



**Intergenerational Learning Involving Young Children and Older People Research Summary**

**Why Old and Young together?**

Intergenerational practice brings people from different generations together. They share activities, learn together, come to understand each other better and have fun together. Most intergenerational learning initiatives have focussed on bringing together older people with children and young people aged 9 to 25 years. Up to now **the potential of intergenerational learning involving younger children, 0 to 8 year-olds, has been ignored.** This is a real missed opportunity.

Young children are active and creative learners and can teach older people to look afresh at things. Older people can teach skills, help educators and pass on important aspects of heritage and culture. Older people are also great volunteers. This is important for intergenerational practice outside the family.

**The TOY Project offers new insights and opportunities in intergenerational learning.**

*This leaflet summarises a research review titled "Intergenerational activities involving young children and older people: a review of the literature" written by the TOY Project consortium. TOY or 'Together Old and Young' is a 2-year project focusing on children under 9 years and older adults, those aged 55 and older. The project is funded under the EC Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme. Nine organisations in seven countries participate in TOY (Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain).*

*TOY was designed and informed by the notion of **Positive Deviance (PD)**. It is a problem-solving approach, based on the fact that communities have resources they haven't tapped into. Uncommon behaviours or strategies are identified amongst the least likely to succeed (positive deviants) and activities and initiatives can be developed based on these. TOY is using an adapted form of the PD approach.*

For more information: [www.toyproject.net](http://www.toyproject.net)



**A growing separation between old and young in Europe?**

Social changes in Europe are affecting the lives, relationships and learning opportunities of both older people and young children.

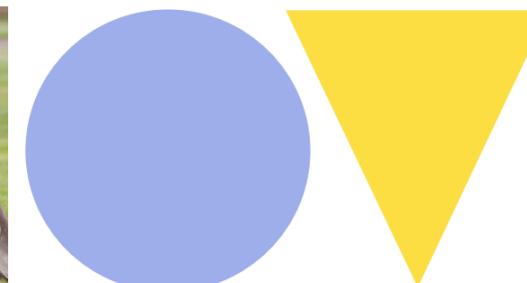
Although **older people are living longer**, many are isolated from family members and young generations because of migration or family breakdown.

Children in Europe are **growing up in smaller families** and have fewer chances to socialise with different age groups. Young children are also playing outdoors less where they can meet older people.

The growing separation of generations into **same age institutions and spaces** such as preschools and retirement homes means that young children and older adults may miss out on opportunities for interaction, understanding and learning from each other.

However, while young children and older adults are less likely to meet and socialise in community settings, the connections between grandparents and grandchildren may be stronger now than a few decades ago.

The research we reviewed highlighted the central role of grandparents in giving love and security, providing care and sharing family values and history. Also, **grandparents** are an **important resource** not only for their own grandchildren but also for other children.



**Partners**



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The TOY Project Consortium (2013) Intergenerational Learning Involving Young Children and Older People, Research Summary, Leiden: The TOY Project.

For complete research review and more information on the TOY Project visit the project website where you will also find details of your local TOY Project contact.

[www.toyproject.net](http://www.toyproject.net)



The TOY Project identifies the following **five goals of intergenerational learning involving older people & young children.**

*Thanks to the research and practices reviewed, we can state that:*

**1. Building and sustaining relationships**

Intergenerational practice can enrich relationships generally and counteract negative stereotypes and isolation of older people. One of the best ways of **building relationships** involving younger children is **through shared activities**. Spending time in each other's company, doing simple activities, such as art projects or cooking and having fun, is the focus of many successful intergenerational projects involving younger children.

**2. Enhancing social cohesion in the community**

**Innovative intergenerational practice** can be observed where different age groups and sectors use the **same building or outdoor space** and collaborate in a range of social and learning activities, such as when a child care centre and an old people's home are located in the same premises.

**3. Facilitating older people as guardians of knowledge**

Older people's roles as guardians of knowledge, traditions and skills are central in a learning society. **Older** people are a **vital link with history and cultural heritage** and give children a sense of identity and perspective. Examples include older people documenting stories or local legends to pass on to children, sharing experiences of play and living in a locality then and now.

**4. Recognising the roles of grandparents in young children's lives**

Grandparents play a central part in the nurture and socialisation of their grandchildren. **Grandparents' role** as listener, storyteller, memory of family history is seen as **complementary to the role of parents**. This can be particularly significant when a parent is absent or unavailable for long periods of time because of family breakdown, illness or migration. Older people who are grandparents are central to many intergenerational programmes in preschools, kindergartens and schools.

**5. Enriching the learning processes of both children and older adults**

**Intergenerational learning offers a more innovative approach** to learning for children where they actively engage with older people in meaningful exchanges. For older people it puts into practice the idea of **education as an enterprise for life**. This can be an empowering experience. An important aspect of intergenerational learning is the opportunity for fun and enjoyment when teaching and learning roles are more open. This can happen in exchange visits and joint art, music, dance and gardening activities involving young children with older people, including those in old people's homes.

**How will TOY promote intergenerational learning?**

Through networking, providing examples of innovative practice and making tools and resources available, the TOY Project will help to build capacity in intergenerational learning.

As well as involving older people and young children, TOY will also involve the 'middle generation' such as parents and various practitioners. Early childhood education and care services, schools, centres, organisations for older people, community centres, arts and cultural organizations and municipalities will be encouraged to exploit opportunities for further intergenerational learning in the community.

The next phase of the TOY project identifies the skills, behaviours and strategies to facilitate intergenerational practices involving young children and older people. Based on the findings, we will develop a training module for practitioners and will support them in the initiation of innovative pilot actions in seven European countries.

**TOY in Practice**

In The Never Ending Story project in Genova, Italy, older people told children **stories and legends from the past**. These were then transformed into drawings and a 12 meter long ceramic panel was created by children and older people. The art work was installed in the old people's residence.

In County Louth, Ireland a project stimulated environmental education and relationships between generations. It involved children from 2 years upwards, senior volunteers and local government to **create three gardens**: a garden beside the village playground, another in a local primary school, and a third in a retirement home.



**Together Old & Young  
building age-friendly  
communities!**