



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1983 Volume VI: Cross-Cultural Variation in Children and Families

Being Old

Guide for Curriculum Unit 83.06.01
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This unit is designed to raise in adolescents and teachers their awareness of, sensitivity to, and understanding of the older generation—the elderly, senior citizens. I have been aware of the avoidance of and uneasiness around anything to do with old age and death by Americans in general. I have come to see a number of similarities that exist in the problems faced by both adolescents and the elderly. For example, one of the paramount issues with both the elderly and teenagers is the struggle between independence and dependency. This problem has a high correlation with monetary independence that becomes difficult to obtain for all in our tight economy. I feel that a strong partnership can be created between adolescents and the elderly if teenagers are made aware that the elderly are in the same boat as they are in.

The actual problems that confront the elderly have resulted in part from a society that is not economically or culturally prepared to deal with them. The life span of the average American has been greatly increased, but our society is not emotionally prepared for this longevity. By beginning with teenagers and ourselves to acknowledge the existence of “ageism,” we can start to reshape a more positive attitude toward the elderly and then set about making significant changes in our society so that “old” will no longer be the dirty word it is in the American vocabulary. The elderly represent a basically untapped asset in our society. We just need to do some rethinking on how to utilize them in such ways that both they and society benefit.

(Recommended for Social Studies grades 9 through 12)

Key Words

Aging America Psychology Elderly Social Services American

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