

Skills 4 Kids Cafes: Working to Support SDG 4 through Delivering Early Childhood Educator Professional Learning in Partnership with Community

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ABSTRACT

Skills 4 Kids (S4K) Cafes is a program of intergenerational community skill-sharing events that offers a form of professional learning for early childhood educators to connect with SDG 4 Quality Education. The S4K model is an alternative ‘side by side’ approach to supporting educators to develop their pedagogical practice in the community, while working alongside children in their care. A mixed methods study was conducted with S4K Cafe participants employing questionnaires, guided conversations and field notes taken by researcher-participants. In this paper, we explore how the program bridged formal and in-formal learning for adults, prioritised community connections and capacity building, and promoted lifelong learning for all participants. We illustrate how participation in S4K Cafes addressed the aims of SDG 4, specifically Target 4.7 and Indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c which broadly relate to the provision of education for sustainable development and quality early childhood education. Findings of the study suggest that the communities-based approach of the S4K Cafes contributed toward SDG 4 aims through supporting lifelong learning for both community members and educators, forming an interactional space for contributing to a shared culture (Target 4.7), and contributing to educators’ practice development (Indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c). The Cafes were found to challenge conceptions of how learning occurs by bringing community members of all ages and backgrounds (professional and non-professional) to participate and learn together. They also challenged epistemological assumptions regarding who can teach and what constitutes sustainability. Through reconstituting whose knowledge was valued, the Cafes formed their own culture, where all were recognised as contributors.

Keywords: Cultural wellbeing, social sustainability, intergenerational, lifelong learning, professional development

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted at a United Nations summit in 2015 after considerable consultation (Unterhalter, 2019), aim to provide a “shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future” (United Nations, n.d.). The United Nations calls for inclusivity and equity through global partnerships in actions to achieve the SDGs by 2030. We report on a program that responds to the aims of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 to: “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (Ritchie et al., 2018, para. 9). In its response to SDG 4 the World Education Forum (2016) acknowledged the importance of diverse and engaging learning opportunities in formal and informal settings across the life span. In this sense, SDG 4 emphasises a lifelong learning perspective in the provision of equitable and inclusive quality education (Hanemann, 2019). Our study begins to address the dearth of research on the

implementation of sustainability focused programs and their effectiveness in relation to SDG 4 in non-formal early years settings and in particular, ways of supporting educators' professional learning in this space.

Our research examined SDG 4-associated outcomes related to the delivery of a community-based experiential intergenerational learning program, called 'Skills 4 Kids Cafes' (S4K Cafes). The program was designed to link young children with community members of all ages to support interactions for promoting a wide range of purposeful skill development. We explore how the program bridged formal and informal learning for children and adults, prioritised community connections and capacity building, and promoted lifelong learning. We also illustrate how participation in S4K Cafes contributed to educators' professional development. We position our discussion in the context of SDG 4, specifically Target 4.7 and Indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c.

SDG 4 Target 4.7 states: "All learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."

Indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c states: "the extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in ... (c) teacher education." (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021, p. 3)

Working towards the SDGs

Each SDG target is supported by a range of subsequent indicators. While useful in providing focus (targets) and measurables (indicators), the SDGs have been criticized for their emphasis on quantitative, metric based interpretations of success (Ball, 2012; Edwards et al., 2020; Lingard & Lewis, 2016; Unterhalter, 2019). For example, the indicators of success for Target 4.7 relate to a quantification of the *extent to which* global citizenship education and education for sustainable development are *mainstreamed* in education sectors. While important, this indicator does not engage directly with questions of education quality around global citizenship or education for sustainable development (King, 2017; Sayed & Moriarty, 2020). What is more, Ball (2012) contends that targets related to achievement and participation place too strong an emphasis on the responsibility of the individual in the neo-liberal education marketplace. Longueira Matos and Vela-Eiden (2020) advocate for a move beyond quantitative results, to a conversation that engages with "(re)thinking about what education we need in order to tackle the major global challenges" (p. 124). In addition, the collection of data for targets also appears problematic. Six years since the SDGs were adopted, the sdg-tracker website indicates that there is no currently available data for Target 4.7 (Ritchie et al., 2018). Despite these problematic aspects of collecting and monitoring data on targets and indicators, we contend that the SDG targets and indicators serve a role in focusing efforts on monitoring progress, and in this paper, we present data that contributes to addressing the data gap for Target 4.7.

The need to achieve the SDGs has been most recently affirmed at the 2019 SDGs Summit, where world leaders called for a decade of action and results for sustainable development through global action to enable great leadership, actions at local levels, and the mobilization of people across sectors (United Nations, 2019). To date, the SDGs have largely remained the responsibility of governments to enact, though clear pathways for doing so remain undefined (King, 2017). Further, Boeren (2019) suggests that to achieve Target 4.7, education and training institutions should approach sustainable development from diverse understandings *and offer* diverse experiences to facilitate learning. One way of achieving diversity is through partnerships and strong connections between micro-level (children/parents) and meso-level actors (education institutions and educators). These, according to Boeren (2016; 2019), are more likely to lead to high-quality learning opportunities; and, we argue are more likely to lead to re-thinking the education 'conversation' promoted by Longueira Matos and Vela-Eiden (2020).

The importance of representation and inclusion of diverse actors across government, institution and community sectors remains an ongoing challenge to the implementation of SDG activities. For example, McGrath and Nolan (2016) suggest that the SDG 4 intended outcome statement does not adequately account for children's, parents' or community voices. Others advocate for an acknowledgement of education as a shared responsibility in efforts to generate interaction between policymakers, educational providers, community and learners (Boeren, 2019). In Australia where this project is situated, there are policy frameworks within the early childhood education sector designed to support and enable actors at all levels to implement inclusive forms of educational responsibilities and practices. We introduce these frameworks in the next section and highlight their SDG 4 enabling features through early childhood education and care (ECEC) and community sector partnerships.

The Australian Early Childhood Education and Care Context

Several historical and demographic summaries of the nature and spread of early childhood service types in Australia illustrate a national trend toward increasing access to services and introducing regulations for quality control (See for example, Irvine & Farrell, 2013; Nailon & Beswick, 2014). Policy changes introduced in Australia from 2009 designed to improve the quality of ECEC have had a marked impact on the delivery of services to young children and their families across all early childhood sectors (Sims et al., 2015). These policy initiatives were mandated under the *National Quality Framework (NQF)* (ACECQA, revised 2017) and incorporated reporting benchmarks through the *National Quality Standard (NQS)*. These and the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* (DEEWR, 2010) curriculum guide rely heavily on the capacity of educators to understand, commit to, and provide higher quality practices (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2017).

Relevant to SDG Target 4.7 is Quality Area 6 of the *NQS* and Learning Outcome 2 of the *EYLF*. For example, *NQS* Quality Area 6 (Collaborative partnerships with families and communities) incorporates Element 6.2.3 (Community Engagement) which advocates for services to partner with families and communities to enhance children's learning and wellbeing. The *EYLF*'s Learning Outcome 2 (Children are connected with and contribute to their world) promotes a similar yet broader intent by incorporating the following indicators: children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities; children respond to diversity with respect; children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment. Although these policy blueprints do not address SDG Target 4.7 directly, they do affirm a proactive role for Australia's ECEC sector to pursue Target 4.7's emphasis on developing citizenship-related values, which Hägglund and Pramling Samuelsson (2009) assert are central to sustainable development.

It can be argued that policies for educating children for a sustainable world including through community partnerships are not enough to generate the change in educator practices necessary for success. Pramling Samuelsson and Park (2017) suggest that supporting children's learning for sustainability requires epistemological and ontological shifts away from metric oriented mindsets and activities (such as quality assessment and rating systems) towards high level skill development promoting ethics of care for people and planet. In this sense, early childhood educators and educational sites need further (alternative) support structures and partnerships to change the learning experiences that children have, both in terms of *where, what, and how* they learn (Pramling Samuelsson & Park, 2017). One way of responding to the shifts called for is by fostering intergenerational community-based learning communities.

SDG Target 4.7 and in-service learning communities in ECEC

Common approaches to in-service models of professional learning in the early childhood sector involve educators engaging in activities such as short workshops, or online modules of learning during or outside of work time. These approaches are aimed at improving some element of educators' theoretical understandings and practices in the field (Waniganayake et al., 2008). Some professional learning for Australian educators is provided on-site by nominated educational leaders. According to the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) (2018, p. 2),

"The role of the educational leader is primarily to collaborate with educators and provide curriculum direction and guidance; support educators to effectively implement the cycle of planning to enhance programs and practices; [and] lead the development and implementation of an effective educational program in the service."

Such approaches reflect traditional 'expert-led' or transmission methods of learning. However, as Boyle, While and Boyle (2004) and Dyment and O'Connell (2014) argue, traditional transmission of knowledge approaches are often insufficient for altering educators' practice. Some scholars maintain that models which position facilitators and trainers as 'expert' risk perpetuating the disconnect between theory and practice for educators (Fenech et al., 2010; Urban, 2008) by placing knowledge-creation, theorising and the facilitation of learning as external to educators as learners.

By comparison, communities of practice (CoP) models (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Pyrko et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017; Wenger, 1998) disrupt traditional transmission delivery approaches and are based on the understanding that learning develops through participation in practices and through processes of identity formation. Communities of practice models also open opportunities for the inclusion of diverse participants, recognising that each individual is bringing with them unique and valuable contributions (Lave & Wenger, 1991). According to Simoncini, Lasen, and Rocco (2014), critical reflection can be developed through an individual's continuing involvement in a CoP. CoPs provide a space and time where practice can be improved as members share tacit knowledge (Iverson, 2011; Wenger et al., 2002), and all actors' experiences and knowledge are valued in the space.

An innovative approach to creating a CoP involved intergenerational sharing of knowledge and skills, referred to as Legacy Cafes, developed in Liverpool in the United Kingdom by Diane Boyd (Boyd, 2018; Boyd & McNeill, 2019). The Legacy Cafes aimed to bring together elders from the area to teach and mentor 'lost' skills (Langlands, 2018), such as sewing, knitting and cooking with local produce to local children and their families (Boyd, 2019). The Legacy Cafes were also trialled in Finland (forthcoming paper) and within the USA, as well as the Australian state of Tasmania. The Skills 4 Kids (S4K) Cafes reported here are based upon the Legacy Cafes concept, reflecting the transferability of the concept since it draws upon local culture and traditions.

The S4K Cafes were designed as a form of learning community which embraces the ethos of CoP approaches. Internationally, the implementation of the Cafe concept sits within the framework of what Davis (2015) describes as early childhood education for sustainability (ECEfS). Research into the application of the concept in Tasmania, namely S4K Cafes is shared here, revealing SDG Target 4 and specifically target 4.7-related findings.

The Skills 4 Kids Cafes Program

Located in a regional Tasmanian city, S4K Cafes were regularly attended throughout 2019 by children and educators from three ECEC centres, children and educators from a family day care scheme, parents with young children; and, community members whose ages ranged from 18 - 80 years. The program brought people together to share skills in regular (monthly) two-hour long 'cafe' sessions offering experiences that ranged from arts and crafts, music and storytelling to reading and imaginative open-ended play (Beasy, 2020). The S4K Cafes were a mechanism for intergenerational community-based learning where adults interacted in activities alongside children. In contrast to traditional approaches to (professional) learning, S4K Cafes occurred during the hours ECEC educators were responsible for groups of children. That is, educators attended each session with, rather than away from the children in their care. S4K Cafes offered a *learning with* approach - learning with children, learning with and in community and learning with each other. Here, an intersection between formal and informal learning occurred in ways that valued the diverse expertise, skills, and experiences of all participants (younger and older) in the program.

The aims of the S4K Cafes were twofold:

- to support ECEC educators to develop pedagogical practices which educate children for a sustainable world; and,

- to support lifelong learning through the bringing together of community members of all ages and social backgrounds to learn from and with each other.

These aims aligned with SDG 4 lifelong learning goals by developing an intergenerational community of learners. The focus on community building represents ‘cultural contributions’ aspects of SDG Target 4.7 by valuing the skills and attributes of all participants; and providing activities which emphasised sustainable lifestyles. The project also addressed indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c, through figuring new ways of mainstreaming development opportunities for a cohort of early childhood educators.

The S4K Cafes were guided by ideas of sustainable living in the design of activities emphasising social, environmental and cultural dimensions (Beasy, 2019; Emery, 2019). The social and environmental fabric of the intergenerational Cafes fostered a sense of people (including children) as collaborative ‘artisans’ learning about ways of valuing and working with materials and re-purposing them. Further, there was an emphasis on increasing young children’s social, language and independence skills and disrupting taken-for-granted child-adult relations (where adults are expert). From the outset, cultural sustainability emphasised children’s life skill development within a shared ‘café’ culture. For example, children were supported to produce healthy snacks for themselves. This included making fruit skewers (cutting and threading the fruit pieces), buttering, filling and cutting sandwiches, creating yoghurt and other ‘dishes’ with adult supervision (for safety). The children’s engagement in food-oriented interactions with adults, receiving ‘help as required’, was an enjoyable part of each S4K Café. The ‘make our own food’ experience was new for many of the children. Also, new (for some) was that they could eat when they were hungry (as people do in regular cafes), sitting in small groups with an adult or two, at adult-sized tables and chairs. Overall, the children were embraced as decision makers and active agents in the program (McGrath & Nolan, 2016), able to make choices about how they participated in various activities.

The Skills 4 Kids Cafes Research

In this paper, we report on six free S4K Cafes held once each month at the headquarters of a State-wide ECEC organisation, Northern Children’s Network (NCN), during periods when their outside school hours care space was not being used. The Cafes were attended by educators and children (aged from 3 to 5 years) from local early learning/child-care centres not formally associated with NCN, with two centres in regular attendance. Groups of up to eight children were accompanied by at least two educators from their respective centres. Two groups arrived and left in maxi-taxis and one group walked to and from the venue. Overall, the number of children who attended each Cafe ranged from 8 to 23 with attendance growing over the months as familiarity with the Cafes grew. Children, parents and educators were invited to engage in a range of activities set up by community members who had volunteered via associated organisations (such as Northern Early Years Group and Education for Sustainability Tasmania) and personal friendship networks. The number of community members attending each cafe ranged from 6 to 12 adults. Many of the community members had previous experiences working in the health, social services and education sectors, and the majority identified as female and of Anglo-Celtic heritage.

Along with the development of social and language skills, the activities presented opportunities for children’s physical development targeting both gross and fine motor skills. Activities such as balancing on fixed beams in the playground, throwing and catching balls, digging in the sand pit and playing hopscotch and dancing to music played on the guitar formed the basis of gross motor skill development. Fine motor skills and children’s literacies, creativity and persistence were targeted through arts rich activities including painting, stitching wool patterns into hessian, collage, exploring the properties of clay and using clay to ‘make worlds’. While some of the arts and craft activities were precise and emphasised fine details, other arts activities were open-ended to foster creative expression and language development. The clay work for example focused on providing a medium through which children could develop stories and offered an alternative language for expression. Educators worked alongside children and community members, experimenting with the clay and sharing new techniques.

Some community members brought along activities that were personally meaningful; for example, one introduced a button box so children could sort and match the various buttons. In addition to developing skills of identifying

patterns, classifying and counting, this activity enabled the community member to share her personal history, talking about buttons from her uniform from when she was employed in the armed forces.

Research Methods

To explore the ways in which the learning community approach of the S4K Cafes supported learning for educators and community participants, a convergent mixed methods research design was employed to generate relevant data (Creswell, 2015). The research was guided by two questions:

- How do the Skills 4 Kids Cafes support lifelong learning?
- In what ways do the Skills 4 Kids Cafes address SDG Target 4.7?

Ethical approval was received from the researching institution (H0017912) for the project and methods included guided conversations (Cartmel, n.d.) at the end of each session, a short questionnaire completed towards the end of the program, and field notes (Cresswell, 2015) taken by researcher-participants. As Morse and Neihaus (2009) suggest, mixed methods research is useful for studies that are exploratory in nature and where the phenomenon under investigation is complex.

The questionnaire ($n=10$; 7 childcare centre educators, 3 community members) included basic demographic information about participants, four seven-point Likert scale questions designed to examine participants' knowledge about sustainability skills and their confidence in their personal sustainability skills capabilities before and at the end of the Cafes as well as their levels of enjoyment. Likert-scales are widely used in educational research and are a valid way of collecting data about how strongly participants agree or disagree with statements (Walter, 2010). Open-ended questions were included to elicit written feedback on Cafe learning; intentions regarding actions inspired by Cafes, as well as a question seeking to identify participants' preferred future Cafe activities.

A total of six guided conversations (Cartmel, n.d.) were conducted with community members at the conclusion of each of the Cafes which provided opportunities to reflect on the activities, the learnings, and moments throughout the session that were noteworthy (Brinkman, 2013). Conversations ranged from 20-60 minutes in length, were voice recorded with participants' consent and selectively transcribed. The conversations adopted Stanfield's (2000) seminal 'focused' approach to debrief about the session and identify potential teachable moments (Hyun, 2006) that could be acted upon in future Cafes.

Field notes (Cresswell, 2015) were recorded by two of the researcher-participants at the Cafes. These comprised written memos and voice recorded observations that were later transcribed. The researchers made particular note of the interactions between those attending, including the children, community members and educators. Pseudonyms are used to preserve participants' confidentiality and anonymity.

Quantitative and qualitative findings were analysed concurrently. Quantitative data was compiled and analysed using descriptive statistics in Excel and qualitative data was coded for themes manually by Kim and Sheridan. Inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was guided by the research questions and allowed common themes within data to be identified and explored. Researcher field notes enriched and contextualised the themes identified in the survey and conversations (Creswell, 2015). Through the analysis, three broad themes were thus identified and labelled: learning in community to support lifelong learning; supporting educator practice; and, contributing to culture to support education for sustainable development. They were then linked with SDG 4 generally and Target 4.7 specifically to present as research findings.

Findings

The findings from the analysis of the educators' survey responses draw upon the self-ratings and reflective comments made about their involvement in the Cafes. Overall, the predominantly female (85% of educator

attendees), full time-employed educators said they met new people through attending the Cafes and enjoyed the experience (average rating of 5.5 on the 7-point Likert Scale). Aspects of the Cafes that educators indicated contributed to their learning accorded with the aspects of the Cafes that they also valued. For example, educators noted that the opportunity to interact with and alongside community members willing to share a range of specific child and adult-oriented skills was a highly valued component of the S4K program. In addition, the adult to child ratio was considerably higher than the required centre-based ratios and according to survey responses and through conversations with educators and community members alike, this enabled sustained interactions with children.

Study findings suggest that the communities-based approach of the S4K Cafes contributed toward SDG 4 aims through supporting lifelong learning for both community members and educators, forming an interactional space for contributing to a shared culture (Target 4.7), and contributing to educators practice development (Indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c). Each are presented below.

SDG 4 - Supporting Lifelong Learning

Guided conversations revealed how the community members participating in the Cafes found them to be an opportunity to learn about relating to young children. As the following exchange from a guided conversation indicates, an Educational Leader (Deborah) facilitated a conversation about the community members engaging with young children for the first S4K café. Community member Sally commented:

It's funny because, I realized how quickly you lose confidence if you're not in regular contact all the time with very young children. You doubt yourself and think 'I couldn't possibly run a workshop' but when it's in a group situation like this, I feel like, at least there is something I can do. (Sally, Guided conversation NCN1)

Elise indicated she felt the same way "Because though it's been a long time since I've worked with small children, I know everyone here can help me. It's good to know they can provide extra reinforcement." (Guided conversation NCN1). In a similar way, Rebecca (Guided conversation NCN5), a community member described herself as a novice at working with children: "I'm coming in really fresh. from not being an educator, I'm a parent [with] adult children." She explained her interest in participating in the S4K Cafes:

I was in the headspace that whatever happens [during the Cafe] is all good today, and I'm learning about what three year olds and four year olds can actually do. So, you know, if you're not an educator, you really don't know. Even though you're a parent, you still don't really understand what kids' capabilities are. (Rebecca, Guided conversation NCN5)

In this way community members perceived that the Cafes provided opportunities for advancing their understandings about working and playing with young children.

Educators too appeared to be learning skills in the S4K Cafes based on their personal interests, and such skills would contribute to their educational role. SDG 4 reflects a commitment to providing lifelong learning opportunities for all. In the Cafes, equal emphasis was placed on providing learning opportunities to both adult and child attendees. Educational Leader Deborah, who participated as a community member during the Cafes reflected on a conversation she had with an educator:

Lindy, one of the educators was saying she felt inspired to learn to play guitar after seeing me playing it with the children. She could see how much the children loved it and how she would love to be able to do this in her centre too. (Guided conversation NCN4)

The educational leader perceived that Lindy could see the possibility of developing a new skill that would be useful in her teaching practice. Over the course of the Cafes, Deborah supported Lindy with her guitar playing and reflected on how Lindy developed some basic skills for using the guitar while working with children, explaining:

Part of it was the fact that she saw how I wasn't particularly playing songs that you had to learn first. So, she could see that she didn't need to be a musician, but she could simply compose. The spontaneity meant that she couldn't go wrong. (Guided conversation NCN4)

The potential of the S4K Cafes as a space for lifelong learning was evidenced even further in the educator music episodes. During one Cafe, the educator and community member were playing their guitars together when a young boy came up to watch. He was invited to participate by the educator who said: "If I hold my fingers there, do you want to do what my thumb is doing?". The boy began to strum the guitar listening attentively to the music he made. These examples show how scaffolded learning experiences eventuated through the Skills 4 Kids Cafes and were made possible through the provision of resources and community integration and through a culture that fostered learning as an activity for all to engage in.

SDG Target 4.7 - Culture's contribution to sustainable development

A society's values and the way they are expressed represent a society's culture according to Hawkes (2001) who positioned culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability. The S4K Cafes may be regarded as culture-in-action bringing people of different ages, social backgrounds and interests together with the explicit intention of interacting together. Hägglund and Pramling Samuelsson (2009, p. 60) depict an image of children's learning about sustainability as including "a conviction that working for a sustainable world demands co-operation between human beings across borders of time and space". Viewed in this way, the S4K Cafes program offers a proactive strategy for contributing to a culture of sustainable development.

Educators mentioned the importance of seeing children in their care enjoy the space and enjoying the space *with* them. Comments included "I got to develop close bonds with my children and see new aspects of their learning" (Survey Educator 1). Key to being able to take the time to observe and reflect on the children's interactions with other people and the environment was having "plenty of supervision" (Survey Educator 7).

Field notes recorded by one of the researchers reflecting on these survey results noted the importance of giving educators time to become involved in the Cafes' activities and practices.

The S4K Cafes appear to provide abundant community volunteer support, engaging activities set up for children's involvement, and healthy eating provisions for children to prepare for themselves (with community member assistance), that it enables educators to be sufficiently relieved of the barriers to their own participation so that they too can get 'hands-on' in activities and practices with children, knowing that they are surrounded by sufficient supervision and support. (Field note, researcher 2, 30/5/19)

This field note draws attention to the intensity of early childhood educators' professional roles and the wide-ranging tasks they are required to perform in their regular settings in order to engage, educate and care for children (Sims et al., 2018), while also adhering to legislated assessment, reporting and compliance requirements. The Cafes provided a safe and appropriate community learning space with human and material resources enabling playful interactions amongst all attendees including educators. In so doing, the Cafes fostered a culture of 'relaxed' participation.

Findings from the research showed that the S4K Cafes also contributed to the development of a participatory culture through positioning children as active participants in the construction of stories alongside community members and educators. Some of these stories connected back to what the children had been learning in their centres. Two rich examples surfaced in field notes and illustrated the cultural connections made:

During the Skills 4 Kids café, a boy aged 5 spent approximately an hour re-creating the story of the three little pigs at the clay table with a community member. He used clay to build small houses for

the pigs - forming bricks to make the brick house and crafting small twigs and grasses into clay bases to represent the stick house and straw house. An educator joined in this extended clay story session taking place. The educator entered into the story at times with the child, and a community member supported the child by bringing additional materials for the house making and listening to the child's story telling. In addition, the educator documented some of the story telling for further conversations back at the childcare centre. (Field note, researcher 2, 28/6/19)

On another occasion:

Two boys developed a dinosaur world using clay combined with seed pods and garden cuttings to form the forest setting for the stegosaurus and pterodactyl dinosaurs that they crafted from clay - these were dinosaur names that the children volunteered, based on their own prior knowledge. The 'dinosaur world-building' provided an opportunity for extended conversations between the two children about what was happening in the forest they were creating, complete with a volcano and lava. An educator from the childcare centre attended by these boys spent time working with clay alongside them in concert with a community member, who all added to the growing conversation. When the children introduced the volcano into the scene, the educator referred back to the book about Pompeii and its volcano that they had been reading at the centre. In this way, the educator brought together their material explorations with the clay, with their learnings from their childcare centre. (Field note, researcher 2, 30/8/19)

The building of shared cultural worlds was evident in the participation and co-operation of children, educators and community members in these examples. The S4K Cafes provided embodied opportunities for the children to develop their oral language skills and story-telling through interactions with other children and adults using media such as clay 'world building'. At the same time, children and adults were exploring concepts of history, geography and the world they inhabited. The focus of Target 4.7 on culture as a contributor to sustainable development was built through these shared experiences and the intergenerational connections formed.

SDG Indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c - Contributing to educator professional learning and practice development

As materials and activities were brought to the S4K Cafes by community members, the educators were able to devote their time to taking a side-by-side approach with children, engaging in experiences that were different to their usual activities and routines in their own settings. For example, one educator commented that they had not played with clay before and proceeded to sit beside one of the children and *learn with them* to develop rolling, spiralling and blocking techniques. She indicated that this was not a typical practice for her since she was too busy setting up or packing up activities and supervising the children in her care which did not allow sufficient time (Field note, researcher 1, 30/8/19).

Experiencing different activities alongside children allowed educators to make informed decisions about what activities they would take back to their centres. Educators indicated that they highly valued "gathering activity ideas for use in our child-care centre activities where I work" (Survey Educator 3). Other educators suggested that the Cafes offered opportunities for engaging with new and different learning experiences and this formed a key component of what they valued about their involvement.

Educators intentionally developed personal skills by taking 'safe' risks during the Cafes. For example, each S4K Cafe involved the educational leader consultant (Di Nailon) "singing children into the Cafe" with some basic guitar accompaniment. She played limited chords in a rhythmic tune and sang improvised instructions, information and introductions (e.g. to enter the room and sit on the floor, where to find the bathrooms and what activities were happening today). During a later Cafe, an educator experimented singing the children back into the gathering space at the end of the session. Within a safe and supported environment with mentorship on hand, the educator in this example found the courage to create and try-out a new (for her) strategy for managing children's transitions.

Educators suggested that they valued the opportunity to network with educators from other centres and services (such as Family Day Care) and “have professional conversations with the adults” (Survey Educator 5) present. Many of the educators noted that they have limited opportunities to “network with other educators/professionals [and hear] different perspectives” (Survey Educator 4). In addition, educators noted how they valued the opportunities that the S4K Cafes provided for “networking [and] meeting new people in the community” (Survey Educator 6). In the reflective conversations conducted at the end of a Cafe, a community member confirmed this S4K Cafe outcome. She recounted that an educator had sought her advice about how they might better connect with community resources to enhance the experiences of the children in their centres. In the meantime, the educators’ recurring participation in the S4K Cafes provided ongoing opportunities to experience and explore the networking and educational benefits of professional learning in this (particular) style of community of practice, contributing towards the focus of SDG Indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c on educator professional learning.

Discussion

The research findings provide some evidence that the design and implementation of S4K Cafes were important in supporting the lifelong learning aims of SDG 4. In particular, ‘cultural contributions’ (Target 4.7) of the S4K Cafes that focused on developing dispositions for sustainable lifestyles including inclusion, learning together and working collectively, were highlighted in comments made by community members and educators. In addition, SDG Target indicator 4.7.1 (ii) c was evidenced through the Cafes creating an alternative professional learning approach in ECEC. Boeren (2019) argues for the need to include diverse experiences if high quality SDG-related learning is to occur. In this sense, the variety of ages and social backgrounds of the S4K Cafes participants echoed Boeren’s sentiment and reflected Egert, Fukkink and Eckhardt’s (2018) meta-analysis of professional development (PD) in ECEC. Egert, Fukkink and Eckhardt (2018) found that ECEC PD participant heterogeneity promoted higher level outcomes for educators’ understanding and practices as well as outcomes for children. The S4K Cafes brought together people with diverse knowledge and skills and afforded new learning experiences focused on young children’s participation and contribution to this intergenerational community of learners.

S4K Cafes combined formal and in-formal learning by adopting interactional strategies associated with experiential learning communities as described by Lave and Wenger (1991). As a specifically designed community of practice (CoP) the Cafes created opportunities: (i) for educators to learn from and with community; (ii) for community to interact and learn with children and ECEC professionals; and, (iii) for children to learn from other children and adults of diverse ages and life experiences. Within the CoP, selected ‘artisan’ skills-coaching between community members and educators contributed to ECEC professional learning outcomes. Also important in this context was the learning evidenced by community members’ reflections. Community members suggested that they were (re)discovering how to interact with children in safe and supported ways. S4K Cafes therefore provided ongoing relational learning interactions. According to Múñez et al. (2017) informal discussions in settings (such as CoPs) have the potential to lead to changes in participants’ ECEC-related behaviours, cognition, emotions, and motivations.

Findings also indicated that the S4K Cafes supported educators by building confidence to put new skills into practice, as the instance of the educator singing children back to the gathering place indicates. ECEC policy reforms in Australia have placed a greater emphasis on the need for intentional teaching by educators to achieve desired learning outcomes (DEEWR, 2010). At the same time, internationally in the field of early childhood research there has been a foregrounding of the need for educators to recognise and value the capacities of children (Heikka et al., 2018). The S4K Cafes disrupted the status quo of an education system in which educators are positioned as key pedagogical decision-makers and opened a creative space for the capacities of children and community to emerge as agentic in pedagogical decision-making. In this sense of building capacity for all participants, the S4K Cafes engaged with SDG 4.7.1 (ii) c, through focusing on ways to support early childhood educators to develop practice to implement education that supports sustainable development.

Beasy (2018; 2019) contends that for education for sustainable development to transcend from abstract ideas of what constitutes sustainability into practice-oriented actions for sustainability, it needs to reflect the everyday worlds of the communities engaging with it. To support such transitions, Pramling Samuelsson and Park (2017) argue

for epistemological and ontological shifts in the first instance. The S4K Cafes presented a format for engaging with education for sustainable development that firstly offered opportunity for ontological shifts. The Cafes challenged conceptions of how learning occurs by bringing community members of all ages and diverse social backgrounds (both professional and non-professional) to participate and learn together. Secondly, activities in the S4K Cafes reflected the sustainability skills of the community and through doing so, challenged embedded, epistemological assumptions regarding who can teach and what constitutes sustainability and is worth learning (Beasy, 2019). Everyone's skills and needs in the space were valued (Fenech et al., 2010). Thirdly, through reconstituting whose knowledge was valued and how knowledge is made, the Cafes formed their own culture, where all were recognised as contributors (Emery, 2019), offering one approach to supporting SDG Target 4.7 through culture's contribution to sustainable development.

Limitations

The design of the current study is subject to limitations. In recognition of the limitations of our research, we make the following recommendations to those who might wish to develop a community integrated intergenerational approach to education, and in particular ECEC professional learning. First, we recommend that opportunities for guided reflection with all participants similar to those held with community volunteers at the conclusion of each S4K Cafe are integrated into the program. In our case, as educators needed to return to their ECEC centres with the children in their care, there was insufficient time to engage them in reflecting upon the sessions before departing. Future iterations of the program (scheduled to continue in the near future) will include strategies for the conduct of reflective conversations at each centre. This, we believe, will support deeper understandings and activities for achieving SDG goals more generally, and in ways that focus on the conversations necessary to (re)think the approaches to education necessary for tackling major global challenges, at least in the early years. In addition, we acknowledge that participants in this iteration of the S4K Cafe program were largely homogenous across both ethnicity (largely Anglo-Celtic) and gender (largely female). We found the S4K program useful for the development of intergenerational understandings and see its potential for building intercultural understandings among attendees and suggest further iterations of the program to support participation that is more heterogeneous.

Conclusion

The early years are a foundational stage in which children enter into society. It is an important time for children to learn practices that support sustainable lifestyles. SDG 4 ambitiously demands education for all that supports sustainable development. Initiatives such as the S4K Cafes create conditions in which lifelong education for sustainable development become possible and exemplify how SDG 4, specifically SDG 4.7, 4.7.1 (ii) c., can be implemented in the early childhood sector. Policy and curriculum frameworks such as the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, revised 2017) and the Early Years Learning Framework in Australia (DEEWR, 2010), position education for sustainable development and the aspirations of SDG Target 4.7 in the domain of ECEC.

SDG Target 4.7 recognises the numerous complexities in constituting the educational needs of supporting sustainable development. This SDG Target, in contrast to so many of the other Targets under SDG 4 (and other SDGs), does not have 'strict' quantitative metrics that accompany it - perhaps recognising the integrated and multidimensional composition required in supporting sustainable lifestyles. In conducting this research, we brought into relief the complexity of isolating the experiences and instances of education for sustainable development in ECEC contexts and processes of culture building. In our attempts to analyse what goes on in a S4K Cafe, and in isolating out each of the individual elements that contributed to Targets and Indicators of SDG 4, there is a risk that the ways elements worked together synergistically is lost. Seeking to simplify and reduce down culture building, or lifelong learning to its constituent parts, fails to give recognition to the interactions that necessarily occur in concert. In this paper, we have sought to establish some ways of documenting the often intangible, 'felt' experiences of these phenomena as means of paving forward paths to evidence SDG 4.7, but at the same time, caution those seeking to replicate to take care that the complexity of relations are not lost.

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