



# Together Old & Young

A Review of the Literature on Intergenerational  
Learning Involving Young Children and Older People



# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

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Intergenerational learning involves different age groups learning together or learning from each other in a range of settings. It is viewed as being important in contemporary Europe as it facilitates learning that might otherwise be diminished due to changing family structures, migration, technological changes and growing age segregation.

Interest in intergenerational learning stems from new understandings of the process and participation in education and learning. This includes the notions of lifelong and lifewide learning as well as the need to respond positively to the growing separation of generations and the subsequent distance between old and young. It also can be accounted for by concerns regarding economic implications of an ageing Europe and the consequent need for greater social and economic solidarity between generations.

However, whilst the topic is generating increasing interest at policy, academic and community development levels, it is noteworthy that most attention in documented intergenerational learning initiatives has focussed on bringing together older people with older primary school aged children, second level school children and young people (i.e. 9 to 25 year-olds). Intergenerational learning initiatives involving young children would appear to be a neglected area in research, practice, education, training and policy.

Attention in this review is on the specific learning dimension of intergenerational practice that involves young children and older people in community settings. This is the first time that such research has been undertaken and thus offers a new perspective on intergenerational learning. We define young children as children who are 8 years and younger and older people as 55 years and older. The review is part of a two-year European project titled, "Together Old and Young (TOY): Young children and senior citizens learning and developing in intergenerational community spaces", which is being funded under the EC Grundtvig Lifelong Learning Programme. Nine organisations in seven countries are participating in TOY, bringing together the worlds of older care, active ageing, lifelong learning, senior volunteering, early childhood education and care, research, training, community development and local government.

A key rationale for the TOY project was the perceived lack of contact between young children and older people in Europe to the detriment of both generations and a lack of information about intergenerational learning involving young children and older people. In order to further illuminate and address these issues a multi-phase research and capacity building project was designed, which is informed by the Positive Deviance Approach ([www.positivedeviance.org](http://www.positivedeviance.org)).

The classic definition of the Positive Deviance Approach is as follows:

*The Positive Deviance approach is a problem solving, asset-based approach grounded in the fact that communities have assets or resources they haven't tapped. It enables a community or organization to amplify uncommon behaviours or strategies discovered by community members among the least likely to succeed (positive deviants), develop some activities or initiatives based on these findings and measure outcomes. The Positive Deviance approach brings about sustainable behavioural and social change by identifying solutions already existing in the system. (The Positive Deviance Initiative, 2010, p.2)*

The Positive Deviance methodology consists of five steps. These steps and how they are being interpreted in the various phases of the TOY Project are presented below.

- 1 **Define** the problem, current perceived causes, challenges, common practices and goals.  
*This literature review, the result of the first phase of the TOY Project, provides an analysis of intergenerational learning involving older people and young children in Europe including constraints, opportunities and issues needing further analysis.*
- 2 **Determine** the presence of PD individuals or groups.  
*The background research conducted for the literature review involved the identification of individuals, groups and initiatives in seven European countries, which have succeeded in bringing together the two generations in learning contexts.*
- 3 **Discover** uncommon but successful behaviours and strategies through inquiry and observation. *The Positive Deviance Action Research (Phase 2 of the TOY Project) will involve a more in-depth investigation of the individuals, groups and initiatives identified in the Literature Review phase.*
- 4 **Design** activities to allow community members to practise the discovered behaviours. *The design and content of capacity building modules and pilot actions (Phases 3 and 4 of TOY Project) will be based on the outcomes of the TOY Positive Deviance Action Research. It is also envisaged that many of the participants of phase 2 will also participate in the capacity building modules and pilot actions.*
- 5 **Monitor** and evaluate the resulting project or initiative which further fuels change by documenting and sharing improvements as they occur, and help the community discern the effectiveness of the initiative. *The results of all phases of the TOY Project will be monitored, evaluated and documented. Stakeholder seminars involving interested parties will be held in all participating countries to disseminate results. This provides an opportunity to discuss the results with local communities and reflect on what works best.*

As stated above this literature review is the result of the first phase of a multi phase project, which involves action research, capacity building and training and development of innovative pilot actions (see [www.toyproject.net](http://www.toyproject.net) for more details).

In summary, by way of a review of the literature we wanted to check firstly, the validity of our perception of a growing separation between young children and older adults; secondly, to review the benefits of intergenerational practice involving these two groups; and thirdly, to find out if there are general and regional trends in Europe with respect to intergenerational learning involving old and young.

## **Why is intergenerational learning important?**

Perceived broad goals and benefits of intergenerational learning have been documented in a number of reports and handbooks (Beth Johnson Foundation, 2011; Bostrom, 2003; ENIL, 2012; Harper & Hamblin, 2010). The following list of benefits from a 2012 report captures the most frequently cited:

*Sharing people's skills, experiences, achievements and talents to achieve mutual benefits; enhancing self-esteem and reducing exclusion for individuals and communities; changing negative perceptions of older and younger people; increasing the participation of people in Life Long Learning; engaging more people in employment, education and training; enhancing active citizenship across generations; helping people feel safer by promoting greater understanding between generations; increasing physical and mental health and wellbeing; creating neighbourhoods that help people to age well; helps in understanding the reasons for people's behaviour, helps in making new contacts with people of different generations. (Welsh Local Government Association and Beth Johnson Foundation, 2012)*

Intergenerational learning is slowly establishing itself as a new interdisciplinary area of study (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Granville & Ellis, 1999) and policy area as demonstrated by the decision of the European Commission to dedicate 2012 as European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. This is paralleled by a growing interest in intergenerational practice from grass roots levels (Beth Johnson Foundation, 2011). Evidence of these developments can be seen in the publication of a dedicated journal on the topic "Journal of Intergenerational Relationships"; the work of European networks and projects such as ENIL (European Network of Intergenerational Learning) and EMIL (European MAP of Intergenerational Learning), a growing database of handbooks and compilations of intergenerational practice. The emergence of the concept of age-friendly communities has also generated interest in intergenerational learning at local government level. Pain (2005) referring to the UK, suggests that intergenerational practice has a valuable contribution to make to the achievement of sustainable communities and inclusive public spaces and closely matches key government priorities, including social inclusion, citizenship and community development.

However, as stated above, there is a definite lack of awareness and expertise regarding intergenerational learning involving young children and older people. This was the key rationale for the TOY project.

### **Aim of review**

- 1 Set the context for the whole TOY Project by exploring why intergenerational learning involving young children and older people is important in contemporary Europe;
- 2 Explain key definitions, concepts and terminology which will inform the TOY Project;
- 3 Synthesise key European research which identifies the goals and benefits of intergenerational learning for older people and young children;
- 4 Explore if regional trends exist in relation to intergenerational learning;
- 5 Identify emerging issues and concerns, which will be further explored in the Positive Deviance action research, capacity building and pilot action phases of the TOY Project.

## **Methodology**

The following were important considerations in the methodological design:

### **A multidisciplinary approach**

Given that intergenerational learning involving young children and older people is a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary enterprise, it was important to include research material from many disciplines and areas of practice including: education, gerontology, sociology, psychology, health, social policy and community development. Relevant peer reviewed academic research was sourced via the following research bases: COBIB, ERIC, EBSCO, google scholar, sage, scopus, and sociological abstracts, springerlink (in English) and Dialnet and Latin Index in Spanish and Portuguese. Search words included: *Intergenerational learning; family learning; non-formal, formal and informal learning; older people; older adults; active ageing; (pre-school) children; lifelong and lifewide learning; community learning; social capital; volunteering; cooperation; grandparenting; quality of life; benefit, wellbeing.*

### **Age range**

We included research, projects, and initiatives which involve young children (under 9 years) and older people (55 – 74 years, 75 years +). In exceptional cases we included intergenerational initiatives involving primary school children where there was a possibility of transfer to a younger age group if it was deemed useful and relevant to the TOY Project.

### **Geographical scope**

The priority in the literature review was given to research conducted in project countries (Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain). If research from countries other than TOY countries was found, and was deemed to be particularly relevant and useful for TOY's focus, this was also included in the review.

### **Temporal scope**

The temporal scope for the literature was 2006 to the present. However, in a few exceptional cases we included earlier key references.

### **Inclusion of both 'grey' and academic literature**

We also gave priority to including data from the so-called 'grey literature' as well as peer reviewed research. Thus, unpublished research, information booklets or leaflets, handbooks, conference proceedings, newspaper reports, news or blog items online, project reports, digital materials, national government or local government reports were also included. This broad scope was important because we felt that much information on intergenerational learning involving young children (if it existed) was hidden and not readily available in research publications. We were also keen to reflect the experience and expertise of civil society. By tapping into this source we would be better prepared for the subsequent phases of the TOY Project i.e. Positive Deviance Action Research; Capacity Building Modules and the Pilot Actions. These considerations are also reflected in the membership of the TOY consortium, a mix of universities, NGOs and local authorities.

Grey literature primarily encompassed information on projects and initiatives from the seven participating countries in TOY. Participating organisations were able to draw on

their own networks in sourcing this information. Additional information was sourced from England, Wales, Scotland and Scandinavia. Of particular interest in reviewing both academic and grey literature was to investigate the form and process of intergenerational learning and benefits, if any, for young children and older people.

### **Overview of report**

The literature review report contains five sections. The first section provides an overview of the social, educational and economic context in Europe impacting on intergenerational practice and learning. This is followed by an explanation of the terminology used when talking about intergenerational learning. In the third section we provide a brief overview of frameworks and models which have been developed to 'make sense of' or to categorise intergenerational practice, programmes and projects. The largest section of the review is Section 4 where we present the *TOY Framework of Intergenerational Learning Involving Old and Young* and review selected intergenerational projects and initiatives in Europe which involve young children and older people. In the final section we identify key questions and challenges which will be further investigated in the subsequent phases of the TOY Project.



# 1 Context

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It is important to consider developments in intergenerational learning in Europe within the context of social, educational, cultural and economic changes. A number of overlapping areas which are considered to impact on the possibilities of young children engaging with older people are now briefly discussed. These include changing demographics, social and family structures, the institutionalisation of education and caring and the role of grandparents. Particular attention is paid to trends in TOY's seven participating countries.

## **Changing demographics and social and family structures**

Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution average life expectancy has grown from 40 to 80 years and there is no sign that this trend is going to change (Vaupel, 2010). In the European Union average life expectancy at birth is 79.7. This is due to improved standards of living, education and advances in healthcare (Eurostat, 2012). An ageing population is a major policy issue across European countries – 71% of the population is conscious that populations are ageing and 42% on average are concerned about that (Eurobarometer, 2012). On the face of it, living longer, healthier and more active lives is something to be celebrated. However, there are also concerns regarding potential conflict among generations, given that relatively speaking there are and will continue to be fewer people of working age in Europe, which has serious implications for public finances, for pensions, health and long-term care. It is noteworthy that the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon links EU proper functioning to intergenerational solidarity (Council of the European Union, 2010).

Although older people are living longer, many are increasingly isolated from family members and young generations due to urbanisation, migration, family breakdown and increasing spread of extended networks of families across communities and continents.

Social and demographic changes in Europe are also affecting the lives, relationships and learning opportunities of young children. A general lowering of fertility means that children in Europe are growing up in smaller families with fewer siblings and have fewer opportunities for connections with diverse age groups. The average number of births per woman across Europe is 1.59. Amongst the countries participating in TOY fertility rates range from 2.0 live births per woman in Ireland to 1.3 live births per woman in Poland (Eurostat, 2012).

While the overall size of families is declining throughout Europe, family structure and form is also changing. The standard nuclear family model while still the dominant model, is being replaced, albeit at different rates, by a range of family forms and lifestyles. The wide range of different, nationally or regionally specific patterns of family forms and structures is connected to different cultural background or family policy models (Beier *et al*, 2010).

The European trend towards lower birth rates will result in future generations having few, if any, siblings. As life expectancy increases, the likelihood of many generations within a family co-existing increases, giving rise to a new form of family tree characterised as the 'beanpole family' (Brannen, 2003). The 'long thin' family is characterised by an increase in the number of living generations within a lineage and a decrease in the number of people within each generation. As a result, more persons in their 50's and 60's will have surviving parents and more children will know their grandparents. So while vertical links between generations of the family are strengthening through increasing life expectancy, the horizontal links within generations may be weakening as divorce rates rise and family size decreases.

## **Institutionalisation of education and caring**

The growing separation of generations into same age institutions and spaces, such as pre-schools and retirement homes, increases the possibility that young children and older adults may miss out on opportunities for interaction, understanding and learning from each other.

More children are attending Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings from an early age. Here, children are frequently organised in same-age groupings and are cared for by predominately young to middle-aged women. The European Commission is stimulating higher participation in ECEC as a means to improve educational success and reduce social inequality. In this regard it has set a target for 2020 of 90% participation in ECEC amongst young children before attending primary school. Current attendance rate is variable, especially for children under 3 years, where just five countries have achieved 33% and the majority are at a 10% rate. Almost 70 percent of 3 to 6 year-olds attend ECEC. However, in some EU countries for example Netherlands, Spain and Italy almost 100% of 4-year-olds are in an ECEC or Primary school setting (European Commission, 2011).

An increasing number of children attend after-school services to support parents in their work and caring responsibilities, although as with ECEC, attendance rates are variable. However, it is also difficult to make accurate cross-national comparisons due to different understandings of 'after-school care', 'after-school services', 'after-school activities', and the variations in number of hours and days per week spent there. According to Quality and Evaluation National Institute (2001), nine out of ten children in Spain attend after-school activities. In the Netherlands, just 20% of 4 to 11 year-olds attend after-school care, and another 4% attend childminding/family day care services.

It is difficult to find accurate comparative data from different EU countries with regard to living arrangements of older people – however the literature does point to some regional diversity. This diversity may be due to cultural tendencies towards more individualised versus familial living as well as national policy trends. The Dutch model of elderly care encourages older people to live independently at home for as long as possible. Here public support can take the form of home help, as well as care in group care homes when necessary, with ongoing family involvement (Melchior, 2013). A European Quality of Life Survey found that 25% of Italians aged 65+ lived in a household with a child, while more than 20% did so in Spain and Slovenia (Saraceno, 2005). Approximately 6% of the population of people aged 65 years and older in Ireland are receiving residential care (McGill, 2010). Independent living trends across Europe are also evident in Eurostat figures. Amongst the TOY participating countries, the highest rate of independent living amongst people aged 65+ as a single adult or as a couple are the Netherlands (95%). Lowest rates of independent living have been recorded for Spain (63%) and Portugal (66%). In Poland, every fifth older person lives in a three generation family, and one in four older persons prefers this family model to any other (Centrum Badania Opinii Publicznej, 2012).

Intergenerational contact between young and old in public spaces has changed due to new family-work patterns, growth of computers and digital based home entertainment, more children in organised ECEC settings, urbanisation and heightened awareness of risk. These factors have resulted in young children being less likely to play on the street, in parks, piazzas or in other public spaces outdoors where traditionally different generations meet. Research conducted by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People found that only 5% of those aged over 65 year had any form of structured contact with local children.

This coupled with the institutionalisation of older people means that young children and older people have little contact with each other.

### **The role of grandparents in Europe**

Despite the separation between the generations, grandparents continue to play an important role in young children's and families' lives across Europe.

Increased life expectancy means that grandparents can have more opportunities to share time with children and grandchildren and over longer periods of time. A study conducted by Guerts (2012) in the Netherlands concluded that connectedness between grandparents and grandchildren is stronger now than a few decades ago. Grandparents had gained a more prominent role in the socialisation and nurturance of their grandchildren largely due to higher employment rates of mothers, increase in single motherhood, rising childcare costs and greater opportunities for grandparents to provide child care. National differences in relation to the role of grandparents in the care of grandchildren are also evident with grandparents in Spain and Italy providing the lowest share of care and those in the Nordic countries providing the highest. However, this does not reflect differences in the amount of regular childcare which may be provided for a shorter duration (Hank and Buber, 2009).

Apart from the tangible roles that many grandparents play in providing care and support, research has highlighted to the symbolic significance of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren and the important role they play in transmitting values and family history. A Polish survey on the role that grandparents played in people's lives found that 72 per cent felt that they owed something to their grandparents – they appreciated that grandparents helped to raise them (65%); loved them (64%); passed on moral values (57%) and passed on religious values (54%). Forty per cent said their grandparents had great influence on their worldview and life choices, while 48% said they owed their sense of duty, diligence, self-control and strong will to their grandparents (Centrum Badania Opini Publicznej, 2012). The important role of grandparents as sources of fun and companionship was identified in an Irish study in which almost two-thirds of children had quite a lot of contact with their grandparents (Growing Up in Ireland, 2011). Not having ultimate parental responsibility for grandchildren means that relationships may revolve less around rules and discipline and more around enjoyment and communication (Timonen, *et al*, 2009).

Research since the 1990s has highlighted the important role grandparents can play in households where parents are absent or at times of crisis. It is also important to acknowledge the costs to the physical and mental health, finances, relationships and social life of the older persons due to caring responsibilities for grandchildren, which has been highlighted in research conducted in Ireland. Extensive caregiving by grandparents can impact negatively on physical and mental health. Furthermore, grandparent-led families often face greater economic disadvantage than other families and tend to be more reliant on government benefits and pensions (cited in Timonen, Doyle & O' Dwyer, 2009). Across Europe, transfers of financial and practical help occur more frequently from older to younger generations than the reverse (Barrett, A. *et al*, 2011)

Research has also reiterated the central role of the middle or parental generation in mediating grandparent-grandchild relations, in particular mothers who have been described in the literature as the 'kin keepers' (Hagestad, 1985, cited in Timonen, Doyle & O'Dwyer, 2009, p.18). Guerts (2012) notes that adult children often serve as a 'lineage bridge'

by either facilitating or hindering contact (Oppelaar & Dykstra, 2004 cited in Guerts, 2012) or indeed they can shape the opportunity structure for intergenerational contact through their choices about where they live. The role of the middle generation may be of particular significance in intergenerational projects with young children and this will be investigated in the course of the TOY project.

We can conclude that in general demographic, social and economic trends in Europe suggest that compared to previous generations, it is less likely that young children and older adults are growing up amongst a diverse set of family and other relationships spanning age groups and generations. Opportunities to interact have been limited for many young children and older persons both within the family and outside the family setting. This may have a negative impact on both generations for learning. It is also important to acknowledge the regional variation in patterns and expectations of intergenerational living. The tendency in Northern Europe is for older people to live alone, independently of children and grandchildren and at the same time remain active in the community. Whereas in countries in Southern Europe, older people are more likely to live with extended family. What is most significant, however, is the important role grandparents play in their grandchildren's lives in all regions in Europe.

## 2 Meanings & Definitions

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This section explores in greater depth the background and meaning of the terminology associated with intergenerational learning including concepts such as lifelong and lifewide learning, informal, nonformal and formal learning and active ageing. While these concepts may be familiar to those working in the area of adult education and lifelong learning, we present them here for early childhood education and care practitioners, researchers and policymakers who may be less familiar with the concepts. Furthermore, it provides a common conceptual framework for the TOY project.

### **Education and lifelong learning**

Up to the late 20th century, formal learning in educational institutions was considered the most highly regarded and frequently the only valid form of learning. However, education is increasingly being seen as an enterprise for life (Hutchins, 1968). By the 1990's the term lifelong learning had begun to be used in policies developed by the OECD, UNESCO and the EU to describe learning and training across the lifespan and to reflect the view that everyone should have the opportunity to engage in learning at any time during their lives (EC, 2007; UNESCO, 2001).

A 2001 UNESCO report, *Revisiting lifelong learning for the 21st century*, noted that

*Not only must it (lifelong learning) adapt to changes in the nature of work, but it must also constitute a continuous process of forming whole beings - their knowledge and aptitudes, as well as the critical faculty and the ability to act. It should enable people to develop awareness of themselves and their environment and encourage them to play their social role and work in the community.* (Delors report, p 221 cited in Medel-Anonuevo et al, 2001, p 4)

In 2012 the European Commission took a dual approach to lifelong learning policy, on the one hand focusing on the 'humanistic' approach while on the other hand stressing "the need to anticipate skill needs and raise overall skill levels, giving priority to the education and training of those with low skills and at the risk of economic and social exclusion" (Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on the new skills for new jobs (007/C290/01).

### **Lifewide learning**

The concept of lifewide learning is a development of the 'lifelong' concept that highlights the fact that learning can take place across the full range of life experiences at any stage in life. The lifewide definition of learning, of its nature, includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. Thus lifewide learning could take place in the family, in the workplace, in leisure time and in community life (Skolverv, 2000) often entailing linkages between formal and nonformal systems of education (Dave, 1976 and Rao, 1979 cited in Bostrom, 2003, p 12). The "contribution to learning of people who are not trained, paid or acknowledged as teachers" (ibid.,p 5) is also important.

The rationale for lifelong learning proposed by the OECD (2010) suggests that it is a means for effective social and community engagement as well as for living fulfilling and meaningful lives. Lifelong and lifewide learning are also viewed as being central to the creation of solidarity among the generations at global, national, community, neighbourhood and family

levels. In a world where ICT confers power in relation to knowledge and resources, older people without technological skills may be marginalised. Children teaching older people ICT skills not only makes learning more widely available within society, but promotes the notion of lifewide learning where the contribution to learning is frequently offered by persons who are not trained, paid or acknowledged as teachers - in this case by children (Linking Generations Northern Ireland, 2011, p 32; *Bringing Generations Together in Wales*, 2012, p 23).

### **Formal, Informal, Nonformal Learning**

With the recognition of lifelong and lifewide learning has come new perspectives on how learning is understood and appreciated resulting in a more flexible, inclusive paradigm of learning that includes formal, nonformal and informal learning and settings. Coombs and Ahmed (1974) proposed the following three modes of education for lifelong learning:

**Formal education** “the highly institutionalised, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured “education system”, spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university. Examples include pre-schools, primary schools, second level schools and third level educational institutions.

**Nonformal education** “any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children.” Examples include parent and toddler groups, volunteer organisations, older people’s clubs and youth clubs.

**Informal education** “the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment – at home, at work, at play; from the example and the attitudes of the family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television.” (Coombs and Ahmed cited in Bostrom, 2003, p.11). Examples include playgrounds, museums, art galleries, clubs and libraries and in children’s and adults spontaneous encounters in social and physical environments.

Coombs and Ahmed argue that it is necessary for elements from formal, nonformal and informal education to be synthesised and strong links to be developed between them, in order for systems of lifelong education to evolve (ibid., cited in Bostrom: 2003, p.12). A similar point has been made by Kernan and van Oudenhoven (2010) in relation to the importances of linkages between informal, non-formal and formal ECEC, so that they can support and reinforce each other and create new possibilities for learning.

Young children learn primarily in informal settings, with parents and the extended family being the primary educators and transmitters of culture. Sociocultural theories of learning derived from Vygotsky’s ideas and developed by Rogoff (1990) are particularly relevant in exploring young children’s learning within the family and may also be important in understanding extrafamilial intergenerational learning. In a study of intergenerational learning between young children and grandparents in East London, Kenner *et al* found key concepts of sociocultural theory included “scaffolding provided by caregivers, the syncretising of knowledge and experiences from different sources, synergy leading to mutual benefits for the young child and others involved, funds of knowledge within communities and the transmission of knowledge or ‘prolepsis’ between generations applied to this new area of

intergenerational learning” (Kenner *et al* 2007, p 220). Adults, after they have completed their formal education, continue to learn in non-formal and informal environments.

### **Intergenerational Learning**

Intergenerational learning is actually the oldest method of learning and is the process whereby knowledge, skills, values and norms are transmitted between generations, typically through the family (Hoff, 2007). Familial intergenerational learning is informal and multigenerational and typically involves learning that takes place naturally as part of day-to-day social activity (Jessel, 2009). Thus, the cultural context of kinship and family structures must be considered in any investigation of intergenerational learning.

Within the field of intergenerational learning, the term *family learning* can be used to describe learning oriented activities that family members do together outside the family home for the benefit of the whole family and often the community as a whole. Examples include family groupings of different generations including children visiting a museum together (Vels Heijn, 2011), or international volunteering workcamps, where children, parents and grandparents from various countries work together on an environmental or restoration project (di Pietro, 2012). Another interpretation of family learning refers to literacy, language and numeracy programmes, which are aimed at supporting parents in their educating role. Here, grandparents or other older volunteers can also be involved and the setting could be the home, or ECEC or library. Interventions at family level to improve family functioning in families experiencing difficulties could also be viewed as a form of family or intergenerational learning. This last more specialised form of intergenerational learning is not being included in this review as it is considered not within the remit of the TOY Project.

A new model of intergenerational learning – the extrafamilial intergenerational learning model facilitates wider social groups outside the family to contribute to the socialisation of the young.

The extrafamilial intergenerational learning model has been identified as having great potential to create benefits for individuals and society. As noted in the introduction a key concept in relation to intergenerational learning is that it puts equal emphasis on learning together, learning from each other and learning about each other (Preisser, 2011). There is some evidence that intergenerational programmes and practice incorporating formal, nonformal and informal learning and settings create resources that add value to the lives of individuals and create better communities (Beth Johnson Foundation, 2011; Butts, 2007; Pinazo *et al*, 2007 and Martin *et al*, 2010).

### **Intergenerational Learning and Active Ageing**

Intergenerational learning has been strongly associated with the concept of active ageing which the World Health Organisation (WHO) defined as the process for optimising opportunities for physical, social and mental well-being throughout the life course (WHO Active Ageing, 2002). The recently published ENIL report (2012), *Intergenerational learning and active ageing* suggests that intergenerational learning is linked to active ageing through activities that structure interactions and exchanges between generations and which function towards social and cultural mediation.

The Third Age has been conceptualised as marking the period when an individual has retired from formal work but is physically and mentally active and able to engage

in active leisure The Third Age fuses the latter part of non-old adulthood and the active younger part of old age (Laslett, 1996). The Fourth Age was seen by Laslett as a period following the Third Age when physical and cognitive decline could be expected. The focus of much intergenerational practice is on the Third Age where more active older people (in the 55 plus age group) engage in educational or purposive leisure activities in some type of community-based educational or social enterprise. It is important, however, to guard against a stereotyping of the Fourth Age when people experience physical and possibly mental decline and to assume that older people in that stage are not also entitled to life affirming experiences such as purposive leisure and developmental activities and do not also contribute to the lives of others.

Older people in the Third Age represent a significant resource for volunteering, which is often a key component of extra-familial intergenerational learning. Volunteering takes on different forms and meanings in different settings as it is strongly influenced by the history, politics, religion and culture of a region. However, commonly agreed characteristics of volunteering include the absence of financial reward, the lack of coercion, personal commitment and the benefits that both the volunteer and the recipient or organisation derive from the volunteering activity (Davis Smith, 1999).

The concept of 'age-friendly communities' which is emerging in the literature reflects the breadth of intergenerational interactions and learning in local communities. The WHO defines an 'age-friendly community' as one that optimises opportunities for health, participation and security as people age. In an age-friendly community, policies, services, and infrastructure are designed to respond flexibly to ageing-related needs and preferences. Some of the factors an age-friendly community considers are outdoor spaces and buildings, social participation, respect, social inclusion and contribution in all areas of community life (WHO, 2007).

The convergence of the concepts intergenerational learning, active ageing and age-friendly communities helps to mainstream and embed intergenerational policy and practice. In the TOY project particular attention is being paid to learning experiences in non-formal settings in the community as well as linkages to formal and informal settings.



### 3 Categorising intergenerational practice

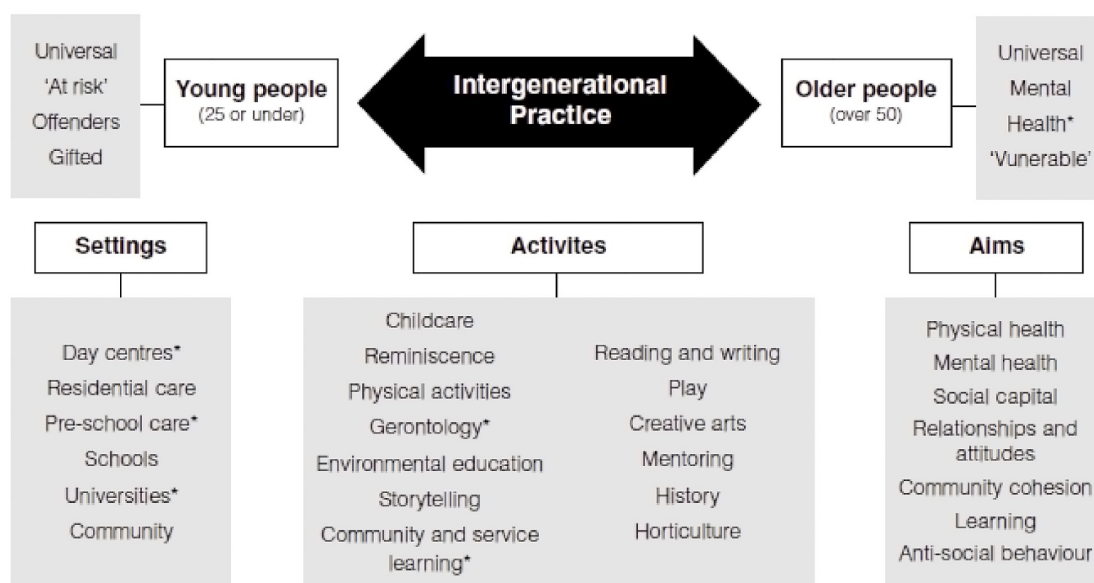
Considerable attention in the literature has been paid to categorising intergenerational practice according to their forms, functions and learning areas. Brown and Ohsako (2003) discuss a typology of interactions between the elderly and the young, comprising;

- Older adults serving children and youth (as tutors, mentors, resource persons, coaches and friends, a grandparent raising a grandchild)
- Children and youth serving older people (as friendly visitors, companions and tutors)
- Older people and youth collaborating in service to community (e.g. environmental and community development projects)
- Older people, youth and children together engaging themselves in informal learning activities, recreation, leisure and sports events or art festivals and exhibitions.

The ENIL report also categorised the different types of activities involved in intergenerational learning according to distinct principles which may overlap:

- *Friendly and informal social encounters,*
  - *Transfer of experiences, knowledge, know-how and memories,*
  - *Mutual creations (artistic, cultural or other),*
  - *Active solidarity towards those in difficulty, living together*
- (Intergenerational learning and active ageing, 2012, p 15)

Springate *et al* (2008) provide a comprehensive model of intergenerational practice (see Figure 1 below) which reflects the diversity of participants, settings, activities and aims of intergenerational practice (Springate *et al*, 2008, p 5).



\* denotes that examples are mainly international, not UK.

Figure 1 – Intergenerational practice

While this model captures the breadth of intergenerational activities, it does not illustrate the depth of engagement involved. Intergenerational activities may be described in terms of a scale ranging from a low level of contact to higher levels that 'promote intensive contact and ongoing opportunities for intimacy' (Kaplan, 2002, p.314) and can be graded according to Kaplan's model as follows:

- Level 1 Learning about the other age group, but with no direct contact
- Level 2 Seeing the other age group but at a distance
- Level 3 Meeting each other
- Level 4 Annual or periodic activities
- Level 5 Demonstration projects (implemented on an experimental or trial basis)
- Level 6 On-going intergenerational programmes
- Level 7 On-going, natural intergenerational sharing, support and communication

The Beth Johnson Foundation suggests that intergenerational practice occurs when level 5 projects lead to level 6 programmes. At the top level (level 7), intergenerational practice is seen to become embedded in the community and therefore becomes a way of working and living (Beth Johnson Foundation, 2011). This is clearly a process that can only evolve over time and links in with ideas of communities for all ages.

The challenge for the TOY Project is to provide a framework for intergenerational practice which captures the process of intergenerational learning in non-formal community spaces and which brings together children 8 years and younger and older people 55 years +. The first step in this endeavour was to explore existing research and practice in this subset of intergenerational practice. The second step will involve undertaking further in-depth action research, which will be informed by a *Positive Deviance* approach (see Introduction). This second phase of TOY (April to August 2013), will aim to uncover successful approaches including skills and resources needed to organise mutually beneficial activities for older people and young children.

# 4 Intergenerational Learning in Practice

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## **The Toy Framework for Intergenerational Learning involving Old and Young**

The analysis of both the academic and the grey literature has led to the identification of the following five goals of intergenerational practice and learning involving young children and older people:

- 1 Building and sustaining relationships
- 2 Enhancing social cohesion in the community
- 3 Facilitating older people as guardians of knowledge
- 4 Recognising the roles of grandparents in young children's lives
- 5 Enriching learning processes of children and older adults

These goals are being used in the TOY project as an organising framework for the capacity building of practitioners and for planning pilot actions. We have also used the five goals of intergenerational learning to outline and discuss projects identified through the grey literature research. These five goals are not mutually exclusive – there are many linkages and overlaps between them.

From the outset in the TOY project, we decided to focus on two broad thematic areas: Nature and Outdoor Learning and Arts, Culture and the Creativity. Whilst our primary focus is on learning in nonformal and informal settings, such as community centres, libraries, gardens, playgrounds, ECEC settings, care homes, family homes, we also included examples from childcare settings, kindergartens and primary schools. We have therefore mainly selected examples of intergenerational practice involving children in the following areas: gardening, planting, growing, preparation and eating food, nature play areas, art and craft projects, storytelling, local history and heritage, play and traditional games, making books, and early literacy support.

The TOY working framework, which builds on the model presented in Springate et al is presented in Figure 2 below. It is likely that the Framework will be further refined based on learning during subsequent phases of the project.

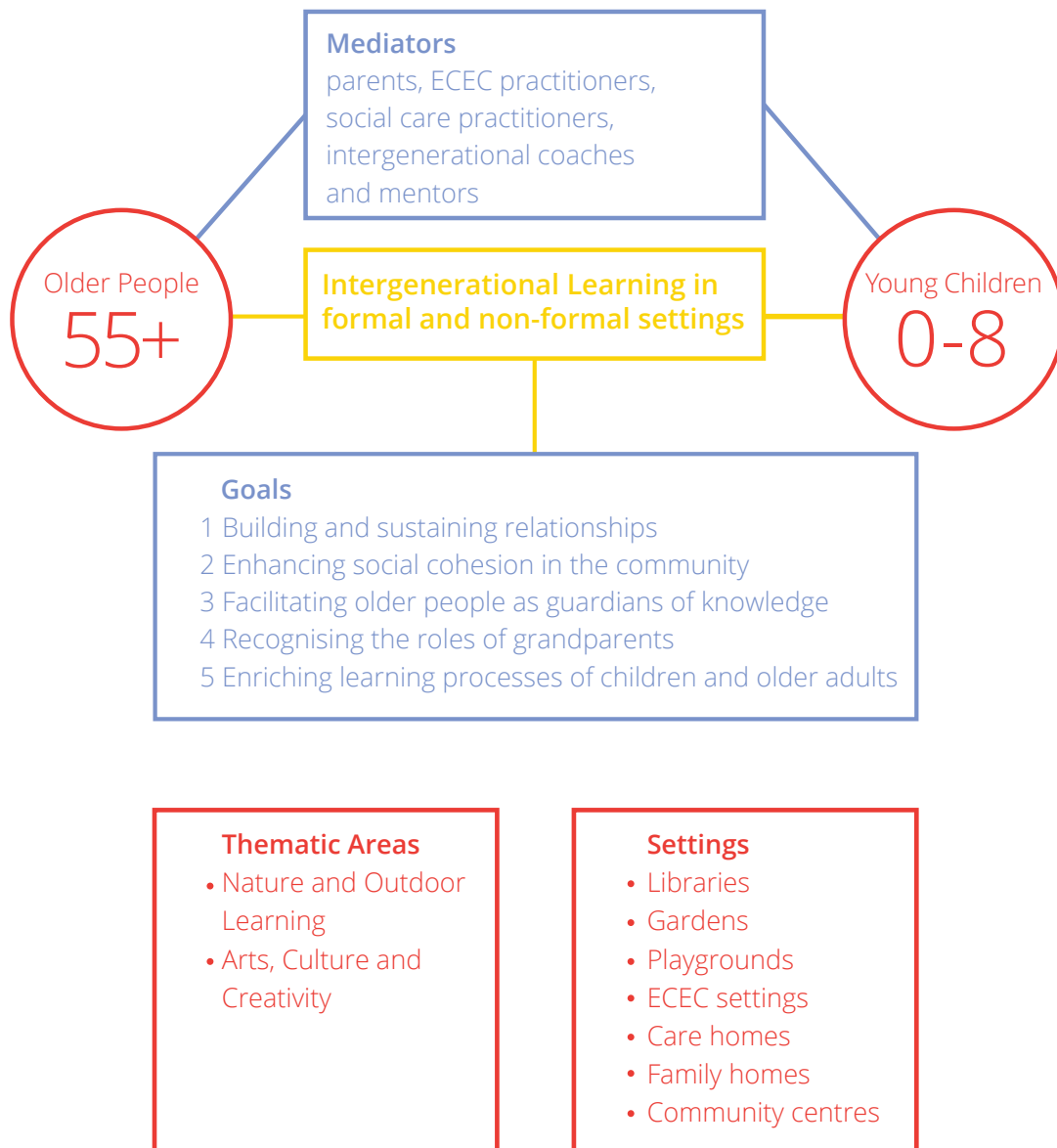


Figure 2 – TOY framework

## **Examples of intergenerational practice in Europe**

In reviewing the literature, we were particularly interested in finding out about the form and process of intergenerational learning involving young and old, which kinds of organisations are involved, who benefits and how, innovative elements in intergenerational practice and any limitations or challenges. Another focus in the review was to assess the initiatives and activities based on Kaplan's model (Kaplan, 2002). More information on the initiatives referred to below can be found by following the website/blog address in the References section.

### 1 **Building and sustaining relationships**

Perhaps the dominant goal of both intra and extra-familial intergenerational practice has been to build and develop relationships and reduce the separation between generations. This can aim both to enrich relationships generally and to counteract negative stereotypes and isolation of older people where these exist (Hollywood, 2004; Pinazo-Hernandis, 2011). Research conducted by the University of Barcelona, Spain, which used children's drawings as a methodology, indicated that the image that 9-12 old children held about older people was less negative than concluded in similar studies. Although some drawings had negative content, most pictured a positive - and even friendly - image of old people (Villar & Faba, 2012).

#### *Selected project examples*

One of the most effective ways of building relationships involving younger children is through shared activities (Bruner, 1976). Spending time in each other's company doing simple activities and having fun is the focus of many successful intergenerational projects involving younger children. This is reflected in the idea of 'Grandparent Days', which are popular in ECEC services and the early classes in Primary school in several countries including the Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and the UK. Typically, these take place once or twice a year and often as part of thematic work on families or grandparents and are reported on or documented in short news items on services' websites and blogs or in photos displayed in the services. The precise form of the involvement varies and could include baking with children, reading stories aloud, performance, dancing and singing together or going on a walk/hike together (See Blogspots consulted for Spain and the Netherlands in References section for further information).

The idea of people looking forward to the meetings, enjoying the company of each other and having fun together has been highlighted in many of the projects reviewed. This is seen as particularly important for older people whose opportunities for social interaction may be restricted. Clearly, fun and enjoyment is a key motivator for young children's learning whether in the company of their peers, or older people in their family or community.

A project that focused on exploring in a light-hearted way the personal identities of old and young was undertaken in a London primary school. A small group of children and local residents used poetry, masks and digital media to explore who they were and who they might like to be (London Borough of Camden, 2009).

Intergenerational projects that focused on improving deficits in relationships among the generations included an initiative in Northern Ireland where local older people worked with migrant children (4-11 years) and their families to promote greater integration in the community. The project also had the benefit of supporting young migrant children who had

little contact with their grandparents. This project facilitated greater community engagement and enriched the lives of all participants by altering negative views and enhancing community engagement and participatory democracy (Linking Generations Northern Ireland, 2010).

Another example is a Polish project involving senior volunteers and an NGO, which involved regular meetings between older people and pre-school and school-aged children. Older people reported feeling needed, being able to forget about their problems and becoming more open. The important outcome of this initiative was that many older people changed their approach to their own families and tried to re-establish broken bonds with their own children and grandchildren (Akademia Rozwoju Filantropii w Polsce, 2007).

It is important to highlight that many of these types of intergenerational projects do not involve in depth cooperation over extended periods. This suggests that they remain at levels 1-4 on Kaplan's model of engagement. Furthermore, such projects often result from the initiative of an individual pre-school teacher, primary school teacher or community worker. This is supported by research in Slovenia (Vonta et al. 2012) which explored the degree to which preschools in Slovenia are connected to older people in the local community. There were only a few isolated initiatives found whereby older adults were invited to take part in activities with the children (Vonta et al, 2012).

## 2 Enhancing social cohesion in the community

Civil society groups can play a critical role in developing and sustaining relationships among generations, which contributes to building social capital in communities. In the public sphere innovative intergenerational practice can be observed where a number of autonomous agencies representing different age groups and sectors use the same premises or outdoor space and collaborate in a range of social and learning activities.

### *Selected project examples*

The idea of different age groups sharing the same space with inspired by a *Kindergarten for all Ages* project in Spain. Initially thought of as just-for-children services, this innovative Kindergarten project has challenged the local community to think of kindergartens as places for all ages, within multi and inter-generational contexts where older people get involved as volunteers and enrich the learning for the children and their own development.

A similar initiative in Italy is the Intergenerational Centre *Casetta Maritati*, which has been active since 2007 - a place where children, parents and grandparents can participate in recreational activities offering possibilities for building relationships between generations. The centre is surrounded by a games park, has a warm and welcoming atmosphere, with small multi-purpose areas, where rooms and spaces are organised to respond to different purposes. There children from 0 years to 14 years with their parents, grandparents, childminders and older people can meet to play, read, and learn

The Slovenian project *Hand in Hand* ran from 2009-2011 during which time two kindergartens, four elementary schools, two high schools and three nursing homes in the Koroška region collaborated on a range of activities. These included creating flower beds, joint art projects, learning about herbs, learning German together and preparing musical and cultural events. Secondary school students visited elderly people, interviewed them and wrote down their life stories thus getting an insight into life after World War II (Narat et al, 2012).

Innovative projects often develop from the vision and energy of people already active in community contexts. Additionally many writers have highlighted that intergenerational practice releases the potential of older people to contribute positively to their community and has spin-off benefits for other community projects (Granville, 2002; Hatton-Yeo, 2007; Kaplan, 2002; Stanton and Tench, 2003, cited in Springate *et al*, 2008, 13-14).

Outdoor play and learning involving community volunteers would seem to offer rich possibilities for intergenerational contact and broad community benefits. Three such gardening and outdoor learning projects involving young children and older people are briefly described. An Irish project that connected local government, participants from 2 years up and community volunteers, aimed to encourage environmental education, to contribute to Louth County Council's profile as an Age-Friendly County and to promote relationships between community members of different ages through activities which encourage social interaction. Within the project, three biodiversity gardens were developed by gardeners of all ages within the communities, in a local Primary school, a retirement home and a secret garden beside the village playground. The participants undertook gardening workshops, shared life experiences and organised special events such as an intergenerational parade and a celebration of National Tree Week. Recorded benefits are collaborations between the local authority, schools and community groups, a collective feeling of achievement, and the development of new friendships among participants (Finn and Scharf, 2012).

A recent initiative in the Netherlands has been the development of *Generation Gardens*, a place where people of all ages do gardening together on a regular basis. Three documented Generation Gardens now exist in The Hague (2010), Amersfoort (opened 2011) and Utrecht (opened 2012). These have involved collaborative working between two or more of the following: childcare centres, afterschool services, schools, colleges, old people's homes or retirement homes, community centres, local housing corporations and municipalities. Benefits suggested relate to health and wellbeing of both old and young; lower levels of isolation among residents in old people's homes, more positive role models of older people for children, greater awareness of growing food and healthy eating and an enhanced feeling of community and collaborative working (Verspeek, 2010; Both, 2011).

An intergenerational project that has been systematically evaluated is a project to renew and revitalise a public park in the city of Aveiro in Portugal. The aim of the project is to preserve the city's historical, ecological and social richness through the promotion of intergenerational activities and relationships. The project was designed to be appealing to all ages by including walking and educational trails in the park, a family tree, and activities to attract all ages. Benefits which were identified by participants and visitors to the park, included joy at seeing the park come 'alive', fostering community identity, offering a communal meeting place; thereby increasing inter and intragenerational interaction. Other benefits include the transmission of cultural and historical heritage through sharing of memories with younger generations. The project had approximately 11,540 participants, 23 per cent of whom were children, 19 per cent young people; 41 per cent adults and 18 per cent seniors. In total 45 partners and stakeholders were involved (Vieira & Guerra, 2012).

When intergenerational thinking is built into the planning and design stages of community centres and public spaces opportunities are created for deep and enduring interaction involving all ages. *The Castlehaven Intergenerational Forum* is a multi-age and multi-cultural initiative in Camden, London where different age and ethnic groups all use the same

premises and organise joint projects under the direction of twelve local people of varying ages. All participants are in a familiar, safe, neutral space. Good policies and training have been established and the project has also resulted in an increase in volunteers of all ages. This could be termed a community for all ages ('Castlehaven', London Borough of Camden, 2009).

While the Castlehaven project seeks to embed intergenerational learning at a conceptual and planning level, all intergenerational projects have the capacity to create social capital and enhance understanding across all ages.

### 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 heritage, history and cultural and give children a sense of identity and perspective. Older people have acquired life skills and experience that might be relevant to young people particularly in a rapidly changing society and in the current challenging economic circumstances. Innovative intergenerational learning can make available mature adult experiences to vulnerable young people and promote positive face-to-face interactions in an increasingly virtual world. In this case the emphasis is less on the relationships and more on the perspectives and resource that older people represent. Older people can be considered as serving in the capacity as tutors, mentors and resource persons.

#### *Selected project examples*

In Italy concern about the loss of art and handicraft skills has led to projects where older people teach traditional craft skills to school children – as a way of preserving a rich educational heritage (TUCEP, 2011). In the *Libro di Storia Vivente* project (The Living History Book) in Belmonte, Sabina the centre for older people and the primary school worked together in order to produce a book of living history. The narratives of the elders were collected through recordings and later transformed into literary texts. It also contains oral tales, local legends, poems and rhymes composed to pass on values and knowledge to children. All contributions were read and presented at the primary school and children responded with thoughts, drawings, small nursery rhymes and real stories.

The universality of play and its legacy over time was identified as an important aspect of culture that could bring young and old together to explore how play has changed over time and what factors are affecting contemporary children's play (see Play Memories, Centre for Intergenerational Practice, Europe wide resources 'Reference Section')

An Irish Local History Programme based in Ballymun, Dublin also recognised older people as a source of historical knowledge about locality. It aimed to build connections between younger and older people and reduce isolation of older people by encouraging voluntary activity, to enhance pupils' experience of history and familiarise teachers with the locality. In practice, older volunteer residents visited local primary schools to talk about their experience of school, growing up and life in Ballymun when they moved to the area (Finn and Scharf, 2012).

The concerns raised about the possible loss of heritage, traditional skills, cultural values, traditional games and play and knowledge of local history go beyond local intergenerational initiatives to national concerns. Local intergenerational projects draw our attention to



important policy questions in relation to curricula at national level. For example one of the projects (*The Ballymun project*) illustrated the benefits for all generations including the teachers.

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

Grandparents play a central part in the nurturance and socialisation of their grandchildren. Grandparents' role as listener, story teller, conduit of family and social history is seen as complementary to the role of parents. This can be particularly significant when a parent is absent or unavailable for considerable periods of time as a result of family breakdown, illness or migration. Yet, these roles can be enacted by older people interacting with young children with whom there is no kin relationship. This can be thought of as a form of social grandparenthood and is illustrated in the Grandparent Day described above.

##### *Selected project examples*

Older people who are grandparents are central to many intergenerational programmes in preschools, kindergartens and schools. *The Grandad Project* in secondary schools in Stockholm (Bostrom, 2003) reflects the role of the social grandparent. In this project older males from the community are employed to assist teachers by providing care for the pupils. While the activities they engage in are of a social character and the 'Grandads' do not teach them formally, pupils interact with these older people as role models and friends

Grandparents can be involved in what is termed family learning which benefits families and the community as a whole. Recognising the active care role, which many grandparents take on either by choice but often by circumstances, intergenerational projects can offer support to grandparents in their role as carers for grandchildren. One example identified in the literature review, is a grandparents support group during school holidays, which resulted in the older people offering and receiving peer support; finding new areas of interest; seeing positive changes in the children's behaviour and offering structure to their caring tasks during school holidays (Bringing Generations Together in Wales, 2012, p 22). A Polish study (Skura, 2009) focused on intergenerational dialogue between older people (grandparents) and school-aged children (grandchildren). Grandparents perceived that the project gave them recognition and helped them to feel useful and the grandchildren acknowledged the integrating role of their grandparent/s in organising family meetings and festivities.

An example of a pre-school based intergenerational project that links the roles of biological grandparent, volunteer grandparent and less active grandparent/older person was developed in the UK. A programme for preschoolers and older people was designed to promote three types of prosocial behaviour in the children: sharing, cooperating, and helping. There was interaction involving natural grandparents in the preschool, regular older volunteers, competent older visitors, less able elders in a nursing home and pre-school children and their teachers. Benefits that were detected during the project were increased prosocial behaviours in the children, and providing positive and realistic information about older people and ageing (Lambert *et al*, 1990, 2004).

The above is a good example of tapping the resource that grandparents/older people represent at local level in cooperation with educational settings, and widening the benefits through the idea of social grandparenthood and active ageing.

## 5 Enriching learning processes of children and older adults

Intergenerational learning offers a more experiential and innovative approach to learning for children where they actively engage with people in meaningful exchanges. Such programmes complement the more traditional curricula and offer more active learning opportunities which are considered to be educationally beneficial and where the children and older people co-construct knowledge. For older people it operationalises the idea of education as an enterprise for life and can be an empowering experience. Such programmes can be based on a philosophy of mutual regard and equality, recognising the unique perspectives of both groups. An important aspect of intergenerational learning is the opportunity for fun and enjoyment when teaching and learning roles are more open. Older people have acquired life skills and experience that might be relevant to young people. Young people on the other hand offer fresh, innovative and forward-looking perspectives for the future (Murphy, 2012).

### *Selected project examples*

A project in East London that investigated the learning exchanges between 3 to 6-year-old children and their grandparents found that learning interactions were co-constructed by children and grandparents within a relationship of mutuality. Touch was found to be an important method of communication. The intergenerational exchange developed concepts and skills being taught formally thereby complementing the role of the school (Kenner et al, 2007).

In the Cultural and Social Centre of Mangualde in Portugal, 5-year-old children get together with the older people from the day care centre, with the aim of promoting interaction and sharing of knowledge. Both groups have the opportunity to share what they know: the older people teach their old traditions through the passage of wisdom and memories, and the children can teach some things which will update and enrich the older adults. Some of the activities are sessions of stories, tongue twisters, proverbs, games, songs, crafts (Paróquia de Mangualde, 2008).

An Italian project, *Doing together*, Rivoli Pre-school and local associations started when a home for older and disabled people was built next to the pre-school centre. The children visited the old people's home once a week and learnt to socialise with disabled and older people where great importance was given to the experimentation of different artistic expression and languages such as painting, music, and dancing.

The project *The Never Ending Story*, also in Italy, in Sestri Levante in the province of Genova, involved children (age 6 to 10 years), working together with teachers, artists, craftsmen, social workers, residents of old people's homes, each with their own skills and capacities. Older people told children stories and legends of past times and these were used to create a piece of art work. The teachers, children and older people reflected on the stories, which were transformed into drawings. The drawings were presented to the 250 children and all contributed to the creation of a 12 metre long ceramic panel. The art work was installed in the old people's residence, and strong connections were made between the older storytellers and the young listeners.

In Ireland, a project *Sligo Arts and Health* involving Primary school children (8 to 12-year-olds) and local older residents (aged 55 to 80+ ) provided an opportunity to collaborate with professional artists and to explore their identity, where they live and their sense of place and community. The main rationale of the project was to connect people who may not otherwise

have had any previous access to the Arts. The aims were to enhance social relationships, to improve health, to promote greater understanding of health and well-being using creative projects, to celebrate creativity in older age and to provide work for professional artists. The project provided opportunities for older people to discover new ways to express themselves (Finn and Scharf, 2012).

Reading initiatives to help younger children develop literacy are often located in school settings. However, our review indicated that nonformal and informal settings such as the local library and the home provide rich opportunity for intergenerational and family learning focussing on early literacy and story telling. Here too mutual and shared learning are often evident.

An example of a reading initiative in a community setting under the motto 'Life Long Learning' was found in the Netherlands. Volunteer older people organise a weekly interactive story book reading session in a local library in the city of Leiden with children aged 1 to 6 years and their parents. Volunteers are happy to share their love of books to stimulate children's language and literacy development. Many of the children and parents who participate do not speak Dutch as their first language and the sessions facilitate a relaxed opportunity to listen to and practice Dutch and become familiar with the other services the library, music, culture and arts centre offers.

In the *Tortosa Intergenerational Storytelling Project* in Spain the goal has been to encourage reading as a strategy to combat school failure, to encourage intergenerational links by involving older people in the community and to promote inter-cultural contact reflecting the diversity of the town's population. The older volunteers visited the library on a weekly basis to rehearse, prepare and tell the stories. The cognitive exercises in the project can serve to enhance the older people's self-esteem and promote better cognitive functioning.

From a pedagogical standpoint, it can be argued that different types of generation-specific knowledge can enrich the learning process of all generations. These examples illustrate different ways of learning which use non-traditional teachers and learners, and non-traditional sites of learning. Rather than the focus being on building relationships, the aim is primarily to develop innovative pedagogical and creative methodologies. What is important is that continuous cohorts of young and old experience this type of learning and that it becomes embedded in pedagogical practice and in a variety of educational, social care and civil society settings. However, it should be noted that a research study of intergenerational learning projects in the UK and Portugal questioned the learning potential of projects and the extent to which all age groups had benefitted from the projects (Harper and Hamblin, 2010).

## 5 Conclusions & Questions

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In the course of researching for this review early confirmation was obtained about the lack of research and evaluation data on extra-familial intergenerational learning involving young children and older people, as measured by the small number of references found in the academic literature. However, the experience and broad networks of the consortium provided access to a wide range of more informal documentation and evidence illustrating a limited number of examples focusing specifically on children aged 8 years and under. An important conclusion of the review is that the contribution of young children to intergenerational learning is an issue that merits more attention.

Promoting opportunities for active ageing, recognising the capacity of children to be agents in their own learning and creating spaces in communities where young and old can meet and interact are the key elements that must be integrated to develop intergenerational learning programmes. Building critical capacity over time will require key sectors such as schools, care settings and civil society groups to recognise the potential of intergenerational learning. The TOY Project will provide exemplars of innovative practice that will demonstrate what can be achieved. The networking involved in making contacts with a range of civil society groups across seven EU countries will itself stimulate interest and discussion on what is possible. The role of the middle generation may be critical in facilitating such programmes (Narat *et al.* 2012). Therefore, parents, teachers, early childhood practitioners, social care practitioners are important target groups for the TOY project. They will be encouraged and supported to exploit opportunities for further intergenerational learning in their work at local and sectoral level. At local government level planning for communities and public spaces requires awareness of the benefits of all generations meeting and interacting.

*Specific questions and challenges will arise for the TOY project in the following areas:*

- The dearth of intergenerational projects specifically focusing on children aged 8 and under may indicate possible limitations of intergenerational learning with this age group. This could suggest that mixed ages and the involvement of the middle generation are necessary for intergenerational activities involving young children.
- Developing awareness of the benefits of and the skills required for intergenerational practice involving young children and older people will be addressed.
- Intergenerational projects appear to be highly dependent on the commitment and innovativeness of key individuals. The Positive Deviance Action Research will further illuminate this issue.
- Intergenerational learning is a different approach to teaching and learning in schools which presents a challenge to traditional methodologies and vested interests. The intergenerational learning approach could add value to the more traditional education model. However it demands time for planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- Across Europe there is regional variation in patterns and expectations of intergenerational living. How this translates into intergenerational learning practice will be further explored.
- As intergenerational projects often have many aims, the possible benefits have to be considered more widely than from solely a specific learning perspective e.g. environmental sustainability
- In general, women are much more involved in the caring and education of young children, in formal, nonformal and informal settings. It may be more difficult to involve older men in

developing intergenerational projects with young children.

- The issue of safeguarding and risk for young children is an important ethical and practice issue in many countries and may act as a disincentive to older people becoming involved in intergenerational projects.
- It was difficult to find examples of intergenerational learning involving young children which had been evaluated. This means that lessons learnt may not have been assimilated in planning new initiatives.

Based on the findings from this review and the Positive Deviance Action Research we will develop capacity building modules for practitioners and organisations and will support the development of pilot actions which will be evaluated. All learning from the TOY project will be disseminated widely and will inform further practice and policy in this area.

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## Partners



## Associate Partners



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

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