

Intergenerational Programs: Breaking Down Ageist Barriers & Improving Youth Experiences

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Introduction

Ageism is discrimination based on a person's age. We live in a society where there are often misconceptions about aging^[1]. Ageism today is most commonly directed towards older adults^[2]. People view older people as unproductive, sickly and cognitively slower. While it is less common, ageism can also be directed by older adults towards younger generations. Situations where for example a young person will not get a job because they are "too young" or "too inexperienced". Stereotypes such as these can be harmful especially since they are often untrue. LINKages is a non-profit organization that aims bridge the gap between older and younger generations by building intergenerational programs for youth and seniors. Intergenerational programs aim to eliminate prejudice based on age and develop understanding between age groups. Linkages provides Intergenerational Sensitivity Training for students. Mandatory training and orientation helps produce meaningful and impactful interaction between youth and seniors. Senior participants in LINKages programs have consistently been noted as having increased socialization, as well as improved quality of life and general well being. Students gain a better understanding of the older generation. When it comes to choosing a career path, students who better understand older adults are more likely to chose to work with seniors.

Background Information

LINKages' intergenerational programs use engaging activities suitable for all ages. LINKages added musicLINKS to their programs in 2016. MusicLINKS incorporates music in to the interactions between seniors and students. The addition of music to LINKages was inspired by research showing the positive outcomes music can have for seniors with dementia^{[3][4]}. Like any other LINKages program, students are matched with a senior who they get to connect with and learn from. In addition, they also get to work with their senior to assemble a playlist of the seniors favorite songs. In the process, both parties gain a better understanding of each other and the goal is that former misconceptions will change.



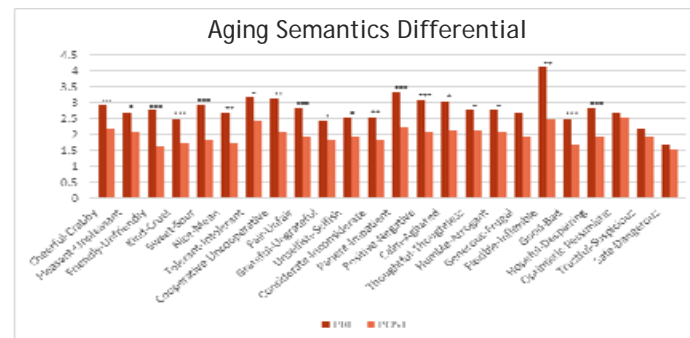
Research Questions

- Did youth impressions of the elderly change over time?
- Do students experience a positive attitude shift towards aging and seniors in general?
- Do students experience growth in character development?
- Was the program a positive experience for youth?

Methods

Design: Single Group Pre Post-test design was used.
Sample: 44 residents and 87 students participated in the program. There were eight residents that dropped out, eight that passed away and four that joined. Program ended with 32 residents and 87 students.
Setting: Programs took place in Agecare Glenmore, Agecare Midnapore, Carewest Sarcee and Carewest George Boyack care facilities. Students from St Stephen School, Bishop Carroll High School, Centennial High School and G.P. Vanier School participated. Schools and facilities were all located in Calgary Alberta.
Data Collection: Surveys were distributed through Google Docs and filled out by students prior to beginning the program and then again at the project's conclusion.
Measures: Data was collected using the Youth Experience Survey (YES) and the Aging Semantics Differential (ASD)^{[5][6]}.
Data Analysis: Data was analyzed using Independent Sample T tests and Descriptive statistics with SPSS.

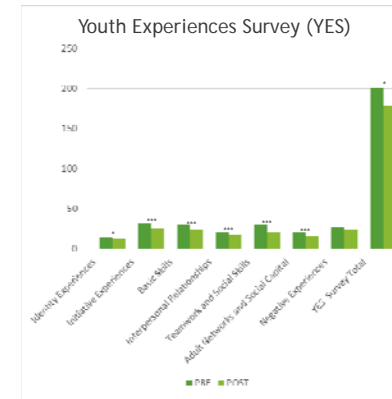
Results



The Aging Semantics Differential measures youth perception of aging individuals on a number of personal qualities. Differences tested by independent samples t-tests

*Indicates significance. * = p < 0.05
** = p < 0.01
*** = p < 0.001

Results



The YES survey measured the type of youth developmental experiences encountered through the MusicLINKS program. With a focus on positive developmental experiences within the domain of personal and interpersonal developmental experiences gained through the program. These include Identity development, Initiative, Basic Skills, Teamwork, Social Skills, Building Positive Relationships, Adult Networks and Social Capital. Tests of differences pre and post implementation of the MusicLINKS program were performed using independent samples t-tests

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Conclusion

On average, youth attitudes about older people improved significantly after engagement in the MusicLINKS program. Youth gained a better understanding of the older generation. Intergenerational programs such as this one are significant because in a society that is aging, the population of older adults is growing. Along with the population of elderly people, the number of people with dementia will also continue to grow. Breaking down barriers and tackling misconceptions now means a more understanding society in the future. It also could mean that such programs could increase the number of young people willing to enter in to professions working with elderly people in the future.



[1]Rippon, I., Kneale, D., de Oliveira, C., Dumakovic, P., & Scipione, A. (2014). Perceived age discrimination in older adults. *Age and Aging*, 43(3), 374-386. doi:10.1093/ageing/afu144
[2]Jayson, L., & Teuch-Romer, C. (2017). Taking a closer look at ageism: self- and other-directed ageist attitudes and discrimination. *European Journal of Ageing*, 14(1), 1-4. doi:10.1007/s10433-016-0409-4
[3]Hooley, L. (2012). Musical intervention for patients with dementia: a meta-analysis. *Journal of clinical nursing*, 22, 1202-1216
[4]Vanstone, A. D., & Cuddy, L. L. (2009). Musical Memory in Alzheimer Disease. *Aging, Neuropsychology, and Cognition*, 17(3), 108-128. doi:10.1080/1380339080262676
[5] Hansen, D. M., & Larson, R. (2002). The Youth Experience Survey. Unpublished manuscript, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. [http://web.acad.siu.edu/youthdev/]
[6] Robert C. Irwin, P., Alexander von Eye, PhD, and Jeffrey A. Kelly, PhD. (1992). The Aging Semantics Differential: A Confirmatory Factor Analysis. *The Gerontologist*, 32(5), 614-621.

Methods

- ▶ 4 Care Facilities and 4 local junior high and high schools
- ▶ 32 residents and 87 students meet once a week for 60min
- ▶ Groups of 2-3 students worked with each resident
- ▶ Groups engaged in six different types of activities, MusicLINKs being one of them

- ▶ Student Surveys - completed pre and post intervention
 - ▶ Youth Experiences Survey
 - ▶ Aging Semantic Differential

- ▶ Resident Observations
 - ▶ Observational Measurement of Engagement
 - ▶ Observed Emotion Rating Scale

Results

Youth Experiences Survey

- ❖ Investigates youth learning and developmental experiences as they participate in activities.

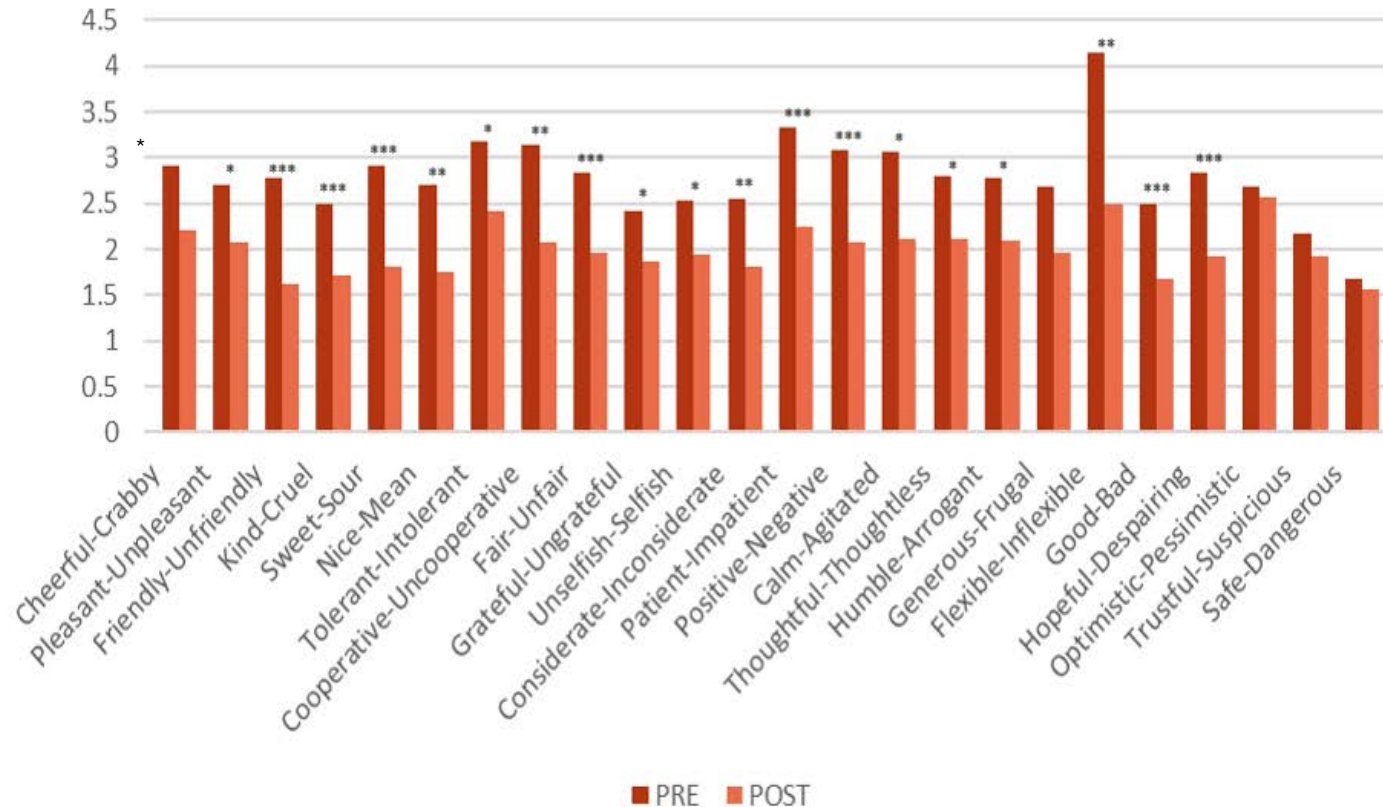
- ▶ Students found that the program allowed them opportunity to:
 - ▶ Engage and connect with their parents as they had conversations with them about the program.
 - ▶ Get to know people within their community.
 - ▶ Think about different career and job opportunities.

- ▶ Students gained experience in:
 - ▶ Building interpersonal relationships with individuals from different backgrounds than themselves.
 - ▶ Team work and social skills like compromising, patience, and sharing responsibility.
 - ▶ Improving relationships with parents and elderly individuals in their own personal lives.

Aging Semantic Differential Survey

- Perceptions of older individuals by youth changed over the course of the program as youth started to see older individuals more positively.

Aging Semantics Differential



Aging Semantics Differential measures youth perception of aging individuals.

*Indicates significance. * = $p < 0.05$
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Observational Measure of Engagement (OME)

- 616 observations were made using the OME to measure quality of engagement.
- 1. Attitude during activities (scale range: very negative = 1 to very positive = 7)
 - Residents demonstrated the most positive attitudes towards the activity when listening to iPod (M = 6.36) as compared to talking with students (M = 5.59) or playing games (M = 5.56).
- 2. Attention during activities (scale range: very disruptive = 1 to very attentive = 7)
 - Residents demonstrated the most attention during participation in crafts (M = 6.30), creating music lists with iPod/tablets (M = 6.09) and talking with students (M = 6.06).

Observed Emotional Rating Scale (OER)

- ▶ Residents demonstrated positive emotional responses during all LINKages activities with the student.
 - ▶ General Alertness - 98% of the time for 1 min or longer.
 - ▶ Pleasure - 88% of the time for 1 min or longer.
 - ▶ Anger - 0.2%, In one instance for no longer than 16 seconds.
 - ▶ Anxiety/Fear - 0% of the time, never observed.
 - ▶ Sadness - 1.1% of the time, Rarely observed and never for more than 1 min.