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Intergenerational civic education

**INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING: COLLABORATIONS TO DEVELOP CIVIC  
LITERACY IN YOUNG CHILDREN IN IRISH PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This study investigated the potential of intergenerational learning collaborations to develop civic literacy in young children in Irish primary school. The study, measured against a control group, used a mixed-methods embedded design. Quantitative results confirmed that, across a range of curriculum-related collaborations, student self-reported civic literacy ratings, substantiated by teacher checklists, showed significant improvement ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) in civic literacy scores over an academic year. Qualitative findings explained how intergenerational learning collaborations contributed to desired outcomes for civic literacy in young children.

**KEYWORDS:** Intergenerational programmes, civic literacy, social learning.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper responds to an identified two-dimensional problem in Irish society: weaknesses in the delivery of citizenship education in primary school, and a widening social distance between older and younger generations, interchangeably called young and old, or elders and youth. Firstly, official evaluation of the Social Political and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum (Government of Ireland, 2009) reveals that many pupils do not receive hands-on learning opportunities to acquire values, attitudes and skills of citizenship. Some primary schools do not address such aspects at all even though the curriculum prescribes active learning approaches to help children to think critically, and be responsible for applying their own learning across domains. Secondly, some children are growing up with fewer opportunities to connect with people belonging to older age-groups. This disconnectedness is mainly due to ‘urbanisation, migration, family breakdown and increasing spread of extended networks of families across communities and continents’ (TOY, 2013, p.9). Ageing Well Network (2012) found that, devoid of social opportunities, generations tend to associate more with and value contemporaries to the exclusion of other age-groups; and while age-specific institutions like schools or adult day-care centres have grown, opportunities to connect across ages and cultures have become increasingly limited. Consequently, intergenerational learning opportunities can be oftentimes missed.

This paper reports on an empirical study (Hanmore-Cawley, 2015) which investigated the potential of intergenerational learning to develop civic literacy in young children in Irish primary school with the question:

*To what extent and in what ways can participation in intergenerational learning collaborations develop the civic literacy concept in young children?*

The conceptual framework therefore addresses three domains: intergenerational programmes; the civic literacy concept; and social learning.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Intergenerational programmes*

Key to understanding ‘intergenerational’, is the Latin word *inter*, i.e., the ‘between’. This between-ness is the essence of intergenerational programmes, namely ‘purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations for individual and social benefits’ (Hatton-Yeo, 2007, p.26). This ‘between-ness’ when based on values of equity, reciprocity and inclusiveness is key to intergenerational solidarity which, supported by the United Nations (2002), is one way to build more inclusive and cohesive societies.

According to Hatton-Yeo (2007), the most important applications for intergenerational programmes are that they contribute to citizenship development, community cohesion, challenging intergenerational mistrust and lack of mutual respect and contact. Widely reported outcomes for intergenerational programmes (e.g., Martin, Springate & Atkinson, 2010; Sánchez *et al.*, 2009) suggest: greater civic engagement through older people’s and children’s participation; greater community cohesion; changed negative stereotyping of young and old; reduced isolation for individuals and communities through better opportunities for lifelong learning; better connection between peoples of different ages; and improved health and well-being. However, many of these outcomes lack a solid evidence base. Hanmore-Cawley (2015) found, when conducting a literature review into the civic engagement of young children through intergenerational learning, that evaluations frequently were anecdotal and lacked empirical evidence. Similarly, Sánchez & Díaz (2009), (in Sánchez *et al.*, 2009), having analysed 133 programmes in Spain, found that research was ‘based on anecdotal evidence that [el]udes to some specific aspect of the programme rather than its general impact’ (p.10). Notwithstanding this point, Martin *et al.* (2010) found that

wherever projects were informed by curricula (e.g., citizenship education), ‘there can be positive benefits for academic work’ (p.7). A possible reason for the limited evidence-base might be that randomized controlled trials (RCT) serve as the evidential ‘gold standard’ for the effectiveness of interventions but are rarely performed in youth care practice due to ethical objections (Veerman & van Yperen, 2007). Ethically, RCTs could not be conducted on interventions that are not yet accepted into practice.

Explanations for positive outcomes, albeit anecdotal, might be attributable to factors other than intergenerational practice. This encompasses generativity needs, the reciprocal needs of young and old, and older adults’ volunteering needs. Firstly, Erikson (1963, p.91) theorised life-cycle development whereby each stage contributes to and influences other stages. Stage-4 (middle childhood: 7~11 years) and Stage-7 (later adulthood: 50 years and over) could be understood as twin-track stages: young and old journey together in shared learning relationships. At Stage-4 (Industry vs. Inferiority), children develop a sense of mastery in success or a sense of inferiority in failure. At Stage-7 (Generativity vs. Stagnation), older people (aged 50 years and above) want to leave a legacy and guide the next generation. Success leads to a sense of accomplishment driven by ‘the need to be needed’ (p.267), whereas failure leads to shallow involvement with the world. Secondly, following Newman and Smith (1997), people possess ‘reciprocal intergenerational needs’ (p.18): children need to be nurtured, taught, want to learn from the past, have a cultural identity, have positive role models, and be connected to preceding generations; older people need to nurture, teach, have a successful life review, share cultural mores, communicate positive values and leave a legacy. It is the ‘unique synergy between the two age groups that enables growth and provides the kind of purposeful existence that is important to human development’ (p.19) which connects them. Lastly, Snyder and Omoto (2009) maintain that people volunteer to effect concern for others and themselves, and to contribute to community. Accordingly,

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volunteering engenders personal growth which enhances well-being. People who experience meaningful belonging are less likely to experience social exclusion and isolation.

Alongside consideration of ‘needs’, Bressler, Henkin and Adler (2005) specify the essential elements of successful intergenerational programmes ‘that are most effective at achieving their goals and most fulfilling to participants’ (in Sánchez *et al.*, 2009, p.9): roles, relationships, reciprocity, recognition, and responsiveness. Essentially, participants in such programmes should be assigned relevant and understandable roles/tasks which develop meaningful interpersonal relationships and where reciprocity, give-and-take, is experienced between people belonging to a different age group. Also, to maintain motivation, participants should be recognised for their contributions, with programmes responding to and satisfying clearly identified community needs. Hanmore-Cawley (2015, p.268) added a sixth ‘R’ *réasúnaíocht* (‘the act of reasoning’ in Gaelic) as the values-based tool of critical thought. Declared values for the study were dialogue, connectedness and practice. Fundamentally, when young and old collaboratively planned, designed, delivered, reflected upon and critically evaluated interventions, they did so through the prism of declared values so as to formulate knowledge claims. Therefore, ‘values of dialogue, connectedness and practice became epistemological standards of judgement for claims to educational knowledge’ (p.272) about how young and old arrived at a common understanding of civic literacy concept.

### *The civic literacy concept*

Civic literacy infers ‘components of personal responsibility, caring for others and for the community, and leadership to take positive actions’ (Chi, Jastrzab & Melchior, 2006, p.6). Insofar as civic literacy informs citizenship, the traditional approaches to citizenship framed as liberalism, civic republicanism, communitarianism or global citizenship, make understandings of citizenship difficult constructions for young children (Millei & Imre,

2009). However, interpretations like citizenship-as-practice (Lawy & Biesta, 2006) or lived citizenship (Lister, 2007), being more developmentally appropriate, better facilitate children to become civically literate as ‘*de facto*, even if not complete *de jure*, citizens’ (p.717).

Given the dearth of literature on developing civic literacy in young children (Hanmore-Cawley, 2015), key discourses on youth participation were consulted to inform the civic literacy concept. Relevant discourses encompassed: positive youth development; social capital; social support and resilience; and social justice youth development.

Positive youth development (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas & Lerner, 2005) builds on five key stages – the ‘5C’s’ of competence, confidence, connection, caring and character. Competence to perform a task is fundamental to acting on identified community needs. Confidence derives from competence, which forges connection through family and school to wider community. Caring, or demonstrating empathetic understanding of another’s perspective, leads to character-building whereby social conscience is displayed. When exercised, these attributes induce contribution to community which builds social capital, namely: ‘people’s sense of community, their sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, caring about the people who live there, and believing that the people who live there care about them’ (Portney & Berry, 2001, p.71). Through community involvement, youth can derive social support and resilience which are strengthened when people discover reciprocally supportive relationships from which they learn to belong to something bigger than themselves because they gain insights into another’s difficulties (Dolan, 2011). Collectively, positive youth development, social capital, and social support and resilience accommodate social justice youth development which encourages youth as ‘active agents of change in their own environment based on understanding of socio-political conditions and injustice’ (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p.86). It follows that youth, as change agents, need real opportunities for youth leadership so as to practice team-collaboration, problem-solving and decision-making – skills which can be taught, equipping

them to express diverse opinions through oral and written competencies (Redmond, Dolan & Brennan, 2013). Elders can provide valuable roles as mentors for youth participation and leadership because, additional to being role models, they can offer social support and resilience-building strategies, while simultaneously, youth can learn to help, support and protect their elders (Dolan, 2011). Viewed this way, intergenerational programmes, where participants have clearly designated roles, can enhance youth participation and leadership thus helping to connect young and old through the civic literacy concept. Dewey (1916) understands connection as ‘participation in a common understanding’ (p.9).

Realistically, young children’s participation is best developed at school through enhancing curricular content because ‘if the living, experiencing being is an intimate participant in the activities of the world to which it belongs, then knowledge is a mode of participation, valuable in the degree in which it is effective’ (Dewey, 1916, p.338). Hence, understanding of the civic literacy concept was mediated through social learning principles pertinent to connecting young and old.

### *Social Learning*

Learning largely depends on learners’ socio-cultural backgrounds and levels of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky theorised that what learners can do with the assistance of more capable others is ‘more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone’ (p.85). Bruner (1983) developed the idea of ‘scaffolding’ the child, then ‘pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it’ (p.60). Lave and Wenger (1991) developed zones of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’: ‘newcomers’ learn a skill from ‘old-timers’; role models (‘old-timers’) represent forms of practice which combine knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of successful performance; learning becomes evident when learners (‘newcomers’) can perform tasks with mastery.

Bronfenbrenner (1978) emphasises the importance of placing the child at the centre of learning relationships: at the *microsystemic* level of family, extending through *mesosystemic* levels of peers, church and school to *exosystemic* levels of extended neighbourhood/community, to fully embrace the wider world at *macrosystemic* levels.

Since social learning requires knowledge of matching teaching styles, differentiated teaching strategies would be mapped onto diverse learning styles as entry points for teaching/learning (Gardner, Kornhaber & Wake, 1996). In terms of intergenerational programming, such strategies might include: narrational (storytelling), aesthetic (arts/crafts), logical-mathematical (problem-solving), experiential (activities-based workshops), and interpersonal or social-cooperative (group collaborations) forms of learning.

Literature on the conceptual framework for this paper informed a potential response to the two-dimensional problem outlined at the beginning of this article. Intergenerational programmes highlighted the value of mutually beneficial learning collaborations; discourses on youth participation informed the civic literacy concept; and social learning theories illuminated how the civic literacy concept might be developed in the young supported by the old.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Following ethical approval by the National University of Ireland Galway, 34 older volunteers, aged 65 years and over, were recruited using snowballing techniques from a community in the western region of Ireland. Children, in third- and fourth-class, aged 9-10 years, were recruited through the participation of five primary schools: a control (n=30 pupils) and an intervention group (n=73). Fieldwork was conducted over an academic year (September-June) at both a boys' and girls' school. Separate pilots were deemed essential

insofar as elders might gain optimum experience. Experimental conditions were established on the basis that third- and fourth-class combined was the unit of analysis, having at least 30 students per unit. To analyse classes separately would violate the normality principle (Agresti & Finlay, 2009).

Embedded mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) suited collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data which, when combined with the intervention, created quasi-experimental conditions to assess whether an intervention has significant impact. Interventions were informed by the living theory approach to action research (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), whereby research-practitioners investigate their own practice to produce their own living theories for what they are doing and why. Epistemological standards of judgement for knowledge claims were examined through declared educational values which were (Hanmore-Cawley, 2015, p. 99): '*practice* of civic literacy-themed intergenerational collaborations; *connectedness* to an inclusional view of humanity existing in a web of relationships (Arendt, 1958); and *dialogue* to enjoy the mutuality of the 'I-Thou' relationship (Buber, 1958)'.

Quantitative tools, to measure the civic literacy concept, were constructed by Chi *et al.* (2006). They included a self-reporting validated student questionnaire, and corresponding checklists of student civic skills and behaviours maintained by class teachers. The civic literacy concept was measured through (pp.11-16):

*Personal Responsibility*: student would accept responsibility for his/her own behaviour and demonstrate responsible work habits like 'staying on task, working independently and showing best effort'.

*Civic Responsibility*: student would demonstrate care for others, for community and environment; value group collaboration; and appreciate diversity.

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*Leadership*: student would ‘take initiative and act as role model to help group, class or school to make a positive difference’ [through] ‘leadership efficacy; critical thinking; and civic participation’.

Questionnaires and checklists were administered at beginning (Time-1) and end (Time-2) of the school year. Measurement tools included: paired-samples t-tests to measure individual and group scores; and independent-samples t-tests to measure mean differences between intervention (i.e., boys and girls combined classes) and control group scores. Tools like multiple baseline design or interrupted time-series design might have created more statistical data but were deemed unnecessary since pre-intervention observations would be required to establish baselines; and post-intervention might, or might not, show statistical deviation from pre-intervention expectations. By comparison, paired-samples and independent t-tests would fulfil similar criteria, and data collection would better suit year-end post-intervention assessment when SPHE courses and interventions were completed. Data were analysed using SPSS (Version 20). To minimise the likelihood of error, statistical significance was reduced from  $p \leq 0.05$  to  $p \leq 0.01$ . Effect size, reflecting the magnitude of difference between intervention and control groups, applied Cohen’s (1988) formula (small=.01; moderate=.06; large=.14).

Reflective cycles of ‘awareness-action-evaluation’ (Foróige, 2010) provided supplementary data to support quantitative functions. ‘Awareness’ evolved when participants identified another’s learning needs and initiated action-oriented learning programmes. ‘Evaluation’, based on critical reflection, incorporated reflections from participants, parents/guardians, class-teachers and the lead-researcher. Oral and written submissions, transcribed verbatim, detailed what went well and how it could be improved. The Hart (1992) model informed participation: ‘child-initiated, shared decisions with adults’ and/or ‘adult-initiated, shared decisions with children’.

Veerman and van Yperen's (2007) four-level model of evidence-based research undertaken in youth-care practice supported claims to knowledge. Level-1 describes core elements of interventions; Level-2 provides a rationale for how such interventions might derive certain outcomes; Level-3 evaluates effectiveness of interventions, showing if desired changes had occurred. An RCT, which produces Level-4 evidence, could not be conducted because the chosen interventions were not yet accepted into Irish primary school. However, repeated single case studies provided evidence 'that is just as convincing as the evidence from RCTs' (p.218) when participants are observed before, during and after interventions.

Winter's (1989, pp.38-66) criteria of rigour informed reflexive and dialectical critique, drawing on multiple data sources, and theory-practice transformations. Habermas (1987) informed validity whereby communicative action must be truthful, understandable, sincere and appropriate. Potential bias was minimised by reflective journaling (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

## **Quantitative Results**

This section addresses the quantitative sub-question, *To what extent can participation in intergenerational learning collaborations develop the civic literacy concept in young children?* Results are presented in Tables 1-2.

### **Table 1: Student self-reported scores of civic literacy:**

[Insert here]

### **Table 2: Teachers' reports by gender for student civic literacy scores:**

[Insert here]

## **Overview**

Civic literacy themes were aggregated to give an overview. Paired-samples t-tests confirm that the Intervention Group (n=73) improved their civic literacy concept from Time-1

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( $m=2.76\pm 0.05$ ) to Time-2 ( $m=3.49\pm 0.02$ ,  $t(72)=-16.43$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) as corroborated by class-teachers from Time-1 ( $m=2.49\pm 0.07$ ) to Time-2 ( $m=3.6\pm 0.06$ ,  $t(72)=-19.87$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). By comparison, the Control Group without an intervention, fell back from Time-1 ( $m=3.3\pm 0.06$ ) to Time-2 ( $m=3.28\pm 0.07$ ,  $t(29)=.23$ ,  $p=.82$ ).

Independent-samples t-tests further confirm significance when comparing the Intervention Group and Control Group for civic literacy scores. Levene's test for equality of variance was assumed ( $F=1.52$ ,  $\text{Sig}=.22$ ) and thence, the mean difference for aggregated themes between Time-1 and Time-2 was greater for the Intervention Group ( $m=0.73\pm 0.04$ ,  $SD=0.38$ ;  $t(101)=9.68$ ,  $p<.01$ ) than for the Control Group ( $m=0.01\pm 0.05$ ,  $SD=0.27$ ). The magnitude of difference in the means (mean diff=.74, 99% *CI*: .54 to .94) contributes to the effect size of .48 which is extremely large according to Cohen's (1988) formula (.14=large). This statistic suggests that the mean difference of the average pupil in the intervention group is approximately .48 standard deviations above the mean difference for the average pupil in the control group. In the absence of other explanations, this variance suggests that the Intervention Group gained significantly from exposure to intergenerational learning compared to a Control Group who did not experience such exposure. Thus, it is evident that pupils who participate in intergenerational learning collaborations score more positively on measures of the civic literacy concept than do pupils who do not participate in such collaborations.

## Qualitative Findings

Quantitative analyses demonstrated that scores for the civic literacy concept improved significantly over time. However, the 'how' needs to be addressed, as per the qualitative sub-

question, *How can participation in intergenerational learning collaborations develop the civic literacy concept in young children?*

The data are analysed in terms of how intergenerational learning contributed to developing personal and civic responsibility, and positive leadership in young children. The ‘Setup-Quote-Comment’ model (Weaver-Hightower, 2014) was applied to data analysis: context was presented which elucidated thesis statements; supporting quotations were derived from field-notes; data were tied back to thesis statements supported by the literature. Workshops to develop the civic literacy concept were curriculum-informed and incorporated: music and dance; arts and crafts; creative writing; European language learning; local history and storytelling; environmental awareness; and information and communications technology.

### **Responsibility**

Evidence for overall responsibility was sought through data which illustrated how pupils took responsibility for their own actions, and showed care for others and community including the environment. Data from elders, youth and teachers were presented here, to illustrate outcomes for the civic literacy concept and for how older people’s contributions might have made a significant difference. Usually, elders worked with groups of four or five but in some workshops pupils received one-to-one attention, for example during arts and crafts activities. As the class-teacher remarked after an entire class succeeded in knitting Trauma Teddies for the ambulance service:

*These kids show huge ability with one-to-one...everyone can knit now. What would take a year took a month...it just wouldn't have happened otherwise!*

An elder explains this phenomenon:

*I held [the pupil's] needles in her hands with her until she made that first stitch. Then she screeched 'Oh! I can knit'. She believed that. She thrived on the help...she finished her teddy. She helped around. Funny! She didn't mind making mistakes with this 'granny', as she called me.*

This entire class lifted onto a new plateau of learning because of the attention given to each individual. The learning echoes Vygotsky (1978), in that what children can do with support from more capable elders might more accurately reflect their mental development than what they might do alone; and Bruner's (1993) 'scaffolding' idea whereby the elders provided support which was gradually withdrawn as pupils gained competence, and Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion that learning processes which connect the production of 'old-timers' to 'newcomers' is what creates communities of practice. This elder support occurred in similar fashion across other workshops such that on achieving mastery in any skill, pupils were thriving during middle childhood, like Lerner *et al.*, (2005) saw youth 'thriving during adolescence'. A child echoed common classroom sentiments afterwards that 'once we can knit, we can always help a child worse off than us', showing that in helping others, pupils learned a core criterion of citizenship (Dolan, 2011).

Through helping others, students learned to take greater personal responsibility. On, for example *LáGaeilge*, Irish day, young taught old how to read modern Irish. Some succeeded through well-prepared homework. However, not all pupils realised why homework and responsibility are interconnected, at least not until after the event, as one boy discovered:

*We were supposed to know our Irish reading. I didn't...so I couldn't help [elder]...I just sat there watching [elder] learning...If I knew it I'd have helped him surely...He thanked the boys at our table...even me. Now I know it from being pure embarrassed.*

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Children who prepared their work reported gaining confidence from the experience, as another boy reports:

*Our table helped [elder]. He's deaf. We had to say it into his ear with [flash]-cards. Then he read a whole page with his finger under it...said 'so now'. We knew he could read then. We clapped...he said we were powerful... 'cos we teached him good. Gaeilge showed me how to care about them.*

The pupils discovered that through homework preparation they developed competence from which they derived confidence to deliver any task. Thus the '5C's' of positive youth development (Lerner *et al.*, 2005) were derived through good preparation and delivery of any task, such that elders and youth could connect through, for example, written words in Irish, sung words in music, spoken words in French, or typed words on computers. Furthermore, through helping another, pupils showed that they could give and receive social support and learn resilience from observing older adults. Consequently, they gained insights into elders' lives and learned, as Dolan (2011) understands it, from how people face adversity: a key function of citizenship and, by extension, civic literacy.

### **Leadership**

Interventions aimed at developing leadership addressed leadership efficacy, critical thinking and civic participation. For example, skills of leadership efficacy were promoted through vocabulary workshops whereby young and old shared reading and extracted vocabulary for discussion. Pupils, with elder support, constructed sentences from their developing vocabulary before making word-presentations to peers, elders and teachers. Each word-presenter took questions from those present, consulted the team, and responded with sentence-examples. One girl described how she learned self-belief from the experience:

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*You picked your word...and [elder] helped you understand it...She wouldn't let you up there until you could make different sentences of it... I could do it again now 'cos once you did it, you could always go first and not be afraid ...we all could... we all did.*

The elder helped this pupil to overcome the challenges of speaking in public by acting as her supporting 'scaffold' (Bruner, 1996).

Critical thinking, another aspect of leadership, was developed when pupils engaged with older volunteers to address the causes of Ireland's 2008/9 banking collapse. For example, when pupils interviewed elders for life histories, mathematics evolved as the learning tool of critical thought through the question, *Why did the banks collapse?* Rather than give them ready answers, pupils had to work out, with elder support, weekly mortgage costs and the consequences of defaulting on payment. One pupil's response illustrates how the class arrived at an understanding of the financial crisis:

*'Cos people lost their jobs...and they could not pay €365 every week [mortgage]...They had to buy food...and when all the money was gone the banks got in trouble; bankers should not have lent money unless people had full jobs.*

Pupils were supported by more capable others to derive mathematical explanations from their own questions (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, they could better identify a problem, construct knowledge around it, and propose possible solutions. Such skills constitute positive leadership criteria (Chi *et al.*, 2006).

Civic participation, another feature of leadership, was addressed through interventions addressing perspective-taking, communication and group membership. For example, hearing evacuation stories from World War Two helped students to gain perspective on another's suffering because they could better empathise with evacuees whose experiences were more easily imagined, then understood, as different from their own. Children developed empathy, through storytelling, which allowed them to imagine their own vulnerability:

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*I felt so sorry for [evacuee] ...my age...or those poor people in air-raids ...so scary...you didn't know whose house was gone when you peeped out...my worries are tiny besides theirs!*

The pupil shows potential for imaginative and emotional receptivity, openness and responsiveness, aligned to Nussbaum's (1997) notion of 'sympathetic imagination' (p.98), a core component of civic literacy.

Another example of developing positive leadership evolved when pupils learned about the eco-system and its workings. An elder gave the presentation. On hearing about destructive practices, perpetrated by local authorities, pupils wrote protest letters to the perpetrators, from which their teacher selected one to be countersigned by the class and posted. The letter outlined the damage that local authorities are doing to the eco-system by prematurely cutting roadside verges. In a parent's words:

*I believe his character grew as a result of his contact with [elder]...he organised himself and his class in being pro-active on an issue that he felt strongly about...Informed by the senior citizen he became an active and informed citizen.*

In a pupil's words:

*I got annoyed with what they [local authorities] do to orchids that take 12 years to bloom. It's good we signed the letter. I'm going to be a botanist when I grow up.*

While a representative letter was chosen, nevertheless each signature identified an active countersigner, corroborating Ginwright and Cammarota's (2002) thesis in the sense that pupils became active agents of change when informed about socio-political conditions and injustices. This action was directly prompted by the elder's presentation and exemplifies how positive leadership activity was developed in the young when supported by their elders.

## Summary

Overall, because learning involved intergenerational collaboration, pupils could practice skills and dispositions of civic literacy with the support and partnership of older people. No single intervention could deliver all components of civic literacy. Yet, pupils learned civic literacy through ‘citizenship-as-practice’ (Lawy & Biesta, 2006) and through ‘lived citizenship’ (Lister, 2007). Essentially, through collaborating with their elders, regardless of activity, children became, in Lister’s words, ‘*de facto* even if not *de jure* citizens’ (p.717). Consequently, pupils were able to show significant improvement over time when: taking responsibility for their actions; helping on projects of mutual benefit; showing empathy and consideration; valuing group work; learning from people with backgrounds and experiences different to theirs; doing their part for the environment; and engaging in positive leadership activities. These are all desired outcomes for the civic literacy concept as defined by Chi *et al.* (2006).

Data emerged, across the study, to illuminate how elder participation was key to how pupils could practice and live their citizenship. Six key factors emerged: active learning partnerships; contribution to community: role-modeling; voice; meaning; and values-driven collaborations.

1. Elders and children formed active learning partnerships, on a needs-resources basis, whereby pupils were at the centre of learning. For example, sessions on modern European languages sought to develop respect for others through basic French, German, Spanish and Italian. Retired language teachers delivered lessons, with participants then role-playing in dialogue following instructions. One pupil encapsulates the class sentiment afterwards: ‘if French people came here, we could speak to them in French...and show respect...and treat them like ourselves...and they might stay longer’. Pupils expressed a value for dialogue akin

to the 'I-Thou' relationship of equals theorised by Buber (1958). An elder, who taught French, recognised that the learning had wider repercussions:

*From one little classroom...the interaction extends...to the home...into the community, and then further into the wider world.*

By placing the child at the centre (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), pupils' internal developmental capacities may have been bi-directionally connected, through elders in active learning partnerships, to their proximal contexts in community.

2. Elders expressed a desire to contribute to community through passing on their skills. One elder reported being better equipped to teach children her skills as a result of learning from them:

*Nobody was any different in there today...It was nice to feel I could do the same thing as the children...I felt I could keep up with them. Then when we taught them something that we knew, that made them and us equal.*

Here is evidence of criteria for 'intergenerational solidarity' (UN, 2002): a relationship between equals based on principles of equity, reciprocity and inclusiveness. A growing sense of community is also evident (Bridger, Brennan & Luloff, 2009) between equals who share mutual interests, thus providing interactional contexts that support individual and social well-being.

3. Elders acted as role models for positive behaviour. They taught pupils how to care for another through better understanding of another's learning needs. A stroke survivor wanted to recover her speech through speaking Irish with the children. A younger elder who minded her and taught the pupils how to help her speak and read in Irish, afterwards reflected on the pupils' changed attitudes:

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*That day they changed because they had to teach [older-elder] how to read her Irish. They were less about showing themselves off...maybe more about showing off what they could do for her. They realised that people need to be helped... We showed them how.*

Such to-and-fro assistance, learned from adult role models present, resonates with Dolan's (2011) notion of social support and building resilience: qualities fundamental to becoming civically literate.

4. Elders and youth, when they could collaboratively plan, act and evaluate interventions, felt that they could 'give voice'. As one man put it:

*They wanted to repay us. We wanted to learn 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. We planned it out, did it and discussed it after. That was good because we all got a say. That's what gave it the purpose.*

Such participation echoes Hart's (1992) participation model: 'child-initiated, shared decisions with adults' and 'adult-initiated, shared decisions with children'. Purpose gave elders meaningful roles in that they could offer their skills during school hours, having free time. As an elder said:

*I'm freer now...I'm retired. You participate if you've something to teach or learn. My thing was gardening and I wanted iPad. My grandchildren are gone but these are all grandchildren to me...they're powerful teachers! And they see me as a granddad!*

Children, in associating elders with their grandparents, bonded with elders from the outset, giving them a sense of belonging. Such close relationships echo Newman and Smith (1997) who see young and old as a unique synergy bridging the generations.

5. Elders and youth derived meaning: they were needed. A school principal submitted that:

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*All age groups, both young and not so young, benefitted from the weekly interactions which help[ed] all progress and develop in different ways...This project has brought much joy to all who invested their time and hard work in giving so much to the pupils.*

An elder corroborated the principal's sentiments:

*Every morning I have two choices: be useless or be useful...and isn't it great to be useful and help a child...and isn't it lovely to be liked and...A little girl said 'You're like my granny and I love her and I love you too'. I felt I belonged that day.*

Pupils likewise reported positive validation:

*[Elder] kept telling us 'Ye're just brilliant'...That was the first time I was ever told I was brilliant...I like myself more now...I like school better too...I'd never miss Tuesdays 'cos I love showing them stuff.*

Unwittingly, the participants are resonating Erikson's (1963) life-stages theory: twin tracks of industry and generativity. Elders want to leave a legacy and children want to gain mastery at selected tasks.

6. Elders and youth collaborated in making the civic literacy concept values-driven, through the idea of *reasúnaíocht*: the act of reasoning (Hanmore-Cawley, 2015, p.272). Through dialogue, pupils became aware of another's learning needs. Appropriate action was taken to respond to those needs. Action was followed by critical reflection and evaluation. Connectedness, the idea of 'participation in a common understanding' (Dewey, 1916), occurred whenever elders and youth shared similar emotional and intellectual dispositions pertinent to the civic literacy concept, i.e., whenever they shared 'aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge' (p.8) of the civic literacy concept. All told, students came to better understand

the civic literacy concept and increasingly assumed ownership of and responsibility for their own learning, as advocated by the SPHE curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999).

## **DISCUSSION**

This study addressed the twin problems of weaknesses in the delivery of citizenship education in Irish primary school and the perceived widening social distance between young and old in Irish society. While the quantitative results cannot be generalised, because of non-probability sampling, the intervention programmes may have universal adaptability.

Primarily, older people became involved in this project because they wanted to teach and learn from children. They could share their knowledge, skills and abilities on a needs-resources basis whilst simultaneously interacting socially with each other and with children. The twin problem was solved through intergenerational learning in the mode of twin-track social grandparenting. Young and old alike enjoyed: loving and being loved; nurturing and being nurtured; teaching and being taught; passing on a socio-cultural identity while becoming better connected to contemporary life by youth. Elders felt valued, appreciated and needed by the children and the school community. Children felt loved, secured and supported by elders and would never miss 'Tuesdays'. Key to imparting the civic literacy concept was that young and old were assigned meaningful tasks reasoned around values of practice, dialogue and connectedness. Intergenerational learning collaborations significantly enhanced children's skills and dispositions of civic literacy and, through this common understanding, young and old became better connected.

This study did not seek to establish whether involvement of any other generation would have achieved equivalent or different outcomes. However, as a next step, longitudinal and/or

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comparative studies might be undertaken to determine if multigenerational groups, or other forms of community initiative, might enhance the civic literacy concept in young children in significantly different ways.

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**Table 1: Student self-reported scores of civic literacy**

Theme 1: Personal Responsibility: self-reported scores					
Group	Time-1 $\pm$ SEM1	Time-2 $\pm$ SEM2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Intervention (n=73)	3.08 $\pm$ .06	3.55 $\pm$ .03	-8.59	72	<i>p</i> <.01
Control (n=30)	3.37 $\pm$ .08	3.26 $\pm$ .09	+1.79	29	<i>p</i> =.084
Theme 2: Civic Responsibility					
Group	Time-1 $\pm$ SEM1	Time-2 $\pm$ SEM2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Intervention (n=73)	2.57 $\pm$ .05	3.61 $\pm$ .03	-22.16	72	<i>p</i> <.01
Control (n=30)	3.26 $\pm$ .07	3.31 $\pm$ .08	-0.39	29	<i>p</i> =.697
Theme 3: Leadership					
Group	Time-1 $\pm$ SEM1	Time-2 $\pm$ SEM2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Intervention (n=73)	2.62 $\pm$ .06	3.32 $\pm$ .03	-11.55	72	<i>p</i> <.01
Control (n=30)	3.24 $\pm$ .07	3.27 $\pm$ .08	-0.64	29	<i>p</i> =.53

Note on Table 1:

1. Time-1: year-beginning; Time-2: year-end
2. Intervention group: Third- and fourth-class boys and girls
3. SEM: standard error of the mean at Time-1/2
4. A Likert scale (from 1 to 4) was used to measure civic literacy

**Table 2: Teachers' reports by gender for student civic literacy scores**

Theme 1: Personal Responsibility: Teachers' checklist scores					
Intervention Group	Time-1 $\pm$ SEM1	Time-2 $\pm$ SEM2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Girls (n=41)	2.89 $\pm$ .09	3.65 $\pm$ .08	-14.31	40	<i>p</i> <.01
Boys (n=32)	2.09 $\pm$ .13	3.6 $\pm$ .13	-13.9	31	<i>p</i> <.01
Theme 2: Civic Responsibility					
Intervention Group	Time-1 $\pm$ SEM1	Time-2 $\pm$ SEM2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Girls (n=41)	2.92 $\pm$ .08	3.74 $\pm$ .07	-14.8	40	<i>p</i> <.01
Boys (n=32)	2.2 $\pm$ .12	3.59 $\pm$ .12	-13.96	31	<i>p</i> <.01
Theme 3: Leadership					
Intervention Group	Time-1 $\pm$ SEM1	Time-2 $\pm$ SEM2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Girls (n=41)	2.54 $\pm$ .07	3.57 $\pm$ .09	-13.42	40	<i>p</i> <.01
Boys (n=32)	3.28 $\pm$ .11	3.44 $\pm$ .11	-15.93	31	<i>p</i> <.01

Note on Table 2:

1. Time-1: year-beginning; Time-2: year-end
2. Intervention group: Third- and fourth-class boys and girls
3. SEM: standard error of the mean at Time-1/2
4. A Likert scale (from 1 to 4) was used to measure civic literacy

<b>Overall scores for civic literacy by group</b>					
Reporting Group	Time-1 $\pm$ SEM1	Time-2 $\pm$ SEM2	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Intervention (n=73)	2.76 $\pm$ .05	3.49 $\pm$ .02	-16.43	72	<i>p</i> <.01
Teachers (n=73)	2.49 $\pm$ .07	3.6 $\pm$ .06	-19.87	72	<i>p</i> <.01
Control (n=30)	3.3 $\pm$ .06	3.28 $\pm$ .07	+0.23	29	<i>p</i> =.82