SCHOLARSHIP

We encourage readers to consider submitting papers that inform us of their work and interest in intergenerational program development, research, and policy. We welcome papers that reflect how intergenerational concepts can be integrated within multiple academic disciplines and can contribute to collaborative efforts within human service and community development initiatives. We look for submissions that examine a variety of research questions that will provide insights about intergenerational relations in formal and informal settings and that explore the social and global implications of this growing area of inquiry.
Intergenerational Dialogue to Reduce Prejudice: A Conceptual Model

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ABSTRACT. Residential segregation has severely limited racial integration in public schools and racial hostility and prejudice continue to exist within society. Studies demonstrate that youth may be unprepared as future leaders in dealing with the social justice issues of a diverse and global economy. Interventions to promote positive civic participation and mutual understanding between groups are essential ingredients for community building and social renewal. Theory suggests an intergenerational dialogic model may provide an effective framework to reduce prejudice among youth. A conceptual model for an intervention...
is presented. Descriptions of a pilot program and an elaboration of the model for future interventions are included. doi:10.1300/J194v05n01_02

KEYWORDS. Intergenerational, dialogue, prejudice, race relations, youth

INTRODUCTION

Community relationships once created through mutual understanding and generalized reciprocity are diminishing, making it difficult for divergent groups to connect on a meaningful basis (Cummings, Williams, & Ellis, 2002; Kaplan, Henkin, & Kusano, 2002; Putman, 2000). Persistent residential segregation has severely limited racial integration in public schools and racial hostility and prejudice continues to exist within society (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Studies demonstrate youth may be unprepared as future leaders dealing with the social justice issues of a diverse and global economy (Buckingham, 1999; Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Roker, Player, & Coleman, 1999; Schoem, 2003; Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best, Diversi, McLaughlin, & Silbereisen, 2002).

Age prejudice is also prevalent in our society (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). Palmore’s (1990) “Facts on Aging Questionnaire” identifies specific stereotypes of the elderly including being unhealthy, asexual, ugly, cognitively impaired, useless, isolated, lonely, poor, and depressed. Younger generations also suffer from negative stereotypes due to lack of contact with other age groups and often feel patronized and misunderstood by elders (Giles & Williams, 1994; Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). Ageist attitudes create a vicious cycle by limiting contact, thereby encouraging the stereotypes.

This paper proposes a conceptual model for an intergenerational, interracial dyadic intervention to reduce bias among youth and decrease ageist attitudes among youth and elders. It begins with a theoretical review of the development of intergroup bias and dominant practice paradigms to reduce bias. An intergenerational dialogic model is then presented followed by empirical support for the model. Suggestions as to how the model may be operationalized and evaluated for future interventions are included.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Social constructionism is an epistemological position asserting that reality is not fixed but known through human experience and interpretation. Individuals are active agents in constructing their social worlds through a process of negotiation with others in the development of shared meaning. Social representations are individual interpretations of experiences, interactions, and physical phenomena (Garfinkel, 1967). These interpretations, or representations, structure the way individuals and groups are culturally identified and socially positioned, leading to social categorizations (Blumer, 1969; McGowan, 1997).

Social categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) suggests that individuals organize their beliefs about the social world. Categorization is the process people use to understand objects by determining commonalities and differences with other known objects. Such categorizations also include people. When individuals classify themselves with others based on pre-conceived criteria, such as race or age, they maintain a shared categorization or shared social identity. Group identities lead to the development of ingroup favoritism and intergroup bias in order to view their group positively. Such bias promotes “us” versus “them” attitudes. Numerous studies indicate the power of social categorizations on behavioral, cognitive, and affective reactions to others (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Figure 1 illustrates the development of such bias.

FIGURE 1. Formation of intergroup bias.
Allport’s (1979) contact theory has emerged as a predictive theory for the reduction of intergroup bias. According to Allport, simple contact between divergent groups experiencing intergroup bias may not be sufficient to improve relationships. When participants perceive equal status within the contact situation, experience intergroup cooperation, and share common goals, bias may be reduced (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Pettigrew, 1998). Allowing time for personal acquaintance to develop and learning the historical and cultural background of the “other” also encourages mutual understanding (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Dovidio et al., 2003).

Interracial dialogue has been a predominant practice paradigm to reduce prejudicial attitudes and is grounded in contact theory (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Maoz, 2003; Oskamp, 2000; Schoem, 2003). Katherine Walsh (2003) estimates that as of December 2002, there were more than 266 civic interracial dialogue programs in 46 states and the District of Columbia. Although some dialogues have effectively increased knowledge, communication, and discussion among diverse groups, many are not framed to include the damaging consequences of inequitable power arrangements and have actually strengthened prejudicial attitudes (Helman, 2002; Schoem, 2003).

A weakness in the dialogue paradigm is that manipulating contact between diverse individuals within a structured context does not take into account the power dynamics of everyday social interactions. According to Dixon and Durrheim (2003), the contact model may neglect “the historical and current realities of segregation, realities that continue to shape intergroup contact” and may legitimize “an ideology for defining ‘our’ relationships with ‘them’ ” (p. 20). Pettigrew (1998) found perceived equal status among participants an important component in reducing bias. For interaction to be most effective, power inequalities in society should not translate into imbalances of power within dialogical settings (Walsh, 2002).

Utilizing narratives to challenge social categorizations has been effective in numerous interventions, with and without direct interracial contact (Bell, 2003; Ohsako, 2002; Pennix, 2002). Hearing personal, historical accounts of injustice may make it difficult to justify negative racial attitudes. “Whites are, in fact, often taken by surprise when confronted with alternative scenarios and interpretations of racial experience”
(Bell, 2003, p. 5). This approach encourages a more global acceptance of others and reduces “us” versus “them” ideologies.

**INTERGENERATIONAL CONTACT AND INTERVENTIONS**

Institutional age barriers created by laws and policies, along with informal norms and stereotypes, have restricted interaction between individuals across the life course. Dependence upon age-based social institutions is an integral component of western society creating social roles and expectations for different cohorts (Decker, 1978; Traphagan, 1998). Children are separated according to school grade, middle-aged individuals are expected to engage in work roles, and older people spend time in retirement and leisure activities (Riley & Riley, 1994). As a consequence of social policies there are increasingly more age segregated programs and social services (Torres-Gil, 2002). Since the social structure of a society greatly determines the nature and extent of social networks available to an individual, an age-delineated society limits the diversity of available networks (Berkman & Glass, 2002; Hagestad & Dannefer, 2001; Riley & Riley, 2000). Indeed, age segregation creates deficits for all age groups and may be as intractable as racial segregation (Hagestad & Dannefer, 2002; Henkin et al., 1997).

Intergenerational programs and interventions have recently emerged as a direct response to age segregation (Larkin & Newman, 1997). Intergenerational programs may be defined as “organized activities between members of two generations that foster cooperation and promote attitudinal change” (Cummings et al., 2002, p. 93). Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s intergenerational interventions have grown internationally and represent great diversity in purpose and methodology (Kaplan, Henkin, & Kusano, 2002).

Evaluations of intergenerational programs have demonstrated the positive impact of intergenerational contact in attitudinal changes towards the elderly (Aday, Sims, Evans, McDuffle, & Evans, 1996; Cummings et al., 2002; Seefeldt, 1989), generating life meaning (Sellars, 1998), and reducing isolation among elders (Greengross, 2002). Benefits for youth include increased sense of well-being, increased school attendance, and more positive attitudes toward elders (Abrams & Giles, 1999; Cummings et al., 2002). Intergenerational programs promote the development of social cohesion, shared meaning, and cultural continuity and increases cultural awareness (Henkin, Santiago, Sonkowsky, &...
Tunick, 1997; Kaplan et al., 2002). Granville and Ellis (1999) suggest that the unique relationship between adolescents and elders in intergenerational programs represent a model for social change.

At a time when institutional and cultural constraints make it increasingly difficult for divergent groups to interact, the intergenerational framework may provide an excellent intervention to promote social cohesion and positive social change.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
FOR AN INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGIC MODEL

Fox and Giles (1993) have incorporated an intergenerational communication model into the contact theory framework. Examining intergenerational contact as an intergroup concept, they have included age salience, age identity, and personality traits as necessary concepts for investigation. Research demonstrates the positive effect of intergenerational contact in reducing ageism in both elderly and youth.

Adolescents and elders both have ambiguous roles within society which may lessen the perceived power influences interfering with reducing bias. Granville and Ellis (1999) found that when bringing these groups together: “Both generations recognize their similarities and the way they are disenfranchised from mainstream social activities. . . . This unique relationship and the dynamics that take place when two marginalized groups come together, also present a powerful model for social change” (p. 235). In addition, due to generational distance, direct blame for historical discriminatory practices cannot be placed on participants, eliminating potential resentment and anger.

Feminist standpoint theory strongly suggests members of dominant groups may have a self-interest in maintaining and legitimizing their dominance within social structures (Swigonski, 1994). The voices of the oppressed, whether as a result of their ethnic, racial, spiritual, gender, or sexual identity, may have less interest in maintaining the status quo and their perspectives may offer valuable critical analyses. Eliciting the narratives of marginalized populations may provide needed data to evaluate social representations and encourage reflexivity.

Developmental theory also suggests the potential for the intergenerational model. Erikson’s theory suggests that there is a conflict of integrity versus despair occurring during old age (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998). This involves the ability to accept death as an inevitable part of life and a belief that one has made significant
contributions during life versus the belief that one’s life has been meaningless. According to this model, adolescents are conflicted between identity development and role confusion and are attempting to discover who they are and that they are capable of fulfilling meaningful roles in society. Both these stages imply the potential for the re-examination of self and one’s dominant value orientation. While the adolescent is struggling to develop an identity and learn his/her potential, the elder is in a period of reflection to find meaning and contentment. These introspective stages are conducive to self-examination, necessary to alter existing social categorizations and attitudes.

Figure 2 illustrates the theoretical model for an intergenerational narrative intervention. Intergenerational contact theory, developmental theory, and feminist standpoint theory suggest the intergenerational intervention may have a positive effect in reducing racial bias and ageist attitudes among youth.

**EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR MODEL**

A small qualitative study of intergenerational dialogue between German pupils and Jewish Seniors provides empirical support for the

![Theoretical Model Diagram]

FIGURE 2. Theoretical model.
intergenerational model for encouraging reflexivity (Ohsako, 2002). Students met with a Jewish senior group as part of a school-based intervention. Teachers asked the elders to discuss significant childhood experiences followed by student questions as part of a three-hour dialogue. When participants were interviewed upon the completion of the dialogue, seniors reported ease of communication with students. German students described increased empathy toward the seniors and expressed respect and admiration for their courage and tolerance.

Intergenerational dialogue journals have been used to challenge participants to consider divergent interpretation of events (Bean & Rigoni, 2001). The sharing of oral history within an intergenerational framework has also been effective in the area of art education (LaPorte, 2000). The Netherlands Institute of Care and Welfare developed a neighborhood-reminiscence program using memories and stories of residents to promote understanding and respect between social groups (Merken, 2002).

**PILOT PROGRAM OF MODEL**

A pilot program involving college students and elders living in a southern community was organized by Meet Me There, Inc., a nonprofit agency dedicated to intergenerational and interracial programming. After being trained in interview techniques, students interviewed elders in racially diverse dyads to discuss their experiences with racism. Using a semi-structured interview format, students asked about discrimination and racism throughout the elder’s lifespan. Most student/elders met a minimum of four times to complete the interviews. The narratives were then typed, edited, and bound in a single volume. A celebratory event was held for participants, friends, and community members. Individual stories were shared on a voluntary basis and books were distributed. Although the program was not part of a research study, program evaluation indicates the strong potential for the intergenerational narrative format to eradicate negative social categorizations.

Statements from students include the following:1

My eyes were opened to a new perspective of history. A personal version that I never heard before. The injustices he experienced inspire me to fight for social justice and, when I become a teacher, make sure my students hear the reality about hate.
I grew up in a family full of prejudice. Meeting Mary and hearing about the pain of discrimination will stop that ugly cycle.

You have certainly provided me with a lot of insight that I would not have acquired, had I not been given the opportunity to get to know you. You have taught me a lot, and definitely provided me with the insight to recognize the subtleties of discrimination in this country.

I was somewhat skeptical as to whether we would have any kind of connection . . . but from the time that we (met) I felt as though I had met a kindred spirit or a long time friend. Any generalizations I had of you were quickly abolished.

Hearing the narrative accounts of discrimination and racism from Black elders offers the potential for the recognition of negative social categorizations held by students with little experiential knowledge of power inequalities within social structures and normative value orientations. Such realization may prepare students to be leaders in facing social justice issues in a diverse and global economy. A conceptual model for the intervention is seen in Figure 3.

**FUTURE INTERVENTIONS**

Future interventions, building on the intergenerational narrative model, could merge developmental theory, intergenerational contact theory, and feminist standpoint theory to take into account issues of age, race, and power. Classroom-based interventions or interventions held within area youth organizations would bring together youth and elders to discuss the influence of racism and discrimination across the lifespan. Writing narratives contributes to the development of relationships and reiterates the knowledge learned in the interviews. Binding the narratives into a single volume not only provides a mutual and shared goal, but a permanent document available to the community. A post-celebratory event contributes to community building and potentially extends the positive effects of the intervention to others.

The use of pre-tests/post-tests to quantify racial prejudice and ageist attitudes would provide empirical support for the intervention. In addition, focus groups formed at the completion of the intervention would provide qualitative data to serve as an additional measurement of intervention effectiveness and provide more subjective information about the dyadic relationships and the influence of specific narrative stories.
CONCLUSION

In summary, the proposed intergenerational intervention has the potential of decreasing racial and ageist prejudice among the participants. Such attitudinal changes may alter the behavior of the individual which in turn, may create more accepting and tolerant relationships with others, thereby impacting the larger community. Public sharing, in the form of a celebratory event also expands the influence of the program. At a time in history when intolerance is prevalent, such interventions may be a meaningful venue for enhancing relationships and society.
NOTE

1. Names of the students have been changed.

REFERENCES


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