



Linking Generations
Northern Ireland

Education and Intergenerational Practice



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Context

Intergenerational Practice

Intergenerational practice (IP) aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities.

Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the younger and older generations have to offer each other and those around them. It is defined by **core principles** that are key to it being effective. These are given in the Annex.

Linking Generations Northern Ireland

Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNI) is the development body for intergenerational practice.

It has 550 members supported through its 11 council area Intergenerational Networks. LGNI also offers advice and support to build intergenerational capacity, provides small grants and runs an accredited Intergenerational training programme.

LGNI is part of the Beth Johnson Foundation, a UK charity based in Stoke-on-Trent that works to inform and influence discussion and good practice around age and ageing.

Education in Northern Ireland

Children and young people

The NI Ireland Executive's Children and Young People's Strategy sets learning and achieving and making a positive contribution to society as key outcomes and notes that these need a curriculum that provides practical life skills and chances to participate in civic life. ¹

"By promoting meaningful participation and identifying appropriate opportunities for active citizenship, children and young people are more likely to feel confident to engage in discussions about issues affecting them, to participate in activities in school and outside school, and to actively contribute to the life of their communities."²

Primary and post-primary education

The Department of Education is responsible for primary and post-primary education. This follows the Northern Ireland Curriculum which covers education from Foundation (age 4-6) to Key Stage 4 (age 14-16).

It aims to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives and also to develop the young person as an individual and as a contributor to the economy and environment.

The curriculum sets out areas of learning (subject areas) as well as the types of learning experiences that should be provided to develop individual attitudes and dispositions. Alongside which it emphasizes cross-curricular and thinking skills. For more detail, see the Big Picture curriculum graphics for Primary and Key Stages 3 and 4 on the CCEA website. ⁱⁱ

Further and higher education

The Department for the Economy is responsible for further and higher education. Its vision set out in - Further education means success – is of economically relevant education and training. This aligns with the curriculum objective of developing young people as contributors to the economy. ⁱⁱⁱ

LGNI: A Resource for the Education Sector

Linking Generations Northern Ireland has worked with schools and colleges across Northern Ireland for over a decade, enabling them to deliver a range of intergenerational activities.

When LGNI established the regional IP Network in 2019, a fifth of members came from education backgrounds.

The IP Networks operate in every council area; are an LGNI resource available to any school or college wanting to explore an intergenerational approach, make contact with older people's groups or care homes schools, learn about good IP practice or discuss how to plan a project that works.

LGNI has wide and direct experience of working schools, colleges and youth groups and connecting them to older people in the community. They share this expertise through the IP Networks and their advice service.

In addition to running demonstration projects, as described in the next section, LGNI makes micro grants to help schools and community groups pair up. The reports on the All Ages April and the Food for Life Get Together grant programmes show how even £150 can support positive intergenerational contact for children and young people. ^{iv}

Education and intergenerational Practice: Shared Benefits

In 2020, LGNI commissioned research into the educational outcomes of IP.^v This reviewed the literature and interviewed students, education providers and policy makers.

Some of this research is presented below.

Overall, the review found that research undertaken over many years and in many countries shows that bringing generations together results in multiple mutual benefits. For children and young people, in particular students, involvement can develop their skills and capabilities, improve their well-being and support their learning. The experiences and life skills gained through involvement in intergenerational practice will also support them in their future study, careers and life generally.

IP Supports Young Learners

Reviewing LGNI projects, the research found that intergenerational activities helped children and young people to:

- Learn more about older people, their interests and concerns.
- Learn that they have things in common with older people.
- Develop respect for older people.
- Change their views of older people.
- Learn new things.
- Become more confident.
- Feel more a part of the community.

It also found these outcomes to be supported by evidence from the other studies. Some of these also indicate educational outcomes, for example:

A study commissioned by the Local Government Association in England found many of the benefits listed above and that: “Where projects focus on activities that relate to the curriculum, such as history, Personal, Social and Health Education, there can be positive benefits for academic work. For example, some young people felt that hearing first-hand about World War II would aid them when they came to study it in history. Others were able to use the artwork produced as part of their GCSE coursework”.^{vi}

An evaluation of a Dublin City University project, involving almost 1,000 students and adult learners, found intergenerational learning to be an excellent methodology for enabling transformative education. It states that intergenerational programmes create significant learning opportunities and a transformation in attitudes between generations while also fostering intergenerational and intercultural solidarity.^{vii}

Research into intergenerational learning and civic literacy in young children in Irish primary schools found that across a range of curriculum-related collaborations, students

showed significant improvement in civic literacy scores. It also noted the development of skills such as critical thinking, gaining confidence and taking greater personal responsibility.^{viii}

Another review of research found IP created better psychological outcomes for students, such as a decrease in levels of anxiety and an increase in self-worth. The author highlights an intergenerational project in the USA which undertook a randomised control trial and found that students (aged 8 to 9) showed significantly higher reading scores than those in the control schools. There were also significant measurable decreases in disruptive behaviours.^{ix}

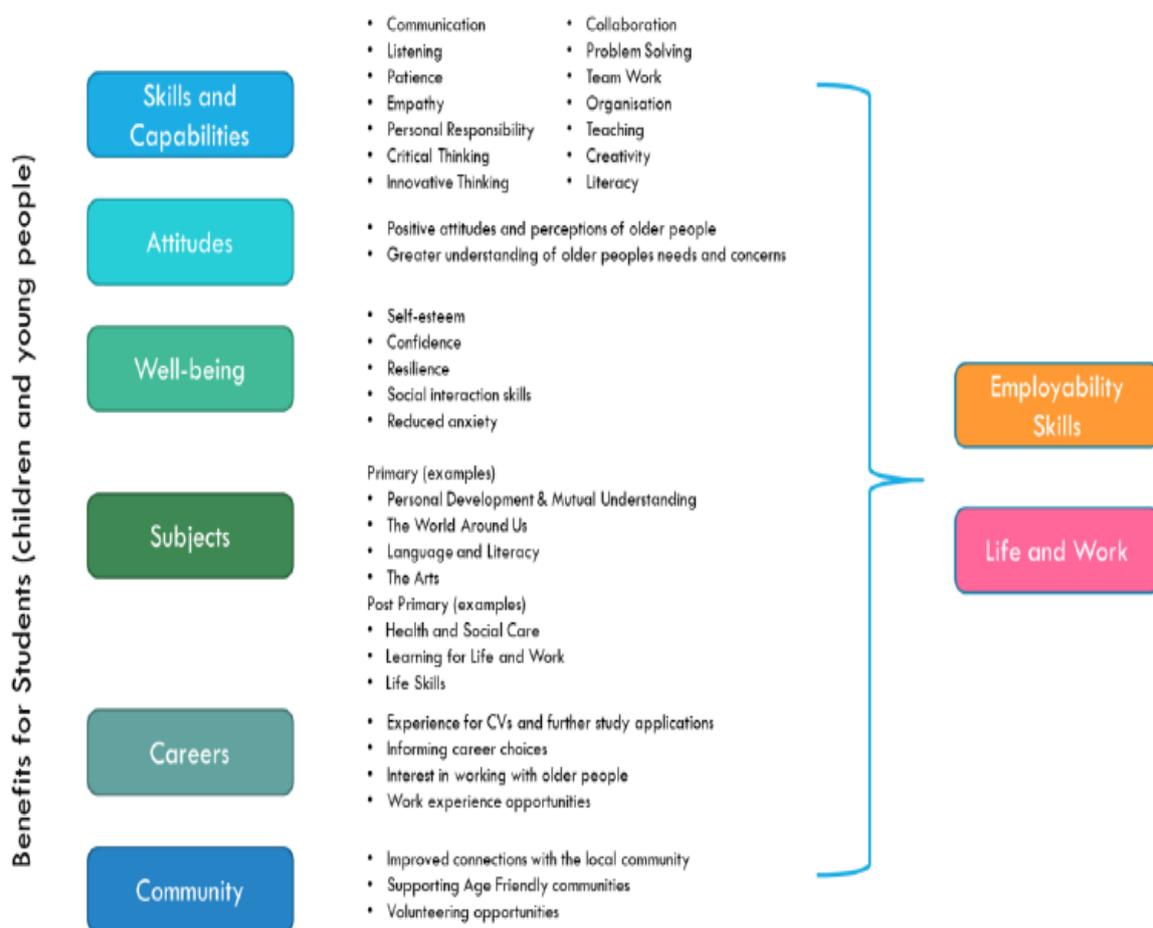


Figure 1 Benefits of intergenerational work for students.^x

IP Supports to Curricular Outcomes

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) contributed to the LGNI education and intergenerational practice review.

It identified *the* following relevant opportunities for participative learning through IP across the areas of learning and key stages within the curriculum.

At primary level

Personal development and mutual understanding. This includes a strand called Mutual understanding in the local and wider community. This encourages children to form relationships with adults and other children, explore and appreciate relationships in the local community and know about aspects of their cultural heritage.

The world around us includes strands called Interdependence, Place and Change over time. These offer a wide range of opportunities to develop links with past generations.

They also saw scope for inter-generational activities in **the arts** and in **language and literacy** where pupils listen, read and respond to stories.

Post primary and qualifications

CCEA pointed to the relevance to **Health and social care** and to seven other areas as having the potential to benefit from experience of IP projects:

- Entry Level Life Skills
- Level 1 & 2 Preparation for Adult Life
- GCSE Learning for Life and Work
- Entry Level Home Economics
- GCSE Religious Studies
- GCSE Physical Education
- GCE Sports Science in the Active Leisure Industry

Areas that IP can help to illuminate include: helping others; family roles; social responsibility; diversity and inclusion; the cause and consequences of prejudice and discrimination; and the social and physical effects of age on health, wellbeing and participation.

Health and social care is provided at GCSE and GCE level and taught as a BTEC and NVQ in regional colleges.^{xi}

IP can contribute to learning about:

- Promoting quality care
- Communication
- Diversity, equality and inclusion
- Health and well-being
- Meeting needs of service users and person-centred care

IP placements and projects also provide the workplace experience needed in further education and for experience based reports required for A-Levels.

The NI skills barometer identifies Health and Social Work as a key growth sector, which means there will be an ongoing need for people with foundation level degrees or higher level apprenticeships.^{xii}

IP is well matched to creating outcomes in relation to
Cross-Curricular: Communication
Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities: Working with others
Areas of Learning:
Primary - Personal development and mutual understanding. The world around us
KS3 Learning for life: Personal development. Local and global citizenship. Through key elements of: Mutual understanding, citizenship and cultural understanding. Subjects: Personal development and mutual understanding. The World around us.
KS4 Learning for life and work: Health and social care. Life skills. Preparation for adult life. Learning for life and work.
Learning Experiences
Primary and KS3 Learning experiences: Challenging and engaging, relevant and enjoyable culturally diverse, skills integrated and active and hands on.
KS4 The relevance of learning to everyday work and life: Personal development, citizenship, community-based learning, work related learning, employability. Independent & lifelong learning: Active enquiry-based learning.
Attitudes and Dispositions
Curiosity, concern for others, community spirit, tolerance, openness to new ideas, self-confidence, respect

Figure 2 Circular contribution of Intergenerational Practice^{xiii}

IP Supports Schools

The Department for Education sets out four characteristics of a successful school in its policy document, Every School a Good School. One of these is that a school should be connected to its local community.

In promoting this, the aim is to ensure that “there are strong and effective links between every school and the parents, families and local communities it serves.”^{xiv}

Intergenerational work can and has created strong links between communities and schools by engaging students with older people in the surrounding community and by bringing older people from the community into the school.

The research commissioned by LGNI in 2020 identified a range of benefits that IP has delivered for schools and colleges. These are shown in Figure 5.



Figure 3 Benefits of intergenerational work for schools and colleges.^{xv}

Examples: IP in Education and Community Links

Every School A Good School

Alexander Dickson **Primary School** in Ballygowan started working with LGNI in 2009 to link with a local seniors' club and has since built IP into their School development plan by undertaking to deliver an intergenerational project each year as part of its work towards the Every School a Good School priority of being connected to its local community.

Health & Social Care A-Levels

The Ards and North Down PCSP supported an LGNI facilitated EngAge project between students studying A-level Health and Social Care at Glastry College and a local care home. Students visited for an hour a week over six weeks, doing arts and crafts activities with the residents, many of whom are living with dementia.

The school and care home described outcomes including the development of multiple skills and capabilities such as communication, confidence, listening, patience, empathy, organisation and teamwork.

The Health and Social Care teacher said:

"It seems to link in really well with my Unit about communication, and also the exam unit which is all about providing services and promoting care values. Building it into the Year 13 course would be fantastic because some have very limited experience of H&SC services."

Project based learning

South West College launched an intergenerational café as part of its project based learning initiative. It was mapped onto particular units of study and helped students to complete assignments. The College's report on the project found it had:

- Supported the acquisition of skills; including critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and communication skills.
- Created positive learning experiences and a desire for more learning.
- A positive impact on the aspirations and employability skills of students.
- Provided working knowledge and experience of a new practice within their vocational field.

Age-friendly Schools

LGNI has been developing the concept of Age-friendly Schools, linked to the global Age-friendly ethos.^{xvi}

The concept for an Age-friendly School or College is one that:

- Supports the WHO Age-friendly ethos.
- Participates in their local intergenerational network and Age-friendly Alliance;
- Develops a plan for ongoing intergenerational practice (activities, mentoring or learning) that:
 - Provides mutually beneficial experiences
 - Develops skills and capabilities
 - Contributes to the improvement of health and wellbeing
 - Enhances the delivery of the curriculum/subjects and contributes to the achievement of educational outcomes for students, which is supported by a network of sustainable community connections.

The Age-friendly School Project

Supported by the Belfast Health Development Unit, the Age-friendly School Project linked a local community group and primary school to build a positive view of ageing and make Age-friendly lives and neighbourhoods. It did this through physical activity, Bingo, IT sessions, drama sessions, a Christmas party and end event.^{xvii}

Age-friendly community results were:

- Increased societal **engagement** between older and younger people.
- Older participants feeling increased community and social **inclusion**.

- Older and younger people had more positive **attitudes** towards other age groups.

How Can We Embed Intergenerational Practice in Education?

- **Increase awareness of IP benefits for students, schools and colleges**

A promotion designed and delivered in partnership between the DE EANI CCEA DFE and LGNI would hugely accelerate awareness of the potential of IP and its benefits across the education sector.

- **Enable every school and college to use intergenerational approaches to sustain educational outcomes and build community connections.**

The above partnership could also super-boost the spread of intergenerational work in education by working with LGNI and other partners to offer and administer small incentive grants to initiate projects.

- **Invest in the support infrastructure for IP in education.**

Schools, colleges and groups in the community need access to advice, development support, training, and resource materials to maximize the benefits of intergenerational work.

LGNI has IP resources, activity models and community contacts, which along with its accredited training and skilled development team could be extended to the education sector through additional resourcing.

- **An intergenerational project to reconnect schools and their community as part of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.**

A wide spread returning to school programme of safe and supervised connections between students and older people. Local schools and colleges would be partnered with older people's groups and receive a small grant for activities, the choice of one of three expertly devised IP activity plans, an evaluation sheet and free IP training for the project leaders in both partners.

LGNI would provide the project infrastructure, support and impact report.

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- iv Evaluation of Food for Life grants linkinggenerationsni.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ffl-evaluation-2019-published-june-2020.pdf and All Ages April linkinggenerationsni.com/portfolio-posts/allagesapril/
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- x LGNI 2021 per endnote iv
- xi In 2017/18, over 600 students entered Health and Social Care exams at GCSE level, and over 1,000 at A-Level and 3,710 enrolled across the six regional colleges in 2018/19.
- xii www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-skills-barometer-2019-update
- xiii Details from the CCEA website per endnote ii.
- xiv www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/every-school-good-school-policy-school-improvement
- xv LGNI 2021 per endnote iv
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