Sensitizing Undergraduate Students to Positive Attitudes towards Older Adults
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Increasing the Significance of Gerontological Education

• The demand of gerontological social workers from the ageing society is increasing.

• Yet, students' negative impression of older adults often jeopardizes the quantity and quality of social work professionals.

• Social work students' low interest in gerontological practice is a critical issue (Fredriksen-Goldsen, et al., 2006; Olson, 2002).

• Developing and employing teaching methods designed for increasing undergraduate student interest in and attention to the fields of ageing is imperative.
Gerontological Education Methods

- The emphasis on developing and employing teaching methods designed for students' experiential learning

- Benefits from the Aging Simulation Games:
  - actively involve students in the learning process
  - motivate students’ learning based on high interest in games
  - promote progressive thinking and responses
  - increase students' empathic understanding of older adults
  - allow students to experience late-life changes and adaptations
  - encourage students to analyze critically their personal attitudes and beliefs about ageing
  - improve students’ cognitive learning and information retention
Four Educational Outcomes

(1) to increase social work students’ interest in working with older adults once they graduate
(2) to enhance social work students' positive attitudes toward older adults
(3) to improve social work students’ gerontological knowledge
(4) to reduce social work students’ anxiety about ageing.
Measures

1. Interest in Working with Older Adults after Graduation (Olson, 2002; Snyder et al., 2008):
   (1) I would not like it; (2) I doubt I would like it; (3) I am undecided as to whether I would like it; (4) I would really like it.

2. Attitudes toward Older Adults:
   • UCLA Geriatrics Attitudes Scale (GAS) (Chua, et al., 2008)
   • Ageing Semantic Differential (ASD) scale (Polizzi, 2003)

3. Gerontological Knowledge:
   • The Facts on Aging Quizzes I and II (Palmore, 1998, 2001)

4. Anxiety about ageing scale (Lasher and Faulkernder, 1993)

5. Sociodemographics, majors, and experience with older adults
Intervention Design

- **Week 1**: Pre-tests (Wave I) using a standardized instrument
- **Week 5**: Intervention of Ageing Simulation Games
  - Three students comprise one team.
  - One-hour inside of the classroom activities
  - One-hour outside of the classroom activities
  - Debrief session for 25 minutes
  - Post-tests (Wave II) using the same standardized instrument
  - Reflection paper as an assignment
- **Week 12**: Post-tests (Wave III) using the same standardized instrument
Target Sample (n=39)

- The average age of students was 23 years.
- A majority of them were females, Chinese, and fourth-year students.
- 62% had at least one experience of working with older adults through their practicum, internships, volunteering, etc.
- 44% had completed an ageing-related module before taking the Social Gerontology class.
- 77% had lived together with older adults and of them, 18% still live with older adults.
- 13% responded that they have talked with older adults on a daily basis,
- 56% reported that they talk with older adults more than once a week.
Intervention Process

problem going up ramp because her arms are weaker.
Evaluation

Paired t-tests showed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measures</th>
<th>Waves II &amp; I t score (df)</th>
<th>Waves III &amp; II t score (df)</th>
<th>Waves III &amp; I t score (df)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gerontological Positive Attitudes (GAS)</td>
<td>2.20 (38)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>1.75 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerontological Negative Attitudes (ASD)</td>
<td>-1.97 (38)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-5.26 (38) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerontological Knowledge</td>
<td>3.65 (38)</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>7.72 (38) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety about Ageing</td>
<td>3.05 (38)</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>-2.74 (38) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in working with older adults</td>
<td>3.13 (38)</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>1.40 (38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * P <.05; ** P <.01; *** P <.001
Implications

• This study verifies that the module of Social Gerontology combined with Ageing Simulation Games was effective at enhancing students’ interest, positive attitudes, and gerontological knowledge.

• The module also decreased students’ anxieties on ageing.

• The Ageing Simulation Games were found to be effective teaching mechanisms for young students to develop their experiential learning on ageing.

• Fluctuating trends on students’ anxiety about ageing need more analytical tests to verify the theoretical relationship between anxiety about ageing and gerontological knowledge incremental.
Limitations and Recommendations

• The main weakness is the internal validity of causation.

• Future studies with larger class sizes should overcome this weakness using an experimental design.

• Several recommendations from student reflection papers:
  • Lack of ageing simulation equipment sets
  • Insufficient space to simulate the ageing games
  • Insufficient time to complete all assignments through Ageing Simulation Games
  • Limited space to simulate the ageing games (i.e. within NUS): exploration to public areas or real life spaces was requested.
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