



Combating Ageism with Curriculum-Based Intergenerational Programs

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Rationale

Age Discrimination in an Ageing Population

Ageing is an inescapable fact of life that we all face equally (Cramer & Barnett, 2018). However, attitudes to ageing, particularly in western society, are often negative (Weintrob, 2022). It has been repeatedly declared, despite age being listed as one of the protected characteristics within the Equality Act 2010 (Equality Act 2010; Williams, 2009), that ageism is the most common type of discrimination experienced in the United Kingdom (UK) (Bratt, Abrams & Swift, 2020; Cramer & Barnett, 2018; McCarron, 2018). The World Health Organization (no date) refers to ageism as the process which begins with the way we think and apply stereotypes to people due to their age. Feelings of prejudice are then attached to those stereotypes; we then act discriminatively upon those feelings.

Although ageism can include discrimination against a person based upon any age, elderly people are more often the victims of age discrimination in western society (Weintrob, 2022; Reid, 2022). Ylännä (2015), attributes this partly to the often-negative representation of older age in the media which creates stereotypical images and attitudes among younger generations. This argument can also be explained in terms of the glorification of youth in western media, as stated by Esposito (1987), as cited by Richeson and Shelton (2006, no page number), a normalised view in western culture is “‘If I can buy enough pills, cream, and hair, I can avoid becoming old’”. Other ways in which the media contributes to damaging societal views of age is through fear-inducing newspapers reports (Cramer & Barnett, 2018), such as this headline written by Graham-Harrison and McCurry for The Guardian newspaper (2023, no

page number): 'Ageing planet: the new demographic timebomb', and suggestions that we should be trying to avoid ageing such as: 'Hypertension drug could be repurposed to delay ageing' (Morgan, 2023, no page number). These depictions of age in turn socially stigmatise elderly people, isolating them from the rest of society and negatively impacting mental health (Corner, Brittain and Bond, 2007; Faculty of Old Age Psychiatry, 2018).

"If I can buy enough pills, cream, and hair, I can avoid becoming old" (Esposito, 1987, as cited by Richeson & Shelton, 2006, no page number),



1 - Figure 3, Anti Aging Programm... (Linolz, no date).

A phenomenon which has also been explored regarding this issue is the concept of internalised ageism (Steward, 2022). This is the process in which an individual internalises the negative societal views of age reflected by the society around them which then forms within their own self-conception (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017). The negative effects of this process have been described by Kang and Kim (2022) as damaging to an individual's psychological well-being, leading to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, all of which can also have an adverse effect on physical health. Ayalon and Tesch-Römer (2017), state that it is not only older people who are affected by internalised ageism but younger people also, who will age with a negative self-perception of themselves. From the above information, we can begin to understand how ageism impacts everyone in society from young to old (Abramson, 2020). Nelson (2005) describes ageism simply as discrimination against our future selves.

It is not only older people who are affected by internalised ageism but younger people also, who will age with a negative perception of themselves (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017).



2 - Figure 4, Man Looking at an Older Himself in the Mirror (Lizzul, no date).

Ageism, however, does not end with the attitudes of the misinformed public and is commonly reported within our social institutions (Chang *et al*, 2020). In recent years there have been multiple claims of age discrimination in our workplaces, media, legal system and health and social care services (World Health Organization, 2021; Macdonald & Levy, 2016; Kydd & Fleming, 2015). In 2012, the UK implemented a ban on age discrimination in the National Health Service (NHS) (Department of Health and Social Care, 2012); within this guidance paper, it is stated that it could be deemed illegal for health professionals to take actions or make decisions based upon stereotypical views of age, this is proof enough that the protection of the Equality Act 2010, which 'ban age discrimination against adults in the provision of services and public functions.' (Government Equalities Office, 2010, no page number) were not enough to prevent institutional ageism. However, some claim that even since the government ban in 2012, the problem persists and was particularly highlighted during the earlier periods of COVID-19 (Inouye, 2021; Mahler, 2021).

It is evident that negative attitudes towards age in the UK are deeply rooted within our societal values and our innate fear of death (Mahler, 2021). O'Connor and Mcfadden (2012), explain this through the application of terror management theory - a theory which illustrates how people naturally strive to protect themselves from death and induced death-thought accessibility (Van Tongeren, 2017) - older people are often: 'associated with mortality, thereby generating death-thought accessibility, stereotypes, and mixed emotions among younger adults.' (O'Connor & McFadden, 2012, p.1). Therefore, to address this inequality and undervaluation of the elderly in society, we must address our inaccurate representations of old age (Swift & Steeden, 2020).

This presentation outlines a proposed solution for tackling the problem of age discrimination in British society.

Intergenerational Programs as Part of the National Curriculum

'Intergenerational activities can be developed to support virtually any curriculum subject and academic skill.' (Kaplan, 2001, p.6).

Examples:

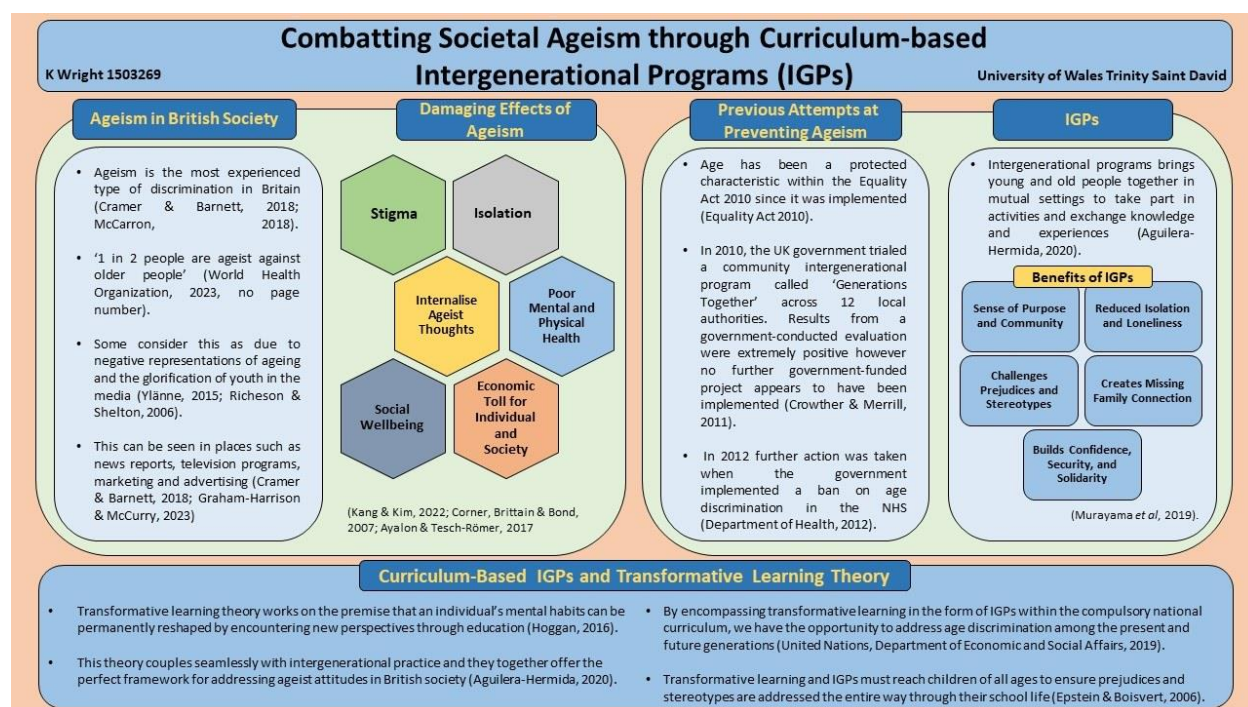
- A college in Israel includes older adults in their classrooms for social work studies (Hantman et al, 2013).
- Some schools in China are taking part in Family Intergenerational learning (UNESCO Institute for Life Long Learning, 2021).



Figure 2. Elderly learners taking the science class Sports and Breathing with children (2021)

<https://sway.office.com/CqmVWCBJzVJ9PwXm#content=qVUBBSa5CKliGU>

The poster below has been created to promote curriculum-based intergenerational programs.



The reference list below includes a list of all the sources used to gather information for all parts of this e-portfolio and a separate image reference list.

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