GENERATIONS GROWING TOGETHER

INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING AS A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES

A HANDBOOK FOR PRACTITIONERS AND TRAINERS

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Acknowledgements

Suggested citation: Fitzpatrick, A. (2024). Generations Growing Together: Intergenerational learning as a pedagogical strategy in early childhood education and care services. A handbook for practitioners and trainers. TOY programme: Leiden.

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Design and layout: Francesco Abbadessa

Foreword

It is my great pleasure to introduce this important handbook detailing the exciting possibilities of intergenerational learning to the early childhood education and care community. It is a timely contribution to enriching our understanding of the unique role of early childhood settings as a key community hub and identifying the early childhood educator as a facilitator in enhancing greater connectivity between children, wider society and older people in particular. In contemporary society children and older adults are spending more time in age-segregated spaces, and this can isolate different age groups and limit social integration resulting in a lack of knowledge and understanding between each other. The idea behind intergenerational learning [IGL] is to break down these barriers through creating opportunities for both groups to meet and learn about, and from, each other.

Extending the focus of early learning environments beyond the setting itself has the potential to create new educational spaces for young children that are more diverse and inclusive than the early childhood setting alone. Recognising the centrality of relationships to children's learning and the benefits of intergenerational connections in expanding network of relationships, the Together Old and Young [TOY] project was designed to bring together young children and older people across both early childhood settings and settings for older people. The intention was to reduce the separation between generations, counteract negative stereotyping and enrich knowledge and relationships through spending time in each other's company doing simple activities, talking and having fun. During visits the young children played and chatted to the older people and many of the older people shared stories from the past and demonstrated crafts that they learned as young children. The primary aim of providing these opportunities is to allow time for the young children and older adults to interact together and get to know each other. Crucially it is the process of IGL, the quality of the interactions, rather than the completion of any specific activity or set of activities, that is central to successful IGL practice.

An evaluation of the TOY project found benefits for all ages in having the opportunity to meet and interact with groups of people previously unfamiliar to them. As the project developed it became clear that intergenerational learning is about more than just connecting across the ages; it provides early educators with a new pedagogical strategy linking children, educators and families with the older generation. The pedagogical value to children was evident in the expansion of their language, the development of critical thinking and social skills and opportunities for reflection and recall. Also observed was the kindness and empathy of young children and the pleasure experienced by parents (some of whom became involved in the project) and the older people.

IGL is an effective pedagogical strategy in ECEC as it aligns closely with internationally recognised principles of young children's learning and development. However, linking the theory of IGL to the practice of IGL is not easy and it can present challenges to early childhood educators. This excellent handbook has been carefully designed by Dr Anne Fitzpatrick, part of the TOY team, to support educators in ECEC settings wishing to implement IGL as part of their pedagogical routine. It offers a clear pathway to planning and implementing IGL pedagogical strategies to maximise the enjoyment of, and benefits gained from, connecting young children and older people. The handbook is organised in 12 sections which are independent of each other and it can be dipped into as necessary to find different approaches to use in response to different circumstances. Topics covered are carefully selected to allow for a local responsiveness alongside pedagogically sound early childhood practice. It provides practical advice, examples, tips and reflective questions to support early childhood educators in establishing and sustaining quality IGL practice over time. Across the sections it introduces the theory and underpinning principles of IGL, describes its benefits to early childhood settings and to young children, outlines the key role of the early childhood educators in effective IGL practice and illustrates approaches to planning, evaluation and overcoming challenges. The handbook also provides a valuable context for reflective practice and the development of a shared pedagogical ethos within early childhood settings. Furthermore, it can act as a teaching tool for introducing ECEC students, ECEC staff groups and other interested practitioners to the theory and practice of IGL.

Generations Growing Together: A Handbook for Practitioners and Trainers is a book of our time. It locates the early childhood setting as a key

community resource and identifies the pivotal role of the early childhood educator. Recognising the social nature of learning and the critical role of relationships in early child development the Handbook provides an important and valuable contribution to early childhood pedagogy. It supports early educators connect children with the wider community, expanding their social experiences and learning opportunities while also enriching the world of older people. It is a resource that should be widely used and I highly recommend it to you.

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Contents

"Intergenerational learning involves people of different generations becoming engaged in learning from each other and learning together."

(European Network for Intergenerational Learning, 2012, p.27)

1. INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational learning is the oldest form of learning, taking place informally in families and communities passing down knowledge, skills, and values through the generations as a natural part of everyday life (Hoff, 2007).

1.1 Overview

Despite being the oldest form of learning, IGL has declined steadily over time due to wide-ranging social, cultural, economic and demographic changes. Children in the Western world are growing up in smaller, geographically dispersed family circles and, consequently, have fewer opportunities to interact with different age groups and to see themselves as part of a multigenerational society. Older people are living longer, yet are frequently separated from their families by distance, migration and family breakdown and, more recently, by COVID-19. Additionally, with the increasing attendance at age-segregated services, including preschools and care homes, traditional places and opportunities for age groups to mix have decreased. This has resulted in fewer opportunities for the development of intergenerational relationships and learning and ultimately poses a risk to social inclusion.

Planned, non-familial IGL, which involves **bringing different unrelated age groups together, to learn from each other and about each other, has emerged in a wide variety of sectors since the late 20th century,** building on the positive resources the young and old have to offer each other. IGL can take place in formal (e.g. schools) and non-formal settings, such as early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, older adults services, community centres, libraries, museums, and parks. **Key benefits of IGL include creating greater understanding and respect between generations, addressing societal concerns of loneliness and isolation, building social cohesion in communities, and enhancing opportunities for lifelong learning.** Bringing generations together expands learning opportunities, enhances feelings of well-being and belonging and helps to build stronger communities for young children to grow up in.

More recently, a growing body of research has demonstrated that **IGL is an effective pedagogical strategy in ECEC as it aligns closely with internationally recognised principles of young children's learning and development.** Furthermore, adopting IGL as a pedagogical strategy raises important philosophical questions about what is important for young children to learn now and into the future. Doing so may extend or challenge

contemporary ideas of ECEC practice as educators harness the benefits of intergenerational learning and support the development of young children as caring, contributing members of communities.

1.2 Purpose of handbook and who it is for

The primary aim of the handbook is to support educators in ECEC services who wish to implement IGL as a pedagogical strategy. It introduces the concept of IGL and its potential in effectively promoting development and learning in young children, as well as understanding and mutual respect between generations. The handbook is informed by a wide-ranging review of contemporary research on both IGL and young children's learning and development, and by curricula from different parts of the world. In particular, the author draws on the research findings of her PhD study on IGL in Irish ECEC services. Most examples and quotes are drawn from this research study, the full report of which is available (*Fitzpatrick, 2021*). **The handbook presents theoretical understandings of IGL, as well as practical advice, tips and reflective questions to support educators in planning, implementing, and evaluating sustainable IGL in their ECEC services.**

IGL can take many forms ranging from active older adults volunteering in ECEC services to co-located older adults' care homes and ECEC services sharing common programmes. The principles and processes in the handbook are all relevant to IGL in ECEC services, however the examples are drawn mainly from experiences of children (2.5-5 years) interacting with older adults in day and residential care services. While it is also a useful resource for staff in services for older adults, it is not a comprehensive guide to the specific requirement of older adults' services.

An important use of the handbook is as a teaching tool for introducing ECEC students, ECEC staff groups and other interested practitioners to the theory and practice of IGL. Policy makers working in the areas of education, social care and community work as well as NGOs will also find the information useful.

The handbook is freely available on the *TOY website*.

1.3 How the handbook is organised

The handbook is organised in 12 sections and is structured so that educators and other users can dip in and out depending on their needs. If the concept of IGL is new, the user may wish to start at the beginning, while educators already implementing IGL may go straight to the section on evaluation.

- Section 2 introduces the **concept and key principles of IGL.**

- Section 3 focuses on **the benefits of IGL in ECEC services.**

- Section 4 reflects on **how IGL fits with ECEC theory and policy.**

- Section 5 looks at the **key role of the educator in IGL practice.**

- Section 6 focuses on **planning for successful IGL practice.**

- Section 7 provides **guidelines for implementing IGL practice.**

- Section 8 considers **how to evaluate IGL practice.**

- Section 9 identifies some of the **challenges of IGL.**

- Section 10 raises some **concluding thoughts.**

- Section 11 References.

- Section 12 Appendices.
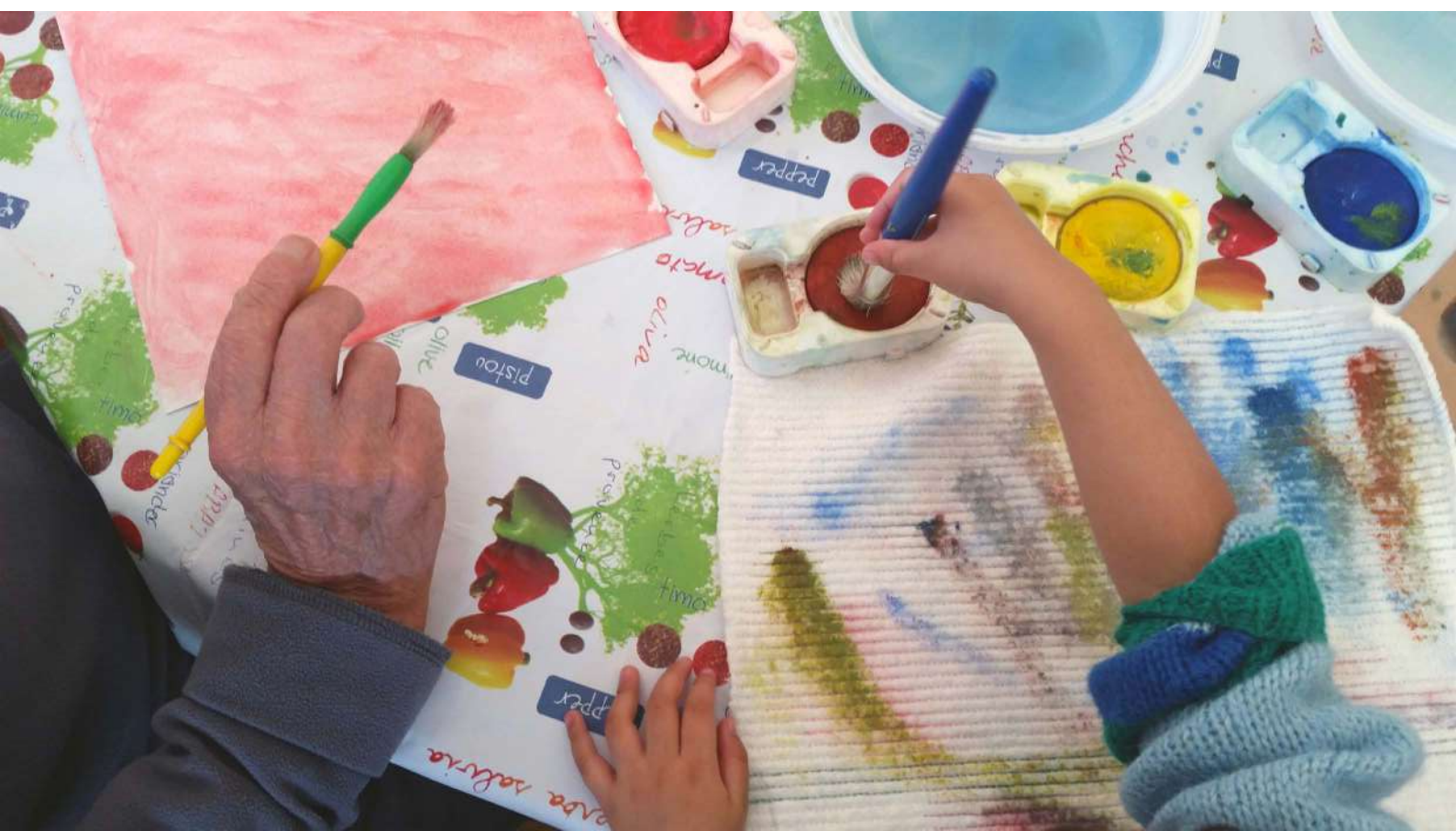
1.4 Terminology

This handbook adopts the term ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care), reflecting its wide usage in EU and international policy.

The term educator is used to refer to a practitioner of any level working in an ECEC service.

While the terms intergenerational learning and intergenerational practice are frequently used interchangeably, the term intergenerational learning is used in this handbook emphasising that the IGL practice referred to in this handbook is purposefully planned to include one or several learning aims and outcomes across the generations.

The term "experiences" rather than "activities" will be used throughout to emphasise that it is the process and the interaction, rather than the completion of an activity, that is central to successful IGL practice e.g. spending time interacting together is a more appropriate aim than making playdough.

2. WHAT IS INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING?

Bringing children and older adults together is not intergenerational in itself unless developing relationships is a key element of the aims and objectives (TOY Project Consortium, 2013).

2.1 Understanding IGL

Intergenerational learning is the way people of all ages can learn together and from each other. It is based on a partnership model where all ages contribute to the development of knowledge, values, and skills for themselves and each other. They do this through coming together for focused and meaningful interactions and experiences using a playful approach (TOY Project). Successful IGL practice requires that **all ages contribute and benefit in mutually satisfying ways and that there are planned learning outcomes for all participants.**

Crucially, IGL is not a once-off activity or add-on to a curriculum but is a purposeful approach embedded in the plans of the participating services. **While an occasional activity such as children singing carols for older adults at Christmas could be enjoyable, it could not be termed IGL unless ongoing interactions, with the aim of building relationships is central.**

From an ECEC perspective, this planned and non-familial model of IGL focuses on how a wide range of social groups can play a key role in the learning and development of children. Typical IGL practice in ECEC services to date include children spending time with older adults in adult day care services, care homes and in community activities. For a brief report of examples of two IGL experience see *Appendix A*.

To understand IGL more fully it is useful first to consider the five goals of IGL identified by the TOY project.

1. **Building and sustaining relationships:** IGL can enrich relationships, reduce separation between generations and counteract negative stereotypes and isolation of older people. One of the best ways of

building relationships involves spending time in each other's company, doing simple activities, such as art or cooking and having fun together.

2. **Enhancing social cohesion in the community:** IGL promotes connections and understanding between different age groups and sectors as they share spaces and collaborate in a range of experiences together. Supporting children and older adults to contribute to joint experiences as active citizens enhances social cohesion in the community.

3. **Facilitating older people as guardians of knowledge:** Older people's roles as guardians of knowledge, traditions and skills are central to a flourishing society. Older people are a vital link with history and cultural heritage and give children a sense of identity and perspective, as well as sustaining knowledge and skills.

4. **Recognising the role of grandparents in young children's lives:** Grandparents play a central part in the nurture, socialisation and protection of their grandchildren, playing a complementary role to that of parents. IGL introduces the concept of the social grandparent, which can be particularly significant for children whose parent or grandparent is absent or unavailable because of family breakdown, migration, illness or death.

5. **Enriching the learning processes of both children and older adults:** IGL offers an innovative approach to learning for children where they actively engage with older people as learners and teachers in real-life contexts. For older people, IGL puts into practice the idea of education as an enterprise for life. This can be an empowering experience for all participants and an opportunity for fun and enjoyment as learning and teaching roles become more open, see TOY Research summary.

2.2 Key principles underpinning IGL practice

The following principles are central to the implementation of IGL and can guide your thinking as you begin to adopt an IGL approach in your ECEC service:

1. **Mutual benefit and reciprocal learning:** IGL is built on the premise that all the participating generations gain from the experiences and that **learning is inclusive, reciprocal and continues over the life course.** In practice this means children and older adults are both teachers and learners.

2. **Relationships are central and being active in learning is essential:** IGL is based on the belief that **relationships are central to children's and older adults' learning** and development and that learning is an active social process.

3. **Strengths-based:** Children and older adults have a strong capacity to contribute from their **equally valued but different resources.** IGL draws on the strengths of each individual and age group (e.g. their energy, creativity, wisdom) and builds on these for the benefit of the other.

4. **Promotes active citizenship and inclusion:** IGL operationalises the rights of young children and older adults to be viewed positively as fully-fledged active citizens, visible and embedded in communities with much to contribute. Additionally, it **challenges the marginalisation of young children and older people** and can be particularly valuable for those living in difficult circumstances.

5. **Mobilises the resources of the community to promote the flourishing of young and old:** IGL reflects the old saying "it takes a village to raise a child". In **expanding the circle of those who care and educate**, IGL values everyday relationships and experiences in the community as rich, caring and learning environments. Promoting positive, cross-generational engagement also strengthens community bonds, promotes social cohesion and challenges ageism.

6. **Well-planned and educationally and culturally sound:** IGL draws on **best practice in learning for all ages**, which requires that it be an active, open-ended, and collaborative process. As relationships develop, educators can build on emerging interests linked to curricular aims and local cultural contexts.

7. **Cross-disciplinary:** IGL practice requires a cross-disciplinary and intersectoral approach. While professionals are generally specialists in working with one age group, successful IGL requires that they think more broadly about **the benefits of working in a variety of ways with mixed age groups**. Importantly, a strong cross-disciplinary partnership with organisations that share a similar sense of purpose makes it more likely that the IGL programme will survive over time.

2.3 Why IGL is important in communities and society

IGL is increasingly important in the 21st century as it acknowledges and responds to several significant societal concerns.

Age segregation and ageism: Children and older adults now spend more time in age-segregated spaces, which can result in a lack of knowledge and understanding between each other. Promoting understanding, respect and sharing of ideas and experience can address stereotyping and discrimination based on age.

Global ageing: IGL is an effective response to the global challenge of ageing societies. Through integrating age groups, IGL can support personal development, promote positive ageing and reduce social isolation. IGL can help combat the negative impact of loneliness on older people by helping to promote the health benefits of satisfying relationships.

Social solidarity: IGL operationalises the concept of communities for all ages as different age groups interact together creating social capital and social cohesion, as a result of which everybody gains.

Civic participation: Better connected communities can lead to more active citizenship particularly among marginalised groups including young children and older adults.

Lifelong learning: IGL offers opportunities for lifelong learning, a pre-requisite for our 21st century knowledge society, as generations learn with and from each other. IGL highly values the informal learning in real-life situations, which ensures it is interesting, relevant and useful to participants.

To conclude, experiences can be classified as IGL when they fulfil the following criteria:

- Involve more than one generation

- Place relationships at the heart of the experiences

- Are planned as purposeful, progressive and mutually beneficial learning opportunities

- Promote greater understanding and respect between generations and, consequently, community cohesion.

2.4 Reflection

1. Draw up an outline plan for your IGL practice based on the five goals identified by the TOY project (see *2.1*), giving examples of how each goal might be operationalised in practice.

2. A group of 3-year-olds spend time at a day centre for older adults every week and enjoy singing and dancing and sharing a snack together. Outline the possible learning and development outcomes there might be for the 3-year-olds.

2.5 Additional Resources

- *Visit the Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) website to get a useful overview of what intergenerational practice is, why IG relationships are important, potential benefits and outcomes, where IG work can take place and the principles of IGL*

- *A textbook that provides a comprehensive background to IGL in the early years, along with resources to help develop and improve your intergenerational practice.*
  Kernan, M. & Cortellesi, G. (2020). Intergenerational learning in practice: Together Old and Young. Routledge.

- *A chapter in the above textbook that explores the potential of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in the early years.*
  Fitzpatrick, A. (2020). Towards a pedagogy of intergenerational learning. In M. Kernan & G. Cortellesi (Eds.), *Intergenerational Learning in Practice: Together Old and Young* (pp.40-60). London, Routledge.

- *A literature review on intergenerational learning involving young children and older adults undertaken by the TOY Project Consortium.*
  TOY Project Consortium (2013). Intergenerational Learning Involving Young Children and Older People, Leiden: The TOY Project.

3. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING IGL IN ECEC SERVICES?

The older generation, they bring different values and learning and interactions that extend and elaborate the learning, socially and emotionally, because they are in a different space (Educator).

Research shows that IGL in ECEC services benefits children, educators, families and communities (*Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018*). Importantly, IGL experiences facilitate children to develop knowledge and skills that could not be taught or learned within the ECEC service, but could only be achieved when they are immersed in everyday community activities.

3.1 Benefits to children

IGL has been identified as an effective and enjoyable pedagogical strategy in ECEC services, supporting a broad range of learning and development objectives for young children. **Children's happiness, socio-emotional competences and life-skills, all foundational elements of successful learning and living are strongly supported through IGL.** Moreover, IGL increases the range and types of learning experiences and environments offered to children. Additional benefits to children include real-life experiences of social participation and opportunities for children to contribute to communities.

IGL creates opportunities for nurturing relationships between young children and older adults which play a positive role in children's learning and development

Children feeling loved, cared for and understood, which strengthens their emotional well-being, provides the most effective foundation for all aspects of their development and their flourishing (Hayes, 2024). IGL has at its core, **the importance of nurturing relationships between children and older adults in real-life social and cultural contexts.** IGL can be understood as a nurturing or relational pedagogy, highlighting the inextricable link between children's emotional, social, and cognitive development.

Specific characteristics of these nurturing, social grandparent type relationships include the enthusiasm and responsiveness of the interactions; individualised attention, time and opportunities for being listened to; their ready availability, as well as their caring and affectionate nature. Crucially, IGL offers opportunities for children to experience caring relationships beyond their parents, which have been shown to have an important protective effect, particularly for children experiencing challenges:

> The engagement [the learning takes place because of the engagement between children and older adults] . . . because we could do the activity here [in the ECE service] . . . definitely it is the engagement [that is important] (Educator).

Social and emotional learning is enhanced through IGL

Children's self-esteem and confidence grow as they develop their communication and social skills through actively interacting with older adults as they contribute ideas, facilitate experiences, and offer and receive help. **Active listening, perspective-taking, initiative, social etiquette and resilience** (important life skills and key elements of IGL) are some of the qualities and skills which can be developed through IGL. Opportunities for confidence in language use and acquisition are also enhanced through interacting with older adults.

IGL offers rich opportunities for the development of **empathy, respect and kindness towards others,** including older adults and can be seen in children as young as two years. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that children can come to respond to disability and dementia

without judgement, highlighting the importance of creating opportunities for inclusive thinking among children. Educators and parents have also reported children involved in IGL being gentler with other children, older relatives and family pets. In an IGL space, children have been shown to demonstrate a capacity to understand boundaries and to **regulate their behaviour** to meet the needs of the situation. This has included children managing their active behaviour and projecting their voices or repeating their message when communicating with older adults in what could be understood as facilitating children to be at their best:

> They [older adults] like playing with me . . . (Child).
>
> Those children going down to the day centre, we're seeing empathy being built up . . . some of the older people have no speech . . . and to see the children actually understanding them and supporting [older] people to do things . . . that's all amazing stuff . . . and it's so natural to the children (Educator).

Children's sense of identity, belonging and connectedness are reinforced through their caring and reciprocal relationships with older adults, and other members of the community they interact with through their IGL experiences. Thus, the IGL experiences support children as they build a range of images of themselves and the worlds to which they belong through social feedback and approval.

IGL increases the range and type of learning experiences and environments for children attending ECEC services

Viewing ordinary life experiences and relationships as valuable learning opportunities, an idea central to the concept of IGL, expands ideas about what constitutes a stimulating ECEC learning environment. Adopting IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECEC services reflects a belief in **the importance of learning spaces beyond the walls of the ECEC service** to include the importance of learning in the wider community. Moving beyond the walls of the ECEC service also places a value on the contribution to children's learning of more varied role models and people not typically acknowledged as teachers.

Learning in the community, or what Rogoff (2014) calls **"learning by observing and pitching in" to family and community endeavours through implementing IGL leads to unknown territories, new ideas**

and new relationships for children. This requires children to negotiate emotional and social relationships, behaviour, cultures and physical spaces that are diverse, unpredictable, and sometimes challenging in what could be termed risk-rich environments. In doing so, children develop their capacity to make connections, remember and reflect, key skills in critical thinking. **There are far-reaching benefits for children learning with and from people of mixed ages, abilities, cultures and experiences.**

Children have been shown to learn about crafts, cooking, horticulture, geography, local history, languages, culture, the environment and ageing through their interactions with older adults. Through these experiences, children also develop a greater understanding of time and place as they interact with older adults with a longer history of the world. IGL promotes opportunities for testing out ideas and sustained shared thinking, as children draw together their prior understandings with the support of knowledgeable older adults in the community (Vygotsky, 1978). This process reflects the strengths for children's learning of the golden triangle of formal, informal and non-formal learning (Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010):

IGL brings to life for young children the concept of lifelong and lifewide learning as they experience it in reality through their interactions with older adults in IGL practice.

> [Children were asking] . . . where's [name of place] on the map [hanging in the ECEC service] because one of the residents [in the care home] was from there and "oh . . . she's come a long, long way to live here in [location of ECEC service] you know, and why does she live here?" . . . so we're doing a map . . . it's absolutely learning at its best (Educator).

IGL is an effective vehicle for enhancing children's participation as valued, contributing citizens in communities

Engaging with a broad range of people and experiences through IGL extends children's experience of citizenship as they learn to participate effectively beyond the ECEC service in community contexts. Children practising citizenship and developing civic behaviour, including respect and helpfulness, acknowledges the reality that **citizenship is a process that develops in interaction with fellow citizens.** Additionally, IGL enhances children's visibility through their participation as embedded members of the community. As they become more visible through IGL practice, social perceptions of young children are challenged. Children come to be seen not only as individuals in need of care and protection but as active, contributing citizens to their own well-being and the well-being of older adults in the community. Through IGL, children develop understanding and learn the skills of caring for those around them. In facilitating children as both beneficiaries and contributors to the social capital of communities, **IGL has considerable potential to reframe children as key partners in strengthening and transforming communities:**

> They are interested in being involved in the community because . . . they are now telling us what they want to do (Educator).
>
> Nobody ever thinks of offering [children] one [a role in the community] (Educator).
>
> There is no point in putting them in this little place [the ECEC service] and wrapping them in bubble wrap when the world is bigger than just here (Educator).

IGL is a pedagogical strategy valued and enjoyed by children

Research shows that **children highly value and enjoy the caring, affectionate, friendship relationships they have with older adults, through a social grandparent type of relationship**, highlighting the contribution of IGL to children's happiness and flourishing. Additionally, children's enjoyment of IGL as a new or fun experience, moving outside the ECEC service, participating in a social outing with their peers, experiencing the new environments and activities associated with IGL, all contribute to the effectiveness of IGL as an enjoyable pedagogical strategy. **Children may enjoy the IGL experience in many ways which may change over time.** Initially, for some children the enjoyment may come, not specifically from the IGL experiences, but from the walk to the older adults' service or the snacks they may share. Other children may look forward to meeting

particular older people who are their friends or to activities they will participate in:
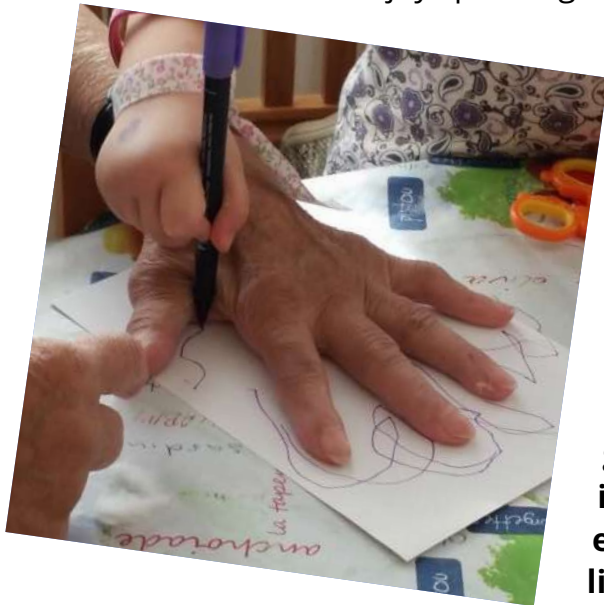
> I like the sprinkles on the ice cream (Child).
>
> I like [name] and I love going to see her (Child).

IGL offers particular benefits to some children

The potential of IGL to respond to the diverse needs of children points to its use not only as a mainstream strategy that could be offered as a choice to all children in ECEC services, but one that is valuable in meeting the individual needs of some children. These include children who particularly enjoy spending time with older adults, children whom educators believe would benefit from supportive, individualised attention, children living with adversity who can be introduced to more positive aspects of their community through IGL and children who do not have contact with their grandparents. Children whose grandparents are at a distance or deceased can benefit from the social grandparent relationships created through IGL. Increasingly recognised in research is **the protective role grandparents play in mitigating the adverse impacts of social, emotional, and environmental challenges in young children's lives.** Through IGL more children can experience the protective role of the social grandparent:

> One of the children involved in the IGL experiences always phoned her grandmother (in another country) on the evening of the visit, as her grandmother was interested in hearing about the visit (Educator).

IGL challenges stereotypes and promotes social inclusion

Intergenerational relationships can play a key role in supporting positive views of difference, which is particularly important as children as young as three have been found to hold ageist attitudes. **Respectful relationships with older adults help to challenge stereotypes about age and culture**

while fostering values of social responsibility and solidarity. IGL also promotes awareness of the positive and challenging aspects of ageing in real-life contexts as children experience the richness as well as the challenges of ageing. IGL can, therefore, **help children understand ageing as a natural part of the life cycle**, including learning about health conditions such as reduced mobility, hearing and memory loss. Through personal relationships between older adults and children, both groups can feel acknowledged, welcomed and accepted while addressing ageism. Interacting with adults from diverse communities provides opportunities for connection and the development of respect, acceptance and solidarity (*Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016*). Additionally, IGL **creates opportunities for older adults' understanding and respect for the contemporary lives of young children:**

> They [children] don't make assumptions . . . they accept everybody for who they are . . . they are so accepting . . . they just think . . . "my friend" . . . that is it . . . it doesn't matter how old the friend is (Educator).
>
> No, adults do not see children as part of the community, but I think we are slowly changing people's ideas (Educator).

IGL operationalises a slow pedagogy

Slow pedagogy, a growing movement in ECEC in the Western world, explores alternatives to the hurried and pressurised ECEC environments with their increasing focus on measurability and outcomes. **IGL offers a unique example of slow pedagogy with its emphasis on "being with" and full immersion in what is happening in the moment.** An openness to new possibilities and interests at an unhurried pace is a characteristic of both IGL and slow pedagogy, which emphasises self-actualisation rather than achievement. The quieter environment and slower pace of older adults' services can offer an alternative world to that of the ECEC service:

> We're always busy, busy, busy [in the ECEC service] . . . then we go up there [to the older adults' day centre] . . . maybe the little walk helps everyone to actually stop and take a breath before you get in and you can calm down (Educator).

3.2 Who else benefits from IGL?

ECEC staff

Research shows that **educators enjoy IGL as a result of developing personal relationships with the older adults, introducing new ideas to their ECEC services, broadening their knowledge and skills through working with practitioners from other sectors, making their work more interesting and having the opportunity to work in the community.** IGL can also help educators understand and connect with the local community, with which they may not be familiar. Furthermore, educators appreciated that IGL contributed to a stronger partnership with families as parents highly valued the IGL programme, wanted their children to participate and were eager to know more about how their children got on in the IGL programme. **IGL also helped to enhance morale among educators** because IGL was highly valued not only by parents, staff in the older adults' services but also by the wider community:

> As a practitioner I felt it opened my eyes to the community we live in but often don't even notice (Educator).
>
> I felt very proud and even emotional when the older people introduced their "special child or children" to others (Educator).

Older adults

The benefits of IGL to older adults have been extensively documented *TOY literature review*. **The joy of new, non-judgemental relationships and friendships with children and educators** (and sometimes with children's parents) can contribute to improved well-being and is a key benefit of IGL to older adults. Similarly, **play has increasingly been seen as valuable for people of all ages** and laughter and fun are powerful methods of creating connections and promoting well-being. Social isolation and loneliness have the greatest impact on older adults compared with any other age group. Older adults who may not have children or grandchildren have the opportunity to develop close relationships with young children. **Sharing songs, stories, crafts and other skills can give older adults a sense of purpose and help them feel valued** as they contribute their knowledge, wisdom and skills to younger generations. In turn, older adults can learn much from and about children, their families as well as contemporary family lifestyles through IGL experiences. In opening up the environments where older adults spend time, IGL can **challenge negative perceptions of older adults, enhance civic participation and help them feel more part of the community** with its diverse range of ages, cultures, ethnicities and interests.

Families of children involved in IGL

Parents have been found to be happy for their children to participate in IGL programmes and the reasons given included: children did not have contact with grandparents through distance or death; children learnt a lot from interacting with older adults including empathy, history, culture and respectful behaviour and children contributing positively to the lives of older adults taught them social responsibility. Research has also shown that parents were curious about the older adults' services, asked how their children got on and some were enthusiastic to help with the experiences. Thus, IGL programmes can create opportunities for parents to gain greater insight into the learning programme of the ECEC service. Additionally, IGL can respond to parents who feel isolated or who have few social supports as they develop a greater knowledge, new relationships and a sense of belonging in the community because of their children's participation in IGL.

Expanding the circle of those who care for and about children is an important strength of IGL, reflecting the profound wisdom of the idea that it takes a village to raise a child. IGL creates opportunities for older adults to contribute reassurance and care to younger generations, including parents. Time-poor families are supported as their children benefit from the

individualised attention of older adults. This finding points to **the potential of IGL to reconceptualise the role of ECEC services as one that not only supports children but can also empower families.**

Communities

Communities can be strengthened through IGL as it **helps to facilitate the transmission of culture, to minimise social divisions and build age-friendly communities.** Research has also shown that IGL can support children living in communities where they may experience the negative impact of anti-social behaviour, substance abuse or aggression. Through IGL, children can experience more positive and supportive aspects of their communities, which play a significant role in their well-being.

In practical terms, IGL contributes to what have been termed **intergenerational contact zones** (*Kaplan et al., 2020*), spaces where different generations can meet and build relationships. Opening up the spaces, physically and metaphorically, where children and older adults spend much time, creates extensive opportunities for learning how to live together more positively in sustainable communities, a key purpose of education (Delors, 1996) and central to the UN *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG, UN, 2015).

3.3 Reflection

Draw up a memo to the board of management of your ECEC service outlining why you propose introducing IGL practice to the service.

3.4 Additional Resources

- *A fact sheet entitled "Intergenerational programs benefit everyone" developed by Generations United which might be useful for sharing with managers, potential partners, parents and interested parties.*

- *This article presents the wider context and possibilities for developing intergenerational education in Spanish primary schools.* Sánchez, M., Sáez, J., Díaz, P., & Campillo, M. (2018). Intergenerational education in Spanish primary schools: Making the policy case. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships, 16*(1-2), 166-183.

- *A useful link to Zero to Three research on how bias and inequity develop in young children.*

- *A research article on old age-related stereotypes of preschool children by Flamion et al. (2020)*

4. HOW DOES IGL FIT WITH ECEC THEORY AND POLICY?

Education and care from the earliest stages has an essential role to play in learning to live together in heterogeneous societies. These services can strengthen social cohesion and inclusion in several ways. They can serve as meeting places for families (EU Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, 2019).

The key trends in EU quality standards and curricula in the Western world demonstrate **a high degree of consensus on the broad developmental domains that are addressed in ECEC.** These include emotional, personal and social development, language and communication, knowledge and understanding of the surrounding world, creative expression and physical development. **Strongly emphasised is the importance of combining socialisation, education and caring in rich learning environments, rather than an emphasis on academic learning.** This emphasis on the holistic development of children resonates closely with key principles of IGL and affirms its potential as a strong pedagogical strategy.

4.1 IGL and socio-cultural theory

IGL offers a strong model for operationalising and extending the collaborative, real-life, social and community elements of socio-cultural theories of learning, which are strongly reflected in contemporary ECEC pedagogy internationally (European Commission, 2014; NCCA, 2022). Socio-cultural theories of learning contend that development and learning are embedded in the context of social relationships in children's social and cultural contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 1990), with Vygotsky (1978) arguing that social interaction is the greatest motivating factor in human development. IGL is predominantly about the relationships that develop between children and older adults in a planned environment and the practices that emerge based on these relationships. This **real-life learning which situates learners in authentic situations has been shown to be a very successful form of learning.**

4.2 IGL and international ECEC policy and practice

Principles and practices of IGL are closely aligned with key principles of the EU Quality Framework for ECEC, international ECEC curricula (including High/Scope, Te Whariki, Aistear) and the UN Sustainable

Development Goals. For example, the European Union Council recommendation stated: *Through social-emotional learning, early childhood education and care experiences can enable children to learn how to be empathic as well as learn about their rights, equality, tolerance and diversity* (EU Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems). Key principles underpinning international ECEC policy and practice focus on the foundational elements necessary for children to become powerful learners: experiencing nurturing relationships; developing social-emotional competence, self-management skills and flexible thinking. **To become powerful learners, children need warm and loving relationships and first-hand collaborative learning experiences with a broad range of people in community contexts.** ECEC services are well positioned to offer opportunities for IGL which reflect the broad aims of international ECEC policy with their focus on learning how to learn. IGL draws particular attention to the richness of the community as a real-life learning environment offering, what could be understood as - **the curriculum of ordinary life**. Expanding the types of relationships and the age range of the people involved, which are different to those typically offered to children in ECEC services, allows them to experience at first hand learning as a lifelong and lifewide endeavour.

These key principles of high quality ECEC systems are closely reflected in IGL and therefore offer a strong foundation for implementing IGL as a pedagogical strategy. However, you should start by considering policies and reports relating to ECEC in your jurisdiction as an essential guide in supporting your consideration of IGL as a pedagogical strategy. Local, social and cultural contexts and priorities should play a central role in your IGL strategy.

4.3 Aligning your IGL strategy with a curricular framework

In a literature review of 33 international research studies on young children's learning undertaken in 2022, key trends that emerged included an emphasis on *"nurturing relationships, compassion, empathy, risky play, participation, sustainability and children's agency through social justice".* (NCCA, 2022, p.8). A brief overview of key trends and principles underpinning a sample of ECEC curricula that resonate strongly with principles of IGL is presented below:

A key goal of the **High/Scope** curriculum is for children to become *independent, responsible, and confident problem solvers and decision makers - ready for school and ready for life.*

The **Irish** curriculum framework Aistear (meaning journey) is structured around four key themes for children's learning and development: *well-being; identity and belonging; communicating and exploring and thinking.*

The general aims of the **Scottish** curriculum (3-18) are *a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen, an effective contributor*.

Te Whāriki, the **New Zealand** ECE curriculum, focuses on the motivational aspects of learning and on supporting positive learning dispositions so that *children grow up as competent and confident learners, healthy in mind and body, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to the world.*

The **Australian** Early Years Learning Framework identifies 5 outcomes - *children have a strong sense of identity; children are connected with and contribute to their world; children have a strong sense of well-being; children are confident and involved learners; children are effective communicators*.

The desired results of the **South African** national curriculum framework highlight: *children becoming more aware of themselves as individuals, developing a positive self- image and learning how to manage their own behaviour; demonstrating growing awareness of diversity and the need to respect and care for others and learning how to think critically, solve problems and form concepts.*

A central aim of internationally-respected ECEC curricula is **the key role parents and communities play in their children's learning and development.** IGL has been shown to be an effective and enjoyable opportunity for parents and educators to work in partnership on a shared goal and an innovative strategy in the ECEC service. IGL not only embeds children in the community but activates the resources of the community to support their learning and development.

4.4 Reflection

1. Outline how IGL practice fits with the ethos and policies of your ECEC service.

2. The theme of children's well-being is widely accepted as central to children's learning and development in international curricula. In the Irish curricular framework, the theme states that children should be confident, happy and healthy and strong psychologically and socially. The learning goals are as follows: In partnership with the adult, children will:

   - *Make strong attachments and develop warm and supportive relationships*

   - *Name their feelings and know that others have different feelings*

   - *Handle transitions and changes well*

   - *Be confident and self-reliant*

   - *Respect themselves, others and the environment*

   - *Make decisions and choices.*

   Taking the theme of well-being as an example, give examples of how a proposed IGL experience might meet the learning goals outlined.

4.5 Additional Resources

- *This article highlights the close links that exist between IGL and socio-cultural theories of learning.*
  Fitzpatrick, A. & Halpenny, A.M. (2022): Intergenerational learning as a pedagogical strategy in early childhood education services: perspectives from an Irish study, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal.*

- *This chapter focuses on the exosystem exploring how ECEC services can act as a bridge between individual children, families, the wider community, and the world beyond the early childhood setting,*
  O'Toole, L. Hayes, N. and Halpenny, A.M. (2022). (2nd ed).
  Introducing Bronfenbrenner: A guide for practitioners and students in early years education. Routledge. Chapter 10.

- *Read more about the European Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems.*

- *This [NCCA, 2022] literature review draws together research on early childhood learning as a basis for the updating of the Irish early childhood curriculum framework.*

5. THE KEY ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR IN IGL PRACTICE

Intergenerational practitioners are reflective, ethical and caring professionals, with vision and passion to facilitate intergenerational encounters. They understand and demonstrate a commitment to collaboration and partnership through effective networks (Sánchez, Clyde & Brown, 2019).

The educator plays a key role in implementing successful IGL practice by acting as a bridge between generations. Research tells us that educators who implement IGL are **knowledgeable about IGL, reflective, flexible, value equally children and older adults as learners and teachers and active members of communities** and are passionate about the wide-ranging benefits of IGL for people of all ages. The educator implementing IGL is committed to collaboration and partnership across service boundaries and trainings. They have also been seen as courageous, visionary, and skilled in their approach to ECEC. They review the ECEC curriculum and what they are already doing through an intergenerational lens and build on this, rather than seeing IGL as an additional piece of work. They are innovators as they implement a form of **intentional teaching** by going beyond the walls of the ECEC service to introduce children to risk-rich environments where IGL is implemented.

5.1 Characteristics of educators implementing IGL

Important **values and attitudes** for educators implementing IGL include a belief in the:

- central role of relationships in young children's holistic learning

- importance for children's well-being of social relationships in the community

- wide-ranging learning opportunities offered by collaborating with older adults

- richness of real-life learning in environments beyond the ECEC service

- right and the desire of young children to participate in communities

- view of children as active, contributing citizens embedded in communities.

Essential **skills and competences** for implementing IGL require the educator to be:

- knowledgeable about innovative learning and IGL practice

- open and communicative in negotiating with children, parents and other service providers

- confident in cross-disciplinary and intersectoral practice, including understanding the learning and development needs of different age groups and sharing expertise between organisations and individuals

- able to work collaboratively to build bridges between generations and to work in community contexts

- a proficient planner on relational and practice aspects of IGL

- skilled in consultation with young children and older adults in designing and evaluating IGL programmes against clear goals and objectives.

5.2 Intentional teaching

In introducing IGL, educators implement a form of intentional teaching – educators being thoughtful, informed and deliberate in their strategies as they introduce new ideas and challenges that may be outside children's experiences. Research has shown that **intentional teaching, balanced with child-led practice, offers the best outcomes for children** (Kilderry, 2015). Intentional teaching draws attention to the power and autonomy of **educators to act as brokers in identifying interesting and effective experiences for children which are personally, socially and culturally relevant.**

Intentional teaching, a key dimension of a nurturing pedagogy, requires that you have a vision for children and to achieve your vision you need time to look closely at your intentions. An important first step in intentional teaching is being aware of contemporary and well-documented research in the field of ECEC as this knowledge will offer a strong base on which to develop your practice. What you do then each day is very important not only for children, families and the field of ECEC, but also for humanity.

5.3 Cross-disciplinary and intersectoral practice

Staff who work with young children or older adults are typically trained to focus on one end of the life course or the other. However, IGL is **a shared form of practice that requires collaboration and an openness to listening and learning from colleagues in other sectors.** Working between the two sectors of ECEC and older adults, as in IGL, may pose challenges to staff that should be acknowledged. An essential starting point is meetings of staff groups (from ECEC and older adults' services) to develop trust and to share questions and concerns. Learning about the philosophy, policies and practices of each other's programmes and working with staff from a range of disciplines can lead to more diversified thinking and ultimately to more innovative ways of working. **Building on each other's knowledge and skills in both disciplines can bring new energy** and enhance professional development that will ultimately enrich the holistic development of both young children and older adults. It also creates opportunities for services to share resources. In opening up services both metaphorically and physically as staff move beyond the walls of their services, **IGL requires staff to develop a community approach to their practice** that may not have been part of their training.

5.4 Reflection

1. Outline the vision for children, how and where they learn, and their role as citizens which is reflected in the policies and practices of your ECEC service.

2. What thoughts and concerns might you have for yourself and for children as you introduce IGL practice in your ECEC service?

5.5 Additional Resources

- *Read this article for more information about intentional teaching.* Kilderry, A. (2015). Intentional pedagogies: Insights from the past. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 40(3)*, 20-28.

- *Read in this Penn State Extension* resource *about becoming an 'intentional' early educator.*

- *To learn more about the characteristics and roles of IGL managers read this article.* Sánchez, M., Díaz, P., Sáez, J., & Pinazo, S. (2014). The professional profile of intergenerational program managers: General and specific characteristics. Educational Gerontology, 40(6), 427-441.

- *The free, short TOY online course "Together Old and Young: An Intergenerational Approach" will support you in developing good quality, sustainable intergenerational practice.*

- *Enrol for a free, short online learning course offered by Generations Working Together (Scotland).*

6. PLANNING FOR SUCCESSFUL IGL PRACTICE

It was good playing catch with the people [older adults] . . . they were good at playing catch . . . I played with the girl in the wheelchair . . . I love playing with her (Child).

Successful and sustainable **IGL requires careful planning with clear aims and objectives broadly linked to curricular goals,** to ensure it offers meaningful and interesting experiences to young children and older adults. A starting point could be the quality framework already embedded in your service. It is important for the IGL practice to be clearly linked to the existing curriculum workload, rather than being seen as an additional piece of work. To be successful for all participants, **planning for IGL must happen at many levels including management and staff of ECEC and older adults' services, parents, children and older adults.**

There is no one approach to IGL practice, rather, planning for IGL should be seen as a process that grows and changes through participants' relationships and contributions. It is very important to **start your IGL practice by taking small steps**, focusing on quality rather than quantity. This allows staff, children and older adults to build confidence, trust and interest. Starting with over-ambitious plans could overwhelm participants and result in negative experiences of IGL.

6.1 How to plan your IGL practice

Management and staff buy-in

If IGL reflects a significant change in the ECEC programme, a starting point would be **to consult with the Board of Management/directors/funders to gain their support.** It may also be useful to appoint one staff member as the lead for IGL. In the early stages particularly, it is useful to **have an IGL champion to initiate and energise the staff teams.** An initial survey of educators to get their views and ideas about IGL would be an important first step as **staff buy-in will be central to the success of the IGL programme.** IGL practice almost always take more time and energy than the more routine activities of the ECEC service, particularly in the early days, and is unlikely to succeed without interested and committed educators who are fully informed and feel ownership of the IGL programme. A successful IGL programme also requires that a similar process be undertaken to ensure staff in the older adults' services are committed to the IGL programme.

Staff training and support

Introductory training will focus on developing an understanding of the concept of IGL, how it can enhance the lives and learning of children and older adults and how it fits into the overall ECEC service curriculum. Educators will also benefit from an understanding of the developmental needs of older adults and their programmes. Differences in developmental levels of both age groups should be considered including attention span, energy and ability levels and approaches to any activity.

Ongoing training will focus on skills necessary to plan and facilitate IGL sessions and practical skills in working with older adults. Building trusting relationships with staff in the older adults' services is important for supporting each other in implementing and evaluating the IGL practice. Support for participating educators should be offered by the manager and through peer-to-peer support on an ongoing basis.

Consider the possibility that **some ECEC staff may not feel positive about IGL** as they may have commitments in caring for older relatives and may not wish to spend time with older adults during their working day, they may have had recent bereavements or do not feel confident to work in an intergenerational way. Illness and death of older adults with whom they will develop relationships may also be a staff concern. Moreover, educators may fear IGL will create a heavier workload. Assure staff that the IGL practice will be developed slowly, support will be ongoing, concerns will be addressed, and further support or training offered, where appropriate. Seeking out **the support of ECEC services already implementing IGL can be very valuable** at this stage.

Setting up a planning group and identifying roles and responsibilities.

Managers and staff from both ECEC and older adults' services should participate in the planning group. **A key aim of the planning group is to develop trust and open communication between staff in both services.** A short schedule of meetings should be agreed that will include a mid-programme review and a final evaluation of the IGL programme. Duration and sustainability should be discussed at the planning stage and realistic commitments of time and effort should be clarified.

Identify key players and their responsibilities, including agreeing and assigning tasks that need to be completed (obtaining parental consent forms; communicating with older adults' services; seeking feedback from parents; evaluating sessions). Clarify the staff-to-child ratios required and which staff and children will be invited to participate (e.g. age range, group size). Information sharing/visits by ECEC and older adult staff to each other's services is essential. A number of **visits to each other's services should be made** by each services' managers and by the practitioners who will implement the IGL programme in order to build up trust and clarify aims. Draw up a rough plan with a review session built in and an agreed timeframe. It is important that **children and older adults should increasingly be involved in the planning of IGL experiences** over time.

Communicating with parents

Parental support will greatly enhance your IGL programme and communication with them should begin at an early stage. Information about IGL should be provided in the ECEC services' policies and parents' handbook. Educators should also explain why an IGL approach is being introduced in the ECEC service, how it will be introduced, and examples given of learning goals. **Seek parents' views and suggestions**. Be ready to address parents' questions and concerns, including the purpose and benefits of IGL, children's safety and a child or parent's right to opt in or out. Discuss the possibility of illness and death of older adults during the IGL programme and how this will be addressed with children (see section on "Positive ways of helping children deal with illness and death" below). Discuss your service policies in relation to parental consent for activities, use of photos and social media postings and agree changes, if necessary. **Welcome parents/family members to participate in IGL experiences when appropriate.** Assure parents that they will be kept informed about the IGL practice and will be asked for their ongoing feedback.

Identifying specific aims and objectives of IGL that link with ECEC service and national policies

It is important to embed IGL in the ECEC services' policies and to reference IGL experiences to specific learning themes and objectives. IGL could be linked to general ECEC themes such as well-being, identity and belonging and communication. IGL should also be linked to objectives, e.g. children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity. Consider how these themes overlap with priorities of the

older adults' services. Aims are aspirational (e.g. to improve relationships between young and old) while objectives need to be specific, measurable, and attainable (e.g. to create weekly experiences where young children and older persons spend time together on a co-operative activity). **Don't forget about what might be considered side goals of IGL**, e.g. learning about road safety, local landmarks, weather.

Safeguarding children

Your safeguarding policies should be reviewed and updated to ensure they are relevant in an IGL context. It may be useful to consult with ECEC regulatory personnel as well as ECEC services who already have IGL experience. **Consider what additional safeguarding measures might be required when children spend time in older adults' services and vice versa**. Issues about supervision by staff should be clarified, to ensure each service's safeguarding policies are maintained throughout the IGL experiences. Procedures for identifying and reporting issues in safeguarding should be agreed at the planning stage.

Protocols for IGL practice should be developed including appropriate behaviour between children, older adults, and staff in older adults' services. For example, will children and older adults be permitted to hug each other, or will children be permitted to sit on older adults' knees? Consider how different behaviours, language and terminology will be managed respectfully and by whom, e.g. if an older adult wants to pick up a child, or if older adults or children are being referred to using negative terminology. Ideas about acceptable behaviour and management should be discussed and shared among staff from both services. Road crossings, carrying of equipment and storage of buggies/children's outdoor clothing should be considered. First-aid kits and up-to-date lists of the emergency contacts for all participants should be maintained. Clarify permissions in relation to **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, photography and use of social media. Each service requires permission of the other in relation to the use of images of children and older adults to be used in displays, newsletters and social media. Review your service's outings policies and consider if any adjustments need to be made including staff/child ratios. Undertake a health and safety risk assessment of proposed IGL experiences. ECEC staff should familiarise themselves with legislation,

protocols, and practices required by older adults' services. All **IGL encounters should take place in public areas**, activity rooms, dining halls or public facilities, including libraries, museums and cafés.

Meeting with ECEC regulatory personnel

Before introducing your IGL practice, it may be useful to consult with ECEC regulation and inspection personnel to share your IGL plans and policies and to elicit their feedback. **Seek their support and advice and maintain links with them as the IGL practice develops**. Documentation of your IGL practice will be valuable in explaining how IGL supports children's development and learning, while meeting regulatory requirements.

Identifying appropriate partnerships with older adults' services

Start by looking at what opportunities for partnership might exist on your own doorstep. **Personal contacts of staff and parents have been shown to be effective in developing partnerships for IGL practice**. Finding services and organisations in close proximity to your service makes it more likely that supportive and trusting networks can be developed and sustained as well as avoiding transport costs and difficult logistics. However, take your time in choosing a partner as **it is crucial that you have a shared vision and that your goals complement each other.** Where possible, identify a partner with an expressed interest in IGL and/or in developing links in the community and is energised about getting started with IGL.

Ideally, while IGL experiences should reflect a broad spectrum of older adulthood, including the possibility of older adults acting as volunteers in the ECEC service, this may not always be possible. Successful partnerships are built on shared goals, trust, open communication, willingness to change and patience. Consider if a written partnership agreement, including clarifying ECEC service aims with those of older adults' services and ensuring compatible visions, would be useful. The importance of **proximity to the ECEC service cannot be emphasised enough** because typically the children will walk to the older adults' services as mobility issues are more likely among the older adults. Additionally, small chairs, furniture and toilets in ECEC services may not suit older adults. Consider the time that will be required to walk, as well as safety issues, including the number of road crossings.

Considering the role of grandparents

While planned IGL typically focuses on non-familial relationships, the central role grandparents play in the nurturing and socialisation of grandchildren is valued and built on in IGL practice. **Grandparents may be accessible, interested and available to become involved in IGL practice** while strengthening the positive connections between home, ECEC services and communities. The **grandparents may continue their involvement when their children have finished in the ECEC service and may recruit other older adults to participate in the IGL practice.** In their role as social grandparents, educators can draw on their local knowledge, community connections, interests and skills to extend young children's learning and to develop shared learning spaces. However, grandparents are playing an increasing role in caring for grandchildren while parents are working so may not wish for further involvement.

Assessing the physical spaces

Early in the planning stage, the suitability of the spaces available in the older adults' and ECEC services should be examined. **Suitable toilet, nappy-changing and hand-washing facilities and lifts, buggy/wheelchair accessibility and storage need to be considered.** Consider the possibility of families/visitors/other professionals being present in the older adults' services which may result in limited space. Potential **safety hazards** such as easily accessible exit doors and low opening windows should be noted. Consider also that children may not be comfortable with birds or other pets that may be present in the older adults' services.

The size and flexibility of the space available for children and older adults to meet and share experiences should be discussed. The physical space should foster an interactive social environment, ensuring children and older adults will feel comfortable and safe and can be on the same level to support eye contact and ease of communication. Ideally, **the space should allow for quiet communication as well as more active experiences.** Furthermore, clutter, background noise, acoustics and storage of materials are issues that should be considered. Investigate **community and public spaces** as potential venues for IGL experiences as they can serve as rich learning environments and have been planned for people of all ages. The potential of the **outdoors** for IGL practice should be considered whenever possible drawing on the lessons learned from outdoor experiences undertaken during COVID-19.

Planning for regular IGL experiences

Regular and frequent contact between children and older adults is essential, as **successful IGL is built on relationships, which will not develop on once-off or occasional interactions.** Children and older adults need time to become comfortable with each other and this is also true for staff in both services. While regular visits are the aim, permitting children and older adults a choice to participate or not in any IGL experience supersedes the importance of regular visits.

Involving participants in selecting and organising experiences

Where possible, **work with the same group of children and older adults to facilitate the key aim and strength of IGL – developing relationships between children and older adults.** However, it is also important to be flexible as children and older adults have the right to opt in or out of experiences and illness poses another challenge to continuity. In choosing activities, **consider children's and older adults' interests, energy and concentration levels, time and space available for IGL experience, accessibility and the possible mess that may be created!** Focus on activities where young and old can actively participate whatever their abilities e.g. playdough. Avoid activities where either young or old do not feel confident to participate e.g. where the activity is too complex for any of the participants, or there is an element of performance in it. Consider changing the activity over the session(s) from one-to-one to group activities and work towards ensuring **children and older adults play a central role in choosing activities over time.**

Preparing children for IGL experiences

While it is essential to prepare children for IGL experiences, it is important not to increase stereotypes of age. **Focus on common characteristics and experiences of people of all ages as part of your preparation.** Introduce the concept of ageing and the lifestyle of older adults to children through stories and pictures (*Share a Story guide*). You could begin with a focus on the life cycle with pictures of the human or animal life cycle and seasonal change. Photos of older adults, of the environments in which IGL experiences will take place and of materials that may be unfamiliar to children could then be introduced. Discuss issues around mobility, hearing, vision, and memory in older adults and reflect with children on how to respond. Consider borrowing a walker or wheelchair, if appropriate. Introducing **the IGL experiences of a previous group of children** as recorded in the floor book (see 8.2) can be a useful and concrete aspect of the preparation. Educators should make an introductory visit to the older adults' service and invite their staff to visit the ECEC service. Consider asking staff from both services to talk to children and older adults about the programme:

> Before we started, one of the nurses visited us to explain to the children what it is like to work there and who we would meet (Educator).

Consider that previous experience of "the other" may not have been favourable and **explore how children and older adults understand each other and address any misunderstandings** or negative issues. Differences may emerge in how older adults view children, for example, allowing children to choose to opt out of an activity may be seen as rude by an older adult but as normal practice by an educator. Also consider children's lack of familiarity with the environments in which they will meet older adults. Pay particular attention to the additional needs some children may have, for example, in relation to sensory issues. Introductory visits for individual or small groups of children to the older adults' services could be helpful. Consider the use of **social stories** (see 6.4 below) to introduce children to IGL experiences. It is very important to assure children (and older adults) that they can opt out at any time. **Educators should continuously monitor children's views and feelings.** Similarly, educators should seek feedback from parents on their children's views of the IGL experiences to ensure they are alert to any possible challenges that may arise for children.

Ideally, similar preparation for IGL should be undertaken with older adults by staff in their services.

Positive ways of helping children deal with illness and death

As IGL offers opportunities for children to learn about the life cycle it also increases the likelihood of children experiencing illness, frailty and death of older adults. It is important that ECEC staff have **a policy (which has also been agreed with parents) on how these issues will be managed.** Ensure that staff are prepared to discuss these issues with children and draw on books for children that address illness and death. Explaining illnesses of older adults is important and can be an opportunity to promote caring skills through asking about the person or making a card for them. Where possible, children and ECEC staff should be told of serious illness or death in advance of a visit. Be aware that a visit may need to be postponed allowing older adults time to grieve. Death and dying can be explained in the context of nature and the life cycle, topics which may already be discussed in the ECEC service.

Illness and death can create important opportunities for children to talk about their feelings and other losses, building a foundation for positive mental health. A focus on the happy memories of times shared and how they can celebrate the friendships they experienced can support children's ability to cope with loss and bereavement.

Ensuring ECEC service policies are maintained in IGL practice

Agreement should be reached in advance about how the ECEC service's policies will be implemented during the IGL experiences. **Supporting children emotionally, managing children's behaviour, assisting children with toileting and responding to falls or trips should remain the responsibility of the ECEC staff.** Similarly, how much and what types of food children (observing food safety regulations, allergies and dietary requirements) will be offered in the older adults' services should be agreed in advance.

Considering budget issues

Consider what extra costs could be involved in implementing your IGL practice and **only commit to costs that can be covered on an ongoing basis.** These could include staffing costs, activity materials, food, transport, and costs associated with special events if older adults visit the ECEC service. Ensure the ECEC service's insurance policy covers the IGL practice.

Scheduling IGL experiences

Scheduling the best times for IGL experiences requires awareness of the arrival and departure times and the busy schedules of both ECEC and older adults' services. Importantly, it **requires flexibility by both services.** Consider rest, snack and routine activity times as well as travelling times. Scheduling in the ECEC service may need to be adapted, for example, to ensure children have their dietary needs met before they visit the older adults' services. The frequency and duration of the IGL experiences should be agreed at the planning stage to ensure all participants have regular contact. **The more often the same groups of children and older adults meet, the deeper the relationships that develop** and the more beneficial it will be for all participants. Clear arrangements about cancelling visits, including who is to be contacted and how, should be agreed at the planning stage.

Considering who else might contribute to the IGL experiences

Expand the IGL possibilities for children and older adults by **linking in with services that typically offer services to the two age groups separately.** These could include library, community centre or museum staff, artists, musicians, fitness instructors and storytellers. Consider **other professionals whose remit may include an IGL element** including community development workers, social inclusion officers, age-friendly programme staff. Partnering with **local or national organisations** as a way of making links with mixed age groups e.g. Community Gardens groups, Tidy Towns groups, Men's and Women's Sheds, and Active Retirement Groups could be explored. Local and national events could offer opportunities to adopt an IGL approach e.g. national book day, global intergenerational week, grandparents' day, environmental awareness week. **Local businesses,** cafés, garden centres, supermarkets, sports clubs and other organisations might also be interested in contributing to your IGL programme.

Building in sustainability to your IGL programme

Through careful planning you will already have considered the issue of sustainability. Ensuring that all participants feel engaged and that the IGL experiences meet the aims of all services will help to sustain the IGL programme. **Successful IGL practice takes time and patience** as relationship-building and attitude change cannot be hurried. Only when

meaningful connections are made can real learning begin. Careful planning will acknowledge this while also considering the consequences for all participants if the programme finishes. Features that you can build into the programme to promote sustainability include assigning **a leadership in IGL role to a staff member** on a rotation basis. Ensuring **the IGL programme belongs to the ECEC service and is integrated into service policies** and job roles, rather than being associated with an IGL "champion" or a particular practitioner, lessens the possibility of IGL ceasing if staff changes occur. Perhaps one of the most important issues in relation to sustainability may relate to the **availability and cost of staff undertaking the IGL practice** at any time, an issue that requires initial and ongoing consideration.

Creating a community of practice

Making links with practitioners and services implementing IGL programmes (in real life and online) can be an important contributor to sustainability as **developing a community of practice has been found to be an important support and sounding board for IGL practice.** The *TOY website* serves as one example of an ongoing valuable space for an international community of practice to communicate and share practice ideas, news and blogs.

Dealing with disruptions in services

Services can close or not accept visitors from time to time as a result of infections, bad weather or staff shortages. Consider how your IGL programme might adapt to the challenge of physical contact being cancelled or limited. A useful guide developed by Generations United in response to the challenges of physical contacts being cancelled or limited can be reviewed *here*.

Evidence from educators implementing IGL through COVID-19 found **many interesting ways of maintaining relationships between children and older adults.** These included creating Zoom meetings, communicating through use of tablets, song and story recordings, sharing artwork, posting cards and letters, decorating the outside of the older adults' services and talking and singing through the windows. However, it is important to note that starting an IGL programme in these conditions could pose challenges in the development of relationships.

6.2 Getting started

It may be useful to bring staff together before your first IGL initiative to reflect on the various steps that are required in organising successful IGL practice. This useful checklist has been adapted from a training manual developed as part of the TOY project:

☐ What are the aims of the initiative?

☐ What are the intended outcomes?

☐ Where is the initiative going to take place?

☐ Does the initiative respond to an interest of children/older adults/ families/services?

☐ Who shall we invite to take part?

☐ How do we approach potential participants (children older adults)?

☐ How do we ensure the protection of both children and older adults?

☐ How will we involve them in the planning?

☐ What material resources will be needed (staff, space, materials, budget)?

☐ What level of structure is required?

☐ What will the rough schedule look like?

☐ What difficulties might occur?

☐ How will children, older adults and families evaluate the experiences?

☐ Is the initiative sustainable?

☐ Other?

6.3 Reflection

1. Make a list of questions you would ask a manager of an older adults' day centre about their service before you initiate your IGL practice.

2. Outline the updates you might make to your child safeguarding policy when introducing IGL.

3. At the planning stage it would be useful to draft a rough IGL plan for your service. Using the checklist at 6.2 above, develop an initial plan for your IGL practice.

6.4 Additional Resources

- *A [step-by-step guide](#) by Generations Working Together (Scotland for introducing IGL in ECEC services.*
Generations Working Together (GWT), Scotland. (2019). Intergenerational Guide in Early Learning and Childcare.

- *A [guide](#) on IGL for educators in ECEC services developed by Penn State University, USA:*
Penn State University, USA. (2003). Developing an Intergenerational Program in your Early Childhood Care and Education Center: A Guidebook for Early Childhood Practitioners.

- *A [guide](#) for educators about books that show positive intergenerational relationships and expert tips on choosing and sharing these stories published by TOY and Hibernia College.*
Share a Story - TOY, Hibernia College, Ireland and Generations Working Together, Scotland (2022) Share a Story

- This *[tip sheet](#)* (Better Start) is a useful resource for learning more about social stories.

- *This [presentation](#) (Better Start) on the transition from home to pre-school is a good introduction to the use of social stories with young children and could be adapted for introducing your IGL practice to children.*

- Visit the *[GDPR website](#)* to read more about data protection regulations.

- *A World Health Organisation (WHO) (2023) [guide](#) to connecting generations and implementing interventions for intergenerational contact which includes a bank of effective IGL activities.*

7. IMPLEMENTING IGL PRACTICE

Through projects, intergenerational relationships may be built and nurtured. This may help children develop life skills, increase self-esteem and confidence, encourage them to learn respect and empathy for the older generation, improve their patience and compassion, help develop resilience, improve their mental health and wellbeing and, importantly, give them the opportunity to have fun with someone of a different generation (Generations Working Together, Intergenerational Guide in Early Learning and Childcare, 2019).

After time spent planning you are now ready to implement your IGL experience. While you may have an activity in mind and you want it to be successful, remember it is only a means to an end - **the activity is just the vehicle to promote social and emotional connection and it is the process which remains central.** What is important now is the defining purpose of IGL: to bring together people of different ages and to give them time to build relationships and learn together and from each other. For a brief example of the importance of focusing on the process in IGL practice see *Appendix A*. Children and older adults bring different strengths to the IGL experiences and the aim of the practitioner is to facilitate the exchange of interests and experience of both. For example, a focus on food could facilitate older adults' experience of growing or cooking food and children's curiosity about food. As always in ECEC, the process is more important than the product!

7.1 Facilitating IGL experiences

- Keep in mind your ECEC training and experience about **how you 'normally' provide for and engage children in meaningful experiences** – for example, building on children's interests, facilitating play with concrete materials, giving children a choice, allowing children to opt out

- **Find a balance between over- and under-directing the experiences** – interactions between children and older adults cannot be hurried. In the early encounters, which should be short, the practitioners will play an active role in helping children and older adults to connect and this could involve a little more structure. This could include making introductions, singing songs, asking open-ended questions, reminding children and older adults of previous exchanges, starting with snack time, arranging the seating and slowly introducing favourite materials/ activities. As children and older adults become more confident with each

other, cues from the practitioners should lessen and their intervention should be more supportive than directive. This should include building in unstructured time so that 'being in the moment' can allow informal connections and individual preferences and relationships to emerge

- Identify **activities that are of interest to both groups** and are relatively simple such as snack time, singing and chatting as you begin. Don't underestimate the value of snack time as a key activity, as sharing food is a social experience that can put people at their ease and create a sense of togetherness. Similarly, singing is a powerful activity for children and older adults to make emotional connections and build relationships

- Consider what **prior real life experiences children and older adults might have in common**, e.g. birthdays, holidays, families, hobbies and pets, and use these to build experiences around. Using objects, photos, pictures and books could act as prompts for interaction. Simple ideas such as identifying favourite foods, animals or colours can help foster connections

- Always **be prepared to modify an activity or experience** by simplifying, extending or concluding and have back-up plans if you need to change or end an activity

- **Arrange seating and tables to maximise eye contact between children and older adults** and allow for one-to-one interactions (e.g. a chair and table beside an older adult in a wheelchair), as well as small group experiences. Avoid children being in the centre of the room where they are being 'viewed' by older adults

- Remember **some children and older adults may just want to watch.** Be patient – relationships need time to develop

- **Value the physical environment of the older adults' services as interesting learning environments** for children e.g. unfamiliar objects such as fireplaces, dressers, walkers, medicine trolleys

- Consider a **display area** in the older adults' and ECEC services where artwork, photos, video montage of IGL is displayed to facilitate ongoing discussions, including with other staff and families

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities** for each IGL session to include preparing the environment and tidying away

- **Evaluate** every session

- Remember, above all, IGL should **be an enjoyable and fun experience!**

7.2 Organising IGL experiences

For each IGL experience it is useful to make a brief plan which might include the following information:

Date and Timeframe

Change of clothes

Staff involved

First Aid kit

Location of
IGL experience

Risk assessment

Materials required

Contact details of key IGL
staff in case plans change

Food required

7.3 IGL experiences: a bank of ideas

The following experiences and activities have been implemented previously in ECEC services implementing IGL practice. Many of these activities can be undertaken indoors, outdoors and virtually.

Circle time using prompts such as what is your favourite food or TV programme can be useful

"Show and tell", bringing a treasured object to show and talk about

Reading or telling stories to each other with books or pictures

Using puppets for role play and to tell well-known or personal stories

Singing songs associated with each age group as an intergenerational "choir" (objects or pictures of songs can be used as prompts)

Sharing music-making/using musical instruments or listening to music together

Karaoke sessions

Playing picture bingo

Creating collages, junk art activities and painting stones

Doing art and craft activities for seasonal and other celebrations

Hand painting and drawing, painting or drawing around each other's hands

Making a patchwork quilt using squares decorated by all participants (using fabric pens, sewing, sticking on materials

Decorating plant pots and sowing bulbs and seeds (this can serve as an ongoing activity as they care for the plants over time)

Creating a nature table together in either or both settings

Making bird feeders

Sending postcards, pictures or letters (real or digital) to each other

Doing simple cookery (no-bake buns, sandwiches, fruit skewers (which could be developed over time by introducing "blind" tasting of fruits)

Enjoying a birthday or seasonal party together

Doing gentle physical exercises together including use of bean bags, balloons and bats, parachute

Tossing rings onto pegs

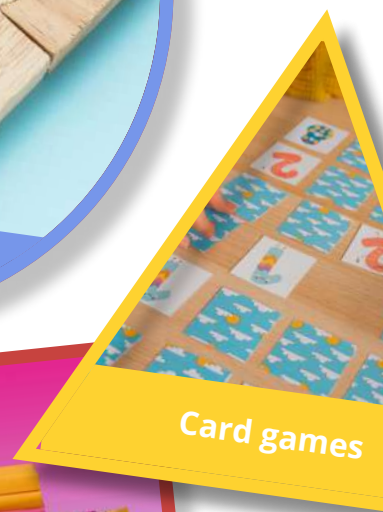Treasure hunt, pairing older and younger person to find the object

Going for walks together

Outings to cafés, libraries, museums.

7.4 Useful materials for IGL experiences

The following materials and ideas have been shown to be useful in supporting playful experiences when young children and older adults spend time together:

Puppets

Photos
(photos of children/older adults in their daily routine are good talking points)

Bubbles

Digital cameras

Bean bags/soft balls

Lego

Jigsaws

Card games

Board games

Skittles

Books/storytelling items

Montessori or similar materials
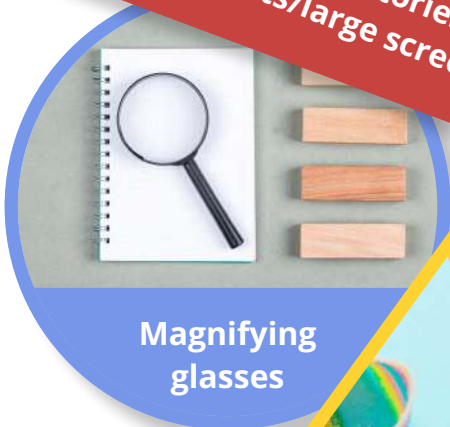
Balloons

Bingo games

Visual images/songs/ stories presented on tablets/large screens

Parachute

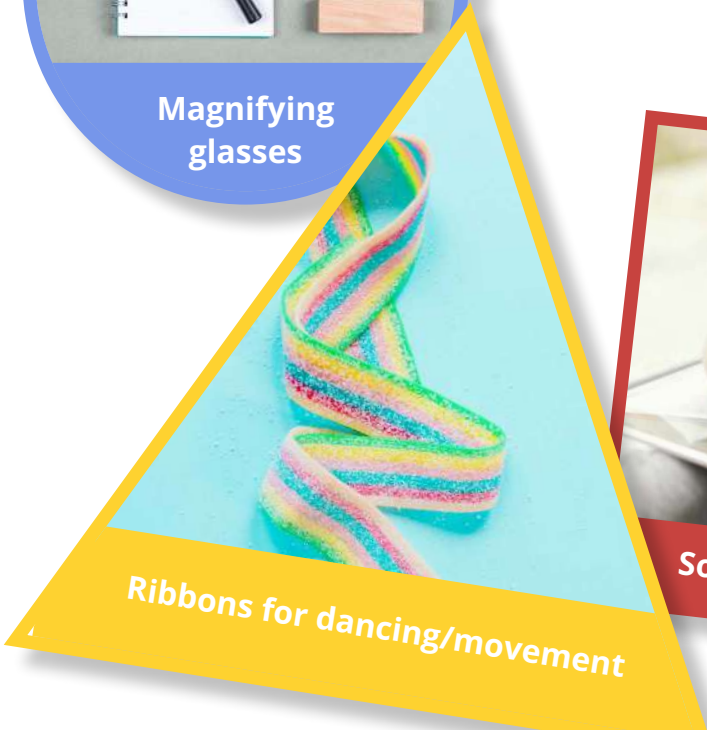Art and sensory materials (paper, crayons, chalk, playdough)

Magnifying glasses

Loose Parts play materials

Songs on CDs/tablets

Ribbons for dancing/movement

7.5 Reflection

1. What new skills might you, as an educator in an ECEC service, need to develop to implement IGL?

2. Brainstorm possible ideas for IGL experiences that might work well for your ECEC service keeping in mind your social and cultural context.

3. What are the strengths and challenges for your ECEC service of extending children's learning by using the resources of the community as learning opportunities?

7.6 Additional Resources

- *The TOY website is a rich resource of research, case studies, ideas and blog posts useful for planning and implementing IGL experiences.*

  TOY Toolkit. A Training Manual for Intergenerational Learning Activities
  TOY in Action activities
  TOY Blog

- *While this guide is primarily an activities guide for IGL practice with young children and older adults in* **co-located sites**, *it contains useful information and ideas which can be applied more generally.* Generations United (2008). Tried and True: A Guide to Successful Intergenerational Activities at Shared Site Programs.

- An *introduction* by Play Scotland to loose parts play.

8. EVALUATING IGL PRACTICE

It is important to evaluate IGL initiatives against clear goals and objectives and consult both young children and older people in the design and evaluation of IGL practice (TOY Toolkit).

IGL initiatives must be of high quality if they are to have benefit and evaluating your IGL practice is **an essential process in identifying what does and does not work.** Evaluation processes should be built into the IGL practice from the beginning and should be closely related to the curricular aims, quality standards and the policies and practices of your ECEC service. Importantly, your **evaluation processes should not be onerous** and should be incorporated into the evaluation processes you already use (*Appendix B*).

Evaluation can also help to offer ongoing motivation to practitioners, encourage new participants and enhance practice. Moreover, sharing information about the benefits of your IGL practice can raise the profile of IGL more widely and have a ripple effect among the education and community sector. Evaluation should, of course, also **report the difficulties or challenges** as research is limited and there is some evidence to show that what empirical evidence is available has focused on the benefits of IGL practice (*Jarrott, 2011*)

8.1 What to evaluate and with whom

Evaluation can focus on several levels, for example, it may be useful to record inputs (materials, volunteers, staff time, venues) and outputs (numbers of children and older adults involved; number of sessions held). You could also consider how effective the IGL practice was in supporting IGL relationships – smiles, hugs, requests to visits, recounting interactions. However, in adopting IGL as a pedagogical strategy, **it is important to evaluate the impact of IGL on children's learning and development.** You may do this in a holistic manner considering developmental domains, e.g. reviewing how children communicated, showed initiative, managed their behaviour, showed understanding and empathy or showed creativity. You may also consider criteria such as the development of self-esteem, friendships, teamwork and resilience, having fun, skills development, songs or games.

Importantly, your **IGL practice should be evaluated against the mission statement of your ECEC service and your curricular aims and learning goals.** To assess and evaluate how children are experiencing the IGL programme, a multi-method approach is recommended, listening to and seeking feedback from children, parents and educators, such as the Mosaic approach (see link to information about the Mosaic approach at 8.6).

8.2 Evaluating with children

Educators' evaluations can follow the format of monitoring and evaluating you typically use in relation to all aspects of children's ECEC experiences, such as documenting children's IGL experiences as learning stories. Evaluating with children **involves active listening and documenting based on observations, drawings, drawing and talking combined, verbal communications, photos, and anecdotes.**

Consider documenting all the IGL experiences and feedback in a **floor book**. Floor books are similar to scrapbooks that organise and collate children's thinking, focusing on what children find meaningful and interesting. They can showcase children's conceptual understanding and their questions and conversations which help reflect their learning journey. Photos of the IGL experience can be placed in the floor book and children invited to discuss, draw or add their comments. Parents and staff comments can also be added to the floor book which can then be brought to the older adults' services for their feedback to be included. The floor book serves as an ongoing evaluation tool documenting how IGL can extend

general learning goals of ECEC curricula over time (see example from an Irish ECEC service below):
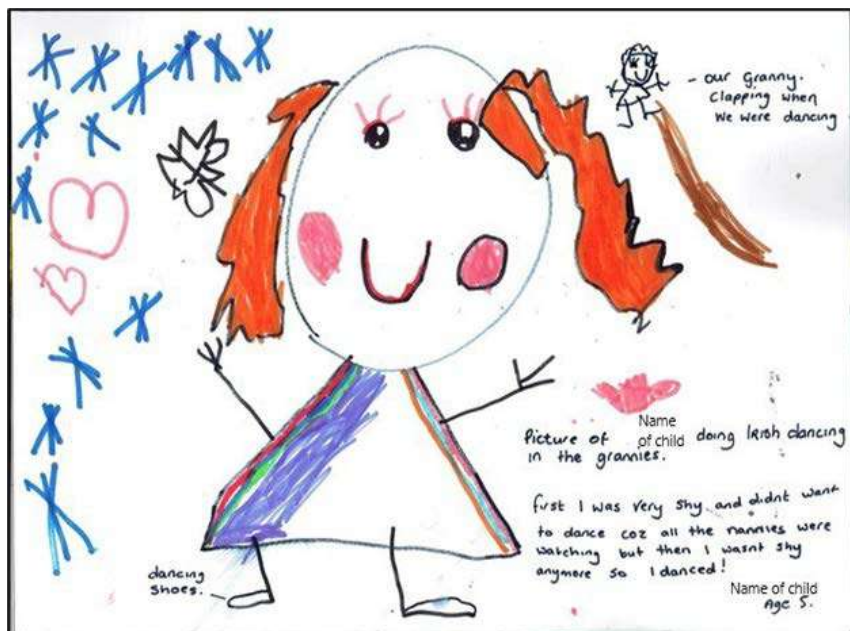
> " Our granny clapping when we were dancing . . . first I was shy and didn't want to dance coz all the nannies were watching but then I wasn't shy anymore, so I danced (Child).

Children's **feedback can be elicited informally,** for example, children may discuss their IGL experiences with each other on the walk back from the older adults' service:

> " I loved everything . . . the people, the playdough and the biscuits (Child).

Educators may also take a more **focused approach** by asking open-ended questions to understand the wide range of children's opinions and feelings. This could be done at circle time, snack time or through individual conversations:

> " Do you remember when we visited the older adults today . . . what did you like/not like? (Educator).

Photos of the IGL experiences may also be used to prompt discussion.
Children could also be invited to represent their feelings and experiences
through drawing or painting, remembering that the power of artwork is
often in the words and ideas expressed by children during the creative
process. It may be useful for one educator to facilitate discussion and one
to record if in a group situation.

8.3 Educator evaluations

Assessing children's learning and development and using the information
they gather to help children to progress is part of educators' day-to-day
interactions with children. **Educators' evaluations of the overall IGL
experience as well as their evaluations of individuals children's
experiences are a valuable data source:**

> Each Wednesday afternoon we looked at the photos after the weekly
> visit, we could see the bonds building through the facial expressions
> and body language of both young and old (Educator).

Assessment and evaluation should be directly linked to curricular aims and
goals (see example in *Appendix B*) highlighting where IGL is meeting the
aims and learning goals of the theme Identity and Belonging). Where
possible, **use the evaluation strategies already in place in your service.**
These can include the assessments of individual and teams of educators
observing and reflecting on children's comments, body language, photos
and drawings.

8.4 Evaluating with others

Evaluating with **parents** involves actively seeking feedback from parents
of their children's IGL experiences and can be done in the ways educators
usually communicate with parents. This could include verbal feedback when
children are coming or going to the ECEC service, texts, emails and phone
calls. Occasional focus groups, face-to-face interviews, feedback sheets, IGL
noticeboard with post-it notes and questionnaires could also be used to
supplement the informal feedback (see *Appendix C*). Examples of text/email
feedback from parents in Irish ECEC services:

> John loved going to [care home] and said the older people were his friends (Parent).
>
> Just a quick email to say X had a great time today at Z. He was all about it for the first time. He loved showing off his Lego duck and being there for the birthday of the lady with the red handbag! Before this he always just talked about the cookie & juice! Keep up the amazing work (Parent).
>
> We found it hugely beneficial as our children lost a set of grandparents in the space of five months, our children went from weekly contact with their grandparents to losing them (Parent).

Consider evaluating the impact of the IGL practice on **ECEC staff and on the service**. Has the IGL practice impacted on the ethos or pedagogical strategies of the service, relationships with the wider community or staff morale? Evaluation with staff could be done in regular or specific staff meetings, individual meetings between staff and manager or through questionnaires.

Educators should seek regular feedback from their partners in older adults' services. Feedback from the **older adults, their families and care staff** on what the older adults enjoyed or did not enjoy is central to ongoing planning with ECEC staff. Broader questions might focus on what elements of the IGL practice are working well or not, and what ideas have they for future developments. Regular meetings between staff in ECEC and older adults' services to plan the IGL experiences should include ongoing evaluation. Seek possibilities for external review through community organisations, colleges and students who might have resources or a college assignment which could benefit your IGL practice. External reviews are valuable in helping to build knowledge and strengthen support for IGL more broadly and may be useful in seeking funding for IGL programmes.

8.5 Reflection

Read about the *TOY for Quality programme* which has identified the key elements of a high-quality IGL programme and use them to reflect on your IGL practice and as a basis for building an action plan. Give possible examples under each element.

1. Building relationships and well-being

2. Respect for diversity

3. Interaction with and within the community

4. Learning with and from each other

5. Professional development and teamwork

6. Monitoring, evaluation and sustainability.

8.6 Additional Resources

- *Useful evaluation tools for enhancing the quality of your IGL practice.*

  TOY for Quality Programme: an assessment tool to evaluate and improve quality of intergenerational learning initiatives.

  Jarrott, S. E. (2019). *The intergenerational evaluation toolkit.* Washington, DC. Generations United.

- *A chapter by Clark (2017) introducing the Mosaic Approach.*

One false belief is that by merely coming into contact with one another, young and old will immediately connect and understand each other and that bonding and relationships will occur magically and automatically . . . in reality it takes planning and concentrated efforts . . . intergenerational connections may be magic, but magic takes work (Steinig, 2003, p.17).

While research findings on IGL with young children are highly positive, it is important to know about and anticipate possible challenges and ways to limit and address them if they arise. Careful planning, training and collaborative working are important in dealing with difficulties.

Children's changing responses and behaviour

Children (and older adults) becoming **tired or losing interest** in IGL experiences should be anticipated and can be addressed by facilitating simple, short encounters or activities at good times of the day, where possible. Acknowledge that **at times IGL may not suit** very active or anxious children or children who have recently experienced difficulties such as the death of a grandparent. For example, staff should be cognisant of children who may worry about older adults between visits. Children (and older adults) with challenging behaviour can benefit from IGL, once clear guidelines on how to respond are established with staff in both services to minimise any possible negative impact. **Children and older adults should always have the choice to opt out** of IGL experiences.

Infrequent IGL contact

Scheduling pressures, illness among children, older adults and staff, staff shortages, children's (and older adults') right to opt out of IGL experiences and time for planning are ongoing challenges to IGL practice. If interactions are irregular, it is difficult to establish meaningful relationships and positive attitudes between young children and older adults. Importantly, research has shown that infrequent contact can result in more negative attitudes. **If it is unlikely that regular contact is possible, postponing the IGL practice should be considered.**

The departure of an educator passionate about IGL and/or staff shortages

A significant challenge to the development of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECEC services relates to **over-dependence on a passionate advocate** of IGL in the service and their centrality to the whole programme. Ensure from the beginning that **the IGL programme is embedded in the ECEC services' policies** and does not become overly associated with an IGL champion or individual staff members. However, the significant skills and values of educators implementing IGL may not be easily replicated in a short timeframe, as they reflect particular personal and professional values, interests, experience, and, it could be argued, courage. **Staff shortages and high staff turnover** in either the ECEC or older adults' services can also be a serious challenge to the sustainability of IGL programmes.

Absence of IGL in ECEC curricular frameworks

In considering the challenge of embedding or scaling up IGL in ECEC services, its **absence from curricular frameworks as a pedagogical strategy can pose a challenge.** However, most ECEC curricular frameworks offer considerable flexibility in how themes and outcomes can be facilitated, so IGL can be implemented as an innovative and community-focused approach.

Pre or in-service training and ongoing support for IGL

In the absence of IGL being identified as a pedagogical strategy in ECEC curricular frameworks, pre-service IGL training for educators is unlikely to be prioritised. The increasing focus internationally on measurable outcomes, with less emphasis on life skills and informal learning for children, may also present a challenge. Additionally, **as regulation of the ECEC sector increases internationally, skills and competences which are difficult to measure and which focus on the holistic development of children, such as initiative, empathy, critical thinking and social-emotional skills, may receive less attention.** However, IGL offers a robust response to these developments. Drawing on continuing professional development training, communities of practice and a growing body of research, committed educators have demonstrated that IGL can successfully meet children's developmental needs and curricular requirements.

Equal status between the age groups

The strong evidence that IGL is a valuable response to contemporary social issues, including an ageing society, social and age segregation, isolation and loneliness could potentially focus on the benefits to older persons and society. Such **a limited understanding of IGL could be understood as privileging one generation over another** and could, for example, give rise to attempts to make IGL attractive to children. However, as the IGL body of knowledge grows, the benefits to persons of all ages are increasingly understood. Importantly, **a rights-based approach to children's (and older adults') participation in IGL will ensure such a possibility is avoided.**

10. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A sustainable society is one that relies on citizens who have learned the sensitivities, motivations and skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's views are closely mirrored by the most recent EU recommendations for ECEC services on the essential role ECEC services have to play in learning about equality, tolerance and diversity and how to live together in heterogeneous societies. **Adopting IGL as a pedagogical strategy in the context of these views of the role of ECEC services raises important philosophical questions.** These centre around imagining learning priorities for young children now and into the future, which may involve extending or challenging contemporary ideas of ECEC practice.

Future-building or future-proofing?

Focusing on developing children's life skills and potentialities in relating to older adults in the community highlights a **humanistic rather than an instrumental view of education.** Educators adopting a humanistic view of education demonstrate a commitment to the **future-building rather than the future-proofing** of children. This perspective understands education in the broadest sense as fostering children's development and well-being and their ability to live a good life. It also fits with the goal that both the individual and society will flourish, and, significantly, views **education as life and not merely preparation for an unknown kind of future living**.

A humanistic view of education focuses on learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be (Delors Report, 1996). This view of education is reflected in what is widely known as **relational pedagogy** in ECEC. Relational pedagogies draw on the relationships, communication and interconnection of people, places and things in children's sociocultural contexts to enhance and extend their learning and development. These views on the aims of education resonate strongly with IGL principles, which include the central role of relationships in developing understandings, learning with and from each other and promoting well-being among individuals at different stages of development.

In implementing IGL, educators demonstrate two key beliefs: the importance of balancing children's happiness in the here and now with future outcomes, and the importance of the how of learning, rather than focusing on academic or cognitive outcomes, which could be understood as the what of learning. Introducing **IGL practice requires educators who are courageous and willing to think outside the box** and act as

brokers in creating innovative opportunities for young children's learning and development. In doing so, educators are meeting the learning and development needs of the children they work with but are also meeting a much broader remit of society - promoting age-friendly communities, combatting social isolation and enhancing civic participation of young children and older adults. **In adopting IGL, educators are taking radical social action, demonstrating the importance of loving and caring for each other, showing that every person is valued and has something to contribute in the community.**

10.1 Additional Resources

For a critique of ECEC models and concepts of professionalism read the following articles:

- Moss, P. (2009). *There are alternatives! Markets and democratic experimentalism in early childhood education and care. Working papers in early childhood development: No. 53.* Bernard van Leer Foundation.

- Urban, M. (2008). *Dealing with uncertainty: challenges and possibilities for the early childhood profession.* University of East London.

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Cortellesi, G., & Kernan, M. (2016). *Together old and young: how informal contact between young children and older people lead to intergenerational solidarity. Studia paedagogica*, *21*(2), 101–116.

Delors, J., (1996). *Learning: The treasure within.* Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the 21st century. UNESCO.

European Commission. (2014). *Proposal for key principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care.* Report of the Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care under the auspices of the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education and Culture).

European Council. (2019). *Council recommendation (C189/4) on high-quality early childhood education and care systems.*

[ENIL]. European Network for Intergenerational Learning [ENIL]. (2012). *Learning for active ageing and intergenerational learning: Final report.* European Commission.

Fitzpatrick, A. (2020). Towards a pedagogy of intergenerational learning. In M. Kernan & G. Cortellesi (Eds.), *Intergenerational learning in practice: Together Old and Young* (pp.40-60). Routledge.

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Zero to Three.

APPENDICES

Brief report of two IGL experiences

The following brief reports are from Irish ECEC services (serving children aged 2.5-5 years) linked, in the first example with a nearby care home, and, in the second example with a day care centre for older adults:

We go down to the nursing home once a week on a Tuesday and we will bring down activities with us but it depends . . . sometimes you'll go in with an activity but you know it just won't happen that day . . . it's very much on the mood of both children and the residents down there . . . sometimes the kids will just sit on the floor and they'll talk to them [older adults] or they'll play ring a Ring-a-Rosy with them . . . last week we did a game of bingo which was a huge success . . . the week before that we brought down play dough, again it was a huge success so it just really depends . . . but we just go down there and we just go down to really socialise and have a chat and find out as much as we can about each other (Educator).

So a typical day . . . they'd [older adults] come in and meet us, then we'd play different games but at the end of each session we'd always ask what will we do next week and we'd come to some sort of consensus on what we do on the next week . . . so the main ones [activities] are . . . we play bingo, we did cooking, we did colouring, that really didn't go down very well the colouring one . . . we did story time, we did just general sitting and chatting . . . like just chatting about the old days . . . we had a karaoke one of the days, we had a sports day another day . . . we used the hall beside us to do that so it was a proper sports day in there . . . we visited Santa in the local supermarket . . . we did carol singing in the supermarket as well (Educator).

Linking IGL experiences to curricular aims and learning goals

The aims and learning goals for the theme of **Identity and Belonging** in Aistear (2009), the Irish Early Childhood Curriculum Framework are presented below. Highlighted in yellow are some examples of where IGL experiences are meeting *Aistear's learning goals*.

Aims	Learning goals
Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories.	In partnership with the adult, children will ● **build respectful relationships with others** ● **appreciate the features that make a person special and unique (name, size, hair, hand and footprint, gender, birthday)** ● understand that as individuals they are separate from others with their own needs, interests and abilities ● have a sense of 'who they are' and be able to describe their backgrounds, strengths and abilities ● feel valued and see themselves and their interests reflected in the environment ● **express their own ideas, preferences and needs, and have these responded to with respect and consistency.**
Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.	In partnership with the adult, children will ● **feel that they have a place and a right to belong to the group** ● know that members of their family and community are positively acknowledged and welcomed ● be able to share personal experiences about their own families and cultures, and come to know that there is a diversity of family structures, cultures and backgrounds ● understand and take part in routines, customs, festivals, and celebrations ● **see themselves as part of a wider community and know about their local area, including some of its places, features and people** ● understand the different roles of people in the community.

Aims	Learning goals
3 **Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others.**	In partnership with the adult, children will ● express their views and help make decisions in matters that affect them ● **understand the rules and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour** ● interact, work co-operatively, and help others ● **be aware of and respect others' needs, rights, feelings, culture, language, background, and religious beliefs** ● have a sense of social justice and recognise and deal with unfair behaviour ● demonstrate the skills of co-operation, responsibility, negotiation, and conflict resolution.
4 **Children will see themselves as capable learners.**	In partnership with the adult, children will ● develop a broad range of abilities and interests ● **show an awareness of their own unique strengths, abilities and learning styles, and be willing to share their skills and knowledge with others** ● show increasing confidence and self-assurance in directing their own learning ● **demonstrate dispositions like curiosity, persistence and responsibility** ● experience learning opportunities that are based on personal interests, and linked to their home, community and culture ● be motivated, and begin to think about and recognise their own progress and achievements.

Appendix C

Documenting sheet for parents about their children's IGL experiences

Sharing the experience of the intergenerational experiences with your child, you might introduce the topic- *"You went to the care home today"*.

Your child might draw a picture here (or use a bigger sheet). Ask your child if they could describe their drawing to you and you write a note of this beside or on the back of their drawing.

What do you think the experiences with the older people mean for your child?

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