were instructed that they could select one, two or all of the options given. The three options presented were:

- **Face to Face** (e.g. visiting),
- **Verbal** (e.g. phone), and
- **Written** (e.g. letters).

The results demonstrated that 36% of respondents indicated that they had only one type of contact, while 40% experienced two types in combination and 24% stated that they did all three types with a senior.

Of those who had only one type of contact with a senior, the face to face option was the most popular with thirty-two (32) respondents, while only six (6) said verbal. Written was the least popular, recording no responses (n=38). Thus, this demonstrates that of those children who experienced only one type of contact with a senior, it is more likely to be face to face.

As stated, 40% of the participants experience two types of contact with a senior. This research shows that the most popular combination was face to face and verbal contact, recording thirty (30) out of the forty-two (n=42) respondents. The combination of verbal and written communication was not as popular with nine (9), followed by face to face and written contact, which three (3) individuals selected. Thus, those children who experience a combination of two types of contact are more likely to visit (face to face) and talk on the phone (verbal) with the seniors. Finally,
twenty-six of the one hundred and six respondents (24%) stated that they experience all the types of contact mentioned with seniors.

**Activities undertaken with Seniors**

Respondents were asked to list the types of activities that they do with an elderly person. Responses varied considerably and they were narrowed down into general areas. Ten main types of activities were discovered, these being:

- Talking,
- Writing,
- Visiting,
- Special Occasions,
- Games,
- Entertainment,
- Leisure Activities,
- Recreational Activities,
- Helping a senior, and
- No activities.

Therefore, the responses are explored in relation to these categories. It should be noted that children gave multiple answers to this question and any statistics refer to the number of times the topics are mentioned.

There were comments however, which were hard to find a category for, so they will be just left to speak for themselves. One child stated that the types of activities they do with seniors are "things that don't make them stress very much". Respondents also simply said that when they are with a senior that they do "just about everything".
Talking

The responses received demonstrate some interesting facts about the types of activities that children do with elderly people. It was found that 66% of respondents referred specifically to "talking" as an activity which they did with a senior, with some respondents simply stating that they would "talk" to a senior. Another stated that "when I go to mum's work, (in a nursing home) I talk to them".

Moreover, the topics of conversation fell into several categories. The most popular topic of discussion was about 'the past':

Tell stories from the past.

We talk about when we were younger.

Talk about when nanna was little.

I also just sit and talk because it's interesting to hear what they did when they were young or in the war.

Other discussions between the senior and the child related to school experiences of the child or what the senior had done. It was also commonplace for talking to be mentioned in conjunction with another activity such as visiting or going out. One participant commented "usually just talking but also going out places".

There was also a variation in how participants talk to elderly people. Some "talk to them face to face and just be friendly", while others said that they "talk on the phone". The responses reveal that talking in person was the most popular, followed by talking on the phone. A small proportion stated that they wrote to an elderly person. As well, it was noted that in some of the cases, where an elderly person was some distance away from
the child, they were more likely to speak on the phone, and then write. One child also stated that the reason why he/she wrote letters to 'Nanna' in England, was because he/she enjoyed doing so, even though Nanna's handwriting was hard to read.

Communication between the elderly person and the child was seen as an essential part of their relationship with 96% of respondents undertaking an activity which involved communication. One respondent remarked "sometimes I play board games with the poor unsophisticated old sods". Other activities included kicking the football, writing letters and shopping. "My nanna shows me some of the things she has collected" remarked one respondent, while another said:

I watch T.V., listen to music but we don't always agree on it, share our knowledge and tell jokes, stay with them when they are lonely and just have fun.

The differing relationships between the children and the seniors were also reflected in the comments made. The majority referred to their grandparents, while one said that, "I talk to old people (the elderly men who hold the sign on the road)". Just as a distinction was made with the different seniors whom children talk to, so too did many children note that the activity varies depending upon who it was with. One child noted that "I talk with grandma, [and] I muck around with grandad".

Many children underrated the role talking plays in their relationship with seniors. One comment was, "well I don't really do much . . . but mainly we just talk". There were some of the children who had special stories to tell about their activities as they explain:

I used to bake stuff with my grandma before she died. She used to like playing cards. My grandpa liked sports but after he got sick he couldn't do that. When he was in hospital I used to ask him about what he did when he was young.
Therefore, children experienced a number of activities in combination with elderly people, and while the relationship to the elderly person varied, in the majority of cases that person was a grandparent.

**Visiting**

It was common for the children to respond that the activity either involved visiting a senior or having the senior visit them. The children who listed 'visiting' as an activity that they did with a senior view having an elderly person visit them as a special activity. Moreover, it was noted that many of the activities, with the exception of talking on the phone and writing letters, involved meeting each other or 'visiting'. Thus, 'visiting' is an important activity for children to do with a senior.

**Special Occasions**

Under this heading, activities include going to family dinners, picnics, having barbecues, going on holidays, and celebrating Christmas and birthdays. Examples include:

- Christmas, because we spend time with each other for a longer periods of time and Christmas is fun.
- I enjoy having a picnic or lunch at their house because all of my family is there.

Children perceive these as important activities that they do with elderly people and thus, special events are important activities for the interaction between elderly people and children.
Games

Playing games such as card games including ‘poker’ or ‘go fish’ and board games, such as monopoly, were also popular as an activity. Some of the more unusual ‘games’ or activities included gambling, ‘fun play’ and looking at ‘old stuff’ such as coins, books and things that they had collected.

Entertainment

Activities which were under the heading of entertainment included going to the movies, watching television, videos, and listening to music. ‘Going out’ to places such as Underwater World, the zoo, into the city, museums and theatre were also popular responses among the children. Shopping was another frequently mentioned activity that participants did with seniors.

Leisure Activities

Leisure type activities were ones such as conking, fishing, gardening, going on walks, and walking the dog. Other activities also included learning how to knit, making models, fixing motorbikes and painting.

Recreational Activities

Recreational activities, including swimming, playing golf (botanical), basketball, football and cricket, were popular amongst both age groups and genders. The most unusual recreational activity, occurred when "my grannie teaches me to windsurf whenever I visit her in Victoria".
Helping a Senior

A small percentage (8%) specifically stated that the activity that they did involved the senior helping. Seniors assisted the children in learning a variety of skills such as cooking, making models, knitting and painting. One respondent stated that "an elderly person has a lot to teach. They can teach you how to sew, knit and garden. They can teach you that life is not worth being thrown away".

Cooking was a popular activity, not only for a senior helping them, but as an interactive activity. Two comments from respondents who took part said that the senior "teaches me to cook" and that "I cook with them". Another remarked that "sometimes she (nanna) tries to teach me how to knit but it's too hard". Other popular activities included, "when I'm with grandad we paint pictures and look in the hen house for googy eggs"; "do carpentry with them" and "with my grandad I do a lot of work with him in the shed and he helps me with my motorbike. My nana lets me try her cooking".

Moreover, 20% of respondents believed that the activity they were doing was assisting or helping the senior/s in some way.

I help them around, have lots of fun with them, make them feel like a kid again.

I help Grandma clean the house and walk her dogs.

I help on the farm, help prepare food.

I do the gardening, I do the housework with them.

Most of the activities mentioned referred to activities around the house such as cooking, cleaning, and gardening. However, one was less conventional and more 'nineties', stating that "I teach them how to use the computer."
No Activities

There were, however, 4% of respondents who stated that they did not engage in any activities with seniors. Several reasons were given ranging from them living overseas or them being deceased. Two respondents stated:

None because they live in England.

My elderly [sic] live in Sydney so I barely see them.

Thus, although every participant stated that they had contact with a senior, there was a small percentage who perceived themselves as not in fact undertaking any activities with a senior.

Children's Evaluation of the Intergenerational Experiences

Activities Enjoyed the Most

Talking

Twenty-five percent (25%) of respondents stated that they enjoyed talking with a senior the most. There were various reasons given by the children as to why they enjoyed the activity. It was common for respondents to state that the reason why they enjoyed it the most was because of the 'stories' that they heard. One child said that:

I like it when my nanna shows me all the things she has collected over the years and tells me a story about each one because it is interesting to hear all the stories, or when my nanna and pop write letters because I know that they're OK.

Moreover, others stated that they liked learning about their senior's 'life story':
To talk to them because they told me a lot about their past and about the kind of lifestyle they lived.

I like to talk the most because my grandparents have a lot of memories that they like to share with me.

I like the talking part because I can find out more that's going on in their life.

Talking about when they were young. Because it is very interesting and you find out things you wouldn't expect.

Some children enjoyed talking because they learnt about their family history or cultural history. One child said, "I like telling stories because I get to learn what it was like living in Portugal and I also like it when my Grandmother makes them up".

Other children questioned their discussions with seniors, stating that they were not really sure whether the 'stories' they were being told were correct or not, but enjoyed listening to them anyway. One child states:

Talk. Because when they talk to you they make up funny stories and they think that the make up stories actually happened to them a long time ago.

Thus, talking provides an important opportunity for seniors to reminisce and for children to learn about the 'past'.

Many of the participants viewed that they enjoyed talking because the children felt that elderly people 'listened' to them. Children stated that they enjoyed "talking to them because they never interrupted" and "I enjoy talking with her the most because she always listens". They also enjoyed "spending quality time together and sharing secrets" with them.

Others enjoyed "keeping them company because you know that you are giving them a great help and you know that if they need you you will be there for them". Also, one child enjoyed telling jokes and laughing "...
because it makes you very happy and the elderly person feel happy”.

**Games**

Despite the fact that 'playing games' polled well as an activity done with a senior, only 6% listed ‘playing games’ as their favourite activity. Responses varied with the majority saying they enjoyed it because they won. One child stated, “I like playing cards because I usually win”, and "chess, because I always win!". Another child enjoyed it because they won money. One respondent enjoyed playing games because "when we play I try and cheat but they know I’m cheating so they cheat as well and they win”.

**Entertainment**

Watching television and going to the movies polled poorly with only 7% of the respondents saying that they enjoyed it. The reasons varied and some responses were:

Go to movies because I don’t get bored.

Going to movies because I spend the day not being hassled by my mum.

Moreover, shopping was little better, scoring 10% of respondent votes. The reason why children preferred this activity, was because they ‘got something’ out of it. This was demonstrated with responses like:

I mostly like going shopping because they normally buy me nice things.

I like going shopping with my great grandma she buys me heaps of clothes. She spoils me.

Others enjoyed shopping because it was a chance to spend time with their
senior, through comments such as:

[I] enjoy going shopping and talking with elderly because you get to know them more.

Going shopping because its the only time I get to talk to them because they would usually be talking to the other adults. We spend time together.

Going out with seniors was also enjoyed by many participants because they felt it was an opportunity for them to talk and be with an elderly person, all by themselves or with others. Many perceived that when 'going out' they provided company for the senior and that the senior was company for them. One remark was "I enjoy going out with them and talking with them cause they give me company and talk to me about good things".

Recreational Activities

Such pursuits were enjoyed by 13% of respondents, who enjoyed going swimming and playing 'backyard' sports. Responses again varied as to why the children enjoyed the activity. The majority believed it was because the seniors were spending time with them. The children liked to show the seniors what they have learnt or can do, and so that the senior can likewise show them what they can do. The children also enjoy the activities because they are fun.

Helping a Senior

Only 5% of respondents specifically listed helping a senior as their most enjoyed activity. One respondent said:

I would have to say I love cooking with my nanna because I want to be a chief [sic] [chef] and I learn lots (I also like licking the bowl when she makes cakes).
Other activities besides cooking included teaching them how to use the computer, doing the gardening and helping on the farm. Another enjoyed "helping my grandad with my motorbike because I like motorbikes and I love my grandad". Other children enjoyed learning how to do something different, as these statements demonstrate:

- Woodwork because I like making things that I thought that I couldn't.
- I think I like gardening with her the most. She shows me insects, flowers and weeds that I didn't know existed.

An important aspect of why these children enjoyed helping was because of the seniors’ appreciation of what they were doing. One child stated that "I enjoy helping my Grandma the most because she's really kind and I know she appreciates it".

Furthermore, 10% of the participants enjoyed every activity that they listed. The reasons varied from the fact that they do not see the senior that often, to just "because I do". Moreover, 4% of respondents undertook no activities with seniors. Finally, 2% stated that they enjoyed "all of them as long as the elderly person is enjoying themselves".

By far the most enjoyed activity was talking to seniors. However, this often occurred in combination with other activities such as going out, playing sports or visiting. Many of the respondents enjoyed their activities because both they, and the senior, liked spending time together. Thus, although the majority of activities were enjoyed because the children liked the activity, the children enjoyed it more when the senior appeared to as well.
Activities Enjoyed the Least

Talking

Compared with the 25% of respondents who enjoyed talking the most, 14% indicated that it was their least liked activity. Many didn’t enjoy talking because the subject was not of interest to them:

Sitting round and talking with lots of them for a while . . . you can get bored, or the subject can be interesting.

I don’t enjoy talking to grandma because she talks about sewing and childcare and tea parties.

Others just thought talking was “boring”. Some felt left out in conversations because they did not know who the seniors were talking about:

Talking because they never stop going on about everyone and you can’t understand them or they can’t understand you.

One individual did not like talking, especially when it was the child themself who was the topic of the senior’s conversation.

Talk about me: because I get embarrassed easily and go red and that means that the day is over.

Another individual found it made them sad when the senior talked about their life. Sadness was also the theme with other children, who “least like[s] talking to them on the phone because it makes me sad because I’d rather be with them”. This was especially the case where the senior lived some distance away from the child.

Other children also disliked it when “they start talking to you, they never shut up!” or when they got a “lecture because my grandmother tells me what I’ve done wrong and she doesn’t know what she’s talking about”.
Visiting

Four percent (4%) listed visiting seniors as the activity they liked least. The main reason for this was because "there are other people there, celebrating occasions because everybody is always talking about something else". Thus, they enjoy being the centre of the senior's attention. One respondent however, stated "being alone with them. Because most of them have aslimans [sic] [alzheimers] and they sometimes act weird".

Games & Entertainment

Only a small percentage (7%) of children in the sample listed playing games as the least liked activity. They did not enjoy it because it was the senior who won the game, not them. Moreover, 10% did not enjoy going to the movies and watching television. The responses demonstrate that this is because the senior "falls asleep", "they always watch boring shows and when they watch T.V. they never talk to you" and "having to watch their video tapes when they have got married round 20 years ago (the tapes are all blurry because they're so old)".

Shopping was also enjoyed least, mainly because the children perceive that shopping is "boring". Furthermore, a few of the children did not enjoy "going out to dinner because they would always be talking and doing things with the other adults" and another child stated that they "don't like going to the city because I never get anything and all we do is look around".

Recreation

Only eight per cent (8%) enjoyed recreation activities the least. One child does not like to "go fishing because sometimes I get sick and we don't
catch much". Another does not enjoy "watching him do his horses because I don't get to bet" or "going for walks because I can never keep up with her". Finally, "I don't enjoy windsurfing with my Grannie because the mast always hits me on the head". Thus, the reason why the children disliked the activities was because it was not of interest to them or they did not enjoy it.

**Helping a Senior**

Helping a senior scored 2% of the votes, just as did having a senior help them as an activity which was enjoyed least, with the reasons such as those that follow:

- Doing the gardening with them because they tell you to do more than one thing at once and it gets you frustrated.
- The one I like the least would have to be the knitting because well, I just can't and it does not help being a left hander but it's still fun because nanna tells me stories.
- Bird Watching: is boring because I sit there watching stupid birds. I only bird watch when mum makes me. And to make my grandpa happy!

The most significant statistic demonstrates that 34% of respondents stated that "none" of the activities listed were least enjoyed. With respondents making comments like:

- I don't like any activities the least because we always do fun things.

Thus, the majority of respondents enjoyed the activities that they were doing with a senior. Of those who did not enjoy the activity, it is was mainly because they felt left out or the activity did not interest them, even though it may have interested the senior.

There was a considerable spread of activities which the participants
least liked. The reason why they did not enjoy the activity was mostly because they had no interest in the activity. However, it was acknowledged by some that although they did not like it, the senior did and they did not wish to hurt their feelings.

Summary of Findings

The findings obtained about intergenerational contact provide an interesting insight into how children relate to seniors, the seniors' relationships to the children and the frequency of contact. All children were found to have some sort of contact with seniors, whether it be talking on the phone, visiting or writing letters. The children perceived that they enjoyed some of the activities that they did with seniors, but not all. In addition, many of the children commented on the beneficial value of spending time with a senior. Other children, did however, lament the fact they they couldn't spend more time with them. Another aspect of this research was to investigate whether there was any relationship between the children's scores on the perception scale and the number of seniors with whom they had contact and the frequency of contact. Upon analysis there were found to be no correlations between any of these variables.

Looking Forward

The following section will provide a summation of the previous chapters. It endeavours to provide a link between the literature, presented earlier, and the findings found in the analysis sections. Thus, from these conclusions, implications for future research and the role that this piece of survey research has in the world of academia will be discussed.
CHAPTER 6
Discussion

Background

This chapter will provide a discussion of the research findings in relation to the literature presented in Chapter Two. This section also aims to examine further the findings in relationship to the survey’s research questions and the implications for future research in this area. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to provide a conclusion to these research findings and correlate these with previous research.

Summary of Findings

Children’s Perceptions

One hundred and six (106) participants in Year Six and Seven from a Western Australian primary school took part in this study. The distribution of Year Six students to Year Seven students was fifty (50) to fifty-six (56), while the female to male distribution was fifty-eight (58) to forty-eight (48) in favour of the females.

Participants were asked to give their responses to statements which were presented on a Likert scale. On the scale, this group of children demonstrated themselves to be on the positive half of the scale (a score of 0-29=positive, 30=neutral, 31-60=negative). The respondents were then divided into those who viewed seniors more positively or more negatively. There appeared to be a greater difference in the average scores according to the participant’s year at school, rather than based on the participant’s gender.
It was discovered that children defined 'elderly' in four main ways. This was according to aspects associated with the 'later life' stage, such as 'old' and 'older generation', according to chronological age, personal characteristics and defining an elderly person as a 'grandparent'.

**Intergenerational Contact**

All of the participants stated that they had contact with seniors. Thus, the survey aimed to find out the average number of seniors with whom the children had contact. The average was found to be between five and six seniors. From the data, most participants were more likely to have contact with one to six seniors.

The participants were also asked to explain their relationship to these seniors. The most popular response was the 'grandparent' category, followed by 'friends' and 'relatives'. The children were also asked to nominate how frequently they had contact with a senior. Approximately half of the sample reported having contact once a week or more with a senior.

Participants were also asked to select the type(s) of contact that they experience with seniors. Three categories were presented for options. These were face to face, verbal and written contact. Face to face contact and verbal contact were the most popular options. The use of private motor vehicles or easily accessed public transport enabled many children to have face to face contact on a regular basis. As well, verbal contact rated highly. Perhaps, this is because the telephone provides children with an easy medium to access a senior when there is a need to communicate. Despite the fact that children are becoming geographically more isolated from seniors, because the senior may live in a different country, city, town or suburb, this research demonstrates that most children are still able to
maintain the physical face to face or verbal contact necessary for a mutually satisfying relationship.

The types of activities that children do with seniors were also examined, whereby respondents were asked to list them. Following this, respondents were asked to nominate their most enjoyed and least enjoyed activities and the reasons why. Talking appeared to be the most popular activity. However, the children's opinions were divided between those who enjoyed it most and those who enjoyed it least. The basic reasons were the same, with those who enjoyed talking doing so because they felt close to the senior as it provided a means for understanding more about each other. Those who did not enjoy talking felt this way because they did not feel part of the conversation, either because of the choice of topic or because other people were around.

Thus, communication between a child and a senior was viewed, by the children, as an essential part of the intergenerational experience. Furthermore, being with the senior in person, or having face to face contact, assisted the children in continuing a close relationship with the seniors. Children often referred to the fact that assisting a senior in some way provided them with different skills and knowledge. Moreover, children believed that they learnt many things from seniors. As well, they felt that seniors learnt from them.

The results obtained also demonstrate that a child's level of enjoyment had an important relationship with their level of involvement in the activity. Therefore, in an activity such as talking, children enjoyed it less if they felt that they were not part of the conversation, either because the topic was not of interest or because other people were part of the conversation and they felt 'left out'. This was an interesting revelation which
emerged from the children's responses.

An observation from analysis of the data was the importance to the child of being the centre of attention no matter what the activity was that they were sharing with the senior. Times most enjoyed were when the child was on a one to one basis with the senior and involved in activities such as discussions, playing games and shopping. Thus, intergenerational contact of a personal nature is seen as important by the child.

Intergenerational Activity

Australia has witnessed an ever evolving relationship between the 'younger' and 'older' generations. Myths and stereotypes have historically limited the relationship between these groups, increasing the misunderstandings and fear which has dominated literature on this topic. Through increasing the recognition of the importance of intergenerational relations within the community, education and the family unit, many of these myths are being dispelled and a 'new positive' view of ageing is emerging.

Children are one group to display these revised views, whereby demonstrating a greater respect for, knowledge about, and an improved attitude towards seniors and ageing. The reasons why this has occurred are still a matter of debate. One such reason could be because of the increase in educational programs which impart vital information about the ageing process and provide opportunities for interaction and learning to occur (Strom & Strom, 1995). It may also be due to the role seniors are playing in our community, maintaining active and social lives. The media have a role to play with an ever-increasing amount of literature on ageing, both in fiction and non-fiction form, and greater visibility in advertising and
performance, such as in theatre, television and movies.

However, what has emerged through the research findings of this study is not a confirmation of negative stereotyping of elderly people, rather support for positive views on ageing and the role seniors play in our community. Children, it is acknowledged, also have the potential to possess a range of stereotypes from negative to positive. Moreover, what has been discovered in this study, contrary to other research, is that the notion that children possess negative attitudes or stereotypes towards seniors is, in itself, a great myth.

Some literature on social stereotypes suggests that elderly people are viewed negatively by the young (Bailey, 1991; Bytheway, 1995; Chapman, & Neal, 1990; Couper, et al., 1991; Green, 1981; Intrieri, et al., 1995). This study, however, has indicated that children do not generally hold negative perceptions about ageing and seniors. In fact, the complete opposite was discovered in this research, whereby children respected and acknowledged the importance of seniors in their lives. However, even within a group that possessed positive attitudes, there were those who did reinforce the negative stereotypes.

One of the main purposes of this research was to examine whether there was a relationship between intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors. Prior to this study, researchers were divided as to the relationship between the two variables, with some believing that there was a mild correlation, while others stated that there was no evidence of a causal link (Thomas & Hallebone, 1995; Green, 1981). This research agrees with the latter, where there was found to be no correlation between these two variables.

The research discovered that children from this sample did not
perceive seniors in a negative or 'ageist' manner. Instead, the participants were respectful of all the things that seniors contribute to the community and to their (the children's) well being. It can be concluded that children participating in the survey had an extremely positive outlook on ageing and seniors.

Looking Back

The research design adequately provided a measure of intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors. The results produced interesting responses from the one hundred and six participants. There are, however, areas of improvement for this research design. The survey research approach provided a good avenue for the elicitation of responses. The main change needs to occur with relation to the statements on the perception scale, where modifications are needed to occur to some of the items. This could also have incorporated a pretesting stage of the instrument to a significant sample of respondents. Perhaps this would have been better performed during the early stages, when the instrument was being developed. The reason why this was not employed was because of the time limitations placed on the research process.

Another area of the research instrument which needs modification relates to the relationship of the seniors to the respondents. This question needed to specifically state how the children should answer it, to avoid difficulty in analysing the data. For example, one way would be to get respondents to state '1) grandparent, 2) relative' and so on. Moreover, another approach which could be taken across the whole questionnaire would be to explore the issue of the identity of the person with whom the
children have most contact. Employing this technique may have assisted in exploring another aspect of the intergenerational experience.

Therefore, the main areas for change need to occur with the research instrument. The running of the data collection sessions went smoothly. Thus, through having the participants sit the questionnaire in their own classes a feeling of security was one of the significant factors in ensuring a high response rate. It is also believed that another significant factor was the support by the classroom teachers who encouraged the children to participate in the research.

Another issue which needs to be raised concerns the social desirability of the responses. According to Oppenheim (1992) social desirability is used to describe the tendency of people to want their behaviour or responses to be perceived as socially acceptable. It needs to be asked whether it is possible that the children felt that they could only choose 'socially appropriate' responses.

The answer to this question is impossible to ascertain. It was felt that to some degree respondents, especially in the qualitative responses, stress the view that the senior with whom they have contact gave a 'positive view of ageing'. Therefore, the role that this played in the responses given is unknown. However, it is perceived as having some effect on the research data.

**Implications for Future Research**

The question to be asked now concerns the implications of this research. One implication is the need for more research into children's perceptions of seniors. It is believed that this study has only just touched the
surface of an extremely complex issue.

Another implication concerns the continuing need for interactions to occur, whether informally or in organised activities. Already issues concerning ageing are covered in the Year Six and Seven educational health syllabus, in Western Australia, and this is obviously benefiting many children. Perhaps, the Education Department could look to the future in undertaking formal programmes where seniors are a regular part of the school community, as interaction with seniors demonstrates obvious benefits for both the young and the old.

Issues relating to social policy are more complex and harder to address. It is necessary to recognise the worthwhile contributions and roles that seniors play in the development of children in our community both physically and emotionally. Through raising community awareness of the importance of intergenerational contact, there may be benefits for society.

Thus, there is still a need for much research to be done in the area of intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors. Perhaps future research may address the causes of negative stereotyping in our society. This not only has implications for research in the field of gerontology, but also in sociology and psychology. Future research may hold the key to addressing issues such as ageism, racism and sexism.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX I
Letter to the Principal

(Personal Address Given)

Principal,
Lymburner Primary School,
Hillarys, W.A.

Dear Mr Milne,

My name is Jackie Carmichael and I am a 4th year Bachelor of Social Science (Human Services) honours student at Edith Cowan University. I wish to conduct my research on the topic of Intergenerational contact and children's perceptions of seniors.

I am writing to seek your permission to access some of your year 6 and 7 students for my research. With your permission I would like to survey the year 6 and year 7 classes. The research will involve the delivery of a three-page questionnaire, which I have included in the appendix of my research proposal. The questionnaire will be delivered during a single sitting at a time suitable with the classroom teachers. The delivery of the questionnaire should take approximately 30 minutes.

If your permission is granted, I will need to distribute permission slips to the children involved. I have included a proposal of a letter to be sent home (Appendix 2) and would appreciate it if you could give your approval or offer any suggested alterations. My research is being conducted under the supervision of the Department of Human Services at Edith Cowan University. My supervisor is Dr David Wiles (ph. 400 5528) and please feel free to contact him if you have any concerns with this research.

Thus, what I have presented to you is a copy of my research proposal, complete with questionnaire and permission form. Once you have had a chance to read it, I would like to make an appointment to meet with you to discuss any issues that you may have. I greatly appreciate your time and effort in considering my research project.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Carmichael.
APPENDIX II
Letter from the Principal

Dear Jackie,

I thank you for your letter, summary of your research topic and request to administer a questionnaire to year 6 and 7 students at the above school.

Providing permission slips are signed and agreed to by parents I give permission to undertake your questionnaire amongst the students attending Lymburner School.

Yours sincerely,

H. L. Milne

5th September, 1996.
Dear Teachers,

Thank you for agreeing to allow your class to participate in a questionnaire concerning ‘intergenerational contact and children’s perceptions of seniors’. The 3-page questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes for the children to complete. I will be distributing permission forms for the children to take home today, Monday 9th of September, and would appreciate if these could be handed out to your class. Each morning I will be in to collect any forms which have come back.

I would also like to confirm a date and time for me to deliver the questionnaire between Friday 13th and Wednesday 18th September. If you have any problems or concerns please feel free to contact myself or my supervisor. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to use your class.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Carmichael.
Dear Parent / Guardian,

My name is Jackie Carmichael and I am a honours student in the Bachelor of Social Science (Human Services) at Edith Cowan University. For my research I am investigating 'Intergenerational contact and children’s perceptions of seniors'. I have approached the school, asking if I could use some of the students in upper school (Year 6 and 7) to take part in a questionnaire.

I am, thus, writing to you to ask for permission for your child to take part in a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be completed during school time between Friday 13th and Wednesday 18th September. Permission has been granted by the classroom teacher, who has kindly allowed time for me to get the questionnaire filled out. I assure you that the research will be conducted with strict confidentiality and privacy being assured to those who take part. No questionnaire will be directly identifiable to any particular child.

I would greatly appreciate your permission for your child to take part in filling out the questionnaire. If there are any queries, please feel free to contact myself or my university supervisor. I would also appreciate it if permission slips could be returned by Thursday 12th September.

Yours,

Jackie Carmichael

Supervisor

As guardian/parent of __________________ give permission for him/her to take part in the research questionnaire on 'Intergenerational contact and children’s perceptions of seniors'.

Signed,
APPENDIX V
Questionnaire

Intergenerational Contact

Questionnaire

*Year at School: (please circle)  Six (6)  Seven (7)

*Sex: (please circle):  Female  Male

(Note: an elderly person is considered to be someone over 60 years of age)

*Do you have contact with any elderly people? (Circle)  Yes / No

* How many elderly people do you have contact with? (Number)  

*What is their relationship to you? (eg. grandparent, relative, friend, neighbour)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

*How often do you have contact with an elderly person?

(Tick one please)

( ) once a week.
( ) more than once a week.
( ) once a fortnight.
( ) once a month.
( ) once every six months.
( ) once a year.
( ) never.
What type of contact do you have? (Tick)

- Face to face (eg. visiting)
- Written (eg. letters)
- Verbal (eg. phone calls)
- None

**Statements**

(Circle one for each statement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people are loving towards children.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people like spending time with their family.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a person gets older they get more frail.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people are dependent upon others to live.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people can teach us a lot about our community.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people keep very active.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people live lonely lives.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people are grumpy towards children.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience is a characteristic that elderly people possess.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people contribute little to the community.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people are happy with their lives.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people behave like children.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people enjoy activities with children.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people share wisdom with children.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly people don't like children.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Short Answer**

What does the term ‘elderly’ mean to you?

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Due to the limitations on page size, the size of the print needed to be adjusted for the purpose of demonstrating how the statements appeared in the questionnaire.
In your own words, please describe what types of activities you do with an elderly person:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Which of these activities that you do with an elderly person do you enjoy the most? Why?
________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Which of the activities that you do with an elderly person do you enjoy least? Why?
________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________


APPENDIX VII
Defining Terms

Ageism: is defined as "prejudice by one age group toward other age
groups" (as cited in Job, 1983, p. 6).

Alpha Level: is a predetermined statistical value used to interpret results.
The value is usually set at 0.05.

ANOVA, one-way: this statistical procedure is used to assess the
differences in the means of two or more groups.

ANOVA, two-factor factorial: this statistical procedure is used to
examine the effects of two nominal independent variables on one interval
or ratio dependent variable.

Attitude: is a relatively stable opinion containing a cognitive element, such
as one’s perceptions and beliefs about a topic, and an emotional element,
feelings on the topic (Wade & Tavris, 1990).

Constructivist Paradigm: is proposed by Ego Guba and Yvonna Lincoln
(1994) and assumes an idealist philosophy where it is assumed that what is
real is a construction in the minds of individuals.

Convenience Sampling: whereby the researcher selects a requisite
number from the cases that are conveniently available (Luborsky, &
Rubinstein, 1995).
**Elderly**: individuals aged sixty years and over.

**Ethics**: "ethics is the science of morality: those who engage in it determine the values for the regulation of human behaviour" (Homan, 1991, p. 1).

**Exploratory Research**: occurs when the researcher collects data in an attempt to show that some stimulus (independent variable) caused or had an effect on something else (dependent variable) (Royse, 1991).

**Gerontology**: the study of old aged people and ageing, and special problems associated with it.

**Informed Consent**: "human subjects of research should be allowed to agree or refuse to participate in the light of comprehensive information concerning the nature and purpose of the research" (Homan, 1991, p. 69).

**Intergenerational Communication**: verbal or physical exchanges between individuals of different cohorts, whereby a mutual meaning or message is created.

**Intergenerational Programmes**: are defined as "activities that bring old and young together for their mutual benefit" (Angelis, 1992, p. 318).

**Interpretivist Paradigm**: propositions are predicted based on the assumption that the empiricist picture of social reality omits an important fact, that of 'inter subjectivity' or common meanings (Schwandt, 1994).
**Item Analysis**: a statistical procedure which examines the reliability of items on a particular test or scale.

**Likert Scale**: is a method of measuring attitudes, whereby providing a statement and asking participants to rate themselves on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' about the statement.

**Mean**: is the average of a set of scores. It is a measure of central tendency.

**Median**: is a measure of central tendency; it is the value at the mid point of a distribution of scores when the scores are ordered from highest to lowest.

**Methodology**: is the model which incorporates the theoretical principles as well as a framework which provides guidelines for how the research is done in the context of a particular paradigm (Sarantakos, 1993).

**N value**: refers to the number of participants.

**Pearson r Correlation**: is a measure of the strength and direction of the association between two interval or ratio level variables.

**Perception**: the process by which the brain organises and interprets sensory information (Wade & Tavris, 1990).

**Questionnaire**: is a highly structured data collection technique whereby each respondent is asked the same set of questions (de Vaus, 1991, p.80).
Seniors: individuals aged sixty years and over.

Standard Deviation (SD): is a measure of the spread or variation of a set of scores.

Stereotype: is a summary impression of a group of people in which a person believes that all members of that group share a common trait/s (Wade & Tavris, 1990).

Survey Research: technique used to examine the attitudes, beliefs or behaviours at one point in time using a predetermined set of questions or issues. Surveys reveal what a group of respondents is thinking, feeling, or doing at the time during which it is conducted (Royse, 1991).