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TOGETHER OLD AND YOUNG: HOW INFORMAL CONTACT BETWEEN YOUNG CHILDREN AND OLDER PEOPLE CAN LEAD TO INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

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Abstract

This article discusses the processes and outcomes when space and time are explicitly created for young children and older people to be together, to play together and learn from each other in the contexts of both non-formal and formal education. It is proposed that a big part of this being together is sharing and transforming culture and cultural experiences, which in turn enhances solidarity and social cohesion. The article is based on findings of the European project called Together Old and Young (TOY), which was designed to research and develop good practice in intergenerational learning involving young children and older people. It draws on cultural, anthropological and pedagogical theories to explore how interactions between young children and older people can develop solidarity, social cohesion, and intercultural understanding. Four linked research questions are addressed: 1) How does intergenerational learning (IGL) in non-formal and formal settings support the wellbeing of older adults and young children?; 2) How does IGL influence and transform the identity of older adults and young children?; 3) What mechanisms support inclusion and solidarity between young children and older adults, including those who are migrants?; 4) How do intergenerational relationships create and transform cultures of both young children and older adults?

The findings indicate a need to pay attention to both the social and physical environments in urban planning and social and educational policies, including making provisions for space and time for young children and older adults to play and be creative together and learn about each other's life worlds. The findings also highlight the effectiveness of multi-sensory activities as a bridging mechanism between the generations as a means for children and older adults to re-negotiate cultural meanings together.

Keywords

young children, older people, intergenerational learning, culture and solidarity

Introduction

Human beings have an intrinsic propensity to act together, to create together, to play together and to learn together (Bruner, 1996). Within the fields of psychology and education, it is acknowledged that acting together is the basis for all learning (Rogoff, 2003). Furthermore, Taylor (2013) proposes that today's young children need relational and collective dispositions, not individualistic ones, to equip them to live well in the increasingly complex, interconnected, and boundary-blurred 21st century world. Such dispositions encompass a firm sense of shared belonging and shared responsibility with their immediate worlds.

This article discusses the processes and outcomes when space and time are explicitly created for young children and older people to be together, to act and have fun together, and to learn from each other in the contexts of both non-formal and formal education. It is proposed that a big part of this *being together* is sharing and transforming culture and cultural experiences and that this form of intergenerational learning should be valued at every stage of education, beginning in early childhood. It is further proposed that paying greater attention to intergenerational contact between young children and older adults in public spaces represents an opportunity that can produce positive outcomes for the greater good of all generations (Van Vliet, 2011).

The article draws on findings of an international project called *Together Old and Young* or TOY, which was funded by the European Commission, under the Lifelong Learning Programme Grundtvig. TOY was designed to research and develop good practices in intergenerational learning involving young children and older people. The TOY Consortium was multi-disciplinary, comprising representatives from nine different organizations in seven European countries with expertise and experience in fields such as early childhood education and care, primary education, gerontology, and cultural anthropology, and in action areas such as mobilizing civil society, including senior volunteers. The article is organized as follows: we first review key contextual issues influencing intergenerational learning and outline key concepts informing our analysis. We then outline the research questions guiding the analysis presented in this paper and provide key methodological information about the TOY Project in general and the scope of our analysis. The findings section is organized in four parts reflecting each of the research questions. The article concludes with a discussion.

The promise of intergenerational learning

Intergenerational learning or IGL involves different age groups learning together or learning from each other in a range of settings.[1] It is actually the oldest method of learning, whereby knowledge, skills, values and norms are transmitted among generations, typically through the family (Hoff, 2007), and involves learning that takes place naturally as part of day-to-day social activity. A newer model of intergenerational learning—*extra-familial* intergenerational learning—facilitates wider social groups outside the family to contribute to the socialization of the young (Kaplan, 2002; *Report January – June 2010*, 2010; Vanderbeck & Worth, 2015). Growing interest in IGL stems from both new societal concerns and opportunities and new understandings of the process, and participation in of, education and learning. This includes the notions of lifelong and lifewide learning, combined with the need to respond positively to the growing separation of generations due to urbanization, migration, family breakdown, and increasing spread of extended networks of families across communities and continents.

Compared to previous generations, it is less likely that young children and older adults grow up amongst a diverse set of family and other relationships spanning age groups and generations. The growing separation of generations into same-age institutions and spaces, such as pre-schools and retirement homes, increases the possibility that young children and older adults may miss out on opportunities for interaction, understanding, and learning from each other (*Intergenerational Learning Involving Young Children and Older People*, 2013). As noted by van Vliet and Karsten (2015), shared site facilities, such as day-care centres and centres for older people, benefit all age groups and are an example of cost-effective planning. In recent years, architects, social scientists, and practitioners have started to explore the possibilities of combining spaces for young children and older people into multigenerational facilities which are able to address the needs of both generations (Jarrott, 2008; Pinazo-Hernandis & Tompkins, 2008; Power et al., 2007).

Interest in IGL can also be justified by concerns regarding the economic implications of an ageing Europe and the consequent need for greater social and economic solidarity among generations. The European Commission designated 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. The term *intergenerational solidarity* is defined as the

[1] This was the working definition of IGL informing the TOY Project.

process that leads each generation to recognize its responsibilities towards the others (*Intergenerational Solidarity: Foundation Findings*, 2012). In this regard, making cities and communities *age-friendly* has emerged as an attractive policy response to the challenges of population ageing and urban growth (Biggs & Carr, 2015) and can be conceived as supporting solidarity between generations. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (*Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*, 2007) defines an age-friendly community as one that optimizes opportunities for health, participation, and security as people age. In an age-friendly community, policies, services, and infrastructure are designed to respond flexibly to ageing-related needs and preferences.

Some of the factors an age-friendly community considers are outdoor spaces and buildings, social participation, respect, social inclusion and contribution in all areas of community life (*Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*, 2007). Particular attention needs to be paid to the perspectives of young children and older people in this regard, given that cities are typically designed to support productive capacities i.e. working adults. The needs of young and old are often overlooked (Van Vliet, 2011). Scholars who have analysed the application of the concepts of *age-friendly communities* and *child-friendly cities* developed by UNICEF propose that *friendliness* should mean: fostering social integration, social support, and access to resources for both young and old (Scharlach & Lehning, 2013 in Biggs & Carr, 2015). Additionally, we argue in this article that whilst the term *age-friendly communities* originated with respect to ageing adults, it should also incorporate consideration of other generations, including young children, given the fact that social engagement with other generations is key to the wellbeing of all.

In summary, the design and planning approach to learning spaces needs to take account of societal issues related to the dynamics of family, community, and ageing, as well as care, play, work, and migration. Learning environments of the 21st century are envisioned as extending well beyond the traditional formal learning sites, such as school buildings, to include all of the settings used by generations of all ages. The notion of lifelong and life wide learning, IGL, and age-friendly communities have promised much in responding to these dynamics. However, questions remain as to how intergenerational contact, specifically involving young children and older people, can contribute to social cohesion and solidarity between generations. To further explore this issue we turn to the field of cultural anthropology.

Childhood, ageing, and cultural transmission and transformation through the lens of cultural anthropology

Children and older people have appeared in ethnographies since the establishment of the field of study approximately 150 years ago, but in a fragmented way (Lancy, 2012). It is only recently that the anthropology of childhood and the anthropology of ageing have become distinct fields in anthropological studies.

In 1967, Clark and Anderson published their *Culture and aging: an anthropological study of older Americans*, which is still a touchstone for the concept of situated ageing (Clark & Anderson, 1967). It prompted investigations of ageing in previously unexplored socio-cultural settings especially in the U.S. (Perkinson & Solimeo, 2013). More recent ethnographies exploring neighbourhoods, nursing homes, and other settings, provided useful insights that could improve long-term care (Rahman, Appelbaum, Schnelle, & Simmons, 2012 in Perkinson & Solimeo, 2013) and inform global attempts to develop age-friendly communities and cities (Stafford, 2009).

The well-known and extensively debated article by Hirschfeld (2002), "Why don't anthropologists like children?" and the publication of the first comprehensive reviews of the anthropology of childhood (Lancy, 2008; Levine & New, 2008; Montgomery, 2008) marked a new phase whereby cultural anthropologists were also looking at children as a distinct domain of study, including attention to investigating children's agency and documenting their perspectives on and participation in the social world. As argued by Hirschfeld:

> *Children create and inhabit cultures of their own making, cultures that in significant measure are independent of and distinct from those of the adults with whom they live. […] they significantly constrain and mold not only their own cultural productions but also those of adults.* (Hirschfeld, 2002, p. 613)

Although older people have always appeared in ethnographies, few studies have focused on "how ageing and old age produce its own cultures or how older adults shape the culture of other generations" (Danely, 2013, p. 1). If we agree with Wentzell's argument that ageing not only provokes connection between body and mind but also between generations (Wentzell, 2013), cultural anthropology has much to contribute to analysing, interpreting, and narrating intergenerational relationships.

How is culture understood? For the purposes of our analysis we draw on Geertz's definition of culture: a web of meanings that are constantly transmitted, shared, transformed, and reinterpreted by a group of people (Geertz, 1973) over time. Scholars of sociology and cultural anthropology have studied the intergenerational transmission of material and immaterial culture for decades

(Mannheim, 1927 in Pickering & Keightley, 2015). Cultural transmission happens through collective memory, which develops from individuals who create their own narratives, reinterpreting, translating, negotiating, and constructing memories in and over time (Pickering & Keightley, 2012). In the analysis that follows, we explore the ways in which IGL activities can help young children and older adults to transform and reinterpret cultural meanings and how this contributes to feelings of shared belonging, responsibility, and solidarity.

Methodology

Research questions

The overall research question addressed in this article is: What kind of learning spaces and experiences support solidarity between young children and older people? As noted in the introductory sections, our particular interest is in the linkages between shared experiences in non-formal and formal settings[2] and solidarity between these generations and how this may contribute to creating age-friendly communities.

Four sub questions are addressed:

1) How does IG learning in non-formal and formal settings support the wellbeing of older adults and young children?
2) How does IG learning influence and transform the identity of older adults and young children?
3) What mechanisms support inclusion and solidarity between young children and older adults, including those who are migrants?
4) How do intergenerational relationships create and transform cultures of both young children and older adults?

Research context

The data we draw on in exploring these questions comes from the TOY Project, which researched intergenerational learning in formal and non-formal educational and community settings, such as in preschools, day-care centres, care services for older people, community arts centres, parks, and libraries.

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[2] We define formal learning settings as institutionalised and chronologically graded education settings, including pre-primary and primary schools, secondary schools, and third level institutions. Non-formal learning settings include parent and toddler groups, community playgroups, libraries, and older people's clubs where organised, systematic, and educational activities take place (*Reweaving the Tapestry of the Generations,* 2013).

TOY grew out of a shared concern that the potential of intergenerational learning involving older people and young children was underdeveloped. It was believed that there were huge opportunities for enhanced wellbeing and learning which would benefit both age groups but this was hardly recognized in educational and social policies, and was poorly documented and evaluated.

The TOY Project took place between October 2012 and December 2014. The first phases of the project focused on researching the aims and nature of IGL initiatives in Europe involving young children (ages 0 to 8) and older people (65 years+). This involved a systematic review of the academic literature from the fields of education, gerontology, sociology, psychology, health, social policy, and community development, coupled with a review of *grey literature*.[3] A key result of this analysis was the identification of five goals of IG practice and learning involving young children and older people. These were:

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

Given that there were seven countries and eight languages involved amongst the project participants, as well as researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds, the team of researchers worked hard to agree on a common terminology and definitions of key terms such as lifelong learning, intergenerational learning, non-formal learning, and senior volunteer.

The second phase of the TOY Project research process consisted of case study research of 21 existing IG projects in the seven participating TOY countries (Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain). The purpose of this phase of the Project was to identify perceived benefits of IGL for young children, to test the validity and further illuminate the TOY goals, and to identify the skills and competences necessary for mediators of IGL. These are typically early childhood care and education (ECEC) practitioners, social care practitioners, community workers, or senior volunteers. These initiatives – we selected 2 to 3 per country – were not necessarily good practice examples, but were examples of initiatives that involved both young children and older adults and that took place in non-formal community settings or formal settings.

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[3] By grey literature, we mean unpublished research, information booklets or leaflets, handbooks, conference proceedings, newspaper reports, online news or blog items, project reports, digital materials, and national government or local government reports.

The third phase of the TOY Project consisted of establishing 13 TOY pilot IGL actions in five of the countries, based on lessons learnt in the previous phases and documenting and evaluating their outputs and outcomes in order to inspire others to establish IGL initiatives.

Data collection

Data for both the case study research and the pilot actions were collected via observation, photographing and interviewing the participants in the IGL initiatives (i.e. young children, their parents, senior volunteers, older people, educators, and social care professionals) in groups and individually. Agreed ethical guidelines for research were followed by all data collectors, including: providing information about the project and the purposes of the research, ensuring that all participants gave written consent before data collection began, and informing participants of their right to withdraw at any stage in the research. In the case of children, parents signed consent forms. Participants were given the choice to be identified by their real name or not. Many chose to be known by their real name.

The same data collection instruments and ethical guidelines were used in all countries and were translated into local languages. In total, approximately 500 children aged 0 to 8 years, 303 older adults (65+ years), and 111 facilitators (practitioners and/or senior volunteers) were involved in the case studies. In the TOY pilot actions, a total of 589 children aged 0 to 8 years, 163 older adults, and 101 facilitators participated.

Scope of the analysis

The present article draws on some of the data collected from both the case study research and the TOY pilot actions. The detailed findings of 21 case studies are presented elsewhere (*Case Studies*, 2013; *Reweaving the Tapestry of the Generations*, 2013). The experiences of the pilot actions have been documented in a variety of media, such as an illustrated report; stories and videos of impact are available via the project website, www.toyproject.net.

Our purpose in the present article is to draw on the experiences, testimonies, and motivations of the participants involved in order to further illuminate issues posed in the four research questions with reference to concepts such as age-friendly communities, solidarity, and cultural transformation. These concepts and understandings were not elaborated in the earlier TOY project publications, but we believe they merit further analysis. Our aim here is not to provide definitive answers to the questions posed, but rather to stimulate further discussion, research, and practice in this important area of social and educational practice.

Findings

The findings are organised in four sections to match the four research questions. We begin by considering the contribution IGL makes to the wellbeing of both older adults and young children and how being together generates a feeling of solidarity.

Intergenerational learning and the wellbeing of young and old

According to the anthropologist Jordan Lewis (2013), the four elements of successful ageing are emotional well-being, community engagement, physical health, and spirituality. Not surprisingly, the overarching goal for IG contact between young children and older people emerging from all TOY data sources explored was to enhance the health and wellbeing of both generations involved. Successful ageing was linked to IG contact in TOY with respect to the following dimensions: being and feeling mentally and physically active and useful; being and feeling valued; being and feeling able to contribute; having fun and bringing fun; developing self-confidence and esteem; and taking care and being part of the future of their communities. The wellbeing of children in IG contact was enhanced by the opportunity to be in contact with older people on a regular basis, enjoying the slow pace of this relationship compared to the high-speed daily life they often have with their parents, and learning about the past, traditions, and old games. Another important factor for children was represented by the fact that IG contact challenged stereotypes about *oldness*, discovering the different stages of the life cycle and learning about the values of sharing, solidarity, respect, and acceptance of the *other*.

In taking a closer look at the possible nature of stereotypes, we believe it is interesting to explore and understand how *otherness* is constructed and deconstructed in relationships between young children and older people. Ageing challenges fictions of stability (Wentzell, 2013). Every person changes over time; this process questions the idea of the homogeneous individual self. Our bodies often do not feel the chronological age we are and therefore there is a disjunction between mind and body when we age. Ageing has often been related to wisdom as an evolutionary process that makes us increase our knowledge and experience with time and eventually become mature and complete (Lewis, 2013). In contrast, childhood has often been identified as an age of spontaneity and immaturity. Intergenerational activities can question both these assumptions, providing young children and older people the opportunity to express and experience different selves, to be active learners at any age, and to build connections instead of disjunctions. Intergenerational relationships suggest a holistic approach towards ages and ageing as well as a more fluid and processual understanding of generational cultural production (Danely, 2013).

The opportunity to overcome negative views about older people was mentioned frequently as a goal of IG activities for children in interviews with the organizers of IG activities researched as part of the TOY project. The organizer of an intergenerational workshop in Slovenia explained it as follows:

> *We often experience that children do not know what oldness is or what it means, children have many negative associations connected with that word, for example death, illness, shaking hands, retirement, wheelchair, forgetting.* (Tadeja, facilitator, TOY case studies, 2013)

Seniors also mentioned that the stereotypical views they had about children were challenged. Older people valued getting insight into children's life-worlds and felt more "up-to-date."

In one of our direct discussions with the senior beneficiaries of an intergenerational project in the Netherlands, a 94-year-old woman named Mia told us:

> *When you have contact with one another you become more comfortable with one another* (...) *the contact helps [older people] to become more tolerant of young children. There are elderly people who think young children just make a lot of noise, who find them difficult.* (Mia, 94 years old, senior beneficiary, TOY case studies, 2013)

Both groups had to adapt to and learn how to interact with the *other* and adapt to different personalities outside the family. For the young children involved, this offered an experiential and innovative approach to learning in which they actively engaged with older adults in meaningful exchanges and in which the children and older people co-constructed knowledge (*Intergenerational Learning Involving Young Children and Older People*, 2013; Rogoff, 2003).

An interesting variation regionally was how relationships and connectedness were expressed. In the countries of southern Europe and Poland, affect and physical affection was prioritized:

> *When Claudia, the facilitator, takes us to the children, the moment we get there, the children cling to me and then all the others run and approach me to give kisses and hugs.* (Maria, 86 years old, senior beneficiary, TOY case studies, 2013)

In Ireland, the Netherlands, and Slovenia, sharing of humour was viewed as important, and physical affection was not highlighted as important. As one respondent suggested: "*We can be childish again, simple things can be fun again, and doing things over and over again can be fun*" (Chris, 65 years old, beneficiary, TOY case studies, 2013).

In summary, through experiencing different selves and being active and interconnected learners with other generations, the health and wellbeing of both young children and older people can be enhanced. Let us turn now to consider these learning relations in shared community spaces.

Solidarity between young and old in public spaces

Public or shared spaces may promote relationships and solidarity between generations further by developing opportunities for intergenerational learning. In this regard, Biggs and Carr (2015) refer to "generationally intelligent" spaces, defined as those spaces in the community that allow different generational groups to meet, interact and negotiate the shared use of the environment (Biggs & Carr, 2015, p. 106). The TOY Project research uncovered innovative intergenerational practices in which a number of autonomous agencies representing different age groups and sectors used the same premises or outdoor space and collaborated in a range of social and learning activities, such as the old people's home and day-care centre for children ages 0 to 4 in Leiden, the Netherlands, and the intergenerational centre in Piacenza, Italy, which hosts a day-care centre and a nursing home for the elderly and a nursery for children in the 0 to 3 age range.

In the TOY case studies in Poland, Italy, Slovenia, and Portugal, the development of solidarity between generations was identified as a specific goal and benefit of IG practice. A desire to open up physically and relationally to the community was a key motivation in bringing the generations together, such as when children visited old people's homes. A more elaborated construction in realizing this aim was integrated services for young and old together in the same physical space. An 80-year-old man who lives in a shared facility in Northern Italy described his experience to us during an interview, highlighting the attachment he developed for the place he lives in:

> *I did not know about the child day-care centre when I moved here two years ago. It was a discovery and a pleasure I had never felt before. I am alone in the world, no sons or nephews. Now these children are my enthusiasm and my passion. I have become fond of them and in summer, when the day-care centre for children is closed, I miss them* (...) *and that is okay. I cannot imagine another place to live now.* (Franco, 80 years old, senior beneficiary, TOY case studies, 2013)

The analysis of 21 case studies also demonstrated that multi-sensory experiences engaging the senses of touch, smell, hearing, and sight, and activities involving creativity indoors and outdoors worked really well as a natural bridge between the generations.

IGL and inclusion of migrants

In an earlier section of the paper, we referred to the particularly marginalised position of the very young and old in city planning and uses of public space. However, another very vulnerable and excluded group, which is often ignored by urban and social policies, are migrants. In particular, migrant children are victims of double discrimination, as migrants and as children. To date there has been little research on the convergence of the principles shared by

age-, child-, and intercultural cities (Biggs & Carr, 2015). Neighbourhoods are where the exclusion of older people, children, and migrants becomes visible and tensions between generations and groups can erupt. However, neighbourhoods are also the spaces where people live, meet, and can build inclusion and integration from the bottom up (Mercken, 2002).

The IG activities researched as part of the TOY case studies and pilot actions were viewed as an opportunity to address the impact of migration on social cohesion in a number of initiatives: e.g. senior volunteers better understanding the lives of migrant families through home visits to read stories to children in the Netherlands, or from hearing migrant children talk about their home lives as volunteers in a library in Italy or working with children from play-centres with predominantly migrant children in Spain. In Portugal, the isolation and loneliness of older people left behind due to the emigration of family members was mentioned as one rationale for children to visit and exchange letters with seniors in a care home for older people.

Creating and transforming cultures within IG relationships

The final question addressed in this paper concerns how intergenerational relationships create and transform cultures of both generations involved and of others. In the TOY project, we observed that intergenerational initiatives tended to serve two purposes when focusing on material and immaterial cultural heritage. These are conservation and transformation.

The projects falling under the conservation label were aimed at promoting the transmission of values, beliefs, norms, memories, objects, games, and traditions. These projects tended not to view children as co-creators, but rather saw them as receivers who visit the past through an encounter with a guardian of the past, an old person. The relation that the past can have with the present was hardly discussed and the opportunities for children and older people to negotiate cultural meanings was limited.

In the TOY case studies and pilot actions, there were many examples of seniors teaching skills and sharing their hobbies, e.g. seniors introducing children to local history through examining artefacts and seniors teaching children gardening, food production, and cooking skills. The destruction of the piazza, the traditional meeting and play space for all generations in Poggio Picenze, Italy, in the heart of the town prompted the instigation of a programme whereby old people passed on the collective cultural memory of the town by demonstrating traditional crafts and telling stories from the past.

In other IG cultural initiatives, whilst traditions and memories were a starting point, the interaction then developed into a co-creating space where young children and older people could exchange and discuss their perceptions

and understandings of the past, re-enact it in the present and imagine it in the future. The two generations co-exist in space and time during the transmission. As explained by Pickering and Keightley (2012):

> On the one hand, there is the transmission of memory over time, in which the past is drawn into the present and reworked creatively in the interests of the future. On the other, there is the transmission or sharing of memory in time, through which shared senses of common pasts, presents and futures are actively negotiated and constructed. (p. 117)

This was the case of a project implemented in Lleida, Spain, that involved the revival of a traditional dance and drama – the *Ball parlat dels moros i cristians*. Children and older people, 36 in total (from 4 to 70 years old), worked together to explore the cultural and historical context of the play; they wrote the text, which the children adapted for their peers, made costumes, and finally performed the actual play. All the older people were Catalonian, whereas most of the children were from migrant descent and therefore had very limited knowledge of or familiarity with Catalonian traditions. The traditional dance and drama became an opportunity for those children to explore a part of the cultural heritage of the region they lived in and together with the older people they re-interpreted, actualized, and renegotiated the cultural meanings of the play, developing something completely new that now belongs to both the Catalonian elders and the children with migrant backgrounds.

Another example was the multi-generational project "If you were in my shoes," which took place in Ireland in 2012/13. The participants worked collectively under the guidance of a creative director and writer to create an individual pair of slippers made of felt and personal stories. In an interview, the writer who facilitated the intergenerational activity described the project as a transformative experience during which memories, stories and future projections of all the generations contributed to create common storytelling:

> The stories of the five-year-olds and the seventy-five-year-olds had common themes based on shoes of my past, shoes of my present, and shoes of my future (...) it was like the Canterbury Tales where I felt I was almost part of what people shared, almost walking in their shoes. (WiR, TOY case studies, 2013)

Experiences from the case studies and the TOY pilot actions illustrate that music, drama, dance, storytelling, crafting, gardening, and cooking, provide a natural bridge between generations and also offer excellent opportunities for many generations to transform, own, and re-imagine culture together.

Discussion

In the introduction to this article, we suggested that young children growing up in the 21st century need relational and collective dispositions to equip them to live in an increasingly complex and mobile world with an ageing population. Furthermore, learning environments also need to be responsive to societal changes. In this article, we explore the potential of IGL involving the youngest and oldest members of society to respond to today's realities and in particular to support solidarity between the generations.

Social and planning policies tend to focus on the physical aspects of urban design, such as parks, playgrounds, and transportation, with the aim to build "community for all ages." We demonstrate that attention also needs to be paid to the non-physical aspects of urban living, including the design of learning spaces, in order to have even a greater impact on solidarity and cohesion. Examples of such non-physical aspects highlighted by these findings include playfulness, humour, and opportunities for young children and older adults to play and create together, which will in turn lead to respect and acceptance of each other.

For this to work, urban planning and local social and educational policies need to take account of the perspectives, interests, and needs of all generations and groups involved and stimulate cooperation between different sectors, such as ECEC and the social care sector. It is also important to recognise the strengths that each group brings to the interaction, their openness to learn, and their capacity to negotiate and co-create practices, events, and initiatives. Exploiting the commonalities between the youngest and oldest generations is another important strategy. Given our attention in this paper to the perspective of cultural anthropology, it is also worth emphasizing the potential role of the ethnographer as a mediator and interpreter of the interaction between young and old, as well as of their cultures. Our findings highlight the effectiveness of multi-sensory and creative activities as a bridging mechanism between young children and older adults, where each can learn from the other and re-imagine culture together.

On a cautionary note, IGL between young and old is not a panacea. The experience in the TOY project showed that the interaction cannot be forced and sometimes the contact goes in unexpected ways. However, conditions can be created to cultivate IGL, including for example working together towards a common goal (a product or a performance) and allowing sufficient time for the relationships to develop. It is also important to underline the important roles of IGL mediators, such as being able to recognise non-traditional learning possibilities, being open to the risks of experimenting, and trusting the capacities of young children and older people to manage the IG relationship without intervention. When IGL happens in multi-cultural

communities, it is also vital that mediators are able to promote intercultural learning and recognise the prejudices and power relationships among all of the actors involved.

Finally, while much research has been undertaken on diversity in ECEC and in care of older people, much less attention has been paid to exploring the dynamics involved in IGL taking place between young and old from different cultural backgrounds. Given the growing diversities of our communities in Europe due to migration, further research in this area would be valuable.

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