



A Philosophical Perspective of Pragmatism on the Intergenerational Reminiscence Model (IRM) on Health-Related Quality of Life among Older Adults

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ABSTRACT

The global increase in the older adult population necessitates the development of practical, evidence-based nursing interventions to address critical challenges to Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL), notably loneliness and a diminished sense of purpose. The Intergenerational Reminiscence Model (IRM), involving older adults sharing life experiences with younger generations, offers a highly promising psychosocial approach. This paper provides a conceptual analysis to philosophically ground the IRM within a pragmatist framework, arguing that this lens substantially enhances its theoretical rigor and effectively guides its future application in nursing science. Pragmatism is specifically chosen because its emphasis on action, experience, and practical consequences aligns perfectly with the IRM's primary objective of achieving measurable improvements in HRQoL. From an ontological perspective, pragmatism defines reality as dynamic, constructed actively through meaningful interactions older adults experience within their environments during intergenerational exchanges. Epistemologically, the core argument asserts that the true effectiveness of the IRM is strictly validated by its practical outcomes, specifically, its success in enhancing HRQoL. Axiologically, this framework prioritizes human flourishing, positioning observable improvements in HRQoL as the ultimate value claim. Methodologically, while this paper is philosophical, pragmatism provides robust theoretical justification for future empirical research utilizing mixed methods approaches. This is necessary to successfully capture quantitative results and the rich narratives of intergenerational experiences. Ultimately, pragmatism offers an ideal justification for a context-sensitive nursing intervention. Future research must utilize mixed methods to fully illustrate these benefits. In conclusion, pragmatism remains essential for advancing the IRM into a robust, evidence-based geriatric nursing model.

Keyword: HRQoL, Intergenerational reminiscence model, Older adults, Pragmatism



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1. Introduction

The global population of older adults is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades. By 2030, one in six people worldwide will be 60 years old or older (WHO, 2025). The population in this age group is projected to grow from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion by 2030. By 2050, the number of people aged 60 and over is expected to double, reaching 2.1 billion (United Nations, 2024). This significant rise in the elderly population will have profound implications for various aspects of life, particularly in relation to health-related quality of life (HRQoL) (Wang et al., 2021; S. Zhong et al., 2020). HRQoL is defined as the multidimensional impact of physical, mental, and social health status on an individual's overall well-being. Because older adults frequently face compounded challenges, including frailty, falls, limitations in activities of daily living (ADL), and multi-morbidity, and severe social isolation, HRQoL serves as the primary outcome measure to holistically evaluate their health (Agussamad et al., 2020; Bally et al., 2024; de Oliveira Souza et al., 2024). Moreover, depression, loneliness, and anxiety are significant mental health challenges for older adults, severely impacting their quality of life. These issues tend to be more pronounced among those who live alone or lack social support, as isolation can intensify feelings of loneliness and depression (Bruss et al., 2024; Chang et al., 2024; da Silva, 2025). Addressing these interconnected physical and mental health concerns through community programs, fostering social connections, and encouraging regular engagement with family and friends is crucial for enhancing life satisfaction for older adults (Hwang et al., 2023; Ko et al., 2023; Wagle et al., 2021).

One notable initiative is the implementation of intergenerational programs designed to foster relationships and create mutual benefits between older adults and younger generations (Kaplan et al., 1998). Intergenerational Reminiscence Model (IRM) is one of the strategies that can promote meaningful interactions between younger and older generations. Operationally, IRM is a structured psychosocial intervention, typically conducted in 6 to 12 weekly sessions in a community or care setting, where older adults are paired with younger generations. Its core components include guided storytelling, active listening, and collaborative artifact creation (such as memory books or oral histories). The primary change mechanisms rely on cognitive stimulation, social validation, and role-reversal, which positions the older adult as a valued teacher and mentor (Murayama et al., 2019; Tam et al., 2021). Such activities provide significant psychosocial benefits and foster strong connections between parents and younger individuals (Fields, Xu, Troutman, Daniel, Westmore, et al., 2023; Xu & Raval, 2023). Intergenerational reminiscence facilitates knowledge transfer and cognitive stimulation and enhances the quality of life for older adults (Canedo-garcía et al., 2017; Varma et al., 2015). For older adults, it offers an opportunity to share their experiences and lessons, fostering a sense of purpose. For younger people, it helps build relationships with older adults and encourages positive attitudes toward ageing (DeSouza, 2007; Gaggioli et al., 2014; Tam et al., 2021).

While previous literature has extensively documented the empirical benefits of intergenerational reminiscence, there remains a critical gap: the absence of a cohesive philosophical framework to ground the IRM as a rigorous, actionable nursing intervention. A philosophical approach is vital for understanding the complex generational dynamics in intergenerational reminiscence. This approach can also help address intergenerational interactions' existential and ethical dimensions. A study by Akimov (2023) emphasised the philosophical aspects of intergenerational conflict, particularly the differences in worldviews and life goals. Understanding these differences can help mitigate potential conflicts and promote harmonious relationships across generations (Akimov, 2023). Moreover, intergenerational memories can challenge stereotypes and enhance attitudes toward ageing. A philosophical approach can deepen this process by fostering empathy and understanding through shared narratives and life lessons (Fields et al., 2023).

A rigorous philosophical perspective, specifically through the lens of pragmatism, is essential for a deeper understanding of the intergenerational reminiscence model mechanisms, strengthening its theoretical rigor and guiding its future application in nursing science (Bender, 2018; Clinton, 2023). Unlike Interpretivism, which primarily seeks to understand the subjective meaning of shared narratives, or Critical Theory, which focuses on deconstructing ageist power dynamics, Pragmatism is uniquely suited for the IRM due to its problem-solving orientation. Pragmatism, with its core tenets rooted in action, experience, and the practical consequences of ideas, provides a powerful and congruent lens through which to analyze the intergenerational reminiscence model operational principles (Rydenfelt, 2022; Stroud, 2022). The philosophy posits that the value of any concept or model is determined by its practical utility and its capacity to solve real-world problems (Dolan et al., 2022). This aligns seamlessly with the IRM's central aim: to improve the tangible HRQoL of older adults through active engagement and shared experiences (DeSouza, 2007). Unlike traditional philosophical approaches that may prioritize abstract truths or universal theories, pragmatism's focus on the continuous process of inquiry and adaptation provides a robust framework for an intervention that must be tailored to the unique and dynamic needs of each individual (Baliton, 2023; Reed, 2019; Solymosi, 2012).

Therefore, adopting a philosophical framework in research focused on integrating reminiscence for older adults is important. This approach will address the diverse needs of different generations and provide a suitable model for future studies. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a comprehensive philosophical analysis of the Intergenerational Reminiscence Model in older adults through the lens of pragmatism.

2. Philosophical Framework

The framework is grounded in the key concepts of Pragmatism, primarily associated with thinkers like Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, and emphasizes the practical consequences of ideas and theories as their measure of truth and meaning (Dolan et al., 2022). In nursing, this philosophy supports an action-oriented, problem-solving approach that values the contextual nature of reality and the integration of multiple forms of knowledge (Stroud, 2022; Thi, 2025). In Dewey's philosophy, experience is not a passive reception of data, but an active transaction between an organism and its environment (Dewey, 1938). This transaction involves an "active phase" (doing something) and an "undergoing phase" (observing the consequences of that action) (Garrett, 2007; Mayumi & Ota, 2022; Solymosi, 2012). Pragmatism suggests that thinking or inquiry starts with a "felt difficulty" or an "indeterminate situation," essentially a practical problem that interrupts our habits or beliefs. The purpose of inquiry is to address this uncertainty and help us return to a stable belief or practical course of action (Garrett, 2007; Nowell, 2015).

In nursing research, the philosophy of pragmatism is increasingly recognized as an essential approach due to its focus on practical outcomes and its ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Dolan et al., 2022). According to Goodman (2020), pragmatism is a philosophical movement that highlights the importance of applying practical ideas and examining the consequences of actions to determine their truth. The core of philosophical pragmatism lies in understanding concepts through their practical effects (Goodman, 1996). This approach emphasizes the application of ideas and the outcomes of actions (Metcalf, 2008).

To ensure transparency and academic credibility, it is important to outline the analytical procedure utilised in this paper. While this study does not follow a traditional empirical systematic literature review of databases such as PubMed or Scopus, it adheres to a rigorous methodology of conceptual and philosophical analysis. The procedure involved a systematic and deductive mapping approach. First, the Intergenerational Reminiscence Model (IRM) was established as the primary "object of analysis" by identifying its core operational goals: problem-solving and improving health-related quality of life (HRQoL) through experiential social interaction. Next, we applied Pragmatism as our theoretical lens to examine this object critically. This analytical procedure required evaluating the IRM against four foundational philosophical pillars to assess its theoretical coherence and practical justification in nursing.

The following outline will detail the philosophy of pragmatism as it relates to ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology within the specific context of the IRM:

2.1. Ontology

Ontology within pragmatism, as articulated by John Dewey and Richard Rorty, emphasizes a relational perspective on existence that eschews essentialist concepts and dualistic thinking. This framework views humans as organisms interacting with their environment, where knowledge is not a static entity but emerges through dynamic interactions and reinterpretations of established truths. Dewey and Rorty challenge traditional dualisms, advocating for a more integrated understanding of human experience and cognition. This perspective is rooted in a Darwinian understanding of humans as adaptive organisms, emphasizing the importance of context and interaction in the formation of knowledge (Kivinen & Piirainen, 2004, 2018). Pragmatism, when viewed through the lens of ontology, often closely aligns with pragmatic realism. This discussion explores pragmatic realism as a methodology that involves a lower level of metaphysical commitment compared to critical realism. Proponents of pragmatic realism emphasize the importance of examining social life through the actions and interactions of individuals, rather than relying on rigid structures or essentialist perspectives. This perspective enables a more flexible and practical approach to understanding social phenomena (Garrett, 2007; Kivinen & Piirainen, 2004). Pragmatism is a philosophical approach that emphasizes the practical application of ideas and the consequences of actions (Metcalf, 2008; Ormerod, 2021; Rydenfelt, 2022; Solymosi, 2012).

Intergenerational initiatives promote ontological transformation by enabling participants to confront and re-evaluate their ingrained beliefs regarding aging. Through direct interactions with senior individuals, students transform self-perception, acknowledging the intricacies of aging that extend beyond prevailing stereotypes (McGowan & Blankenship, 1994). For instance, a study involving university students revealed that those who participated in intergenerational service-learning programs moderated their stereotypes of older

people, regardless of direct interaction, indicating a broader shift in perception (Elliott & Rubio, 2018; Hernández & González, 2008). This journey involves self-exploration, where youth reflect on their identities and reevaluate their relationships with older family members. The initiatives promote active listening and empathy, leading to a reassessment of the narratives about aging. Ultimately, this cultivates a deeper appreciation for the individuality of older adults and their diverse experiences with aging (McGowan & Blankenship, 2006). In addition, ontologically intergenerational programs originate from the assumption that society is for all ages. This concept consists of 4 types, namely the situation of the elderly, lifelong, population development and aging, and multigenerational relationships. This concept aims to support elderly people to live independently, care, participate, and maintain dignity (Sanchez et al., 2007). While intergenerational programs have shown promising results in shifting attitudes toward aging, it is essential to address potential issues. For instance, some initiatives might unintentionally replace negative stereotypes with overly optimistic views on aging, which can create their own set of challenges (Thomson, 2009). Additionally, the success of these programs often depends on the quality and depth of interactions, highlighting the need for careful design and execution to achieve the desired outcomes.

2.2. Epistemology

Pragmatist philosophy emphasizes the importance of practical consequences and applications of ideas by focusing on the interaction between meaning and action. This approach offers a dynamic understanding of knowledge, truth, and reality, making it relevant for addressing complex and evolving challenges. Pragmatism is a problem-solving philosophy that views reality through processes and relationships (Dolan et al., 2022; Farjoun et al., 2015). The study of knowledge is a central theme in pragmatism, which offers a unique perspective on how knowledge is constructed and understood (Metcalf, 2008). According to Dolan et al. (2022), pragmatism offers valuable insights into epistemology, the study of knowledge and its acquisition. In this context, truth is not viewed as absolute; instead, it is assessed based on practical utility. This means that what is considered accurate depends on what works in a specific situation. This flexible understanding allows knowledge to evolve as new experiences and information emerge (Dolan et al., 2022). Pragmatism emphasizes the practical application of knowledge, linking philosophical inquiry to real-world problems. This perspective is especially relevant for intergenerational activities, which often engage complex social systems and require innovative solutions (Metcalf, 2008). Knowledge about the effectiveness of the Intergenerational Reminiscence Model (IRM) is generated through its practical consequences. The "truth" of the IRM is validated only if its implementation leads to measurable, positive outcomes in the health-related quality of life (HRQoL) of older adults (Metcalf, 2008). The reminiscence process itself serves as a form of inquiry. The older adult's recollection and interpretation of memories are tested and validated (or reconstructed) through the immediate feedback and contextualization provided by the younger participant (Fields, Xu, Troutman, Daniel, & Miles, 2023; Tatchell et al., 2003; Xu, Hagedorn, & Raval, 2023). The knowledge gained, such as a reconstructed self-narrative and new social connections, proves immediately beneficial in helping the older adult navigate current life challenges (DeSouza, 2007; Gaggioli et al., 2014). Epistemologically, the knowledge derived from nursing practice must be practical, context-specific, and action-guiding. It should integrate universal concepts with the situated understanding gained from direct experience in applying the intergenerational reminiscence model, thereby fostering phronesis, or practical wisdom, in the nurse researcher.

2.3. Axiology

Axiology is the study of values. Pragmatism views values not as fixed moral laws, but as beliefs concerning what should be preferred based on their ability to solve problems and improve life (Edelheim, 2022). Axiology in pragmatism refers to the study of values and how they are understood and applied within the framework of pragmatic philosophy. Pragmatism, which emphasizes the practical application of concepts and the consequences of actions, incorporates axiology by focusing on the values that guide human behavior and decision-making processes (Ansell, 2022). Axiological principles play a crucial role in aligning decision-making with ethical standards, ensuring that decisions are not only efficient but also consistent with ethical norms and constraints (Loreggia et al., 2018). Hodges and Geyer's new interpretation of Asch's experiment emphasizes the influence of values like truth and social solidarity on shaping social perception. In this experiment, participants confronted a moral dilemma, balancing the importance of truth against the need for social cohesion. This illustrates how values can influence practical understanding in social situations (Loreggia et al., 2018).

Intergenerational reminiscence initiatives have emerged as a practical approach to enhance emotional well-being and foster stronger intergenerational bonds. These initiatives often involve organized exchanges where

older individuals share their life experiences with younger audiences. In the context of intergenerational reminiscence, axiology, the study of values, plays a crucial role in understanding the significance of sharing memories across generations. It provides a framework for recognizing the values that are conveyed through these memories, including cultural heritage, familial customs, and personal experiences (DeSouza, 2007; Matheson-Monnet, 2020; Zeleníková et al., 2024). The primary focus of this investigation is Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQoL). From a pragmatic viewpoint, HRQoL is considered a value claim, implying that a higher HRQoL should be prioritized because it is essential for ongoing personal growth and engagement. An effective intervention risk management (IRM) approach enhances the ability of older adults to have valuable experiences (Bergland, 2013; Vriendt et al., 2015).

2.4. Methodology

Within the philosophical framework of pragmatism, the methodology domain refers to the strategies and procedures used to acquire valid knowledge. When applied as a theoretical lens, pragmatism supports a mixed-methods approach, highlighting the methods that most effectively address specific problems, a concept known as methodological pluralism (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). In design research, pragmatism serves as a key epistemological approach, promoting methodological diversity and flexibility. Gavin Melles examines how pragmatism provides a robust framework for design fields, enabling the integration of visual and material reasoning with critical pragmatism (Melles, 2008). This philosophical standpoint underpins the necessity of mixed-methods research, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of nursing phenomena (Melles, 2008).

Intergenerational reminiscence programs have emerged as a promising method for enhancing emotional well-being and fostering connections between generations. These programs typically involve structured interactions where older adults share their life stories with younger participants (Gaggioli et al., 2014; Matheson-Monnet, 2020; Xu, Hagedorn, & Chi, 2023; Xu, Hagedorn, & Raval, 2023) (Xu et al., 2023). We argue that to fully capture the pragmatic value of the IRM in future empirical studies, researchers should utilize a methodological pluralism. To assess the effectiveness of these intergenerational reminiscence programs, a quasi-experimental design or a randomized control trial (RCT) can be utilized. Researchers should gather pre- and post-intervention data using validated health-related quality of life (HRQoL) scales, such as the SF-36 or WHOQOL-BREF. This approach establishes the evidence necessary to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programs (Siverová & Bužgová, 2018; Xu et al., 2024). Additionally, to satisfy Pragmatism's demand for experiential understanding, phenomenological approaches or narrative inquiry can be employed to investigate the experiences of older adults. This qualitative research explores how intergenerational dialogue facilitates meaning-making and its implications for participants' self-narratives and perceived quality of life. Such insights provide the contextual understanding needed for practical implementation (Gaggioli et al., 2014).

3. Relevance of the Philosophical Approach to the Phenomenon

The philosophy of Pragmatism, as articulated by thinkers such as Dewey and James, offers a compelling rationale for examining the effectiveness of the IRM, particularly in relation to the health-related quality of life (HRQoL) of older adults. The central tenet of Pragmatism is that the meaning and truth of an idea or intervention are determined by its practical consequences. This approach emphasizes practical outcomes over abstract truths, focusing on what proves effective in real-life experiences (Morgan, 2014). Pragmatism views reality as dynamic and constantly evolving, emphasizing that knowledge is influenced by context and is socially constructed through experience (Morgan, 2014; Younas, 2020b, 2020a). It advocates for epistemological pluralism, encouraging the exploration of various ways of knowing to achieve a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Younas, 2020a, 2020b).

The Intergenerational Reminiscence Model (IRM) involves interactions across generations and personal storytelling, deeply rooted in social context. Pragmatism supports the use of a mixed-methods approach in research, when applicable, by combining quantitative measures of health-related quality of life with qualitative insights into the experiences of reminiscence and intergenerational bonding. This methodological flexibility, a crucial aspect of pragmatism, is vital for capturing the complexity of the phenomenon and its impacts (Creswell, 1998; Doyle, L., Brady, A.-M., & Byrne, 2009). The IRM is an experiential intervention in which older adults actively engage in recalling, sharing, and interpreting their life events. This process aligns with the pragmatic view that human thought is intrinsically linked to action and that individuals use the memories of past actions to navigate the present and future (DeSouza, 2007; Younas, 2020b). The intergenerational aspect also provides opportunities for reciprocal learning and social interaction, which are direct, observable,

and measurable outcomes that impact well-being and health-related quality of life (HRQoL) (Gaggioli et al., 2014).

4. Review of Relevant Pragmatism Approach

Previous studies on the pragmatic approach in nursing and aging provide valuable insights into the pragmatist philosophical perspective. Gaggioli (2014) exemplifies Pragmatism by focusing on the practical effectiveness of the Intervention Research Model (IRM). Rather than proving a grand theory, the aim was to determine "what works" in real-world settings using a pre- and post-intervention design. Key findings indicated that elderly participants experienced reduced loneliness and an improved health-related quality of life (HRQoL), validating the effectiveness of the intervention (Gaggioli et al., 2014).

Additionally, the study assessed the positive change in children's attitudes towards older individuals, emphasizing the commitment to evaluating all outcomes of purposeful actions. Younas (2020) supports the idea that Pragmatism is an ideal approach for nursing research, advocating for mixed methods that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of HRQoL changes while capturing rich narratives about experiences of reminiscence and intergenerational bonding (Younas, 2020b).

Wu et al. (2023) further align with Pragmatism by synthesizing multiple studies on reminiscence interventions, concluding that Life Review and Reminiscence Therapy (LRT) effectively enhances quality of life and life satisfaction among older adults. This synthesis reflects a pragmatic focus on optimizing interventions without seeking a single, universal truth; instead, it identifies the most effective configurations for achieving desired outcomes. Such an approach is fundamental in nursing, as it leverages evidence to inform and develop valuable clinical practices (Q. Zhong et al., 2023).

5. Conclusion

This philosophical examination demonstrates that Pragmatism serves as the most coherent and impactful framework for understanding and validating the Intergenerational Reminiscence Model (IRM). Its fundamental principles, focused on action, experience, and practical outcomes, align seamlessly with the clinical goals of geriatric nursing, which aim to address real-world issues and improve patient wellness. The IRM, as an experiential intervention, fundamentally embodies a pragmatic ontology, where the older adult's reality (their health-related quality of life, or HRQoL) is dynamically reconstructed through meaningful intergenerational interactions. In terms of knowledge, the "truth" of the IRM is discovered not in theoretical abstraction but in its demonstrated effectiveness, as evidenced by the quantifiable and observable improvements it yields in HRQoL scores, as well as the compelling narratives of renewed purpose and social connections. This successful synthesis of evidence fulfills the value-based aspect of Pragmatism by emphasizing the practical significance of human flourishing as the ultimate objective.

The primary conclusion for future research is the necessity of methodological pluralism. Nursing researchers should combine robust quantitative methods (such as Randomized Controlled Trials or quasi-experimental designs) with qualitative narrative research to demonstrate the efficacy of the IRM and explore how and why it operates in diverse contexts. This pragmatic approach requires sensitivity to context, ensuring that future studies confirm the IRM's effectiveness across various cultures and environments. Additionally, forthcoming research should adopt a reciprocal perspective on outcomes, assessing the mutual benefits of enhanced HRQoL for older adults and attitude shifts for younger generations as validation of the model's overall success. By anchoring the IRM in Pragmatism, this paper strengthens the model's theoretical foundation, positioning it as a strong, evidence-informed, and highly relevant psychosocial intervention essential for promoting person-centered care in an increasingly aging society.

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