



# Intergenerational Education: a Proposal for the Recognition of Diversity and Social Inclusion

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## Abstract

*In present-day society, characterised by the increase in life expectancy, the accelerated changes in all spheres (social, family, economic, cultural, educational, technological, etc), multiculturalism and diversity, it is necessary to accept and value heterogeneity as a positive factor that forms part of the social dynamic[1]. Often, diversity, by reason of gender, race, economic status or age, is presented as a problem that affects equality of opportunity. Specifically, as Montero and Baena[2] point out, certain historic and socio-economic changes have favoured and sometimes imposed segregation by age in the social, educational and working continuity that has relegated elderly people to the second class. From this perspective, this study seeks to make intergenerational education visible as a possibility to promote the recognition of diversity of age and to foster it as an efficient proposal for the inclusion and social recognition of elderly people. A review of the literature demonstrates the need for and value of intergenerational education in the framework of present-day society, and proves that intergenerational education enables diversity to be recognised and heterogeneity to be valued as an enriching element.*

**Keywords:** *Intergenerational Education, diversity, social inclusion.*

## 1. Introductions

In present-day society, characterized by increased life expectancy, the accelerated changes in all spheres (social, family, economic, cultural, educational, technological, etc.), globalization, multiculturalism and diversity, it is necessary to accept and evaluate heterogeneity as a positive factor that is part of social dynamics.

Often, diversity for reasons of gender, race, economic status or age, is presented as a problem of equality of opportunities. Specifically, as pointed out by a Montero and Baena [2] certain historic and socio-economic changes have promoted and at times imposed, segregation by age in social, working and educational continuum that has relegated elderly people to the second level.

A method of recognizing the varied and heterogeneous nature of society is reflected in the backing given by national and international organizations to foster intergenerational relations and learning among distinct generations with the aim of achieving intergenerational solidarity [3]. Intergenerational Education can contribute to balancing out inequalities and overcoming social segregation by promoting understanding and respect among generations, enabling societies to develop [1].

A society cannot evolve if its population groups do not inter relate and even more so, if they do not know each other. In this sense, intergenerational education is an opportunity for bonding between different generations which enables them to develop together. The challenge is to consider elderly people apart from their age, as people, with possibilities for development and social participation, without interposing discriminatory and stereotyped views [4].

From this perspective, this study seeks to make visible intergenerational education as a possibility to promote the recognition of diversity by reason of age, and to encourage it as an efficient means for the inclusion and social recognition of elderly people.

## 2. Pertinence and relevance of intergenerational education

Nowadays, due to the rapid demographic changes experienced in the world in recent decades, age is presented not only as a factor of diversity, but also as a reason for exclusion in the fields of work, education and social life [2].

Formerly, age provided a more important status, both quantitatively and qualitatively. But now, age, by itself, does not confer social status. The value usually attributed to an older social group is that of experience, which now is underrated in most cases [1,5].



The discrimination that arises from age prevents the definition of a clear and positive role for old age. For example, the elderly do not have work obligations, and this marginalises them socially. It frees them of duties, but at the same time, it deives them of status and positive social roles.

This situation brings us to look for a profound qualitative change for the elderly so that old age should be considered as another stage in life and not as a period of weakness and breakdown. We find ourselves faced with a reality to which the sphere of education cannot remain indifferent. Therefore, intergenerational education is a fundamental tool, since among its aims we find how to confront marginalization through education, promoting the development and recognition of everyone, at the personal and social level, regardless of their age [2,1,6].

## 2.1. Conceptualization of Intergenerational Education

In order to understand the concept of intergenerational education we refer to two key definitions for its identification and recognition.

Sáez [7] defines it stressing the relationships between people to facilitate personal empathy:

Processes and procedures that support and legitimize it emphasizing cooperation and interaction between two or more generations whatever, obtaining the sharing of experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, in search of their respective self esteem and personal self realizations. The objective is to change and tranform itself in learning with the others (p.29).

García Mínguez [8] points out that intergenerational education discovers the common values of different age groups enabling them to carry out different life projects in common: "Education between generations is a dialogue of cultures that, starting from common motivational fields, tries to discover the symbolic values leading to the enrichment of the life projects of different groups" (p. 21).

These definitions of intergenerational education enable us to identify its characteristics:

- Intercultural dialogue
- Liberty
- Shared reasoning
- Sharing experiences, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values
- Relationships of equality
- Transformation from learning with others
- Gratification of life projects

In short, as Muñoz y Montero [1] says, interregenerational education starts initially from taking into account the elements that are typical of each individual and that can be transformed to improve the conversation with the other and so achieve a better social and personal relationship. For that, intergeneration dialogue recognizes that there are differences and there is a way to find them. This dos not mean that the logical differences established during the course of life should be rejected, rather it is an attitude, an acceptance of the other person, which brings about an enrichment in one's visión of the world and the strengthening of values such as tolerance, mutual recognition, respect, co-existence and solidarity. Thus, it is not worth so much to draw close to the other to be, but to know ourselves and, from there, to understand and value ourselves and to act.

## 2.2. Characteristics of the teaching model of intergenerational education

In line with what has been said above, to make intergenerational education posible a teaching model is required that considers a series of principles: Mínguez [9] establishes the following characteristics of the educational model for intergenerational relations:

- Focused on improving communication
- Based on respect for mutual rights and duties
- Grounded on participation and dialogue
- Supported on new methods: Innovation and creativity
- Opening up to diversity and personalized attention
- Oriented to teamwork
- Integrated into the real socio-cultural context
- The ecological scenario is is built on the common needs of both younger and older people
- t is realistic, interactive intervention based on solidarity
- It is an intervention boosted by humanistic values and attitudes



### 2.3. Benefits of Intergenerational Education

Educational experience and research carried out from the intergenerational perspective confirm multiple benefits for the people who participate and for society as a whole [1,10,11,12]. Thus the benefits referred to are:

- People of different generations can share their talents, resources, experiences etc.
- It avoids exclusion for reasons of age.
- It overcomes mutual myths and stereotypes
- It recognizes the positive value of diversity
- It will introduce new roles and perspectives
- It will improve self-esteem and understanding
- It makes the social inclusion of elderly people possible

In short, intergenerational education is a possibility for the recognition of diversity as an enriching element and will enable a society for people of all ages to be built [3]. In this sense, Henkin [13] recognized that intergenerational education came with the following values:

- Interdependence given the feeling of responsibility shared among people.
- Reciprocity to assess and learn among all age groups.
- Individual worth, regardless of age
- Diversity as an enriching element
- Inclusion
- Equality
- Social connectivity

### 3. Conclusions

The study confirms that intergenerational education enables diversity and the evaluation of heterogeneity to be recognized as enriching elements. The closer and deeper knowledge of the various age groups makes it possible to create a more real perception of the other, as well as value people's human and social capital. The recognition of the social capital of elderly people is the first step to promote their inclusion and social participation as active members and citizens with full rights in present day society.

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