

RESEARCH BRIEFING

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Pupils and locals on an intergenerational journey

SUMMARY FINDINGS



Intergenerational Place-based Education: where schools, communities, & nature meet

The full report is available at: http://www.scotcip.org.uk/files/documents/IG_Place-based_Education.pdf

It should be cited as: Mannion, G., Adey, C. & Lynch, J. (2010) *Intergenerational Place-based Education: where schools, communities, and nature meet*. Stirling: University of Stirling for Scottish Centre for Intergenerational Practice.

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SUMMARY

This research was commissioned by the Scottish Centre for Intergenerational Practice. The research is an exploration of the synergies (existing and possible) between intergenerational practice, formal school-linked provisions, and the field of place-focused approaches to education. The focus of the research was to consider intergenerational educational programmes that were connected to schools and at the same time, were concerned with making community-wide connections to *some local, outdoor and natural places* through outdoor experiences of different kinds. Thus, the key aim of the research was to consider what were the opportunities and issues for intergenerational place-based education, what its effects might be, and what the consequences are for schooling.

The research collected evidence from two case studies.

1. The first case we researched was a small primary school in an urban area with considerable experience in this work that engaged with their parents and community members to develop a community garden.
2. The second case was a secondary school in the Highlands who sought to experiment with outdoor 'journeying' in their local National Park with one 'year group'.

These cases provide a useful platform for readers to consider what may be possible across the school system if the resources found in local communities are to be harnessed for learning in, about and for local outdoor natural environments in Scotland and beyond.

AIM, METHODS AND APPROACH

We aimed to conduct a study of two intergenerational practice projects in Scotland where the generation of a 'society for all ages' was part of the project's aim, where the context spanned school-community boundaries, and where the focus of the work was in, for or about some local natural outdoor place. We used a place-sensitive, ethnographic approach using individual interviews and focus groups supplemented by fieldnotes and video evidence of events. Data came from interviews with participating community members (mostly parents), teachers, key parents, school staff, management and pupils, and community-based facilitators. The approach taken can be described as an ethnographic case study. We purposively selected the cases that sought to include forms of intergenerational learning and involved place-sensitive activities outdoors in natural or naturalised areas. The cases also needed to have a school and community focus. Transcripts, photographs and video were analysed. Data were coded under a number of themes that emerged after a process of inter-researcher readings of the dataset. The two general themes that we used were 'relationships' and 'place-person interaction'. Sub-themes generated included (i) boundaries (ii) learning and sharing (iii) ethics, values and imagined futures.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- > What do participants express as educationally valuable, purposeful experiences and what do they see as the outcomes of these experiences?
- > What do they see as important as they learn about, and through, these practices?
- > How was place and context implicated in intergenerational education and what were the effects?
- > What are the opportunities and challenges associated with intergenerational practice and education in different kinds of places?
- > Do the findings inform understandings or definitions of intergenerational place-based education?
- > What are the implications for future programmes on sustainable place-focused intergenerational practice?

CASE 1 – PRIMARY SCHOOL IN CENTRAL URBAN AREA IN SCOTLAND

This small primary school was in an area of deprivation undergoing urban renewal housing development. The community garden space was left in a state of disrepair until two years ago when the school won an award to work on its redevelopment. The community garden development was one of a number of initiatives that tried to involve and encourage the parents to participate in their

children's education. Much of the hands-on aspects of the work was led by a local parent, through the support and leadership of teachers from the school. The children were involved in many stages of the work. Some events in the garden involved parents and their children in subject-focused tasks during the school day. The school held other less formal community events in the garden regularly.



Pupil with tools heads out to go the community garden

The work to change the garden and improve it required communication and interaction between the parents, teachers and children within and through the *material* practices afforded by the place. For almost all our respondents, the garden functioned as a site or place-holder for working towards imaginary futures (for parents' children, for teacher's school, for children themselves). The practice of working towards these futures connected younger and older people through a process of place production and intergenerational action. Through practices, there was a perceivable movement of boundaries around what kind of education was possible and where educational activities were possible which seemed critical. This intergenerational 'boundary work' was connected to local place production via material practices, and the generation of some sharing of ethics, values and imaginaries across the generations.

CASE 2 – HIGH SCHOOL IN HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND

The aims of this secondary school project were to use the concept of journey as a way to help people discover the intricacy and wonder of their local landscape, wildlife and culture including local nature reserve sites, the National Nature Reserve and the National Parkland. In particular, the project sought to explore how a combination of writing, arts & crafts, ecology and history can help people connect across generations and

in the process develop sense of place and strengthen community identity & cohesion. This case may have been exceptional in its collaboration with so many outside facilitators. Yet, the case allows us to see what might be possible in other schools. In case two there were outcomes for intergenerational relations between staff and pupils, school and the wider community. The project revealed there was an untapped potential by community people, visiting facilitators and pupils. Teachers could see new possibilities within new curriculum framings for connecting coursework to these approaches in ways that could meet formal learning outcome imperatives in locally specific ways. Pupils noted that older community members brought new authentic, situated, perspectives and had locally valuable knowledge bases.

The case showed that intergenerational place-based learning could be very materially-focused, hands-on, sensory in nature and engendered opportunities for encounters with living and changing places inhabited by people, now, in the past and to be inhabited differently in the future. The activities allowed pupils to be connected with local places in new ways through encounters with living things (domesticated animals as well as wildlife) and non-living things (eg water in the burn, archaeology). These experiences brought many pupils to reflect on how they live now and how they might live in new ways in a place. There were differences between staff members' views and what pupils and community members thought would be possible and who might have input in a more sustained programme of intergenerational place-based education. Particular pressures were strongly felt by staff with responsibilities for older pupils facing examinations (with the knock-on effect of needing to not interfere with timetabling of class periods). This, alongside the lack of tradition around intergenerational models of place-based education among the school sector generally, suggests that we need to remember that teachers' assumptions, beliefs and actions are likely to be critical in curriculum development and enactment.

FINDINGS

- > **Intergenerational Place-based Education.** can be defined as an open-ended, ethical, embodied, and situated activity through which places and intergenerational relations are produced and skills, knowledge and values are learned.
- > **Purpose.** The dual purpose of intergenerational place-based education be *to improve intergenerational relations and individual, community, and ecological wellbeing.*
- > **Scope.** Intergenerational Place-based Education will:
 - » involve people from more than one generation participating in a common locally purposeful, ethical and material practice that happens in some place
 - » involve different interests across the generations and can be employed to address community vitality and environmental concerns through tackling some 'problem' or challenge
 - » connect local places with other places
- > **Requirements.** Intergenerational Place-based Education will require:
 - » a willingness to reciprocally communicate across generational divides (be it through consensus, conflict or cooperation) with the hope of generating and sharing new intergenerational meanings, practices and places that are held in common
 - » a willingness to be responsive to each other, to other species, and to the world through taking shared action
 - » a shared task in some place that addresses a problem or challenge via learning skills, generating understanding, and addressing values
- > **New Ways of Dwelling in Places:** Intergenerational place-based education encourages an examination of people's everyday ways of life, or, how they inhabit places. Importantly, this gives rise to new ways of dwelling in places that are formed through new intergenerational relationships. Programmes can bring generations together and improve social cohesion.
- > **Ethics.** Intergenerational place-based education is an ethical, embodied, and place-based practice founded on a process of the valuation and re-evaluation of places and of people's contributions across the generational divides. This includes the passing on of values and ethical practices from one generation to the next and the creation of new ones.
- > **Outcomes for learners.** For any case, aside from outcomes relating to wellbeing and intergenerational relations, a wide range of locally specific outcomes are possible through intergenerational place-based education. These could be skills, knowledge and understanding, or values and attitudes.
 - » Skill learning could be about a wide variety of topics: for example, horse riding, basket making, gardening, or plant identification. There are a multitude of possible skills that can be learned, as these are locally specific and determined by a localised curriculum set within a national one
 - » Knowledge and understanding is made possible through finding out about current and alternative ways of life, and how these are brought about in changed places through changed intergenerational relations
 - » Values and attitudes: improved appreciation of place and of intergenerational solidarity and the value of different ways of inhabiting a place. How and who decides on what counts may be agreed, contested or undecided at the outset

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Parents and pupils gather for outdoor learning in the community garden

- > **Effects on schools.** Through intergenerational place-based education, schools will likely need to change how they operate and maintain their boundaries. They will involve many new stakeholders and target groups from all generations both as participants in learning and in the design of curricula. Schools will become sites of reciprocal flows in knowledge and understanding across generational boundaries as school staff and pupils, school and local communities, people and place relate to each other differently.
- > **Material, sensory learning.** As an approach, intergenerational place-based education programmes affords many ways of making learning more engaging and memorable, more tangible, sensory in nature, and materially focused.
- > **Environmental Sustainability and Community Wellbeing.** Intergenerational Place-based Education in outdoor and natural places affords new ways of understanding and changing how human culture and nature relate. As such, it affords a way of addressing social, environmental issues and sustainability in the round. By exploring and connecting people to places in new ways, intergenerational place-based education projects encourage ideas and practices that are directed towards making ways of life more sustainable and life-enhancing.

Recommendations

- » That schools be encouraged to consider a more collaborative and intergenerational approach to curriculum design involving young people themselves, local people, professional practitioners, and organisations in investigations for understanding and changing places
- » That schools be encouraged to further contextualise national curricula and to draw upon local resources, local people and local places thereby taking into account their local environmental and social places (and people's sense of this) and the connections to times and places further afield
- » That, as schools embrace a wider programme of outdoor learning (through, for example, Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland), they take more account of local context in its approach by attending to the way local culture interacts with outdoor practices and with 'nature' / environmental concerns
- » That further research be conducted to advance these recommendations and further questions arising

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ideas everywhere