
Resources for the Teaching of Aging to Undergraduates: An Annotated Bibliography

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that ageism is an important topic of study in academic circles as we aim to build more inclusive and equitable environments to facilitate tertiary learning. In the succeeding annotated bibliography, a list of resources that can offer ideas on the topic of teaching of ageism to undergraduates is put forward. These resources include content on why ageism is important as a topic, its importance in the university classroom, and practical applications related to its instruction. To achieve this, this annotated bibliography draws from evidence in research related to gerontology, educational psychology, and social justice pedagogy, amongst other areas. It is hoped that this paper can serve as a guide to academics interested in educating and empowering their students to become more aware of this major form of discrimination.

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that ageism is an important topic of study, especially in academic circles, as we aim to build towards a more inclusive and equitable environment for those whom we benefit. In the text, *Teaching for a Tolerant World*, the NCTE (National Council of Teacher Educators) writes that ageism, amongst other forms of discrimination (i.e. racism, sexism, etc.) "all find their way into American culture; and thus, the attitudes connected with each find their way into the minds, if not the hearts, of American young people" ("Preface," 1999, p. vii). In that sense, "If we as teachers believe that prejudice is a learned behavior, then it is imperative that we work as teachers to reduce, if not eliminate, prejudices we find both in ourselves and in our students" ("Preface," 1999, p. vii).

In the succeeding annotated bibliography, a list of resources that can offer ideas towards the teaching of aging to undergraduates in general education or humanities coursework is put forward. These resources include content on the importance of discussing ageism the university classroom and ideas as to how this can be done most effectively. To achieve this, this annotated bibliography draws from evidence in research related to gerontology, educational psychology, and social justice pedagogy, amongst other areas. It is hoped that this annotated bibliography will serve as a guide to academics interested in educating and empowering their students to become more aware of this major form of discrimination. This annotated bibliography is specifically aimed at instructors who are looking for ways to integrate ageism related discussions within their pedagogy.

2. Annotated Bibliography

Altpeter, M., & Marshall, V. W. (2003). Making Aging "Real" for Undergraduates. *Educational Gerontology*, 29(9), 739-756.

This paper by Mary Altpeter & Victor W. Marshall reflects on a semester-long, one-credit, undergraduate course in aging that was offered at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. The idea of the course came from a realization of the faculty, that aging coursework whilst generally available and well-received by graduate students, was not being provided to nor facilitated for the undergraduate community. Indeed, the faculty was concerned about the lack of undergraduate interest in the topic of aging coupled with the lack of coursework available for them (Altpeter & Marshall, 2003, p. 740). It was in response to this that the "Introduction to Aging" course was created. In this course, a "transformation method" that aimed "at changing students' attitudes and beliefs through collaborative exploration and dialogue shared with their faculty and through their own critical reflection on course content" was employed (Altpeter & Marshall, 2003, p. 742). To demonstrate one way of how this was done in the course, a

"Life Expectancy Calculator Exercise" was presented to students to uncover and raise awareness and sensitivity to aging (Altpeter & Marshall, 2003, p. 755). Student responses and reflections were subsequently discussed in the paper.

Barrett, A. E., & Cantwell, L. E. (2007). Drawing on Stereotypes: Using Undergraduates' Sketches of Elders as a Teaching Tool. *Educational Gerontology*, 33(4), 327-348.

This paper by Anne Barrett and Laura Cantwell discusses the design, implementation, and results of integrating drawing in an undergraduate course on aging. This undertaking was based on the premise that "Ageist biases and misconceptions among students present a challenge to instructors who not only see many positive aspects of aging but also are aware of the many negative societal and individual-level consequences of ageism" (Barrett & Cantwell, 2007, p. 328). To create a starting point for the course on its first day, students were asked to draw a picture of an elderly person. These sketches ultimately "served as a springboard for a discussion on a range of topics including the social construction of age and "old age," the influence of cultural and social structural relations on our attitudes toward the elderly, and strategies to combat ageism" (Barrett & Cantwell, 2007, p. 328). Ultimately, many positive and negative stereotypes of elderly people were found in the student sketches. As the semester progressed, these sketches served as points of discussion, where students' initial attitudes were challenged. The authors also expressed that they found these sketches to be an effective teaching tool that can, in the future, be adopted for a variety of courses.

Choolayil, A. C., & Putran, L. (2020). Ageism among Undergraduate Students: Do Grandparents make a Difference? *Indian Journal of Gerontology*, 34(3), 333-342.

This paper by academics in India begins with a brief but detailed summary of ageism, its current state, origins, and transmission. Given that the study is based in an Indian context, so do the authors express its existence in that context, where traditionally, "Indian culture is often termed gerontocratic or one marked my filial piety" (Choolayil & Putran, 2020, p. 336). The authors make the point that this cultural norm and its associated effects are by no means definite ones, and in fact, are "drastically changing" (Choolayil & Putran, 2020, p. 336). Thus, in a society where the elderly traditionally lived with their children, the new cultural changes represent what is truly a major societal change of thinking. Given this fast and somewhat unsuspecting cultural change, the authors undertook a study to determine if undergraduate students at three colleges who either were living with or had lived with their grandparents "had significantly lower ageism than their colleagues who had never lived with their grandparents" (Choolayil & Putran, 2020, p. 336). It was found ultimately that "the respondents who had either lived or were living with their grandparents had lower ageism scores..." (Choolayil & Putran, 2020, p. 338). The authors concluded that "intergenerational living or living with grandparents can significantly influence the attitudes of young people towards older adults" (Choolayil & Putran, 2020, p. 339).

Danks, C., & Rabinsky, L. B. (1999). *Teaching for a Tolerant World, Grades 9-12: Essays and Resources*. National Council of Teachers.

The text, *Teaching for a Tolerant World, Grades 9-12: Essays and Resources*, published by the NCTE, is a compilation of essays and resources "designed to help high school English teachers adapt their own classroom lessons for teaching about genocide and intolerance". Within this, a variety of issues are covered, including racism, sexism, ageism, ethnocentrism, and homophobia. The book includes sixteen essays, primarily authored by high school teachers and university academics. About half of these issues address intolerance, whilst the other half address genocide. The topics include discussions on definitions of the terms in question, young people's responses to the elderly, teaching about women in 21st-century genocides, and teaching conflict resolution, amongst others. Furthermore, a third part of the book includes resources, organized by subheadings (Native American/Holocaust, etc.) that would be useful for a teacher within a pedagogical context. The text is based on the premise that "understanding or at least being willing to accept the existence of "the other" lies at the heart of issues regarding tolerance" (Danks & Rabinsky, 1999, p. vii). Thus, teachers wanting to promote these goals within their classrooms will find guidance in this text.

Glasgow, J. N. (2001). Teaching Social Justice through Young Adult Literature. *The English Journal*, 90(6), 54-61.

Jacqueline Glasgow's text "Teaching Social Justice through Young Adult Literature" is an examination of the questions of how might differences of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and language be embraced by students. Glasgow pursues this question in the context of young adult literature, which, as she describes "provides a context for students to become conscious of their operating world view and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations" (Glasgow, 2001, p. 54). Glasgow presents her own framework for how she structured her Young Adult Literature course, which is in such a way to "foreground social justice and critique". This was done by assigning novels that would cause students to question the ways systems, such as race, privilege, are implicated in specific situations (Glasgow, 2001, p. 55). Through the usage of web technologies, high school and college students were paired to explore these notions. Students embarked on projects such as creating an "Original Metaphor and Explanation" visual using PowerPoint (Glasgow, 2001, p. 57). Others responded to the literature with their

own visuals and even poetry. Ultimately, it was found that "students and teachers have developed a greater sense of our own agency, as well as a sense of greater social responsibility toward and with others and society as a whole" (Glasgow, 2001, p. 60).

Glynn, C., Wesely, P., & Wassell, B. (2018). *Words and Actions: Teaching Languages Through the Lens of Social Justice* (2nd ed.). ACTFL.

The book *Words and Actions: Teaching Languages Through the Lens of Social Justice*, is one that presents both theory and guidelines for teaching social justice within the language classroom. The book is divided into eight chapters, with the majority of them being practice and implementation based, such as "Creating Original Social Justice Units" and "Planning Daily Lessons". As the authors describe it, the motivation for the project is rooted in the idea that "social justice, critical pedagogy, and culturally sustained teaching are central to our educational philosophies" (Glynn et al., 2018, p. i). The book is targeted for K-16 teachers, many, who, as the authors see it, are striving to address social justice topics within the various spaces they occupy. This is based on the premise that "students from both multicultural and monocultural classrooms will emerge for their educational experiences into a complex, multicultural, multilingual world", and the best ones who are in the optimal position to prepare students to engage in an empathetic, responsive, and open manner (Glynn et al., 2018, p. i).

Heyman, J. C., Gutheil, I. A., White-Ryan, L., Phipps, C., & Guishard, D. (2008). Aging in the Undergraduate Curriculum: Faculty Perspectives. *Educational Gerontology*, 34(5), 372-384.

In this paper, the authors conducted a study of faculty at ten undergraduate institutions across a variety of academic disciplines, with regard to their perceptions on aging content within their respective curriculums. This was done based on the authors understanding that an effective way to help students learn more about aging is through faculty at undergraduate colleges taking the initiative of including aging-based content in their teaching (Heyman et al., 2008, p. 373). In the following study, it was found that "over 80% of the faculty members who responded felt aging content was adequately covered in the courses they taught", something the authors found concerning (Heyman et al., 2008, p. 381). This is because this sentiment ran at odds with the authors' finding that of "the total 474 courses faculty respondents reported on, approximately two-thirds seldom or never included aging content" (Heyman et al., 2008, p. 381). The authors posed questions to the faculty regarding resources that could aid them in the teaching of aging, for which the faculty brought up various ideas, including required readings related to aging being mandated, assistance from aging specialists, and so forth (Heyman et al., 2008, p. 379-380).

Lytle, A., Nowacek, N., & Levy, S. R. (2020). Instapals: Reducing ageism by facilitating intergenerational contact and providing aging education. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 41(3), 308-319.

This paper presents a study whereby undergraduate students were placed with older adults over the age of 65, as part of a framework known as "PEACE" (Positive Education about Aging and Contact Experiences). This model aimed to promote two elements, one being education about aging, and the second being positive intergenerational contact (Lytle et al., 2020, p. 309). PEACE is described by the authors as a framework that serves as an "ageism-reduction intervention". In this case, PEACE was employed on fourteen design majors, in a course not designed for gerontology studies. In practical terms, this was done through an intervention which was coined as "Instapals", which aimed "to test for the first time whether ageism can be reduced by providing more accurate aging education and facilitating positive intergenerational contact using technology (Instagram)" (Lytle et al., 2020, p. 309). The paper, which presented various measures related to this study aim, such as in analyzing student "Affective attitudes toward older adults" and "Aging anxiety" found that "facilitating positive intergenerational contact and challenging inaccurate aging beliefs through education reduced ageism" (Lytle et al., 2020, p. 315).

Qureshi, S., Jones, H., Adamson, J., & Ogundipe, O. A. (2017). Aging simulation for promoting empathy in medical students. *BMJ Simulation and Technology Enhanced Learning*, 3(2).

This study took place in the context of a medical school unit that aimed to prepare students for the care of elder patients, of which the authors opined that fostering professional and altruistic attitudes was a necessary element to achieve. The main purpose was to promote empathy in the students, something that was attempted through a simulation, where students would wear a simulation suit, "consisting of a weighted vest, soft collar, straps, and overshoes" (Qureshi et al., 2017, p. 2). From here, the student would carry out basic tasks, such as getting from seated to standing position, typing a sentence, walking a circuitous route around the center, and so forth (Qureshi et al., 2017, p. 2). This was complicated due to the fact that besides the attire, the suit limited joint movement at the knees, ankles, elbows, wrists, and neck, ultimately stimulating reduced mobility (Qureshi et al., 2017, p. 2). After the simulations, students reflected on their experience, which, as the authors mentioned, showed that students "indicated a more empathetic attitude to older patients" (Qureshi et al., 2017, p. 4).

Tullo, E., Greaves, L., & Wakeling, L. (2016). Involving older people in the design, development, and delivery of an innovative module on aging for undergraduate students. *Educational Gerontology, 42*(10), 698-705.

This paper revolves around a project that aimed to involve elderly people in the design, development, and delivery of an undergraduate module on aging for undergraduate students. In the authors' context of the United Kingdom, they stated that "the majority of university students are unlikely to receive any formal gerontology education or be afforded opportunities to interact with older people during their degree program" (Tullo et al., 2016, p. 698). In that sense, the authors, faculty at Newcastle University aimed to create a module that would allow for undergraduate exposure in the topic of aging, that would be open to students from any academic background. Additionally, an important objective was to "effectively capture the realities of aging as experienced by older people in the community" (Tullo et al., 2016, p. 699). In that sense, elderly people from a university organization aiming to "harness the mental capital and immense experience of the public in addressing the challenges and opportunities of aging and demographic change" were brought to serve as volunteers in the creation of the modular curriculum (Tullo et al., 2016, p. 699). At the end of the resulting module, which was studied via the progression through it by various student volunteers, it was found that the "interaction between students and older people is fundamental to the success of the module" (Tullo et al., 2016, p. 703).

3. Conclusion

An annotated bibliography was presented intended primarily to guide educators hoping to teach and instruct for ageism. These resources draw from a variety of fields and are by no means extensive. It is hoped that this annotated bibliography can serve as a call for more work to be conducted in this area, such as other annotated bibliographies which can further guide educators or lesson plans and scholarly publications analyzing practice. Ultimately, this annotated bibliography is inspired by the notion that educators have a responsibility to inform those who walk through their classrooms of this topic that is consequential to all.

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