Older learners partaking in intergenerational learning: Freirean-inspired remarks

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Abstract

Intergenerational learning (IL) is a popular yet slippery educational concept. IL comprises generations learning from each other, learning together, or learning about each other. IL has recently gained much terrain in policy, research, and practice, to the point where it serves the notorious *Ten Principles of an Age-Friendly University* and other ageing-related policy frameworks. Reckoning that the theorisation about IL is vital but unfinished work, this paper critically examines a few central educational questions around its theory and practice. Then, inspired by feedback from the field, critical educational gerontology, critical geragogy, and Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, I raise concerns over the role of generational actors (learners and teachers) in IL, its goal, as well as the intended object of study. After theoretically unpacking IL, I conclude by drawing demarcation lines beyond which IL risks stultifying older learners in lieu of emancipating involved generational actors.

L'apprendimento intergenerazionale (IL) è un concetto educativo popolare ma scivoloso. Esso include le generazioni che imparano l'una dall'altra, che imparano insieme, o che imparano l'una sull'altra. L'apprendimento intergenerazionale ha recentemente guadagnato terreno nelle politiche, nella ricerca e nella pratica, al punto da essere utilizzato nei famigerati *Dieci Principi delle Università Amiche dell'Età* e in altri quadri politici legati all'invecchiamento. Riconoscendo che la teorizzazione dell'IL è un lavoro fondamentale ma incompiuto, in questo articolo esamino criticamente alcune questioni educative centrali relative alla sua teoria e pratica. Poi, ispirandomi ai riscontri sul campo, alla gerontologia critica educativa, alla geragogia critica e alla Pedagogia dell'oppresso di Freire, sollevo dubbi sul ruolo degli attori generazionali (discenti e insegnanti) nell'IL, sul suo obiettivo e sull'oggetto di studio che si intende raggiungere. Dopo aver spacchettato teoricamente l'IL, concludo tracciando delle linee di demarcazione al di là delle quali l'IL rischia di offuscare i discenti più anziani invece di emancipare gli attori generazionali coinvolti.

1. Introduction

Intergenerational learning (IL) is a nebulous concept. It encompasses various scenarios of intergenerational encounters. These scenarios convene different generations to learn *from* each other (teacher/students), together (multigenerational studentship), or to learn *about* each other[1]. Prone to myriad translations, each translation of IL faces challenges that influence different types of interactions among generational actors (Schmidt-Hertha, 2015), namely those occurring in teacher/students and multigenerational studentship scenarios. The challenges of IL touch on cornerstone issues in the education of older people, including the nature of educational content, the goal of intergenerational educational activity, and the roles of teachers and learners in fulfilling that goal. Apart from these, challenges may also emanate from the space where IL occurs. Despite IL's ambiguity, its popularity is partly hinged on its benefits. The literature shows that IL benefits older and younger generational actors alike (see Newman & Hattan-Yeo, 2008; Petersen, 2022; Pstross et al., 2017), predominantly on the individual level.

Intergenerational learning as an educational concept has gained ground in recent years. Considering its wide acceptance, forging an understanding of what IL constitutes and the goal behind its mobilisation is a timely task. As Schmidt-Hertha (2015) persuasively noted,

> Currently, there seems to be a lack of clear notions of what the term 'intergenerational learning' really means and of what it should be applied to. It seems obvious that simply bringing together people of different age groups in one learning scenario cannot be a sufficient criterion. (p.151)

Formulating a modus operandi to conduct meaningful IL precipitates the allocation of additional theoretical attention to this concept. That is because, in practice, IL continues to be widely enacted as traditional unidirectional learning opportunities delivered by younger teachers to older people (Withnall, 2022), where an older generation learns from a younger one. Among other goals, the (up/re)skilling of older people with the latest technological developments remains a common aim. Besides generations learning *from* each other, another scenario expands with the avenue of age-friendly universities (AFUs)[2]. This scenario entails younger and older students learning *together*, that is, based on a multigenerational studentship. These two forms of IL are found, for instance, in educational institutions for older people, such as universities for the third age (U3As) and in AFUs[3]. In U3As, a non-formal non-vocational type of education prevails, whereas AFUs feature additional and significant vocational orientations[4]. Besides practice, intergenerational learning increasingly marks global policy that intertwines lifelong learning with ageing. In this context, policy mobilises IL as a form of lifelong instrumental learning (see Biesta, 2021) to advance solutions to problems that are (supposedly) linked with ageing, namely in the domains of health and economy, but also elsewhere.

Noting its popularity among older learners in educational institutions but also on the global political level, intergenerational learning may provoke critical questions about its practice, not least under the pretext of understanding and mitigating its challenges. Critical questions include: (1) How can the role of generational actors (learners and teachers) in IL be defined, and which dynamics govern generational actors? (2) Where is IL offered, what does it aim to achieve, and what educational content does it cover? In this article, I theoretically examine these central questions kindled by (self)-reflections on and about previous field encounters with IL. My theoretical examination starts from the vantage point of field feedback by two older learners who problematise IL in two different scenarios and builds on critical educational gerontology, critical geragogy, and Freire's problem-posing pedagogy.

The first scenario of intergenerational learning occurs at a U3A and involves younger teachers and older learners. Besides, I follow a mainstream university course featuring multigenerational studentship in the second scenario. Learner 1, hereafter referred to by the pseudonym Jean, is a U3A member. He reflected on his IL experience as follows:

> … At least he or she [the teacher] must have some life experience. Not someone who has not been married, for example, does not have children, never got divorced, and does not have a mortgage. You need somebody to give you a life dimension in relation to the material in context for it to make sense. There was nothing. It was like a bunch of old people like me, and young lecturers with a flat life experience. I mean if you are a pilot, they measure your experience by flying hours. When you are a senior, they should give you something by somebody who can inspire you, someone who has knowledge, and experience. We must separate between academic smart and wisdom. I cannot describe it. It is a life dimension that is lacking. They [younger teachers at the U3A] are nice young people, they are structured, they are well prepared you know. They know how to articulate their ideas, how to analyse them, we know this. But what does it mean in reality? How can we make life analogies? [Jean; older man]

Learner 2, henceforth referred to by the alias Céline, described her IL experience at a mainstream university course, where she audits an otherwise degree-leading course with traditional university students. She contended:

> It is important to remain conscious to stay in the background; keep it short and succinct. I'm not going to be one of those annoying mature students. My daughter had commented about a mature student that uses too much time in her classes. I keep quiet sometimes even when I know the answers to questions raised in the classroom. [Céline; older woman]

While these glimpses of Jean and Céline's reflections do not mirror an otherwise (and likely) beneficial experience of intergenerational learning, they do set the stage for a theoretical discussion of the concerns Jean and Céline rightfully raise. These concerns constitute examination-worthy overt and covert undercurrents that arise in the practices of IL (namely, younger teachers/older learners and multigenerational studentship). I argue that these practices are akin to 'banking education' (see Freire, 1972) since they seemingly overlook vital requirements of a much-needed emancipatory agenda for IL and generally for older adult education. Such an agenda has been fervently advanced in the ethos of critical educational gerontology and its praxis of critical geragogy. Drawing on the educational philosophy and praxis of critical educational gerontology (CEG) and that of Paolo Freire (1972), I address issues that lamentably characterise much of the practice of intergenerational learning, including those raised by Jean and Céline. Consequently, I draw a demarcation line beyond which IL falls short in fulfilling an emancipatory rationale for educating older people. Above all, CEG's agenda aims to serve their interests[5].

Critical educational gerontology is a strand/philosophy of older adult education (see Battersby & Glendenning, 1992; Findsen, 2002; 2007; Formosa, 2002; 2011; Glendenning & Battersby, 1990) that aims to empower and emancipate older learners from external and internal forms of oppression. It infuses Freire's (1972) ideals, proposes a special relationship between teachers and learners, advances an emancipatory educational goal, and attributes a specific nature to the object of study. These may be primordial to critical and meaningful IL theory and practice. Throughout this paper, I posit that, while learning is a possible outcome of IL, it falls short of emancipating older learners by failing to adhere to a 'problem-posing' type of education. My argumentation

not only widens the theoretical reach of CEG but also adds to the modes of understanding of IL and its eman-cipatory potential in times where further stultification of older people could be served under ruses of false liberty and empowerment.

2. Intergenerational learning: Definitional and policy insights

It is necessary to tread carefully when sifting through intergenerational learning. IL is an example of an educa-tional concept that remains characterised by a certain ambiguity. Essential to the understanding of IL is a good grasp of 'generation', a term that may be described via biological (physical), genealogical (family relationships), and sociological (common socialisation) features. Generations may have differential physical and biological needs and locations within families, but most importantly, they differ in how each generation is socialised and come into being (for example, generational habitus)[6].

Apart from the unavoidable physical events accompanying the passing of decades of life, social differences among generations leave their mark on intergenerational learning. Citing Mannheim's take on the concept of generation, Schmidt-Hertha (2015) postulated "that only shared experiences of socialisation can create a sense of a common ground, of belonging to one generation based on specific values, attitudes, and patterns of inter-pretation" (p. 146). In line with Mannion's (2016) proviso that all three takes (biological, genealogical, and so-cial) on generation are useful, I zoom in on the social differences that characterise generations for their immedi-ate proximity to my problematisation of IL and of the embedded dynamics among generational actors with/and in their world.

Myriad modalities of implementation are available when planning intergenerational learning activities. Whether it is generations learning *together*, *from* each other, or *about* one another (Siebert & Seidel, 1990, cited in Schmidt-Hertha, 2015), IL resists all-encompassing definitions. Despite IL's evasiveness, the literature agrees that a common characteristic to its many definitions remains that of 'intergenerational knowledge exchange', which is clarified in three points. According to the European Network for Intergenerational Learning (ENIL, 2012), IL requires (1) the involvement of more than one generation, (2) an activity that is planned before actual implementation, and consequently (3) leads to mutually beneficial learning. In this context, intergenerational knowledge exchange leads to intergenerational cohesion and may further be understood in

> a way that people of all ages can learn together and from each other. IL is an important part of Lifelong Learning, where the generations work together to gain skills, values and knowledge. Beyond the transfer of knowledge, IL fosters reciprocal learning relationships between differ-ent generations and helps to develop social capital and social cohesion in our ageing societies. (ENIL, 2012, p. 4)

Intergenerational knowledge exchange may also depend on physical and social spaces where intergenerational learning occurs. Clarifying the role of space in shaping IL, Mannion (2012; 2016) formulated central assump-tions about IL: (1) people from different generations and places are enmeshed and co-emergent, and (2) they learn from each other by responding to differences found in geographical places and to one another almost constantly. These statements highlight the importance of space and how generations respond to social and phys-ical locations as they partake in and shape IL. In IL, interactions among generational actors vary based on the intermingling of the location of generations within/with geographical and social spaces. For instance, IL's dy-namics are expected to adapt to formal educational environments dissimilarly compared to non-formal liberal types of IL, viz., in mainstream university courses versus at U3As.

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Attracting more than one generation of actors and purposefully involving them in a single educational activity necessitates certain preconceptions about who is whom and who does what, to what end and where? This paper deals with these questions via two scenarios of intergenerational learning involving different combinations of generational actors who may occupy distinct geographical and social spaces. The first scenario invites older learners and younger teachers, whereas the second constitutes a multigenerational studentship of younger and older learners. Throughout this paper, the older generation is represented by active and retired older learners who pursue non-formal and formal educational activities at U3As or universities. In parallel, the younger generation is represented by traditional university students or by younger teachers at U3As. Figure 1 shows the makeup of the two scenarios.

Figure 1. Intergenerational Learning in two scenarios: teacher/students and multigenerational studentship.
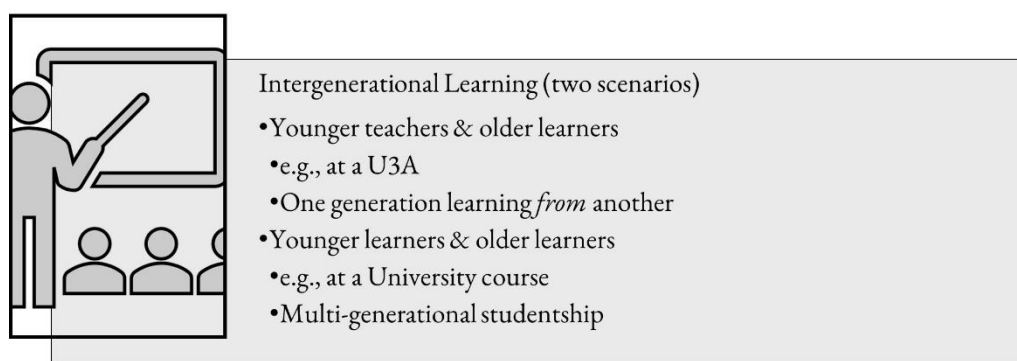
In the dual scenario above, intergenerational learning occurs (or should, at least) with all parties (teachers and learners) wilfully participating, where, most likely, IL benefits all generational actors (see Pstross et al., 2017). Intergenerational encounters, particularly IL, have been used to serve various (educational) goals and evaluated for various outcomes in older actors[7]. When considering the aim of intergenerational programmes to connect "different generations around daily themes, facilitating the transfer and exchange of knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources, allowing different generations to experience both similarities and differences by learning not only about others but also about themselves" (Martins et al., 2019, pp. 106–107) specific outcomes are noted in the literature. Insightful reviews on intergenerational programming and learning (see Giraudeau & Bailly, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Martins et al., 2019; Petersen, 2022) have noted/shown that IL empowers learners and enhances reciprocity, generativity, gratification, and mutual understanding between generations (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008). As a case in point, older people benefit from more productive use of time, a greater sense of meaningfulness and manageability, reaffirmation of one's value, greater satisfaction with life, improved cognitive function, improved mental and physical health, enhanced knowledge and competence, social integration, and improved self-esteem. For example, IL proves particularly helpful for older learners with lower levels of formal education who attend U3As and mainstream university courses in Spain, the USA, and Ireland. It improves older learners' self-confidence, sharpens their ICT skills, and offers them entertainment opportunities (see Montoro-Rodriguez & Pinazo, 2005; Pstross et al., 2017)[8]. However laudable, these outcomes may not rise to emancipation nor to overturning oppressive structures, which older people may more readily endure. The same conclusion holds when examining policy work that promotes IL.

Intergenerational learning is alive and well in global policy documents that intertwine healthy and active ageing with lifelong learning in older age. In this vein, I cite the World Health Organisation's (WHO) framework for

age-friendly cities (and its spinoff concept of age-friendly universities), the United Nations decade on healthy ageing, and the European Union's green paper on ageing; together, they appear to form a causal political cascade involving learning, health, and the economy.

More than ever, universities are invited to play a more elaborate role in strengthening intergenerational connectedness and cohesion and contributing their share to people's active ageing. For example, the WHO (2007) guide on active ageing is partly fulfilled via the provision of spaces for intergenerational contact and learning, not least on university campuses, where the tradition of age-friendly universities is growing in influence.

Although the relatively recent concept of an age-friendly university addresses several of the challenges associated with older age, the role of universities in promoting intergenerational learning dates back two decades. Then, IL was championed by 'engaged universities' before transmogrifying into the timelier concept of 'age-friendly universities', also known as AFUs. Since 1999, an 'engaged' university has recognised

> ...The importance of "engaging" the older learners and the community in its academic opportunities. Effective cross generational learning in higher education can promote intergenerational relationships and learning. Formal and informal settings in the "Engaged University" with a new agenda can foster intergenerational learning for older and younger adults together that promotes themes through which older adults can become more productive contributors to their communities. (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008, p. 36)

University engagement with older people continues with AFUs that nowadays coalesce into a global network of universities representing Europe, North America, South America, Australia, and South-East Asia (O'Kelly, 2022). Apart from recognising the different educational needs of older people (leisure-oriented and vocational), one of the ten guiding principles of AFUs strives "to promote intergenerational learning to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages" (O'Kelly, 2015, p. 5) and to foster intergenerational cohesion. Building on that, another policy framework that underlines the significance of IL is that of the UN (2020) decade on healthy ageing. This framework champions intergenerational solidarity for the betterment of health in older age. One of the guiding principles for this 'decade' stipulates that intergenerational solidarity "enables social cohesion and interactive exchange among generations to support health and well-being for all people" (p. 4). Therefore, health and well-being are integral markers of active ageing that may promise significant contributions to Europe's silver economies. The European Union's (2021) green paper on ageing described intergenerational learning as an opportunity in retirement that can shine a new light on the contributions of older people to societies and economies. In this vein, Slowey and Zubrzycki (2018) argued that IL could positively contribute to the (re)skilling and retention of older people in labour markets to address global skill shortages effectively.

As noted above, intergenerational learning may benefit older people under various schemes; some are reflected in empirical works, and others stipulated in global policies on ageing, learning, health and the economy. On the other hand, IL may originate in an alleged divide between generations, which it may also mitigate. Watts (2017) stated, "we live in an era of divided generations, or so some policy makers and politicians would have us believe" (p. 40). Whether we are indeed divided or not, there is evidence that generational cohesion and tensions may surface in dire times, albeit with cohesion most likely to dominate intergenerational interactions (Prigent et al., 2022). While this is promising, some critical remarks about the benefits and goals of IL may, nevertheless, be raised.

The claimed positive impact of IL on older actors is not self-evident (Giraudeau & Bailly, 2019). For instance, IL is sensitive to empathy, which can make or break feelings of generativity experienced by older people in IL

settings (Tabuchi & Miura, 2016). However, besides its sensitive nature, the impact of IL may fall short of genuinely liberating older people from the oppressive conditions they endure. Even more, policies championing IL are reactive, aiming to aid older learners to endure dire circumstances rather than overturn oppressive structures. Consequently, IL, its conceptualisation, its aims, its object of study, the roles of involved generational actors (teachers and students), and the space where it occurs all precipitate critically oriented and theoretical examinations on the part of scholars in older adult education. Such a task was encouraged by Withnall (2022), who claimed that an additional challenge for today's field of older adult education in the age of longevity is none other than IL.

Building on (1) the reflections that Jean and Céline provide in the aftermath of their intergenerational learning experience, (2) on critical educational gerontology and critical geragogy, and (3) on its Freirean-inspired ethos, this paper engages critically with the role of teachers and learners in IL, the aim of such learning activity, its content, and the space where it occurs.

3. Intergenerational learning through the lens of critical educational gerontology

Critical educational gerontology (CEG) is a strand of older adult education that has attracted significant interest, to the point where any critical approach to the education of older people that overlooks CEG risks incompleteness. Philosophies of learning in older age, including CEG, provide answers to essential questions that encapsulate a worldview capable of guiding the practice of education (see Hachem, 2020). In the context of adult education, Taylor and Tisdell (2000) enumerated these questions, which I condense as follows: (1) What is the purpose of education? Moreover, (2) What is the role of the educator, but also that of learners? Answers to these questions, provided by CEG, may be categorised under a rational/sociological (see Tisdell & Taylor, 2000) worldview that extends over two statements of principles and several former and subsequent scholarly works, including an enunciation of CEG's praxis as critical geragogy.

Critical educational gerontology looks at learning in older age from an a priori political economy perspective that problematises the social positions of older people within their societies. The contributions to CEG by scholars, including Brian Findsen, David Battersby, Frank Glendenning, and Marvin Formosa, remain inspirational for scholars in educational gerontology. Conceived in 1990 by Glendenning and Battersby and restated two decades later by Marvin Formosa (2011), CEG is the theoretical interpretation of a Freirean approach to older adult education, which capitalises on an enduring critical tradition in social gerontology (Findsen, 2002). CEG was born in response to an aphilosophical development of practices in older adult education. One of its premises is that no education is not empowering nor good-natured prima face (Battersby & Glendenning, 1992). Additionally, CEG rejects *banking education* (see Freire, 1972), which cannot, under any circumstances, be politically neutral. As such, if education is not liberating, it is a domesticating institution.

As a praxis for critical educational gerontology, Formosa (2002) assigned a Freirean-inspired role for the *educator* of older people in his so-called critical geragogy. There, the educator is expected to engage in the communal fight against ageist structures and to be cognisant that education is never neutral and is not necessarily empowering. The educator commits to the sufferings of older people, to which awareness is vital. He or she plans and fosters critical education based on self-help and geared towards social change that extends beyond classroom confinement. This role for teachers may reveal pertinence to intergenerational learning.

Critical educational gerontology offers an overarching critical take on the education of older people; it has not yet extended its reach to intergenerational learning[9]. In this paper, I fill this gap by examining IL through the theoretical lens of CEG and the underlying pedagogical theory of Paolo Freire. By doing so, I wish to demarcate

lines beyond which IL loses touch with the 'real' interests of older people, interests that CEG essentially endorses towards their social emancipation.

My line of argumentation is divided axially into two interrelated and encompassing critical arguments concerning (1) the purpose and educational content of intergenerational learning and (2) the role of generational actors (teachers and learners) in said IL. Each line of thought departs from a succinct analysis of Jean and Céline's accounts and builds on CEG's ethos and praxis, besides Freire's *problem-posing* education.

3.1 On the purpose and content of intergenerational learning

In this section, I argue that intergenerational learning should encompass learning and knowledge exchange but, most importantly, bring about the mutual emancipation of all generational actors. Starting from the historicity and the life world of generational actors influencing educational content, intergenerational knowledge exchange, which is shaped by the social and physical spaces of IL, is consequential to actors' social emancipation. An intergenerational learning activity is a purposefully designed form of learning that enjoys a particular mission (ENIL, 2012). If the goal is information delivery, then it is safe to assume that the two IL scenarios (see Figure 1) may have more easily fulfilled this mission. Here, the goal of emancipation is not of concern, nor is educational content that draws on the life world of older learners. Thus, the goal and content of the two scenarios (teacher/students and multigenerational studentship) of IL fall short of liberating older learners (Jean and Céline in particular) for the following reasons. Jean objected to the irrelevance of educational content to his life world and experiences. He argued that a distinction is observed between knowledge as information and knowledge as wisdom (see Shea, 1995), which the younger teacher fails to nurture among the older students[10]. Céline's contemplations also reflect a less-than-emancipatory experience. Her decision to stay in the classroom background and not disturb younger university students is mediated by educational content that is not sensitive to her life experience per se.

Recalling the literature on the outcomes of intergenerational learning and policy work promoting it, a conclusion may be made regarding the practice and politics of IL. In both contexts, the goal of IL is individual, reactive, and, at best, mitigatory rather than proactive. Indeed, the outcomes that older learners may experience – namely enhanced self-concepts, sharpened (ICT) skills, improved cognitive abilities, and social integration (see Giraudeau & Bailly, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; Martins et al., 2019; Withnall, 2022) – are praiseworthy. However, these outcomes are akin to social mobility within possibly oppressive structures (see Inglis, 1997) and normative modes of being, the likes of which are written in guidelines on healthy and active ageing, whereby IL is one solution to societal ails, not least those associated with ageing[11]. Even at age-friendly universities, giving older learners another chance to pursue formal education in retirement (that is, social mobility, too) may result in their (self-)silencing instead.

The two scenarios of intergenerational learning, a set of documented outcomes, and desired aims in policy work indicate that the goal and content of IL may allow elements of banking education. The 'thing' or object of study that generational actors explore is undoubtedly as important as the goal of their learning; needless to say, both may alternatively domesticate learners. A stultifying education renders learners more passive and adaptive to the world. Therefore, its function is essentially reactive and operates on the strings of indoctrination, most often unintentionally (as in the two scenarios). Freire (1972) noted that knowledge is often used to indoctrinate learners rather than to free them. He stated, "more and more, the oppressors are using science and technology as unquestionably powerful instruments for their purpose: the maintenance of the oppressive order through manipulation and repression" (p. 36). To achieve domestication, banking education addresses educational content (however scientific) that remains detached from learners' realities and describes all but their life world. Decided

solely by the teacher, educational content is employed in banking education to advance certain slogans and empty messages that occupy the consciousness of learners and distract them from using their consciousness to confront their realities as situated beings in and with the world. As Freire (1972) contended, such education often "overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real men [and women]" (p. 66).

Seeing its anti-dialogical nature, banking education ensures that content is defined only by the teacher's desire to preach to his/her learners, where such content is in the form of "… bits of information to be deposited in the students" (Freire, 1972, p. 66). Short of being emancipatory, the educational goal in the two scenarios is to deliver content rather than, in Freire's words, transforming "doxa into logos" (p. 54). By contrast, problem-posing education champions a more reasonable goal, which I explore from the vantage point of the intersection of CEG, critical geragogy, and evidently, Freirean perspectives.

Critical educational gerontology does not hesitate to declare a moral goal for educating older people. For CEG, education ought to emancipate and empower older learners. This goal is stipulated in the first and third statements of principles of CEG (Formosa, 2011; Glendenning & Battersby, 1990). In support of emancipation as an educational aim, Findsen's (2002; 2007) works urge the coupling of such education with social gerontology[12]. Findsen believed that critical theory forms an excellent tool for the social critique of the status quo that entraps older people in marginalised circumstances, and he calls for "social action to empower older adults" (2002, p. 48). To this end, CEG's emancipatory goal draws directly from Freirean (1972) pedagogy, through which an examination of the marginalisation of older people in their societies becomes possible. CEG rejects functionalist goals for educational gerontology. This rejection opposes the viewing of older people as a social problem, a problem that may be 'fortunately' solved using education. Instead, CEG (Glendenning & Battersby, 1990) deals with concepts such as empowerment, emancipation, transformation, hegemony, and – most importantly – the concept of 'conscientisation' or consciousness-raising. In this context, emancipation à la Freire entails raising older learners' consciousness from a false state to a more critical one. This journey is based on critical reflection and action; both necessarily intertwine for the success of critical pedagogy. The first, critical reflection, entails an analysis of learners' social realities and their underlying causes. Second, critical action is a revolution against such realities. Here, I remind of Freire's (1972) warning that one without the other "creates unauthentic forms of resistance" (p. 60); that is mere verbalism and activism.

Countering the oeuvres of banking education and prefabricated educational content, problem-posing education may help the practice of intergenerational learning in rising to an emancipatory quest where the object of study is decided in consultation with learners, not despite their opinion. Freire's (1972) notion of "consciousness as consciousness of consciousness" (p. 53) is vital for this task. Objects (or objects of study) are not a reality with an independent sense and value; instead, the learners' consciousness attributes such value and meaning to the object of study (Presti & Sabatano, 2018). Consequently, the point of departure of IL must be in the here and now of older learners, "which constitutes the [often oppressive] situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge and in which they [must] intervene" (Freire, 1972, p. 57). Therefore, space is an essential concern for emancipatory education and, subsequently, IL.

As an emancipatory but voluntary educational undertaking, meaningful intergenerational learning holds on to participatory and intergenerational knowledge exchange, itself influenced by social and physical spaces (see Mannion, 2016). Space influences intergenerational dynamics, the educational content, and the potentiality of accomplishing an emancipatory mission to education. For example, at the U3A, education is dominantly non-formal, and learners may have a more considerable say about the design of educational content, who teaches it and how. At universities, however, vocational, and degree-leading curricula may be more restrictive and resistant to negotiating with the teacher about curricula options and instructional techniques. Consequently,

multigenerational studentships may be governed by differential power volumes and structural constraints, including the number of study places and the resources older generations demand or have access to when considering their education's speculative (often negligible) economic impact.

Following critical educational gerontology and Freirean ideals, an emancipatory goal of intergenerational learning and the choice of objects of study both depend on the volition of actors, generational actors in this case, including learners and teachers. In the next section, I examine the role of generational actors in IL.

3.2 On teachers and learners in intergenerational learning

In this section, I postulate that intergenerational learning should primarily be a volitional horizontal dialogue between generational actors (learners or teachers). To guarantee an authentic dialogue in an emancipatory educational encounter, where consciousness meets and learns from and with consciousness, actors' roles (teachers and learners) are better blurred, considering space.

The *raison d'être* of intergenerational learning is an intergenerational knowledge exchange that taps into actors' consciousness. Feedback from Jean and Céline shows that in the two scenarios (see Figure 1), younger teachers' and younger learners' consciousness did not encounter that of older learners nor their social realities. Such disregard for older learners' life world was either unwelcome, as Jean willed readers to conclude, or self-induced, as signalled by Céline's self-censorship. A certain level of naïveté for younger actors may have marked both scenarios. Jean, who describes the younger teacher as naïve for lacking a particular life dimension, may object to what could be described as youngsplaining, whereby younger teachers assume older learners are clueless about the knowledge typically possessed by younger people[13,14]. For Jean, teachers may have an excellent command of their subject of expertise, which they show relentlessly. He portrayed younger teachers as *lecturers* in reference to their teaching style (unidirectional instruction); they are well-prepared, kind, well-structured, and have impressive analytical skills.

Nevertheless, Jean's contention pertains to a missing life dimension that renders life-world analogies and the contextualisation of acquired 'knowledge' more difficult. Similar, but less overt, is the oblivion of the university teacher in multigenerational studentship. The second scenario marks a failure on the part of the teacher to unpack and problematise learning dynamics between younger learners and their older classmates. Influenced by her daughter's objection to the space or time that older learners occupy in one of the daughter's university courses, Céline wanted to avoid becoming what she defined as an 'annoying' mature classmate, even when her participation would have been beneficial and on point. Therefore, she distances herself from other "annoying mature students" and positions herself physically and mentally in the background. It is most likely that the same power dynamics that the oblivious teacher overlooked were very much present in Celine's act of self-censorship. Older learners' presence on campus seems less legitimate than that of their younger counterparts, so they must accept the position of 'second-class' students. In these two scenarios, generational differences may impact intergenerational learning by opposing two forms of knowledge divided axially. The richer the life experience (that accompanies age) one has, the less their knowledge is about the latest trends, which younger teachers may excel at and base their *youngsplaining* teaching methods on. This lack of generational entente occurs when (younger) teachers overlook learners' social realities and life experiences (as seen in Scenario 1), not least when they are oblivious to power relations that characterise the encounter of older and younger learners in multigenerational studentships (observed in Scenario 2).

Generational entente, cohesion, and solidarity may be nowhere to be found in the two scenarios of intergenerational learning; instead, the intergenerational disconnect is more evident in the role of teachers and learners that simulates banking education. Duly rejected by critical educational gerontology, the banking education

model is consequential to the positioning of older learners and their teachers. This positioning includes the profile but also the role of generational actors. According to Freire (1972), banking education enjoys three features: (1) the teacher teaches, the students are taught; (2) the teacher knows everything, while learners know nothing; and (3) the teacher solely designs educational activities, and learners adapt to them. In this type of education, teachers are the opposites of learners; they are necessary for remedying learners' ignorance, which justifies the existence of and persistent need for the teacher. In the first scenario, generational ignorance is mutually attributed between younger teachers and older learners. One way in which a younger teacher can remediate the ignorance of older learners is "to 'fill' the students by making deposits of information which [the teacher] considers constitute true knowledge" (p. 49)[15]. The role of teachers in banking education is to deposit information into an empty vessel – the learner.

When cultivated in intergenerational learning, depositing information in empty vessels forms an essentially problematic and anti-dialogical relationship between teachers and learners. Freire (1972) objected to the treatment of learners as "welfare recipients" who, due to their deviance from a general normative understanding of a "good, organised, and just society", need to be educated. In this case, older learners are addressed as marginalised, oppressed and lazy but mostly incompetent in 'necessary' skills. In other words, they may be seen as the enemies of the "good and healthy" society, as Freire wrote. Therefore, these learners must be reintegrated and incorporated to cure society of its ails, primarily by changing their mentality and illuminating their generation-based 'ignorance.' Nevertheless, the notion of 'mentality change' that is advanced by banking education is a false one, and instead reproduces learners' oppressive realities for "no oppressive order would permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why?" (p. 59) as was evident in Céline's act of self-censorship. On the opposite side of banking education, CEG, critical geragogy and Freire proposed alternative relationships governing teacher students dynamics, which may also fit IL.

Critical geragogy envisions a particular role for teachers. However, apart from imagining a revolutionary mission for teachers in the footsteps of Freirean pedagogy, learners have an equally engaged and active role in shaping their emancipation through 'dialogue'. That is because learners, as historical beings, can think critically. They face problems in and with the world, they are challenged to respond, and other challenges follow each of their responses; and as their understanding of the world grows, so does their commitment to liberation (Freire, 1972). Fostering this dialogue requires listening, love, and tolerance (Formosa, 2011) to increase (generational) solidarity among learners who are projects of modern political activists. To help learners become activists, CEG recognises that teachers must be(come) aware of the realities that learners endure, but also of their realities too (Formosa, 2002). Only then may they enter a horizontal relationship to overcome the authoritarianism and alienating intellectualism that is otherwise representative of banking education.

Fostering critical intergenerational learning where generational actors (learners and teachers) contribute equally to their mutual emancipation, problem-posing education promulgates 'dialogue'. Liberating education is built upon a dialogue where the educational object mediates between teachers and students. Both are co-investigators in the processes of (intergenerational) knowledge exchange. As a result, teachers and learners become more aware of the problems they face in and with the world. They feel increasingly challenged and must therefore respond, and as they develop their critical reflection skills, learners (and teachers) "come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 1972, p. 56), a reality that they can transform.

A horizontal relationship between teachers and learners liberates learners and teachers alike and precedes dialogue. Starting from their equality, dialogue as a teaching/learning method provides the space for the encounter of [wo]men "mediated by the world in order to name the world" (Freire, 1972, p. 61). Intergenerational dialogue

is based on love, humility, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking (Freire, 1972) and leaves space for the necessary development of intergenerational empathy (see Tabuchi & Miura, 2016).

Intergenerational learning that aims to emancipate generational actors ought to promote an authentic dialogue between generational actors, which in turn requires the roles of teachers and students to be blurred. Consequently, IL that does not engage with older learners' historicity may instead reproduce oppressive realities and biases, including (self-)ageist narratives. Therefore, teachers are invited to "understand themselves and the world in which they live, because this is the only way to be able to articulate a reflection appropriate to the issues posed by the real context of experience"; that is, those issues that encapsulate "ideological implications, political choices, fashions, beliefs, opportunities or contingencies" (Presti & Sabatano, 2018). Naturally, this undertaking must factor in the space where IL occurs, considering that teachers' and learners' agency may be bound by institutional and other constraints, which may burden truly dialogical IL.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the elusive concept of intergenerational learning from a critical perspective, and I have shown how a Freirean take may strengthen the position of older learners in intergenerational encounters. I relied on field accounts by two older learners in two different IL scenarios (teacher/students and multigenerational studentship) but also on critical educational gerontology, critical geragogy and Freirean pedagogy to demarcate a line beyond which IL falls short of emancipating older people. My examination takes stock of central educational questions, including the goal and content of an IL activity, the space where it occurs, and the role of generational actors in said activity. I argue that intergenerational learning might unintentionally domesticate older learners, even though it benefits and empowers them (social mobility) on the individual-psychological level (see Petersen, 2022). Consequently, IL should be essentially based on intergenerational knowledge exchange (see ENIP, 2012; Manion, 2012; 2016) and strive to emancipate generational actors, not least older ones. It can do so by fostering an authentic dialogue among generational actors starting from participatory decision-making on the object of study and generative themes (see Freire, 1972) and not ending with how critical reflection translates into critical action and induces community engagement and social change, see Figure 2. With this paper, I wish to extend the theoretical reach of CEG to include IL and encourage further theoretical treatments of this concept in light of a fervent debate on older people's social and educational emancipation.

Figure 2. Summary Features of a Freirean-inspired Intergenerational Learning.

Intergenerational Learning	Willfull, socially and physically situated, and purposefully designed educational encounters to involve a multitude of generations, and to promote intergenerational knowledge exchange anchored in actors' life world.
	Aims for the social emancipation of involved generational actors, by disrupting taken-for granted assumptions on the individual and societal levels, as well as fostering intergenerational entente and collaboration.
	Teacher and/or learners foster an authentic and horizontal dialogue through which content and geragogical strategies are negotiated, thus encouraging intergenerational alignment and avoiding role polarisation, 'youngsplaining', and scenarios that reinforce the status quo.

Celine and Jean's accounts reveal that intergenerational learning at U3As and mainstream university courses, which older learners partake in, requires constructive theoretical and valid empirical evaluations of the outcomes (see Petersen, 2022). As shown in the two scenarios, uncritical implementations of IL may further tame older learners by subjecting them to 'youngsplaining' and environments that are not as age-friendly as they claim to be, despite exhibiting noble intentions; after all, non-emancipatory benefits remain helpful[16]. One cannot stress the cruciality of fruitful and genuine dialogue between older and younger generations enough when they learn together or from each other as they face similar risks and crises from different generational vantage points, namely global warming, housing crises, austerity measures, delaying retirement age, and labour-market shortages, among others.

Notes

1. This paper considers IL in relation to teacher/students and multigenerational studentship only.
2. See Montepare (2019) for a special issue that celebrates age-friendly universities.
3. See Swindell and Thompson (1995) for a description of U3As.
4. Refer to Manninen (2017) for elaborate definitions of non-formal non-vocational education.
5. Throughout this paper, I uphold CEG's defence of the interests of older people, which may be apparent in my focus on older learners who partake in IL.
6. Formosa (2021) provided an illustrative example of the generational habitus of older Maltese men that is built around their identities and biography.
7. But also, in younger actors. As an educational gerontologist, I mainly focus on the interests of older learners/people.
8. ICT stands for information and communication technology.
9. At least by using CEG as a theoretical lens for the unpacking of IL (to the best of my knowledge).
10. Shea (1995) argues for the need to provide older learners with opportunities that help them further grow since their experience provides them with unique and rich perspectives on the life cycle compared to younger people.
11. See Biesta's (2021) remarks on the current nature of learning to be 'productive and employable' versus learning to be; which easily applies to policy promoting IL.
12. According to Buffel et al. (2012), critical gerontology treats age-related outcomes not "as mere consequences of natural, organismic ageing, but of a complex interplay between social structural, cultural and interactional processes" (p. 14).
13. I define *youngsplaining* as the equivalent of mansplaining with older people. Mansplaining is "to explain something to a woman in a condescending way that assumes she has no knowledge about the topic" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
14. Unidirectional intergenerational ICT courses for older people by younger teachers illustrate my point.
15. Such as courses on ICT.
16. I coined the term 'youngsplaining' as "an explication on a certain topic enacted by a younger person to an older one, based on the subtle assumption that age is the reason for the lack of knowledge; such explication often comes uncalled for."

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