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Intergenerational learning: An exploratory study of the concept, role and potential of intergenerational learning (IGL) as a pedagogical strategy in Irish early childhood education (ECE) services

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the concept, role and potential of intergenerational learning (IGL) as a pedagogical strategy in Irish early childhood education (ECE) services. It explores the perspectives on IGL of educators (5), children (70) and their parents (43) in five Irish ECE services in city, town and suburban locations. The theoretical and conceptual framework was informed by socio-cultural theories of learning aligned to key principles of IGL. A qualitative methodological approach was adopted to access these perspectives. Specifically, the methods used to gather data were semistructured interviews with educators, draw and talk strategies with children and informal written feedback with parents. Educators played a key role in the study as they gathered data with children over time, enhancing the richness and authenticity of the children's data (Sommer et al., 2013). Key findings demonstrated that children's happiness, socio-emotional competences and executive functions, all key elements of successful learning and living, were strongly supported through IGL, reinforcing its potential as a relational pedagogy (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Additionally, IGL, by drawing on the resources of the community created rich opportunities for children's participation and contribution as citizens in communities, underscoring the potential of IGL as a transformative pedagogy (Sánchez et al., 2018). The contribution of accessing young children's experiences of IGL and the invaluable role which educators can play in facilitating children's participation in research is also foregrounded in the study findings. The study concluded that IGL offers a strong pedagogical strategy for Irish ECE services and, significantly, highlighted the potential of IGL to enrich and expand the principles and aims underpinning Irish ECE policy frameworks (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). While the frameworks provide an enabling context for IGL, the success of IGL depends to a considerable extent on the commitment and expertise of educators. Furthermore, for IGL to become embedded as a pedagogical strategy in Irish ECE services would require that the concept be reflected in ECE policy and specifically aligned with principles, aims and goals of the curricular and quality frameworks.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Intergenerational learning (IGL) as a concept is as old as humankind and predates any type of formal education. It typically involved the informal transmission of knowledge, skills and values in multigenerational families as part of daily living (Hoff, 2007; Jessel, 2009; Watts, 2017). This traditional form of IGL began to decline with the introduction of formal schooling and the separation of family life and work life. Over time, ideas about learning and education adapted to these changes until learning, at least in the public arena, began to be associated with formal educational institutions and only for children and young people (Hager & Halliday, 2007). It was not until the late 20th century that interest in planned, extra-familial intergenerational practice emerged, broadly understood as "the way people of all ages can learn together and from each other" (ENIL, 2012, p. 4).

However, the diversity of aims and activities associated with intergenerational practice, as IGL was more commonly known, has drawn on differing definitions and understandings since its inception as a policy and practice concept in the late 20th century. The focus has ranged from individuals of one age group helping individuals of a different age group to viewing intergenerational practice as a policy response to a range of societal concerns (Kaplan et al., 2020; Kuehne & Melville, 2014). A strong focus of intergenerational practice until the early 21st century was as a multi-sectoral response to demographic, social and economic challenges, including ageing populations, the growing segregation of generations due to urbanisation, migration and family breakdown and the growing pressure on human services (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016; Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Radford et al., 2016). Through building relationships between generations and facilitating the exchange of resources, intergenerational practice was perceived to benefit individuals and society through breaking down stereotypes,

enhancing social cohesion, creating opportunities for older adults to feel valued and promoting lifelong learning (Generations Working Together, 2019; Kaplan et al., 2017; Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020). Significantly, this may have contributed to intergenerational practice being framed primarily as a social asset and less as a learning and teaching resource (Pinto, 2011). Additionally, much of the research and commentary reflecting the wide-ranging promises of intergenerational practice across diverse fields, described the practices and named the varied outcomes without identifying what was distinctive about intergenerational learning (Epstein & Boisvert, 2006; Kuehne & Melville, 2014; Mannion, 2016). Nonetheless, an increased emphasis on the learning dimension of intergenerational practice has been evident in literature and policy since the early 21st century, reflected in an increased use of the term intergenerational learning, acknowledging that learning could play a greater role in the way that intergenerational practices were structured (Bottery, 2016; Mannion, 2016). Aligned with this development, the potential of IGL in formal educational contexts is reflected in a growth in learning-focused definitions and studies and an interest in promoting IGL in education policy and practice (Campillo et al., 2020; Cartmel et al., 2018; Sánchez et al, 2018). However, despite the development of interest in IGL in educational settings, IGL does not yet have a clearly defined place in educational discourse, and there remains a critical lack of empirical research on IGL programmes and practices (Jarrott et al., 2019; Kuehne & Melville, 2014). Additionally, theoretical models underpinning IGL are at an early stage of development (VanderVen, 2011), resulting in limited understanding of the processes of IGL (Pinto, 2011; Withnall, 2017). However, there is some agreement in the literature that IGL as a learning approach includes the following key ideas: it promotes positive views of the strong capacity of people of all ages to participate in their own learning; it facilitates socially-constructed learning through collaborative relationships in authentic cultural contexts; it operationalises principles of lifelong and lifewide learning and it mobilises the resources of the community to enrich the

learning of young and old (Hatton-Yeo, 2015; Jarrott & Smith, 2011; Kaplan & Sánchez, 2014; Kuehne & Melville, 2014; Kump & Krašovec, 2014; Sánchez et al., 2007; VanderVen, 2011). Crucially, in this study which focuses specifically on IGL between young children and older adults, IGL draws together commonalities in learning for young children and older adults in bringing to life key concepts of contemporary thinking on young children's learning and development. These concepts are encapsulated in Bruner's (1996, p. 84) broad definition of human learning as "participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them". However, IGL as an explicit pedagogical strategy is neither reflected in well-regarded ECE curricula in the Western world, nor in Irish curricular and quality frameworks (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009), despite the aims and principles of IGL reflecting European Commission (2014) recommendations on key principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care. While emphasising the broad range of benefits for individuals and society, the European Council (European Union, 2019) in its recommendations highlight the essential role of ECE services in supporting individuals to be empathetic, respectful and tolerant and to learn to live together in heterogeneous societies reflecting common aspirations of IGL and ECE. This raises the question of if, and how, IGL, in recognising non-traditional learning possibilities, could extend and enrich learning opportunities and add value to the traditional learning strategies offered to children in ECE services (Cartmel et al., 2018; McAlister et al., 2019). Importantly, IGL offers the possibility of developing educational spaces that are broader and more complete than at present, capitalising on the life experiences and richness of mixed age groups and thereby reframing IGL as a potential new model in education (Cabanillas, 2011).

1.2 Rationale for the study

Research focusing on IGL and young children, and IGL as a potential pedagogical strategy in the field of ECE is largely absent from the academic literature (Heydon, 2013; McAlister et al., 2019). Pedagogy refers to the strategies that allow learning and development to take place and includes the interactions between learner and teacher, the learning environment, the actions of the family and community and the cultural, social and political values held for children (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Despite the dearth of academic literature on IGL in the field of ECE, there is evidence in the international grey literature, which suggests that IGL has a wideranging and positive impact on young children (TOY, 2013). Building and sustaining relationships, enhancing social cohesion, facilitating older people as guardians of knowledge, recognising the role of grandparents in children's lives and enriching the learning processes of young children and adults were identified as key goals of IGL with young children (TOY, 2013). However, the ad-hoc nature of many IGL programmes, the anecdotal nature of much of this evidence and the focus on IGL primarily as a means to attain goals, rather than as a process itself, has limited the development of a strong theoretical base for IGL practice. Specifically, there is limited understanding of the key principles and processes that are central to understanding if, what, and how positive outcomes are achieved for children through IGL (Pinto, 2011; Withnall, 2017).

Central to understanding IGL as a pedagogical strategy are fundamental questions about young children and learning, including how childhood is understood, how children are positioned in society and how and where children learn. This study contributes to developing this knowledge by exploring these questions, critical to the development of IGL, among educators who are implementing IGL by focusing on how IGL aligns with their views of children and learning. Understanding educators' perspectives on these issues will elucidate the values and attitudes of educators, in this small sample, that have served to create a supportive context in which to

implement IGL. Focusing on educators' values and attitudes about children and learning, increasingly perceived as important in impacting on children's experiences in ECE services (Campbell-Barr, 2014; Powell, 2010), will contribute to this, as yet unexplored area in Irish ECE policy and practice (Finn & Scharf, 2012). As a planned intervention across all age groups, IGL is a relatively new area of practice in Ireland and an Irish study revealed that, while there was widespread interest in IGL in education (senior primary and secondary level students) and the arts and community development, none of the work focused specifically on young children and no published studies of IGL in ECE within the Irish context were found (Finn & Scharf, 2012). Importantly, however, there is some evidence to suggest that planned IGL is an area of growing interest in Irish ECE services, based primarily on anecdotal evidence in the Irish ECE community. Specifically, the enrolment profile of learners on six iterations of the Together Old and Young online IGL course (2018 - 2020) shows that a large number of the learners are based in Ireland and outnumbered learners from all other countries (M. Kernan, personal communication, 20 November 2020). The empirical evidence derived from this study, while addressing a gap in the international knowledge base on IGL and ECE, is particularly useful in the Irish context, reflecting the perspectives of educators who are working within the Irish ECE policy and cultural context. Importantly, the perspectives of educators of their IGL experiences and their views of IGL as a pedagogical strategy, which are a key focus of this study and are centrally relevant to the implementation of IGL, is an under-researched area in the IGL literature (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017).

The research also explores perceived barriers in implementing IGL in ECE services – a lack of policy and practice guidelines, as well as a lack of IGL training (Jarrott et al., 2019; McAlister et al., 2019; TOY, 2013). An important reason for undertaking the study is to explore the knowledge and skills of educators currently undertaking IGL practice, as well as enablers and

barriers they encounter, evidence which has the potential to inform future development of IGL policy and practice guidelines, particularly for Irish ECE services.

Significantly, while the perceived benefits of IGL to all participants is considered to be positive and wide-ranging, evidence of young children's IGL experiences and what they themselves found to be meaningful are notably absent from the literature (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020), providing an important impetus for the study and reflecting a key research question. Gathering empirical evidence of children's unique perspectives on their IGL experiences, through engaging with them as full research subjects, is a key objective of this study and will contribute a crucial and, as yet, unheard perspective in the IGL research literature. The study will contribute to the development of the literature in relation to child perspective methodologies, which are increasingly important in undertaking research about children's lives (Fleer & Li, 2016). Importantly, educators are identified in this study as valuable researchers in accessing children's meanings (Carr & Lee, 2012), based on a key aspect of their current role, documenting children's lives and learning (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Involving educators in working as partners with children to co-construct meaning offers richness and authenticity to child perspective methodologies. Parents' perspectives of their children's IGL experiences, which are also explored in the study, add another layer of meaning and enriches understandings (Clark, 2017) of IGL from children's perspectives.

A starting point of the study was the view that IGL as a pedagogical strategy is well aligned with key principles underpinning pedagogical and policy documents central to Irish ECE practice. Seeking educators' perspectives on this view was an important aim of the study as consideration of how IGL aligned with the requirements of Irish regulatory frameworks, including Aistear and Síolta, was centrally relevant to consideration of the usefulness of IGL as a pedagogical strategy (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009).

It is worth noting that, as IGL is a community-focused pedagogical strategy, the study makes a particular contribution to the importance of the community in children's learning, a key element of ECE discourse (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 2003) and one which is foregrounded in Irish ECE policy documents (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Despite its stated importance in child development literature, there is a lack of research evidence on how this is translated into practice (Bessell, 2017).

Finally, this study was considered to be timely, not only because of the current interest in IGL in Irish ECE services and internationally. As increasing numbers of children are spending more time in ECE services (Pobal, 2019)¹ and a growing older population is living longer and increasingly accessing services (TILDA, 2020), an opportunity presents itself to consider IGL as a pedagogical strategy that could benefit both children and older adults.

1.3 Background to the study

This study grew out of the researcher's participation in a European study of IGL as part of the Together Old and Young (TOY) project (2012-14 and 2016-18). The TOY project consortium comprised members from seven EU countries, who worked in partnership to undertake research on IGL between young children and older adults and promote IGL in ECE practice. The consortium also developed a short online training course in IGL, with which the researcher was involved at the pilot stage. Building on this work, the researcher identified a clear gap in relation to primary research on IGL as a pedagogical strategy with young children, which provided the impetus for this study.

¹ Nine out of 10 children in Ireland participate in a nationally funded ECE scheme between the ages of two years and eight months and when they transfer to primary school, usually by age 5 years (Pobal, 2019).

1.4 Research aims

The aims of the study are to explore the concept, role and potential of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in Irish ECE services from the perspective of educators, children and their parents.

The key research questions and sub-questions are:

- 1. What are the views of childhood and learning among a sample of educators undertaking IGL in Irish ECE services?
 - Views of childhood
 - Ideas about learning in early childhood
 - Views of agency and participation
 - Views of the roles and functions of the ECE service.
- 2. What are the educators' experiences and views of IGL undertaken in their ECE services?
 - Types of IGL experiences facilitated
 - Role of educators in facilitating IGL experiences
 - Views of IGL as a pedagogical strategy
 - Challenges of IGL as a pedagogical strategy.
- 3. What are the perspectives of young children and their parents on their IGL experiences?
 - Children's interest in and experiences of IGL activities
 - Parents' views of the meaning of IGL experiences for their children.

While acknowledging the central importance of understanding the IGL experiences from the perspectives of the older adults with whom children interacted in the course of the study and the staff working in the older adults' services, this aspect was beyond the scope of this study, which explored, for the first time, educators' and children's views of IGL in an Irish context.

1.5 Outline of report

A brief overview of Irish ECE policy is outlined in Chapter 2, which sets the context for the study. A review of relevant literature and previous research studies relevant to understanding IGL in the context of ECE is presented in Chapter 3. The methodological approach and associated issues are discussed in Chapter 4, which is followed by three chapters reporting the findings of the study. Educators' views of childhood, learning and the role of ECE services are presented in Chapter 5 and educators' perspectives on IGL are presented in Chapter 6. Children's perspectives of their IGL experiences are the focus of Chapter 7. The study findings will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework, relevant literature and Irish ECE policy context in Chapter 8 and conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 9.

CHAPTER 2 THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE) CONTEXT IN IRELAND

The key levers influencing ECE practice at national and international level are the underpinning legal, policy and practice frameworks, which create a system of education that reflect a society's beliefs and values about early childhood, as well as how, what and where children should learn (OECD, 2015).

Irish ECE policy and practice is primarily governed and guided by three key documents: The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations (DCYA, 2016a), hereafter referred to as the Regulations; Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009); and Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006). While Síolta and Aistear are not statutory requirements, they are widely implemented in Irish ECE services. Implementation of the frameworks are essential requirements for national funding (Pobal, 2019) and provide the basis for the early years education inspection of ECE services (DES, 2018). Importantly, these policies are informed by a number of high level strategies and policies which represent the values, aims and goals for children at national level and include the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989); Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020 (DCYA, 2014); the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA, 2016b); and First Five, the first National Early Years Strategy for Babies and Young Children, 2019-2028 (Government of Ireland, 2018).

The UNCRC serves as an overarching framework for the development of contemporary Irish ECE policy, informed by UNCRC principles of viewing children as citizens and children's right to participation and to have their voices heard. The UNCRC also states that all children have a right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives, maximises their ability, and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages (UN, 1989).

The national policy framework for children and young people, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (DCYA, 2014), aligns government commitments to children against five national outcomes which state that children should: be psychologically and physical healthy; achieve their full potential; be safe and protected from harm; have economic security and opportunity and be connected, respected and contribute to their world.

A focus on the development of positive identities, the celebration of diversity and the provision of an inclusive, participative culture and environment underpins the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA, 2016b). The first national strategy for children under five, First Five (Government of Ireland, 2018), includes in its vision for children that children's early years will be valued as critical, families will be assisted to nurture their development and services will be equipped to contribute to children's development. Furthermore, community contexts will help children to make the most of their early years and fulfil their potential. Central in the strategy are children's relationships and interactions with significant others and the importance of families being supported in their parenting role (Government of Ireland, 2018). While these strategies represent the high-level values and aims underpinning ECE policy and inform the culture in which ECE practice operates, the day-to-day practice is guided by the Regulations, Aistear and Síolta, which will now be discussed.

The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations (DCYA, 2016a) outline the statutory requirements for Irish ECE services in relation to governance, health, welfare and development of children, as well as children's safety in services. Regulation 19, the regulation centrally relevant to children's learning and development, refers to the health, welfare and development of children and requires that relationships and interactions around children are supported; that the service supports inclusion and diversity, that children's positive behaviour is supported and that environments support the learning, development and wellbeing of each

child (DCYA, 2016a). Four elements of Regulation 19 have particular relevance to this study: relationships; social and emotional wellbeing, positive behaviour and environments.

Relationships are emphasised for their role in supporting a sense of belonging, connectedness and wellbeing among children, with three types of relationships specifically mentioned: relationships between adults and children within the ECE service, relationships with families and relationships with the local, regional and national community. Guidance for relationships and integration at local, regional and national level requires that the ECE service establish networks with the wider community, such as visits from the library service, national organisations, sports clubs, community representatives (e.g., scout leader, football coach, postman, farmer) so that community involvement helps to inform, build on and enhance the quality of the programme (DCYA, 2016a).

The requirements of Regulation 19 in relation to fostering the *social and emotional wellbeing* of children include supporting children to develop emotional awareness, self-confidence, self-regulation and pro-social behaviour. Fostering children's social and emotional competences centres on relationships and interactions between children and adults and among children within the ECE service. In highlighting the importance of supporting children's *positive behaviour*, emphasis is placed on self-regulation and pro-social behaviour.

Regulation 19 also focuses on the role of the *environment* in supporting each child's learning, development and wellbeing, outlining that the indoor and outdoor environment of the ECE service should be comfortable, challenging and safe.

While Aistear and Síolta have different primary purposes - Aistear focuses on learning experiences while Síolta focuses on the overall quality within ECE services – they have a common purpose, to provide high-quality learning experiences for children (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009).

Aistear (meaning a journey) is the early childhood curriculum framework and describes the types of learning, values, attitudes, skills and knowledge that young children need to grow as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others (NCCA, 2009). Síolta (meaning seeds) offers a framework for ECE services to define, assess and implement quality practice (CECDE, 2006). The twelve key principles that underpin each framework have much in common and the three categories of principles identified in Aistear offer a useful structure for considering the principles of both frameworks (Hayes, 2013). These three categories consist of children and their lives in early childhood, children's connections with others and how children learn and develop (NCCA, 2009), each of which draws attention to the value of considering the potential of IGL as an approach to operationalise these principles. Children and their lives in early childhood highlights the concept of children as citizens with rights and responsibilities, rights that entitle them to be involved in making decisions and to experience democracy (French, 2007; UN, 1989). Children's individual needs, views, cultures and beliefs need to be treated with respect and represented in ECE services. Additionally, respect for individual children's families and communities with particular traditions and ways of life is foregrounded in the principles. The importance of nurturing equality and diversity to create a fairer society in which everyone can participate equally is identified. Welcoming and valuing individual and group differences, understanding and celebrating difference as part of life, is also identified as a principle in this category (Murray & O'Doherty, 2001; O'Dwyer, 2006). Explicit in this set of principles is the belief that, from this experience of citizenship, children learn that, as well as having rights, they also have responsibilities to respect and help others, and to care for their environment.

Principles identified in the category of *children's connections with others* emphasise the critical importance of relationships recognising that children have a fundamental need to be with other people (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993; Trevarthen, 2004). The principles recognise that it is

through loving and nurturing relationships with adults and other children that children learn and develop (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Acknowledging the importance of the parents and family in caring for the child in the early months and years, the principles also refer to the important roles that extended family and community play as children get older (Pence & Ball, 2000). The pivotal role of the adult in supporting children's connections with others is outlined in this category of principles, including the importance of reciprocal relationships where adults and children take the lead at different times. The role of the adult in scaffolding children's learning as children grow in confidence and competence is also noted (Sylva et al., 2010). The final category of principles refers to how children learn and develop and is based on a key principle of both frameworks, which contends that children learn holistically, learning many different things at the same time and what they learn is connected to where, how and with whom they learn (French, 2007). The importance of active learning, exploring their material and social worlds which helps children develop their cognitive and social skills and develop as confident and competent learners, is foregrounded (Kernan, 2007). Supporting the development of a wide range of communication skills is valued to help children make sense of their world and is dependent not only on children's own abilities but also on the environments they experience. Relevant and meaningful experiences make learning more enjoyable and positive for children and, through assessing how children respond to these experiences, educators can plan appropriately for their future learning and development (Hayes, 2007). A rich and varied learning environment, both inside and outside, influencing what and how children learn is a key principle of both frameworks, which emphasise the importance of fun, choice, freedom, adventure, and challenge (NCCA, 2009).

Building on the principles outlined above, Aistear is informed by four interconnected themes: well-being; identity and belonging; communicating; and exploring and thinking.

Key elements of the *wellbeing* theme are that children would be strong psychologically and socially, be creative and spiritual and have positive outlooks on learning and on life (NCCA, 2009). Elements identified under the *identity and belonging* theme include that children will have strong self and group identities, will express their rights and have regard for the rights of others and will see themselves as capable learners. The importance of a wide range of verbal and non-verbal *communication* skills that broadens children's understandings and social skills is emphasised in the theme of communicating. Aistear's aims for *exploring and thinking* stress the importance of creating opportunities for children to make sense of the world around them, see themselves as problem solvers and develop learning dispositions, including curiosity, perseverance, playfulness, resourcefulness and risk-taking (NCCA, 2009).

Similarly, most of the sixteen quality standards prescribed in Síolta are relevant in broad terms to the study, e.g., the rights of the child; environments, curriculum, and some standards are specifically relevant, e.g., interactions, identity and belonging and, crucially, community involvement. The community involvement standard signposts the importance of the ECE service extending and developing its involvement in the wider community. Moreover, Síolta foregrounds the notion that the ECE service should actively promote children's citizenship in their local, regional and national community (CECDE, 2006).

Finally, looking to the European context, key principles of a quality framework proposed for the development of ECE services in the EU (European Commission, 2014) also reflect principles relevant to the present study. The framework foregrounds the idea of the child as a co-creator of knowledge, who needs and wants interaction with other children and adults. The ECE service is envisioned as a nurturing environment providing a social, cultural and physical space in preparing children for life and citizenship in their society. The framework acknowledges that children's learning can best be sustained by nurturing their sense of identity and belonging, as well as by empowering them to develop an understanding of their

surrounding world. Furthermore, children's self-confidence improves, and their feelings of belonging grow, when their contributions are valued and their views have an impact on their everyday lives (European Commission, 2014). Importantly, the European Union Council Recommendations on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems highlighted the essential role that ECE services play in supporting individuals to learn to live together in heterogeneous societies (European Council, 2019). Moreover, the Recommendations foreground the importance of socio-emotional learning, emphasising that children should be supported to be empathetic, respectful and tolerant.

It is against this background of law and policy, which frames the day-to-day practice of Irish ECE services, that the concept and potential of IGL as a pedagogical strategy will be explored.

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

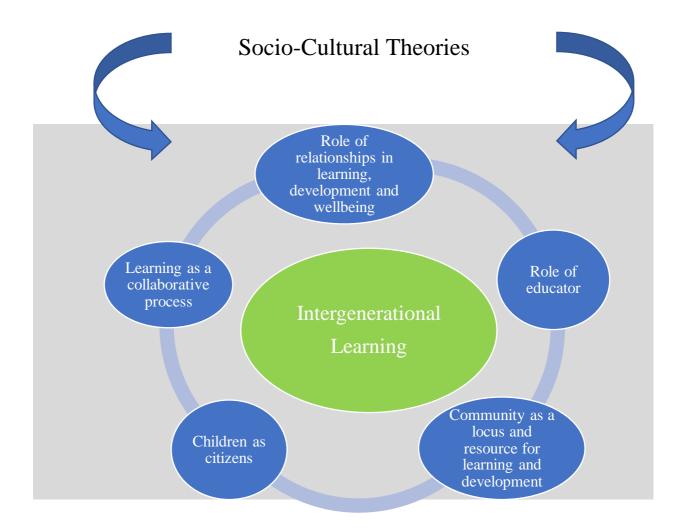
3.1 Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to present a synthesis of the literature and research on key elements of young children's learning, development and wellbeing that inform contemporary thinking in ECE theory and practice in the Irish context and to review the research underpinning IGL in relation to its potential as a pedagogical strategy in ECE. It is important to note that IGL is much broader than learning between children and older adults (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017). Reflected in the expanding literature on IGL is the impact of IGL programmes on participants of all ages, including on their knowledge, skills, wellbeing, social relationships, level of civic involvement, health, recreational activities and sense of identity and cultural pride (Kaplan et al., 2020). However, the focus in this study and literature review is on IGL as a pedagogical strategy between young children and older adults in the context of Irish ECE services.

In relation to understandings of young children's learning and development, the influence of socio-cultural perspectives on ECE policy in the late 20th century marked a watershed in creating new discourses in the field of ECE (Anning et al., 2004; Nolan & Raban, 2015). Extensive evidence now exists on the central role that competent children, relationships, contexts and culture, all key ideas of socio-cultural theories, play in young children's learning and development (Bruner, 1996; Hayes et al., 2017; Rogoff, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Importantly, socio-cultural theories of learning and development dominate contemporary theoretical, research, policy and practice frameworks underpinning ECE in Ireland (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009; Ring et al., 2018). While socio-cultural theories have impacted ECE policy internationally, it has been argued that the discourse at practice level is less well developed (Edwards, 2006; Moyles et al., 2002). This study offers one response to this argument: could IGL be considered a potential pedagogical strategy that aligns with socio-cultural theories of

learning and, as such, could it enhance the learning and development opportunities of children in Irish ECE services? In addressing this question, it becomes clear that, notwithstanding a growing body of research on IGL as an area of professional interest across a wide range of disciplines, little research has focused on analysing if, and how, children and non-related older adults contribute to each other's learning and development or how IGL could be integrated into education systems (Cartmel et al., 2018; Sánchez et al., 2018). This may be due to the complexity of the concepts being measured, such as learning, relationships and outcomes (Heydon, 2013; McAlister et al., 2019). Importantly, however, studies of familial IGL have found a socio-cultural framework to be useful in considering young children's learning (Gregory, 2001; Kenner et al., 2007). Socio-cultural theories of learning were adopted as a framework in which to position the study, grounded on the strong evidence of the key role of socio-cultural theories in young children's learning, principles underpinning IGL, as well as evidence from familial IGL studies. Key themes from socio-cultural theories of young children's learning and development, strongly reflected in contemporary ECE pedagogy (Hayes et al., 2017), include children as citizens; the role of relationships in learning, development and wellbeing; learning as a collaborative process; the role of the educator and the community as a locus and resource for children's learning and development (NCCA, 2009). These themes, represented in Figure 1 below, resonate powerfully with key characteristics of IGL (Cartmel et al., 2018; Sánchez et al., 2018). Each of the themes presented in Figure 1 will be addressed and reviewed in the context of IGL in this chapter, following a brief overview of key characteristics of IGL as a pedagogical strategy.

Figure 3.1 Concepts underpinning IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECE services



3.2 Key characteristics of IGL as a pedagogical strategy

The European Network of Intergenerational Learning (ENIL) defined IGL as a learning partnership based on reciprocity and mutuality that involves different age groups working together to develop knowledge, skills and values. Additionally, the Network stated that IGL must include more than one generation, must include planned, purposeful and progressive learning and lead to mutually beneficial learning outcomes (ENIL, 2012). While there is an emphasis on the importance of identifying learning outcomes, these outcomes may or may not be the primary focus of the IGL activity (Thomas, 2009). Planned, extra-familial IGL builds on key elements of traditional forms of IGL, particularly the importance of relationships and

informal contexts for learning, and facilitates the contributions of wide-ranging social groups outside the family to the learning and development of children and adults (Kaplan, 2002; Sánchez et al., 2018). The main agents of planned IGL are people who are not trained, paid or acknowledged as teachers (Boström, 2003) and the learning space is the place where those people interact, typically through informal encounters in local communities (ENIL, 2012). Planned IGL, therefore, draws on the learning resources that are available in everyday life, facilitates educational exchange between generations, a sharing of resources and, in the process, creates possibilities for increased cooperation between generations, mutual enrichment and benefits to individuals and communities (Cabanillas, 2011; Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008; UNESCO, 2000). Interestingly, the opportunity created by IGL for children and older adults to experience the pleasure and excitement that occurs through the transmission of knowledge and skills from one generation to another has also been identified (Cartmel et al., 2018).

Foregrounded across all definitions of IGL is the central role of interactions between individuals at different stages of development, with the expectation that a relationship will be a defining feature of the IGL experience (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017; Mannion, 2016; VanderVen, 2011). Important aims of the relationships experienced through IGL include positive social and emotional wellbeing, greater understanding and respect between generations, reciprocity and new learning (Cartmel et al., 2018; Heyman et al., 2011). Notwithstanding the importance attributed to the role of relationships in young children's learning and development, IGL is more than a facet of relationships, and experiences can only be considered intergenerational if relationships between young and old become a key component of the IGL experiences (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017; Sánchez et al, 2018). Moreover, IGL is not about a programme of activities but, rather, is a series of collaborative processes involving partners mutually influencing each other in the expectation of

enhancement in the quality of life of both, through being together, resonating with a fundamental concept of education (Mannion, 2016; Sánchez et al., 2018). Learning with and from each other in active collaboration in a range of spaces and places are concepts underpinning the reciprocity and mutualist characteristics of IGL and align strongly with a socio-cultural understanding of young children's learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003). Moreover, learning with and from each other is increasingly valued in educational discourse, reflecting a growing emphasis on the benefits of combining formal, non-formal and informal learning (Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010). Importantly, valuing the potential of IGL for drawing together formal, non-formal and informal learning, foregrounds another characteristic of IGL: the role of older adults as teachers as well as learners. Additionally, IGL creates opportunities for informal spaces in the real world of the community to serve as rich learning environments (Kaplan et al., 2020; Mannion, 2016). While the more recent emphasis on the learning processes and outcomes of IGL has broadened its definition, Mannion (2016) argues that these definitions may still not capture the potential impact of IGL. For example, while the intended learning goals of an IGL experience may be specified, children may experience different and/or additional learning outcomes, as has been identified in other planned experiences for children (Miles, 2018). Moreover, the goals of planned IGL experiences are informed by the perspectives of the organising educators' views of the child, learning and the roles and functions of ECE services (Kaplan, 2002) giving rise to diverse experiences for children. It is clear from the above discussion that IGL is a multidisciplinary and a multisectoral activity, occurring in a wide range of contexts that has made it difficult to build a strong theoretical knowledge base, reflecting VanderVen's (2011, p. 22) claim that "the road to intergenerational theory is under construction".

Key elements of contemporary ECE pedagogy, which draw largely on socio-cultural theories of learning (as outlined in Figure 1 above), will now be examined in the context of current understandings, theory and practices underpinning IGL.

3.3 Children as citizens

Importantly, perceptions of children and childhood (Alanen, 2014), as well as perceptions of how childhood relates to other life stages, illuminate how IGL may be understood in the context of children's lives and learning in ECE services. In this section, two key elements of contemporary thinking on childhood that are particularly relevant in considering IGL as a pedagogical strategy, are addressed: the idea of children as beings and becomings and ideas about children and participation.

3.3.1 Children as beings and becomings

The debate about children as beings or becomings is fundamental to understandings of childhood and citizenship and has implications for all aspects of children's lives (Uprichard, 2008), including IGL. The being and becoming debate has traditionally assumed an adult-child binary (Baker, 2001), with the becoming child perceived as incomplete and on the way to adulthood (James & Prout, 1997; Rodriguez, 2017), while the being child is understood to have social, moral, and political competence now and is an active contributor to society (Corsaro, 2018; Kingdon, 2018). Significantly, this debate draws attention to children's symbolic place in society, with the deficit view attached to the becoming child resulting in children being assigned a lower status in society (Rodriguez, 2017) and the child as a fully-fledged being and a holder of rights resulting in higher status (King, 2007). A brief review of changing views of childhood is useful in illuminating contemporary debates about children as beings or becomings. Views of children as incomplete beings lacking skills, competence, agency and maturity, reflected in the disciplines of psychology and sociology, were being challenged by

the late 20th century (Prout, 2005). Developmental psychologists, drawing primarily on the work of socio-cultural theorists, highlighted the competences of children (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978) and sociologists emphasised the role of children as social actors in society (Corsaro, 2018). Nonetheless, the shared view of both disciplines remained that of children as incomplete beings, with the focus on the future (Hammersley, 2017).

The emergence of the sociology of childhood as a discipline in the late 20th century played a key role in creating a radically different paradigm of childhood. Acknowledging the immaturity of children as a biological fact, it was argued that culture mediated the ways in which that immaturity is understood. Central tenets of the new paradigm suggested that childhood was constructed and reconstructed both for and by children (James & Prout, 1997). Children were viewed as socially active, competent agents with an ability and a desire to engage with other human beings from birth in the construction of their own lives and those around them (Alanen, 2014; James & Prout, 1997). Additionally, it was argued that perceptions of the child and childhood could only be understood within a particular social, political, historical and moral context (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014), emphasising the view that childhood does not exist but is created by society (Rinaldi, 2012). The positive reconceptualisation of the child and childhood opened up new possibilities across many aspects of children's lives (Corsaro, 2018). Corsaro (2018) argued that, from the moment they enter the world, children act on it, and their actions affect both children's and adults' everyday world, reflecting children as rich in potential, powerful, competent and - most importantly - connected to adults, and other children as exemplified in the Reggio Emilia approach² to ECE (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993). Focusing on children's assets and particular expertise, rather than on what they are perceived to lack,

² The Reggio Emilia approach is an educational philosophy for the early years based on the image of a child having strong potentialities, a hundred languages, and is a subject with rights, growing in relation to others (Malaguzzi, 1998). Originating in Italy after World War 2, it is now a widely regarded ECE philosophy internationally including in Ireland.

allows children to be viewed as protagonists, playing meaningful social roles across a range of contexts in civic society (Clark, 2017; Prout, 2011). Importantly, viewing the child as the rich child (Malaguzzi, 1998), challenged traditional views of education and created a climate in which alternative pedagogical strategies might be considered.

However, a more nuanced debate about the complementarity of the concepts of being and becoming has emerged more recently (Uprichard, 2008; Kingdon, 2018). In critiquing notions of being and becoming as divergent discourses, Prout (2011) and others (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Lee, 2002), posited that both children and adults should be seen as becomings, arguing that both are incomplete and dependent. Rejecting the dualism of the concepts of being and becoming as overstated in the sociology of childhood, Prout (2011) argued in favour of softening the boundaries between these concepts, suggesting that both views were useful. The argument was not new as Prigogine, writing in 1980 about being and becoming, suggested that these alternative concepts of time interact and complement one another and reflect the reality of the everyday life of the child, which involves the interaction of present and future (Prigogine, 1980, as cited in Uprichard, 2008). In the same way, adults are always in a state of being and becoming, so that Uprichard (2008) argued that Prigogine's work provided a language to describe how all humans are ageing from birth to death. Interestingly, the idea of being and becoming is also evident in the work of Dewey (1966), who argued that growth, while undeniable in the life of a child, is just as important in the life of the adult, with change being the constant in childhood and adulthood (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014). Concurring with this view, Lee (2002) refers to the interdependence of all human beings, and their relative competence at doing certain things throughout their lives. Building on this view, Uprichard (2008) argued that it is possible to ensure the personhood of every human being, adult and child, through finding a working balance between being and becoming, moving between the present and the future and sometimes considering both timescapes together. Understanding being and becoming as a process of the personhood of every human draws attention to the potential of IGL as a pedagogical strategy for individuals of all ages and highlights the argument that, in the Western world, children's lives are generationed (Alanen, 2009). As a result, children have fewer opportunities for cross-generational interactions (Geraghty et al., 2015) and to be acknowledged for the meaningful social roles they can play. Heydon (2019), in critiquing how spaces and experiences in the Western world are increasingly divided by age group, argues that this has resulted in the possibilities of living well together being squandered. Significantly, she asserts that IGL has the power to create an ageless curriculum for an ageless subject who is "always in process and emerges relationally through intra-action rather than by chronological age" (Heydon, 2019, p. 68). Thus, the being and becoming debate foregrounds children as strong and connected citizens and points to their capacity to be both contributors and beneficiaries in the IGL processes (Heyman et al., 2011; Uprichard, 2008).

Critically, identifying being and becoming as a process of the personhood of every human being, rather than as a process intrinsic to childhood, raises the most fundamental questions for individuals and societies. In relation to rights, it decouples the notion of competency and rationality as pre-conditions of rights and questions why children's competences (including competences that adults might not have) might not be valued as a basis for rights and participation (Tisdall & Punch, 2012; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014).

Based on the understanding of human development outlined above, the right to participation is a central tenet in society, informing how all human beings, including children and older adults, are positioned. This understanding challenges ideas about all aspects of children's lives, including rights, responsibilities, learning, education and civic participation, in what are essentially political questions (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2015). Significantly, the same questions could be raised in relation to older adults. These questions, and how they are addressed in ECE discourse, impact on children's possibilities for participation, their roles in

their communities, their relationships with other social groups and, crucially, what is valuable for children to learn. Importantly, these questions are also fundamental to the consideration of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECE services.

Children's rights and participation, concepts that are central to understandings of children's lives and learning, as well as to the lives of their families and communities, will now be addressed.

3.3.2 Children's rights and participation

Acknowledging children as both beings and becomings was a central focus of two significant developments in the late 20th century relating to understanding children's lives: children as rights holders in society, and in particular, children's right to participation, both of which are centrally relevant to IGL. The increasing emphasis on childhood as a social and cultural construction coincided with a growing interest in the human rights of children, which culminated in the ratification in 1989 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), (Freeman, 1998; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014; UN, 1989). While these developments led to a focus on children's right to participation, with children's interactions and participation in their environments being seen as central to their development and wellbeing (Alderson, 2008; Landsdown, 2005), participation as a concept was widely contested (Horgan et al., 2017; Wyness, 2012). A critique of the concept of participation emerging in the 21st century centres around both philosophical and practical concerns, four of which are particularly relevant to this study. These four concerns are as follows: participation as an individualist and independent selfhood issue; the issue of participation and competence; participation and vulnerability; and the lack of emphasis on children's lived social participation (Abebe, 2019; Bae, 2010; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010).

The idea of the independent child, exercising autonomous will and individual choice without consideration of the complex contexts in which that participation is exercised, is now widely challenged (Bae, 2010; Hammersley, 2017). Participation, it is argued, is no longer understood as an independent selfhood issue, similar to an individual possession exercised in an autonomous space (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014). Interestingly, Bae (2010) suggests that an exclusive focus on an individualistic view of participation could help to explain why the issue of participation of the youngest children has not been adequately addressed in the literature.

A second critique of the concept of participation centres on children's (and particularly the youngest children's) perceived lack of competence, which has been seen as a constraint on participation (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017). The implications of the competence bias continue, despite the lack of clarity relating to the concept (Moran-Ellis & Tisdall, 2019) and despite more nuanced understandings of young children's participation as a co-constructive relational process (Bae, 2010), involving power being shared among children and others.

Thirdly, children's vulnerability and their need for protection has frequently been posited as a barrier to promoting children's participation, including in the highly regulated ECE sector (Mentha et al., 2015), highlighting the tension between the reality of the care that children require and their right to participation (Alderson, 2010; Moran-Ellis, 2010). Importantly, a discourse of care competing with a discourse of rights has led to young children's right to participate frequently being overshadowed by their right to protection, resulting in reduced opportunities for active citizenship (Taggart, 2016). Yet, it can be argued that by exercising their participation rights, children can enhance their protection rights (Alderson, 2010).

Fourthly, an understanding of participation that does not acknowledge the social and informal interactions of young children's lived experiences as they create their own forms of participation in the horizontal spaces of everyday life is limited (Horgan et al., 2017). Based on this perspective, participation is about having opportunities to take part and be involved in the everyday life of the community (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Importantly, participation

for young children, it can be argued, is more richly operationalised through everyday interactions in familiar contexts with supportive adults than through performative, formal structures (Bae, 2010; Horgan et al., 2017).

3.3.3 A relational perspective on children's participation

Informed by the belief that children's participation can only be understood in the social, cultural and political context in which it occurs, a broader construction of the concept of participation began to emerge in the early 21st century (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017).

The work of Bronfenbrenner (2005), characterising the child as a unique individual with their own experiences, needs and right to development and wellbeing, growing up in a complex environment of contextual and cultural influences, contested the view of the universal child. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development highlighted an understanding of agency that placed the child at the centre of their own development and facilitated the expression of their individual characteristics, including their interests and curiosities (Hayes et al., 2017), while acknowledging that agency cannot be separated from its context. Understanding children as context-dependent relational beings (Horgan et al., 2017) points to the importance of a relational understanding of participation defined by Percy-Smith & Thomas (2010, p. 357) as "ways of being and relating, deciding and acting, which characterise the practice of everyday life". Mannion (2010), in reframing children's participation as both spatial and relational, contends that participatory processes should have outcomes for children and adults, suggesting adults are co-learners and co-interpreters. Importantly, a relational understanding foregrounds participation as an interdependent and communal process, set in a framework of intergenerational dialogue and responsibilities that is continually shifting (Mannion, 2010; Wyness, 2012). Significantly for this study, the ties of interdependence underpinning participation highlight that all individuals, not only children, are simultaneously active agents, but whose participation can be limited by social structures and

contexts (Tisdall & Punch, 2012; White & Choudhury, 2010).

The focus on both individual and collective rights underpinning a relational understanding of participation highlights the concept of social obligation – children as individuals entitled to their own views and as members of a community showing consideration to others, conveying what Bae (2010, p. 208) refers to as a "both-and" perspective. An example of the "both-and" perspective can be seen in IGL experiences where children have opportunities both to participate as individuals in a social context while being attuned to and caring for others (Femia et al., 2008). The "both-and" perspective draws attention to the concept of caring, which is increasingly seen as an underpinning value and right of citizenship (Lynch, 2007) as well as an educational goal (Delors, 1996; Noddings, 1984). In a study of language learning between grandparents and grandchildren in immigrant families, Kenner et al., (2007) found that the social skills that children developed through IGL contributed to their sense of participation and citizenship development, highlighting the transactional nature of the process. The role of IGL as a successful vehicle and context for activating children's civic engagement was demonstrated in an Irish study of children's civic literacy that included personal and social responsibility and leadership (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018). Interestingly, in a US study, children themselves recommended that all children should interact with older adults to learn from them, but also "to make the older adults happy" (Fair & Delaplane, 2015, p. 26). Additionally, in contributing their expertise, children can experience the joy and positive impact on their wellbeing that occurs with the exchange of knowledge and skill from one generation to another (Cartmel et al., 2018).

A relational view of participation, highlighting the negotiated nature of children's participation, which can be framed both positively and negatively, illuminates the debate on competence as a condition of children's participation. Individual notions of competence detach children from their rich social contexts, including families and communities, which can provide enabling

contexts for children's competences and participation (Abebe, 2019). Drawing on this perspective, educators can play a key role in validating children's competences (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017) and, by adopting a partnership strategy to supporting children's participation, can contribute to the richness of the learning process. In co-constructing knowledge with children, educators can position participation as part of the pedagogical process with children and adults influencing each other (Cartmel et al., 2018; Hedges & Cullen, 2012). The adult's contribution is then perceived as a positive resource in education supporting the development and implementation of competences, including a sense of belonging, co-operation and solidarity which emerge through interdependence (Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013). Importantly, this perspective aligns with the views of Rogoff (2003), who argued that an individualistic focus on participation has negative consequences in a pedagogical context because it reflects a view of education as an individualised and a reproductive rather than a transformative process. Principles of IGL, emphasising the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among children and older adults (Kaplan, 2002), align well with Rogoff's (2003) views of learning and relational participation. Importantly, IGL highlights the socially constructed nature of learning, with both children and older adults controlling the learning process and thereby counteracting the potentially hierarchical relationship between children and adults (Cartmel et al., 2018; Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2014). Contemporary understandings of participation, highlighting reciprocal exchange, emphasise the importance of children being involved in vital social processes and making contributions and taking actions within the practice of everyday life (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010; Rogoff, 2003). Interdependence and asymmetrical relationships are useful concepts in considering the challenges of balancing children's right to participation with their need for care and protection, which are simultaneously part of children's experiences. This debate has benefitted from a relational understanding of participation that highlights the importance of locating participation in the

broader social context in which it exists (Sirkko, et al., 2019). Moreover, this debate acknowledges the power of the educator in creating opportunities for learning so that adult-child relationships are understood as environments for flourishing, while simultaneously serving as spaces for protection (Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013).

The idea of participation as relational is well aligned with the notion of participation as a continuum, highlighting the fluctuating nature of participation depending on structures, contexts, relationships and time (Abebe, 2019; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Ideas about thick and thin agency (Abebe, 2019) resonate with Hart's hierarchical model of participation (2008), further developed by Mayne et al. (2018), which considers the role of information, understanding, voice and influence. For example, children could experience thickness in relation to the concept of agency, through being involved in, and influencing local situations, while experiencing thinness with reference to this concept at more macro and policy levels, depending on the contexts and range of choices available to them (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). The concept of thickening and thinning agency is a useful lens with which to consider a more inclusive and informal approach to participation that values the role of everyday life experiences as rich opportunities for participation (Horgan et al., 2017). Social participation, where children take actions in their everyday life settings (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010), is increasingly recognised for the opportunities it creates for developing thick agency. The concept of social participation was further developed by Liebel and Saadi (2010), who argued that new possibilities for children's positioning in society could be realised if children were actively and routinely included in vital social processes, an idea central to Rogoff's (2014) theories of learning and development.

Importantly, educators' views about the balance between children's individual and social orientation, whether children are or should be primarily embedded in the ECE service, the family or the wider community (Fleer, 2003; Hayes, 2013), impact on the possibilities that

educators envisage for children's participation. Educators who create contexts for collaborative learning between children and older adults through IGL clearly reflect the view that children are not only members of a family and an ECE service but are embedded in a community with a right to participate socially in their world (Bessell, 2017). However, it should be noted that, while educators may create opportunities for participation, children in ECE services generally may accept or choose not to accept opportunities presented to them (Mashford-Scott & Church, 2011).

Importantly, creating opportunities for children to engage in public communal spaces enables children to activate their citizenship through participation in a democratic community (Krechevsky et al., 2016), while simultaneously creating a context in which dominating views of citizenship can be challenged. Significantly, through this process, views of children and the possibility of a new status for children could be envisaged (Horgan et al., 2017).

3.4 Relationships in children's learning, development and wellbeing

Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships that affect all aspects of their lives and, the richer the relationships are, the better the conditions they create for children to flourish (Bae, 2010; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Importantly, in acknowledging the interdependent relationship of cognitive, social and emotional development (Banaji & Gelman, 2013; Whitebread et al., 2015), it has been established that, when the demands for affective development are not met, cognitive development may suffer (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). An understanding of children's cognitive, emotional and social development as inextricably intertwined and which places interactions at the heart of the learning process is not new (Degotardi, 2014; Hayes et al., 2017). Froebel highlighted the importance of children's relationships with their environment, including family, community and culture (Nolan & Raban, 2015) and Vygotsky

(1978) espoused the view that social interaction is the greatest motivating force in human development. Bronfenbrenner reflected a similar understanding of children's development, highlighting the importance of everyday, interpersonal interactions - proximal processes - as the engines of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Eun, 2010).

Worthy of note is the robust research evidence of the crucial role played by children's participation in, and contribution to, different types of relationships and interactions in shaping their learning experiences (NSCDC, 2004), a finding with particular relevance for IGL. This evidence, drawn from a wide range of disciplines and theoretical perspectives, has influenced the development of ECE policy, pedagogy and curricula internationally (Degotardi et al., 2017) and will now be discussed.

3.4.1 A relational approach to pedagogy

Placing relationships at the heart of learning and development suggests that learning is the outcome of relationships between children and their families, peers, educators and communities, who are the source of children's earliest experiences (Brooker, 2007; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Malaguzzi, in developing the Reggio Emilia approach to ECE, argued that relationships and learning coincide, and that interactions, dialogue and reciprocity are central to these relationships and learning (Malaguzzi, 1998; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). A further development of the dynamics of relationships and learning has more recently emerged, suggesting that relationships are "represented *as* pedagogies, in contrast to the more common perspective of relationships being constructed *through* pedagogies" (Degotardi et al., 2017, p. 359). The central importance of relationships in learning has given rise to a focus in contemporary ECE discourse on relational pedagogies (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009), the broad field of which includes the concepts of nurturing pedagogies (Hayes, 2013), sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) and intersubjectivity (Bruner, 1996).

Relational pedagogies foreground the connectivity and interconnectivity of human beings, the social rather than individual nature of experiences, the empowering force of knowing the self and others and offers learners tools to become reflective, meaning-making citizens in the present and the future (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). In practical terms, relational pedagogies aim to offer enabling environments for the development of children's positive sense of identity and belonging, socio-emotional skills, executive functions and self-regulation skills (NSCDC, 2011; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). This perspective of learning and teaching foregrounds respect for the child as a co-traveller in a learning journey and resists a focus on teaching as a technical practice based on a view of how the child should be, for example, ready for school (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Instead, the pedagogical relationship is understood as one of obligation and attention to the other in developing a partnership approach to learning (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). In prioritising relationships and interactions over teaching, the affective and emotional dimensions of learning, caring and respectful relationships are then understood as the context in which the learning and development of the whole child take place (Dalli, 2008; Noddings, 1984). Based on this perspective, Irish and internationally recognised ECE curricula (Aistear; HighScope³; Reggio Emilia; Te Whāriki⁴) foreground the social and emotional dimension in ECE and the relational and connected way in which children learn and develop (Hayes, 2013).

Importantly, a relational approach to pedagogy responds to a number of ongoing debates in ECE discourse including the care versus education debate and the process versus outcomes debate (Hayes, 2013). It also draws attention to the debate around care as a commodity where

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³ HighScope is an ECE curriculum shaped and developed by research and practice in the USA since the 1960's, whose central belief is that children construct their own learning by doing, and being actively involved in working with materials, people and ideas (Hohman & Weikart, 1995).

⁴ Te Whāriki, the New Zealand ECE curriculum, focuses on the motivational aspects of learning and in supporting positive learning dispositions, so that children grow up as competent and confident learners, healthy in mind and body, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to the world (Ministry of Education, 2017). The development of Aistear was strongly influenced by the Te Whāriki curriculum.

elements, including caring, happiness and relationships, which cannot be measured or valued, are seen to be marginalised in ECE discourse (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015). The inseparable nature of care and education reflected in relational pedagogies emphasises that all developmental domains, including cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, spiritual and physical domains, are interdependent with children making connections through relationships and experiences (Moss, 2014; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009).

Relational pedagogies address a further important issue in ECE discourse, which reflects fundamental views about children and learning: the process versus outcomes dichotomy and the related issue of child-centred versus adult-centred pedagogical approaches (Hayes, 2013). The debates can be summarised as follows: does the ECE service understand children as citizens in the making, giving rise to an adult-centred, outcomes focused approach where the aim of the ECE service is to prepare children for the future through focusing on knowledge and skills acquisition? Alternatively, does the ECE service understand children as fully-fledged citizens resulting in a focus on valuing children and their capabilities (Hayes & Filipović, 2018) in the here-and-now, giving rise to a child-centred, process-focused approach? Proponents of relational pedagogies suggest that what exists is a false dichotomy between outcomes-based and processes-oriented pedagogical practice, by articulating the processes underpinning relational pedagogies, which have outcomes that have personal and collective meaning and use (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009).

These arguments are centrally reflected in wider debates on the purpose of education which are the subject of a seminal report on education for the 21st century (Delors, 1996), arguing for a humanistic rather than an instrumental view of education. The humanistic view of education, proposed in the Delors Report, was represented in four pillars, *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together* and *learning to be* (Delors, 1996; Elfert, 2015). Importantly, principles of relational pedagogies, which fit within a humanistic view of education, resonate

strongly with key principles of IGL (Boström, 2003; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). For example, an Australian study found that the affective relationships children developed with older adults through IGL experiences played a powerful role in helping children feel supported, valued and respected (Bessell, 2017), highlighting the importance of interpersonal structures for human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

3.4.2 Key characteristics of developmental relationships

Relational pedagogies are centrally dependent on the type and quality of the relationships and interactions that children experience, with the values, attitudes and skills underpinning them identified as crucial (Peters, 2009; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). In a study that identified relationships as key drivers in human development, Osher et al. (2020) concluded that relationships that were reciprocal, attuned, culturally responsive and trustful were a positive developmental force between children and their physical and social contexts. In considering what he termed meaningful relationships between children and members of the community, Nimmo (2008) proposed six important characteristics: intimacy; continuity; complexity; identity; diversity and reciprocity. Other characteristics associated with developmental relationships include compassionate communication, modelling and progressive complexity of joint activity (Li & Julian, 2012). In discussing the role of relationships in the Reggio Emilia approach, Katz (1995) highlights the importance of a sense of belonging and emphasises that, for relationships to be effective, they have to be of mutual interest. The HighScope curriculum, reflecting Erikson's ideas (1980), identified five key attributes essential for children's development that are supported through positive relationships: trust, autonomy, initiative, empathy and self-confidence (Hohman & Weikart, 1995). It is clear that relationships are complex and fulfil many social and learning functions, including attachment, security, agency, self-worth, companionship, socialisation, teaching and learning across all developmental domains (Bae, 2010; Degotardi et al., 2013). In drawing attention to these wide-ranging

functions of relationships, relational pedagogy reflects Bronfenbrenner's theory that a complex network of relationships with others, as well as the interconnections among home, school and neighbourhood, are the building blocks of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009).

1998; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009).

An emphasis on the intrinsic value of affective relationships for the role they play in children's overall well-being and flourishing has emerged more recently in the ECE literature referencing relationships, both within and beyond the ECE service (Fattore & Mason, 2017; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). Importantly, this suggests that children's wellbeing is increasingly valued as important in its own right in educational discourse (Hayes, 2013; Kickbusch, 2012).

In the context of relationships that contribute to children's wellbeing, strong evidence exists on the importance of the grandparent relationship for children (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2018).

An Irish study (Geraghty et al., 2015) found that, while the role of grandparenting is changing in Irish society, a key element of continuity was the warm and positive relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, which created a valuable basis for children's sense of identity beyond the nuclear family. Grandparent involvement has also been associated with positive outcomes in children experiencing adversity, including improved mental health, pro-social behaviour and resilience in grandchildren, because grandparents bring stability to children's lives (Rushanan & Rotkirch, 2018). It is along from the formering discussion that the control

beyond the nuclear family. Grandparent involvement has also been associated with positive outcomes in children experiencing adversity, including improved mental health, pro-social behaviour and resilience in grandchildren, because grandparents bring stability to children's lives (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2018). It is clear from the foregoing discussion that the central role of relationships as drivers of children's development and wellbeing is not new knowledge (Osher et al., 2020). Emerging from the IGL literature is an emphasis on how to operationalise key elements of those particular relationships by focusing on what is at the heart of being human – "being able to derive a sense of self and belonging through active participation with other human beings regardless of age or group membership" (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020, p. 237). Enduring emotional attachment (Li & Julian, 2012) and an enhanced sense of identity (Malaguzzi, 1998), drawing on the warm and positive relationships experienced in a nurturing

environment, were key features of IGL relationships between young children and older adults (Cartmel et al., 2018). Also evident in the limited IGL literature available, was the joy and wonder children and older adults (non-familial) experienced as both looked forward to spending time together (Lux et al., 2020; McKee & Scheffel, 2019). Children experiencing "an abundance of affection and attention that could not be provided in any other type of environment" highlighted what could be considered a distinguishing feature of IGL relationships in ECE services (Clark & Hoover, 2020, p. 170). Additionally, a US study found that the majority of children stated that the older adults really liked them, with one child stating, "they love me" (Lux et al., 2020, p. 205), highlighting the role of IGL relationships in enhancing children's feelings of self-worth, a finding that has been reported in recent IGL studies (Cartmel et al., 2018).

Significantly, while the instrumental and intrinsic elements of relationships and their impact on learning and development may be discussed separately, extensive evidence exists on the interconnectedness of children's learning, development and wellbeing (Hayes, 2013), which will now be addressed.

3.4.3 Relationships, wellbeing and flourishing

The concept of wellbeing is difficult to define, depending on time and contexts and involving the many systems from local to global that impact on children's wellbeing (Fattore & Mason, 2017). Hayes' definition (2013) of children's wellbeing as the absence of distress and the presence of a sense of happiness and contentment highlights the many intersecting opportunities and challenges that exist in promoting children's wellbeing. Crucially, she argues that ECE services have considerable potential and responsibility for the promotion of children's wellbeing, noting also that wellbeing is one of the four themes of Aistear (NCCA, 2009). Acknowledging the importance of wellbeing for children links closely to a holistic approach to children's development (Hayes, 2013), which not only emphasises the interrelatedness of all

areas of children's development but suggests a view of children developing in the context of family, home and community (French, 2013). This perspective also foregrounds what Fattore and Mason (2017) argue has been missing from research - the significance of the social for children's wellbeing. Acknowledging the role of the social for children's wellbeing points to the importance of a positive emotional climate that not only nurtures responsive relationships between educators and children but also connects with their families and communities, highlighting the opportunities and benefits of children's social participation (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Children's need to bond with others and feel a sense of belonging is an international ECE curricular goal and is also considered a key social competence (Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013; Guo & Dalli, 2016), yet is an under-researched area. Trevarthen (2011) argues that children's most fundamental need is to become part of a culture and highlights the importance for the child of a mixed-age community, stating that the child needs responsive companions of all ages. A sense of belonging has been identified as centrally important in promoting children's wellbeing and happiness and enhances their confidence to explore and learn (NCCA, 2009; Woodhead & Brooker, 2008). Children who feel at home with themselves and their worlds through warm, respectful relationships, develop positive views of themselves and others at an important time in the development of self and group identity (Cartmel et al., 2018; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). Related to this, evidence in the IGL literature demonstrated that relationships with older adults impacted positively on children's self-esteem, connectedness, assertiveness, co-operative skills and overall wellbeing (Carmel et al., 2018; Femia et al., 2008; Gigliotti et al., 2005; Liou et al., 2011).

Importantly, children who have a strong self-identity are more likely to have a positive view of difference (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; Murray, 2015) and evidence suggests that children who had IGL experiences were less likely to hold biased or stereotypical views of older adults and had more positive attitudes to ageing (Clark & Hoover, 2020; Femia et al.,

2008; Lee et al., 2020). However, it is worth noting that mixed results are also reported from some studies of children's views of ageing, which might be explained by the variety in types, frequency and duration of IGL programmes included in the studies (Femia et al., 2008). Additionally, promoting a sense of belonging for all individuals and positive views of diversity creates a foundation on which children's caring interactions with all individuals can be supported (DCYA, 2016b; Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). There is indisputable evidence that children who are emotionally secure and have well-developed self-confidence, empathy, curiosity, communication skills, ability to relate to others and manage emotions and behaviour (Housman, 2017) are strongly positioned to develop as powerful learners and as emotionally and socially healthy individuals (Whitebread et al., 2015). This evidence has significant implications for ECE practice. Importantly, the early years have been identified as a critical period for the development of social and emotional learning as the brain architecture is being formed (NSCDC, 2004). Seminal research (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) concluded that there would no longer be a policy debate on whether ECE programmes should focus on cognitive skills or social and emotional development if policy makers understood the impact of emotion, behaviour and executive functions on learning. In particular, they advocate for the strengthening of protective relationships for children with educators, family, and communities, in order to help mitigate the harmful effects of toxic stress. Shonkoff and Phillip's (2000) research highlights the potential role of IGL as one such protective relationship, with higher levels of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy found among children in a number of IGL studies where pre- and post-testing or comparative studies were undertaken (Brant & Studebaker, 2019; Durlak et al., 2011; Fair & Delaplane, 2015).

A humanistic view of education, with its emphasis on children's socio-emotional wellbeing and which challenges the view of childhood as a preparatory life stage (Qvortrup, 2014), is reflected in internationally recognised ECE curricula. Significantly, socio-emotional

development is foregrounded in three of Aistear's four themes: well-being; identity and belonging and communicating. (NCCA, 2009). Similarly, wellbeing, a positive sense of self, contribution and positive relationships are aims across ECE curricula in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. The emphasis in ECE curricula on the whole child in a context of relationships emphasises the crucial role that ECE services can play in children's flourishing. Flourishing can be understood as a state in which an individual feels a positive emotion towards life and is functioning well, psychologically and socially (Keyes, 2003). More specifically in relation to the early years, Hayes (2013) makes the link between wellbeing and flourishing, while Ghirotto and Mazzoni (2013) emphasise participation as part of flourishing, drawing on Gaffney's (2011) notion of flourishing, which entails challenge, connectivity, autonomy and valued competencies. Informed by the work of Nussbaum (2011) in the area of human flourishing, Taylor (2012) suggests that ECE practice could be "framed towards enhancing young children's wellbeing and flourishing" (Hayes, 2013, p. 78). This view is shared by Rouse and Hadley (2018), who propose that flourishing for children in ECE services is the meeting place of the shared goals of care and love, as well as learning and growing.

3.4.4 Executive functions and socio-emotional development

Responsive relationships underpinning relational pedagogies support the development in children of perseverance, feelings of control, challenge and reflection and are particularly useful in supporting self-regulatory and executive function skills development (Whitebread & Coltman, 2011). Evidence from research, including IGL research (Femia et al., 2008; Lux et al., 2020), confirms that children who experience IGL relationships have a stronger foundation for managing their emotions, initiating relationships with others and problem solving than children who do not experience such relationships (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007).

Executive functions, including the capacity to control and co-ordinate information, which have been identified as vital for children's lives and learning (Hayes et al., 2017; NSCDC, 2011),

first develop in the interpersonal sphere (Mercer, 2013; Ring et al., 2018). Executive functions help children to become thoughtful about their learning processes and to manage their learning by viewing themselves as competent learners and problem-solvers who can seek help when necessary (Hayes & Kernan, 2008). Building on this idea, Whitebread et al. (2015) highlight the importance of a positive emotional climate in which to develop these skills, what Malaguzzi and Gandini (1993) refer to as the amiable school, which has a sense of welcome and an atmosphere of serenity and discovery, where children learn skills that would be difficult to teach. Executive functions, as understood by Galinsky (2010), include the following skills: focus and self-control; perspective taking; communicating; making connections; critical thinking; taking on challenges and self-directed learning. While they are sometimes referred to as soft skills, Galinsky argues they are as much cognitive skills as social and emotional skills, focusing on the how as well as the what skills, which are increasingly being valued for the essential role they play in the development of healthy adults and well-functioning societies (Delors, 1996; Galinsky, 2010; United Nations, 2001). Research demonstrates that children who develop these life skills are better at managing their behaviour, emotions and attention, are more co-operative, caring and responsive and do better cognitively and socially (NSCDC, 2011; Hayes, 2013). Factors critical to the development of executive functions are the relationships children have, the activities they have to engage in and the places in which they live and learn (NSCDC, 2011). A calm, unhurried and predictable environment where children feel supported and encouraged to develop these functions points to the unique opportunities ECE services have in this process (Galinsky, 2010; Hayes, 2013). Importantly, strong evidence of executive functions including concentration, patience and response to instruction were demonstrated among children who participated in IGL programmes (Brant & Studebaker, 2019; Gigliotti et al., 2005; Jarrott et al., 2006).

Acknowledging the importance of the early years for children's socio-emotional learning and the key role of the ECE service in supporting this development highlights the potential of IGL as a valuable pedagogical strategy. It is increasingly recognised in the research literature and in ECE curricula in the Western world (Murray, 2015) that educators can intentionally teach and enhance socio-emotional competences through developmental relationships (Hayes et al, 2017; Osher et al., 2020). The educative value of a relational, nurturing pedagogy (Hayes et al., 2017; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009), aligns well with IGL as an intentional approach that supports the holistic development of children (Femia et al., 2008). Importantly, educators can utilise their relationships with children as a tool for helping children succeed in a range of situations (McNally & Slutsky, 2018). Through experiencing caring, responsive relationships, children learn to care for and nurture others (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and, in this way, care can be seen as an essential experience that supports children to become autonomous agents themselves (Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013). Trevarthen (2011) and others observed that children as young as two years old offered support to others, demonstrating a keen sense of empathy towards the emotional needs of others, including older adults (Hastings et al., 2000; Fair & Delaplane, 2015). Children's empathic understanding is closely linked with their capacity for intersubjectivity, the ability to read the minds of others and refine one's thinking (Bruner, 1996), which highlights the importance of social interactions and exposure to diverse social groups in the early years (Femia et al., 2008). Children who had participated in IGL programmes were reported to have greater empathy for older adults, as long as three years after the completion of the IGL programme and were more likely to help a person experiencing a difficulty than children who had not, thereby reflecting their positive social skills (Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Femia et al., 2008). Interestingly, in one US study, the primary benefit to children of consistent interactions with older adults were the positive skills that they developed,

including self-management, social and self-awareness and responsible decision-making (Brant & Studebaker, 2019).

3.5 Learning as a collaborative process

Understanding learning as a collaborative process builds on socio-cultural theories of learning that acknowledge the social nature of learning and the social construction of meaning. Importantly, it points to the powerful role that social context plays in children's lives (Hayes et al., 2017). Drawing on Bruner's (1996) understanding of learning as participatory, collaborative and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them, key concepts underpinning collaborative learning will now be addressed.

3.5.1 Key concepts underpinning collaborative learning

Children's everyday interactions in social contexts that create a wealth of first-hand experiences are drivers of development and highlight the relational and collaborative nature of learning (Hayes, 2013; Hedges & Cooper, 2018). Importantly, it is the process of interacting itself and the shared meanings emerging from shared activities that empowers humans to go beyond their potential (Hayes, 2013). For example, in IGL experiences it is the generational perspectives inherent in the interactions, rather than any activities that are crucial to the learning processes (Sánchez et al., 2018). The importance of progressively more complex interactions is emphasised in the concept of proximal processes introduced by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) to denote the central engines of development. As an example, Hayes et al. (2017) highlight the importance of reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving person and the persons, objects and symbols in their environment such as feeding or comforting a baby or learning a new skill. The quality of proximal processes is mediated by the social interactions, highlighting a link between the structural factors influencing children's development and the processes that support it. Significantly, therefore, Bronfenbrenner's model offers a useful

framework that links bioecological theories which stress good quality interactions and relationships to ECE practice through the construct of proximal processes (Hayes et al., 2017).

The role of dynamic, bidirectional, transformative interactions in children's learning Acknowledging the central role of interactions points to the importance of the nature and quality of the interactions. To be developmentally effective, interactions must involve engaged interaction in both directions, suggesting, in an IGL context, that children and older adults can influence the nature and direction of the learning. Warm, responsive interactions in stable caring environments that focus on ordinary everyday contexts, can create understandings that flow across the gap and it is in these critical spaces that powerful learning takes place (Hayes et al., 2017). Through these interactions, children refine their thinking, solve problems and enhance their sense of agency. Importantly, children and older adults create learning environments that are changed through the processes of learning together, learning from each other and learning about each other (Siebert & Seidel, 1990, as cited in Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2014), resulting in a constant spiral that reflects Bronfenbrenner's concept of dynamic proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

The importance of contexts in children's learning

The growing importance of contexts and culture in children's learning and development, refuting the view of development as a natural, individualistic process, argues that children's learning can only be understood in the context of their communities, with culture defining development and providing the context in which development is supported (Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Ring et al., 2018). This perspective is reflected in the emphasis on environments underpinning the concept of proximal processes and which, importantly, has implications for ECE practice (Burman, 2001; Woodhead, 2006). Of particular significance is the importance of offering children a variety of cultural contexts in which to develop new perspectives (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). Facilitating children's participation in a broad range of contexts, including IGL environments, acknowledges that learning, is embedded in cultural practices that can be

understood as living curricula for participants who do not require direct instruction (Bertram et al., 2018; Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020; Rogoff, 2003). Moreover, in acknowledging the importance of interactions in learning, opportunities for alternative narratives for development of the self (Bruner, 1996) ensure that learning is an actively created, cultural experience, "a story or many stories created with the child as co-author" (Trevarthen, 2012, p. 303). Broadening the contexts in which learning takes place aligns with fundamental tenets not only of socio-cultural theories of learning but also with IGL principles, international best practice guidelines in ECE and key policy objectives of the Irish ECE sector (Carr, 2001; Kuehne & Melville, 2014; NCCA, 2009).

The role of equal group status in collaborative learning

Acknowledging children as active partners, as well as protagonists in the learning process (Bruner, 1996; Malaguzzi, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978) infers a strengths-based approach to learning, acknowledging all learners as unique individuals with strengths, abilities and diverse funds of knowledge (Hedges et al., 2011; Kenner et al., 2007). The focus of education then is on creating opportunities to complement and support each individual's existing strengths and competence in connecting, sharing and triggering learning in relationship with others (Jarrott & Smith, 2011; McKee & Scheffel, 2019). In their interactions, children and older adults actively and equally draw on their individual funds of knowledge, contributing ideas, intuition, energy, wisdom, skills and knowledge to the learning experiences in what could be termed a community of practice, with individuals playing different roles in different contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The concept of synergies is useful in highlighting the roles that individuals play in acting as adjuvants (Gregory, 2001, p.309) in each other's learning (Bertram et al., 2018; Gregory et al., 2004; Jessel et al., 2004). All individuals benefit from the empowering experience of interchangeably taking on the roles of both teachers and learners (Cabanillas,

2011), an idea strongly reflected in Rogoff's views of successful learning (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016).

The role of scaffolding in collaborative learning

Scaffolding, a key concept in illuminating the process of collaborative learning, was a natural corollary of Vygotsky's (1978) thesis that all higher psychological functions developed through co-operation and collaboration (Eun, 2010; Hayes et al., 2017; Wertsch, 1984). Scaffolding has been critiqued for being primarily focused on a one-way process with the scaffolder (instructing adult) constructing the scaffold and presenting it to the novice (passive child) (Daniels, 2001). However, Bruner (1996) and others have argued that scaffolding can be a more open, co-constructive process, highlighting the importance of bi-directional interactions in a dynamic view of development, where both children and adults learn with and from each other in the construction of knowledge. This conceptualisation of scaffolding is of particular relevance to IGL. A second critique of scaffolding centres around the question of what types of knowledge and learning should be scaffolded? It has been argued that the learning that is most valued in society, typically academic learning, is prioritised in the scaffolding process, and not only does this limit the potential of scaffolding but it frames learning as a process of transmission or internalisation, with learners inheriting meanings from more knowledgeable others (Cobb & Yackel, 1996).

Building on ideas about collaborative learning but critical of the concept of scaffolding, Rogoff (2014) developed a paradigm of learning that emphasised more strongly the participatory and community focus of children's learning and this, importantly, aligns well with concepts underpinning IGL and will now be addressed.

3.5.2 A participatory and transformative model of learning and development

Building on socio-cultural theories of learning, Rogoff (1994) concluded that development could be understood as transformation of participation, based on her research of children's

increasingly complex participation in communities over time. Learning and development are seen to occur not solely within the individual, between the community members or within the community itself. All three processes contribute to development that can be understood as a transformative process, resulting from participation in a community activity, shifting the focus from the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world in a community of practice (Dewey, 1966; Lagerlöf et al., 2013; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2014). Rogoff's participatory model of development challenged the idea of learning as "a separate activity, isolated from productive activities and community life, in which adults create specialized child-focused or child-centred interactions and activities for the sake of instruction" (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016, p. 135). Instead, she argued for children to be immersed in their communities so that children's participation in everyday family and community activities enabled and encouraged them to develop culturally valued skills and knowledge, while transforming their participation over time (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016). Rogoff argued that children's roles in their communities strongly influenced their learning and development, aligning with ideas of children's "zest for both well-being and learning" (Trevarthen, 2012, p. 311) in an active partnership seeking cultural knowledge (Bruner, 1996). Drawing on research in two very different developmental niches, Rogoff et al. (2007) concluded that, in communities where children are segregated from adult activities, their learning is organised by teachers who provide motivational management. On the other hand, in communities where children participate in adult settings, children learn through observation and participation with support from caregivers. Through participation, individuals exert agency in reconstructing and personalising resources and experiences to fit their individual meaning systems, thereby developing the capacity to adapt their behaviour based on their own participation in a previous situation (Rogoff, 1994). Importantly, the concept of guided participation, central to this view of learning, suggests a broad understanding of learning and development. Guided participation

highlights the interdependence of active children and more experienced others in a partnership approach to learning, reflecting cultural variations and less formal arrangements in relationships between children and adults than those associated with the concept of scaffolding in learning by (Rogoff, 2012). Pivotal to Rogoff's participatory model of development are the inherent processes of transformation facilitated by all participants (children and adults) in communities, even when the relationships are asymmetrical (Carpendale et al., 2018; Rogoff, 1994; Valsiner, 2014). In developing her ideas, Rogoff foregrounded the contribution of nonfamilial others in the community to children's learning. The positive role of more experienced others, while widely acknowledged in the literature, has primarily focused on the role of educators, caregivers and family members (Gregory, 2001; Kenner et al., 2007). However, literature is limited on the role of non-familial, experienced others in children's learning and development, a key concept in Rogoff's theories and a useful context in which to understand IGL (Edwards, 2006).

3.5.3 Learning by Observing and Pitching In (LOPI)

In making a case for understanding development as the participation of children in the context of communities, the importance of local goals and valued skills are emphasised in a multifaceted process termed LOPI (Rogoff, 2014), in what is a version of a community of practice (Ochs, 2014; Wenger, 1998). The four key elements of Wenger's (1998) social learning theory - meaning (or learning as experience); practice (or learning as doing); community (or learning as belonging) and identity (or learning as becoming) - align closely with LOPI. Key characteristics of LOPI, which Rogoff (2014) argued is better expressed as Learning by Observing and Pitching In to family and community endeavours, include: children are routinely incorporated in the community; children are expected and eager to contribute with initiative and to help without being asked; children are supported in their efforts by others who allow them demonstrate initiative and trust their ability to contribute; children's participation

in community activities is transformative and is imbued with respect and responsibility; children are keen observers and alert to events surrounding them; children can take collaborative initiative without adult direction; and children show consideration for the direction of the group endeavour (Ochs, 2014; Rogoff, 2014). Importantly, Rogoff argued that children's learning was guided by a commitment to shared endeavours, noting that children demonstrated evidence of a desire to increase their ability to contribute through collaborative initiatives (Coppens et al., 2014; Rogoff, 2012). Collaborative initiatives arise from children exerting autonomy and responsibility and allow for any individual to take initiative, giving rise to possibilities for fluid leadership (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016). Collaborative initiative serves to highlight the contrast with more traditional understandings of education where adults are more likely to manage the learning processes. However, in a community of learners, children coordinating with other children and adults contribute to the direction, with overall leadership being the responsibility of the adults (Rogoff, 1994). Interestingly, Rogoff questioned if the capacity to demonstrate initiative might be a useful tool in the assessment of children's learning and development in the Western world. Collaborative initiative is a useful concept for illuminating the complexities of children's participation, balancing individual agency without loss of personal motivation to the relational and collective aspects of the endeavour (Abebe, 2019; Bae, 2010; Horgan et al., 2017). Reciprocal relationships in a community where individuals have a sense of belonging creates an environment in which all individuals are trusted to take initiatives. Importantly, an environment that creates space for children and adults to participate with autonomy and responsibility facilitates the development of blended ideas and agendas (Rogoff, 2014). Children's engagement through pitching in was found to promote an alertness in children to their environments, learning from observing and listening intently to activities surrounding them (Coppens et al., 2014). Alertness and intent observation, developed through participation in increasingly complex milieu play a central role in supporting the development of positive learning dispositions in children (Carr & Lee, 2012). Importantly, alertness was found to support the development of executive functions, including helpfulness, perspective-taking and self-regulation, when children were aware of, and alert to, their environment and how their interactions affected others (López et al., 2015). Children's ability to plan was also supported through children assuming responsibility and leadership in shared activities with guidance, but not control, by others. Children developed the ability to review progress and improvise when things did not go according to plan. Moreover, Rogoff and her colleagues argued that these experiences are less available to children whose time and activities are managed by adults, as is typical in education systems in the Western world (Alcalá et al., 2014; Correa-Chávez & Rogoff, 2009). They also noted the challenges for many teachers to move towards the changed role of the teacher required in collaborative learning and LOPI (Coppens et al., 2014). Significantly, these important findings about the potential of LOPI for the development of alertness, perspective-taking and critical thinking in children were emerging at the same time as the importance of executive functions for children's development and well-being in the Western world was being recognised (Galinsky, 2010; Coppens et al., 2014). It is also important to note that LOPI emphasises the importance of the affective dimension of learning, which is not always considered in more formal learning contexts where the focus is on mastery of knowledge and skills (Rogoff, 2014). Feeling part of everyday life in their community, as children who experience LOPI did, led to a sense of belonging essential to children's learning and well-being (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016; NCCA, 2009; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Importantly, the affective dimension of learning extended to the adults as research has demonstrated that adults enjoy giving natural encouragement to children as they master cultural knowledge in a process of joint communication (Rogoff, 2003), and enjoy the positive contribution of children's companionship and playfulness (Trevarthen, 2004). It is worth noting that Trevarthen referenced the ideas of Comenius (1592-1671) in proposing how

children learn best. Comenius, who spoke of the school of the mother's lap, identified the important role of older persons in children's learning as he believed older persons naturally respond to children's vitality and urge to understand and wanted to help them (Trevarthen, 2004). As children collaborate with others to ponder and make sense of the world in the transformative learning environment of a community of practice, their sense of agency and competence grows. Children's appropriation of increasingly complex roles as they gain perspective and influence the direction and outcome of activities enables them to participate more effectively in their worlds (Hedges, 2015; Rogoff, 1994), while simultaneously reflecting the aims of education as learning to know, to do, to be and to live together (Delors, 1996).

3.6 The role of the educator in supporting children's learning

The pivotal role of the educator and the quality of teacher-child interactions has consistently been found to have the most enduring impact on children's cognitive, linguistic and social development (McNally & Slutsky, 2018; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Additionally, the educator's role in creating a positive emotional climate and wide-ranging learning opportunities is acknowledged as the single most significant variable in assessing quality in ECE services (Hayes, 2013). However, despite this evidence and the widespread implementation in the Western world of ECE curricula based on socio-cultural perspectives on learning, which acknowledges what Smith (1996, p. 62) refers to as the "awesome" power of the educator in impacting on children's development, there remains a lack of research on all elements of the educator role (Campbell-Barr, 2019; Dockett, 2019). Moreover, a lack of research on the characteristics of effective educators continues in an international context where the focus on quality in ECE services has expanded rapidly and is a matter of significant concern (OECD, 2006). Quality in ECE services is primarily defined by two interlinked forms of quality: structural (e.g., physical environment) and process (e.g., interactions) (Bennett,

2005). Significantly, however, the concept of orientational quality (OECD, 2015) has more recently been introduced into discourses around this area and will now be addressed.

3.6.1 Educators' orientation

Simply stated, orientational quality is a relatively subjective concept and refers to the pedagogical beliefs and values of educators and their ECE services (Anders, 2015). Understanding the influence of the educator's orientational stance highlights the complexity of the interdependencies of children and educators and acknowledging this influence allows for a better understanding of the types of experiences children are offered. In considering orientational quality, educators' educational beliefs and values, professional roles and curricular priorities combine to impact on pedagogical practice and quality processes (Anders, 2015; OECD, 2015). Importantly, orientational factors, including educators' views about children and learning, have the potential to impact on process factors in teacher-child interactions, including what strategies are adopted in curriculum delivery (Bautista et al., 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2015). While acknowledging the importance of theories and policies in ECE practice, the orientational principles of educators contribute significantly to the quality debate by bridging the gap between how concepts informing ECE discourse are viewed by educators and how they actually play out in practice (Bautista et al., 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2015). Significantly, Smith (1996), in considering the ECE curriculum from a socio-cultural perspective and while not referencing the concept of educator orientation, argued for a pedagogy that acknowledges the extensive power of the educator in impacting on children's development. Powell (2010) goes further by arguing that the ECE discourse is impoverished due to the lack of foregrounding of the personal and professional values and dispositions of educators. In considering the concept of agency through the lens of the educator's orientation, Mentha et al. (2015) propose that educators will implement this concept in a variety of ways, based, for example, on their understandings of the slipperiness of the concept, views of

children's competence and ideas about children's need for protection. In this way, the authors suggest that educators could be perceived to function as brokers in ECE services. In another example of educator orientation, Campbell-Barr (2014) considers educators' views of childhood, ranging from childhood as a golden age where children are protected from the adult world, to a view of children as active social members in the ECE service and community. An interesting example of the significant role of the educator's orientation is reflected in a Japanese study where educators framed the quality of ECE service provision in terms of children's happiness. Educators argued that happy experiences were fundamental to the operation of the ECE service and contributed to children's deep engagement, wellbeing, sense of identity, respect for others and participation in society (Ikegami & Agbenyega, 2014).

The balance between children's individual and social orientation, whether children are primarily embedded in the ECE service, the family or the wider community, represents an important orientation of the educator (Fleer, 2003; Hayes, 2013), giving rise to significantly different experiences for children in ECE services (Campbell-Barr, 2014; Moss, 2014). It could be argued that educators who introduce IGL emphasise children's social orientation, perceiving children as citizens with rights to participate in and contribute to their communities (Moss, 2014), viewing IGL as a vehicle for social participation. The research literature demonstrates that educators who adopted IGL as a pedagogical strategy have clearly articulated views about children, about what educators want to achieve with and for children and how best to achieve it (Cartmel et al., 2018; Holmes, 2009; Kaplan & Larkin, 2004; Orte et al., 2018). Implementing IGL reflected educators prioritising of children's socio-emotional development and wellbeing, valuing highly the positive caring relationships children developed through IGL experiences (Bessell, 2017; Femia et al., 2008). Educators implementing IGL also reflected their commitment to high level aims, such as learning how to learn in collaborative, relational, real

life contexts where the educator's role was one of facilitation rather than managing and controlling such experiences (Cartmel et al., 2018; Nimmo, 2008; Wood & Hedges, 2016). Acknowledging the importance of educator orientation highlights the powerful role and responsibility of ECE services and, in particular, the power of educators' values in shaping the characters and values of children (Murray, 2018; Powell, 2010). Importantly, Powell argues that clarity about the values and dispositions required of educators is missing from UK statutory ECE policy documentation, despite the clear requirement that educators will promote particular universal values in their work, a situation which also pertains in the Irish ECE context (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Nonetheless, educators' implicit or explicit orientations, drawing on a range of values and beliefs about children and learning, are reflected in the varied paradigms they adopt to frame the understandings and types of experiences they offer to children (Bautista et al., 2016; Campbell-Barr, 2014) while working within the same curricular, quality and regulatory frameworks. Building on the view that educators' varied orientations will impact on children as ECE services implement a wide range of priorities and strategies to meet ECE service requirements, the important role of intentional teaching will now be addressed.

3.6.2 Intentional teaching

Intentional teaching involves educators being deliberate in their decisions and actions, introducing ideas and challenges to children's thinking with educators moving in and out of different roles and using a range of strategies (Kilderry, 2015). Importantly, intentional teaching draws attention to the power and autonomy of educators and their role as brokers in ECE environments (Mentha et al., 2015). Intentional teaching is particularly relevant in this study of IGL because this proactive strategy, a form of intentional teaching, contrasts with the traditional developmental role of the educator, who typically responds, rather than introduces, ideas and concepts to children (Lewis et al., 2019). However, the early 21st century has seen a shift from a primarily developmental view to a broader, socio-cultural view of children's

learning, reflected strongly, for example, in an emphasis on intentional teaching included in the first national ECE curriculum in Australia. Importantly, a national, longitudinal ECE study in the UK (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) emphasised the significant value of intentional teaching and recommended a balance of interactions typically associated with teaching, combined with the more traditional provision of instructive learning environments, as the most effective pedagogical practice for ECE services. This evidence demonstrates that intentional teaching is one significant strategy that could be used, in combination with others, while simultaneously addressing the tension between adult-directed and child-directed approaches within ECE pedagogy (Edwards, 2017; Epstein, 2007). However, there is a lack of research on whether, and to what extent, intentional teaching is used by educators and on what strategies are used to promote effective conceptual learning (Lewis et al., 2019). This raises the question of if, and how, IGL might be considered to be one such strategy (Cartmel et al., 2018). However, introducing experiences to children that are imbued with an intention, including IGL, and that are qualitatively different to the experiences offered for children's freely chosen and intrinsically motivated play (Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Femia et al., 2008), reflects educators' belief in the value of intentional teaching (Kilderry, 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2015) and its role as a legitimate ECE practice (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Edwards, 2017). Nonetheless, while intentional teaching may be considered challenging in child-centred programmes (Lewis et al., 2019), a large body of research demonstrates that educators can support intentional teaching while honouring children's rights for appropriate and meaningful experiences (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). In this context, the concept of the intentional learner, who can decline an offer to participate in an activity, is relevant (Kilderry 2015), although, while important for this study, no research on the views of children who declined to participate in IGL experiences was found.

3.6.3 Complexities of the educator role in ECE services

While the far-reaching, ambitious aims of ECE to promote the holistic development of children are generally outlined in ECE policy and curricular documents (Bautista et al., 2016), the extensive and specialised knowledges, skills and practical wisdom required of educators are rarely made visible in these documents (Campbell-Barr, 2019; Powell, 2010). The suggestion that educators should be "open-ended (avoiding closure), open-minded (welcoming the unexpected) and open-hearted (valuing difference)" and be competent in working both with children and their families highlights the complexities of the role (Moss, 2009, p. viii). Educators are increasingly challenged to support the development of children's socioemotional skills, executive functions, values and learning dispositions that promote lifelong learning (Bautista et al., 2016; OECD, 2015), yet the research evidence on how educators do this in practice is weak (Campbell-Barr, 2019). Significantly, the research on evidence-based practice that focuses exclusively on empirical evidence responding to the question "does it work?" is being challenged by a more dynamic model of research (McLaughlin et al., 2015, p. 32). The newer model integrates two additional sources of evidence to inform practice: evidence from teachers' professional knowledge, experience and background and evidence from children, families and communities, ensuring that values and preferences are incorporated with evidence from empirical research that primarily focuses on outcomes (McLaughlin et al., 2015). Drawing on this perspective, educators would integrate these three sources of knowledge, drawing in less explicit forms of knowledge on an ongoing basis, in order to decide what might work, who would benefit and whether it is socially valid, and then apply their ideas to benefit children and families. Urban et al. (2017, p. 6) offer useful advice in this context by suggesting that educators should ask themselves on an ongoing basis, "are we doing the right thing?" rather than "are we doing things right?". This understanding of the professional role of the educator could create a climate in which new pedagogies, including IGL, could be considered (McLaughlin et al., 2015). Building on this understanding of how educators move

from theory to practice, Campbell-Barr (2019) argues that knowing is much more than having theory and involves personal characteristics, experiences in the wider society and daily experiences of working with children, resulting in what she terms phronesis or practical wisdom. The various attributes of phronesis include "love, patience, sensitivity, empathy, awareness, respect for others, people who want to make a difference, passion, warmth, being emotionally accessible and reflexivity" (Campbell-Barr, 2019, p. 136). However, research on how these knowledges are reflected in educators' daily practice is largely absent (Powell, 2010). How educators address the issue of love - what Page (2018, p. 123) refers to as "professional love" - and care in the ECE context, serves as one useful example to highlight the complexities of the educator role and contributes to a critical review of the ECE knowledge base. Loving, caring relationships are considered fundamental to the development and flourishing of children (Hayes, 2013) and are considered to be important by educators in the limited research available (Dalli, 2008; O'Connor et al., 2019). However, loving, caring relationships are frequently not addressed in ECE discourse (Rouse & Hadley, 2018), are considered unprofessional (Dalli, 2008) or are perceived as a source of tension (Osgood, 2010). This situation suggests that, in reality, educators draw on their knowledges, experience, wisdom and attunement with children in their daily pedagogical practice in highlighting the importance of children in ECE services experiencing loving relationships (French, 2019; Page, 2018). Importantly, in doing so, educators reflect their attunement with parents, for whom research shows that their child feeling known and loved in the ECE service is a priority (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Page, 2018). In implementing strategies to enhance children's development and wellbeing in areas that may not be strongly reflected in policy documents (Rouse & Hadley, 2018), yet which reflect the reality of their daily practice, educators demonstrate a ground-up perspective on the professional role of the educator (Dalli, 2008). This position highlights the importance of educators' intuitive practice in navigating between

their pedagogical reality and professionalised norms of policy documents (Page, 2018). It could be argued that educators, in responding to changing needs of children, families and communities, frequently reflect their personal and professional competence and confidence to broaden their repertoire of skills and to take risks, eschewing safer options of structured pedagogical approaches (NCCA, 2009; Wood & Hedges, 2016). Intentional teaching to promote children's socio-emotional competence offers a powerful example of educators' expertise in identifying key skills they wish to teach and how they create meaningful opportunities, motivation and inclination for children to practise their developing skills (McLaughlin et al., 2015). Harnessing the resources of the community for young children's learning reflects a further important example of educators drawing on their knowledges to facilitate children's flourishing in an alternative space (Boyd, 2019; Nimmo, 2008; Orte et al., 2018). Significantly, the IGL literature reflects the complex understanding of the educator outlined above (Cartmel et al., 2018; Radford et al., 2018), manifested in educators' values, beliefs and understandings of socio-cultural theories (Gigliotti et al., 2005; Rogoff, 2003), and, importantly, their extensive skills and willingness to create a risk-rich environment for children's learning (New et al., 2005). A Spanish study by Sánchez et al. (2014) of the profile of professionals implementing IGL across a range of settings and age groups found both general and distinctive features, with the general profile featuring consensus around teamwork, skills of observation and contextual analysis and skill in managing resources. The distinctive characteristics deemed most important included skill in promoting contacts, social relationships, interactions and bonds. Additionally, flexibility and open-mindedness were identified as key attributes of educators who promoted IGL in ECE services (McAlister et al., 2019; Radford et al., 2016) reflecting Rogoff's views (2003) that educators who promoted learning in the community were committed to expanding their repertoires of practice, acknowledging that there is no one best way for children's learning (Coppens et al., 2014).

Furthermore, critical skills of educators who implemented IGL included working with practitioners from other disciplines, identifying mutual interests and experiences of children and older adults and ensuring compliance with regulatory and curricular frameworks (Winchell et al., 2018). Importantly, the IGL literature also outlined what educators perceived would support them in their IGL practice, noting the requirement for training in IGL practice and policy guidelines (Lee et al., 2020; McAlister et al., 2019). Visionary leadership and committed individuals who acted as champions have also been identified as enablers in implementing IGL practice (Bryer & Owens, 2019; Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Martin et al., 2010).

3.7 Community as a locus and resource for children's learning and development

A belief in the power of everyday interactions in the community to create enriching spaces for learning (Hayes et al., 2017) draws attention to fundamental questions about education, including what is important to learn, how children learn and where can learning take place (Cohen & Korintus, 2016). Significantly, valuing informal learning in the ordinariness of everyday life suggests that learning to live in the community is an important aim of education (Delors, 1996). The community, as a locus and resource for children's learning and wellbeing, is well aligned with key ideas underpinning children's learning and development. Importantly, it recognises that children learn well from real life experiences, which gives them access to direct sources of information. This bridges children's separation from real life and lessens the risk that children's actual experiences are decontextualised from their daily lives (Boström, 2003; Guo & Dalli, 2016). Interestingly, it has been argued that children may have become more separated from relationships and life in the wider community as a result of childhood being perceived as a special period in life with its associated emphasis on child-centred spaces (Gray et al., 2016). Learning in the community can enhance children's sense of power and flourishing through the opportunities created for them to participate and contribute to everyday

life in the community (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Importantly, effective links with children's communities are considered an important quality indicator in Irish and international ECE practice (CECDE, 2006; Hayes et al., 2017). The positive role associated with children's learning in the community has placed a spotlight on the ordinary spaces, places and people that children interact with as the drivers of children's development and is reflected in ECE discourse (Cohen & Korintus, 2016; Nimmo, 2008). However, while there has been a growing belief in the importance of community in children's learning, understandings of the concept and processes are not well developed (Nimmo, 2008). For example, the range of community experiences offered in ECE services internationally (OECD, 2006) can range from occasional walks in the locality, visiting libraries and shops to ongoing relationships involving children interviewing city workers or participating in the grape harvest, where the environment is considered the third teacher (after the child and teacher) in the Reggio Emilia approach (Cagliari et al, 2016). In distinguishing between the benefits of ongoing relationships in the community, in contrast to once-off interactions such as a museum visit, Nimmo (2008) argues that the numbers of contacts are not as important as the depth and diversity of the relationships, which is an area worthy of further study. Moreover, there is limited research on the impact of community participation on children and the processes involved in extending the learning opportunities offered by formal ECE services (Cohen & Korintus, 2016; Goldfeld et al., 2015).

3.7.1 A pedagogy of the community

In suggesting the local community as the starting point for real world learning, Cohen and Rønning (2014) refer to a pedagogy of the community. This concept resonates with critical perspectives on ECE that challenge the narrow aims of education and the associated reductionist curricula (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Freire, 1972). For example, understanding IGL as a pedagogy of the community broadens the perspective on learning and the permeable contexts where learning takes place, strongly reflecting socio-cultural theories of learning and critical

views of ECE theory and practice (Cannella, 2010; Malaguzzi, 1998; NCCA, 2009). Building bridges across home, school and community, in what McKee and Scheffel (2019) refer to as a third space, can enrich children's learning and wellbeing. Importantly, IGL studies that focused on bridging the home, school, community divide found that the concepts and skills children developed through IGL complemented and enhanced children's school learning (Kenner et al., 2007; Mannion, 2016). Significantly, this understanding of a pedagogy of the community is strongly aligned with the work of socio-cultural theorists. Bronfenbrenner (1993) places the active, agentic child at the centre of a community system, Vygotsky (1978) emphasises collaborative learning, and the enabling cultures of collaborative, community settings identified by Bruner (1996) all point to the importance of community in children's learning. Rogoff's research (2003) demonstrated the breadth of knowledge and skills taught and learned in communities and, similarly, Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning is built on the importance of the community in learning, while Kump and Krašovec (2014) note that community education is linked to IGL because both involve active participation for a common good.

Importantly, a pedagogy of the community has the potential to acknowledge and create educational spaces that are more diverse, versatile and inclusive than formal, centre-based ECE services (Cabanillas, 2011; Cohen & Korintus, 2016) and, in the process, it can enrich children's sense of belonging, citizenship and visibility.

3.7.2 Enhancing children's learning and wellbeing through risk-rich curricula

Seeking out community relationships and environments requires a belief in, what New et al. (2005, p. 17) refer to as, "a risk-rich curriculum" involving "unknown territories, new ideas and new relationships". Real-life learning in the community, which includes IGL, creates opportunities that would be difficult to create authentically within the ECE service and could, in McMillan's terms, writing in the early 20th century, suggest a view of the learning

environment as one limited only by the sky (Ouvry, 2003). The community, with its limitless learning opportunities, can then become a key player within ECE pedagogy. In the rich social context of the community (Bessell, 2017; Haddad, 2006; Malaguzzi, 1998), the social, emotional and cognitive elements of children's learning can be integrated. Significantly, this perspective on ECE services and communities working together to create opportunities for children's learning, is reflected to a greater or lesser extent in the aims of internationally regarded curricular and quality frameworks of HighScope, Reggio Emilia and Te Whāriki, and more recently in Aistear and Síolta (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009).

An important value of learning in the community centres on the opportunities it creates for children to practise transferring their knowledge, skills and experiences to fit new situations (Cabanillas, 2011; Sánchez et al., 2018). Relationships within one space, for example, in the home or school, affect expectations, behaviour and relationships within another, such as a public space (Pain, 2005), challenging children's learning and ability to adapt to changing contexts. A further value of learning in the community is the rich opportunity it creates for living in fast-changing and diverse communities, a characteristic of modern industrialised societies (Mannion, 2016). Children's learning by virtue of social interaction reflects Putnam's understanding of communities as having both instrumental and intrinsic value (Putnam, 2000). The instrumental role frames the community in terms of supporting children's development (often with a focus on children living in contexts of disadvantage). More specifically, the research evidence is strong in relation to successful outcomes for community-focused initiatives for children living with disadvantage (Canavan et al., 2014; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), which frequently have a focus on the future, such as school readiness (OECD, 2018). However, the intrinsic value of the relational aspects of community for children's development and socio-emotional wellbeing has received less attention, despite the increasing recognition of the role of the relational and affective dimensions in young children's successful learning

(Galinsky, 2010; Hayes, 2013) and in their wellbeing (Bessell, 2017). Importantly, the intrinsic value of the community in facilitating relationships between children and older adults has been found to be significant because children who had participated in intergenerational programmes displayed stronger socio-emotional functioning than those who had not (Gigliotti et al., 2005; Winchell et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020).

A fundamental and widely agreed goal of ECE services, and one of Aistear's four themes, is identity and belonging, defined as children developing a positive sense of who they are, and feeling that they are valued and respected as part of a family and community (NCCA, 2009). Supporting children's positive sense of identity and belonging is considered to be crucial both for its intrinsic value and for its role in creating a strong foundation for children's socio-emotional development, cognitive development and overall wellbeing (NSCDC, 2004; Tillett & Wong, 2018). Participation in the community enables children to experience feelings of togetherness (Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001), to investigate how they find their place in the world (Kernan, 2010) and, importantly, how they contribute to other's sense of belonging (Ang, 2014; Nimmo, 2008). Crucially, children's sense of identity and belonging was found to be enhanced through the connections they made in the IGL experiences (Cartmel et al., 2018; Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2014), creating in children "a sense of purpose in the community" (Lux et al., 2020, p. 209).

3.7.3 Children's citizenship and participation in the community

Children's participation in the community acknowledges their rights as citizens, can be understood as a mark of respect for their competence as human beings (Nimmo, 2008) and can enhance their views of themselves as active, contributing citizens (Hart, 1997). Participating in the community positions children as contributors of social capital, promoting their well-being through developing a positive identity, strengthening their networks with trustworthy adults, creating social norms of behaviour (Coleman, 1988; Nimmo, 2008) and enhancing their

repertoire of interactive styles (Woodhead, 2005). Evidence from the IGL literature shows that not only can children be sources of social capital (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017) but they can contribute to the social capital of their parents through sharing their community links with them (Bessell, 2017; Nimmo, 2008) and can also contribute to the social capital of their community (Nimmo, 2008; Putnam, 2000). For example, following a community garden project involving children, adult gardeners reported that children played an active role in forming social networks and in changing adults' views of children's contribution to the project (Nimmo & Hallett, 2008; Nimmo, 2008). Recognition of children's ability to contribute is an important pre-cursor to ensuring children's participation is integral, rather than additional, to community projects (Sinclair, 2004). Importantly, integrating children through participation in the community creates opportunities for the development of civic engagement skills (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018).

The increasing privatisation and institutionalisation of contemporary childhood (Bessell, 2017; Edwards, 2002) has resulted in children spending more of their lives in home and school settings and, as a consequence less time in community environments (Rasmussen, 2004; Holmes, 2009). Importantly, the constrained opportunities for children to develop relationships with a variety of people, including older adults (Sánchez et al., 2018), and for engagement in the wider community (Gray et al., 2016), has raised the issue of the role of the ECE service in supporting the development of intentional relationships in the community (Nimmo, 2008). Additionally, a belief in the right of children to be socialised in the community as well as in the family and the ECE service, points to the roles (Haddad, 2006) and, it could be argued, the responsibilities of the ECE service and the community in supporting this right of children (Fleer, 2003; Hayes et al., 2017).

3.7.4 Children's participation in the community and generationally intelligent spaces

Children's participation in the community sends a strong social message that children are not only members of an ECE service but are also as members of a wider world, with the right to participate (Alderson, 2010). Therefore, an important element of children's socialisation in the community is ensuring, as a first step, that children are visible members of the community (Bessell, 2017). Building on their visibility through participation in the community children are exposed to new relationships and more numerous role models important for wellbeing and socialisation, particularly for children who do not interact with a wide variety of adults (McAlister et al., 2019). Importantly, children's participation in the community raises the issue of the potential of "generationally intelligent spaces", which allow different generational groups to interact and share use of their environment (Biggs & Carr, 2015, p. 106). This idea is reflected in the concept of Intergenerational Contact Zones (ICZ), which act as spatial focal points for different generations to meet and build relationships (Kaplan et al., 2020). The concept was inspired by the Japanese idea of keeping in touch and the term was introduced by Thang (2015) based on her observations of a co-(age) located playground. While ICZ highlights the role of the physical environment in promoting intergenerational connections, it also emphasises the related and significant social and cultural dimensions (Kaplan et al., 2020) so that ICZ could be understood as times and spaces where intergenerational contact can occur, including in older adults' and ECE services. The concepts underpinning ICZ are centrally relevant to the development of IGL in ECE and older adults' services, with Sánchez et al., (2020) suggesting that ICZ can serve as a conceptual, programming and design tool for IGL programmes. Framing children's participation in the community in the context of ICZ strongly reflects key principles of socio-cultural theories of learning, highlighting the child as an active learner, the role of relationships and collaborative learning in real life contexts (Sánchez et al., 2018). Additionally, it brings to life concepts of lifelong and lifewide learning, creating firsthand experiences and understandings of the lifestyles and lifecycles of children and older adults

(Gualano et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Sánchez et al., 2018). Importantly, ICZ can create opportunities to harness the accumulated knowledge and experience of older adults as guardians of knowledge, traditions and skills in communities (Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Kenner et al., 2007). In creating access to culturally relevant activities in the community including music, crafts, stories and history, central to the passing on of cultural identity and wisdom, children also develop deeper knowledge of their community (Cartmel et al., 2018; Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020; Kaplan & Larkin, 2004). Importantly, the role of ICZ in acting as a bridge to the wider community is worthy of consideration in light of an Irish study which found that grandparents are now less likely to act as bridges to wider intergenerational community networks or to play a role in helping children to find their place in the community (Geraghty et al., 2015).

3.7.5 Challenges to supporting children's participation in the community

At the same time as the recognition of the value of children's participation in the community has grown, a constellation of factors has contributed to making children's participation in the community more challenging (Nimmo, 2008). These challenges include the privatisation of childhood, concerns about children's safety, increasing regulation of ECE services and varied understandings of the primary functions of ECE services (Moss, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner argued in the 1970's that children in group care in the USA were becoming increasingly alienated from adult society, with children interacting primarily with a small group of childcare educators, a claim that Nimmo suggests still stands (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nimmo, 2008). The privatisation and institutionalisation of childhood has not only changed the physical spaces in which children spend time but has also played a role in shaping the parameters of childhood, impacting on social perceptions of children's place in society (Bessell, 2017). Moreover, children's decreasing visibility in public spaces has led to a view that children may be considered a disruptive presence in public spaces widely believed to be

the domain of adults (Bessell, 2017; Qvortrup, 2005). A further issue that arises as children spend more time in the home and the school is the argument that children need to be protected when outside of these places, resulting in their absence from public spaces being rationalised in terms of children's safety (Bessell, 2017). Combined, these issues have led to an ambivalent position of the role of community in young children's lives (Nimmo, 2008; Bessell, 2017). While the community is viewed in ECE discourse and beyond as a valuable learning environment for children, a competing perspective views the community as a potential site of danger and risk. Risk and danger, constructed not only in relation to physical risks to children's safety but also in the context of child-adult relationships where strangers are perceived to present particular dangers (Bessell, 2015), may result in limiting children's opportunities for social experiences in the community (Lindon, 2011; James et al., 1998). Based on these views of risk, children may perceive the social world as a frightening place which may then impact on the development of their desire for civic engagement (Rossi, 2001, as cited in Nimmo, 2008; Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018). Children's involvement in IGL has been shown to counter some of the negative aspects of their declining involvement in the community and the associated decline in opportunities for intergenerational relationships (Boström, 2003; Kump Krašovec, 2014). Strong evidence demonstrates that, through IGL, children can enjoy and gain confidence in their relationships with older adults outside the family (Bessell, 2017; Lux et al., 2020). The importance of this is reflected in an Australian study of children in the community, which found that, when children were removed from public spaces, it resulted in a breakdown of intergenerational relationships (Bessell, 2017). A further challenge to children's participation in the community is the increasing regulation of ECE services, with educators in the USA and Australia reporting that institutional issues, including staff ratio requirements and transport issues, as well as parental fears, made it difficult for ECE services to develop community relationships (Nimmo, 2008).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a significant challenge to supporting children's participation (or not) in the community depends on fundamental understandings of the philosophy, aims and functions of ECE services. A strong discourse in contemporary ECE policy in the Western world focuses on ECE as an investment in children's futures, with an instrumental emphasis on school readiness and investment on returns, a paradigm that has been critiqued by the reconceptualist movement (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2015). Challenging the idea of ECE as a means to an end, the reconceptualist movement instead proposes a discourse of ECE founded on democratic principles. Their perception of the ECE service is one that is socially and culturally embedded, emphasising a strong relationship between the ECE service and the community. Encounters, dialogue, democracy, co-operation and solidarity are values and characteristics of democratic practice in ECE services proposed by reconceptualists (Dahlberg et al., 2013). Based on this belief, the ECE service would be constructed as a means of a child being in the community rather than being taken out of it (New South Wales Department of Community Services, 2001). Drawing on the Reggio Emilia approach to ECE as an example of the reconceptualist discourse, key characteristics include a pedagogy of relationships as an underpinning philosophy of the ECE service; children as active contributors to the life of a community and childhood and ECE as community projects (Cagliari et al, 2016). Clearly, policymakers' and educators' views of the functions and priorities of ECE services play a critical role in relation to the issue of children's participation in the community (Moss, 2014) and ultimately in the potential of IGL as a pedagogical strategy.

3.8 Summary

The common characteristics of socio-cultural theories of learning that underpin Irish ECE policy and those underpinning IGL (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017; Cartmel et al., 2018) offered a strong foundation on which to consider IGL as a pedagogical strategy (Campillo et

al., 2020; Orte et al., 2018) for ECE services. Centrally important characteristics include children as citizens actively participating in their lives and learning (Alanen, 2014; Malaguzzi, 1998), the role of relationships in learning, development and wellbeing (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009), learning as a participatory and collaborative process (Kaplan, 2002; Rogoff, 2014), the role of the educator in supporting children's learning (McNally & Slutsky, 2018) and the community as a locus and resource for learning (Hayes et al., 2017; Nimmo, 2008). Viewing children as fully-fledged, competent and contributing citizens (Alanen, 2014) opens up new possibilities across many aspects of children's lives (Corsaro, 2018), including participation in IGL experiences (Radford et al., 2018; Sánchez et al., 2020). Closely linked to viewing children as rich and competent is the growing acknowledgement of children's right to participate in all aspects of their lives in family, education and community contexts (Bae, 2010; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Importantly, IGL experiences facilitated contemporary understandings of participation as embedded in the everyday lives of children who live relationally, intergenerationally and in their communities (Horgan et al., 2017; Mannion, 2007).

The robust research evidence on the role of relationships in impacting on children's learning, development and wellbeing (NSCDC, 2004; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009), which is strongly aligned with principles underpinning both Irish ECE policy and IGL, acknowledges the inextricable links between socio-emotional and cognitive aspects of children's development and wellbeing (Banaji & Gelman, 2013). A relational approach to pedagogy, suggesting learning is the outcome of relationships in real life contexts, highlights the significant potential of IGL as a pedagogical strategy (Clarke & Hoover, 2020). Moreover, placing relationships at the heart of learning reflects contemporary priorities emphasising a process rather than an outcomes focus in ECE practice (Carr & Lee, 2012; Hayes, 2013), while

also pointing to a humanist rather than an instrumental perspective on the purposes of education (Delors, 1996), ideas which align well with IGL (Heydon, 2019).

Learning as a participatory and collaborative process that is dynamic, bidirectional and transformative is not only fundamental to socio-cultural theories of learning but is reflected in international and Irish ECE policy principles (Carr, 2001; NCCA, 2009) and is strongly aligned with principles of IGL (Kuehne & Melville, 2014). In extending ideas about the participatory nature of children's learning, Rogoff (2014) argued that real life learning, by observing and pitching in to family and community endeavours, offered rich learning opportunities, and importantly is built on an intergenerational perspective of living and learning (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016).

While the pivotal role of the educator in supporting children's learning is well established in ECE discourse (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), less attention has been given to characteristics of effective educators (Dockett, 2019; Powell, 2010). Of particular importance in this study were the pedagogical beliefs and values of educators (Anders, 2015; Powell, 2010) and their views on intentional teaching (Kilderry, 2015; Mentha et al., 2015) as IGL is not a typical pedagogical strategy in Irish ECE services.

Ordinary, everyday community experiences as direct sources of learning for children, valued in the theory and practice of ECE (Goldfeld et al., 2015; NCCA, 2009), have drawn attention to the role of the community as a locus and resource for learning (Cohen & Korintus, 2016). The significant potential of IGL is foregrounded in the extensive opportunities for children's learning in the community (Cartmel et al., 2018), in creating risk-rich curricula (New et al., 2005), contexts for the development of social capital (Putnam, 2000), opportunities for civic engagement (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018), and importantly, in contributing to the concept of ICZ (Kaplan et al., 2020).

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an account of the methodological design of the study and is organised around eight main topics. The first section presents the researcher's position and perspective in relation to the study, which is followed by an outline of the methodological principles underpinning and guiding the research study. An overview of the research design is presented in the third section. Conducting research with children is considered in the fourth section while an overview of the study participants is presented in the fifth section. Specific details of the research instruments and data collection processes are reviewed in the sixth section. Key analytic strategies are outlined in the seventh section and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations pertaining to the study.

4.2 Position and perspective of the researcher in relation to the study

The researcher's relationship with the study was identified at the outset to be significant (Kagan et al., 2016) recognising that her background and position would affect the angle of investigation, the methods selected, and how findings and conclusions would be framed and communicated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Malterud, 2001). Thus, the researcher acknowledges that the position of the researcher and the object of study affect each other mutually and continually in the research process (Kagan et al., 2016; Moss, 2016). Data are not collected but produced and facts do not exist independently and can be effectively interpreted only with reference to a theoretical model and the epistemological and philosophical position of the researcher (Miles et al., 2014). This position highlights the importance of explaining the lens through which the researcher viewed the study and made decisions (Mills, 2014) and the importance of the researcher adopting a reflective position throughout the process.

The study grew from the researcher's experience of working with the TOY project consortium over a 4-year period, which included participating in the development and delivery of the TOY pilot training programme. Significantly, the sample for the study was recruited from Irish participants who had completed the TOY pilot training programme. Additionally, the researcher had many years' experience working as a practitioner in ECE services and as a lecturer on the BA (Hons.) Early Childhood Education programme in TU Dublin (formerly DIT), which she perceived as a potential strength with regard to informing the study process. The researcher's views about ECE and the roles and potential roles of ECE services were also pertinent to how the study was approached. The researcher views ECE as essentially a political and ethical endeavour rather than a technical practice (Dahlberg et al., 2013) and the ECE service as one that provides rich opportunities for children's holistic development and can support families and communities in the process. Informing her view of ECE are the ideas of the Reggio Emilia and the reconceptualist movement, which view ECE as a democratic practice and view relationship-building between children, parents and communities as fundamental values and principles of ECE (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Malaguzzi, 1998; Urban, 2015). Furthermore, she holds the view that education is not confined to the school but can occur in many settings and with a range of individuals and communities (Cagliari et al., 2016; Moss, 2015). In viewing ECE as a political and ethical endeavour, positionality and perspective should then be considered core values in the research process (Moss, 2016) and, crucially, reflexivity on the part of the researcher is viewed as central to the authenticity of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) and is discussed in section 4.2.1 below.

The researcher's views about the role that educators in ECE services can play in relation to research was significant in the implementation of the study. Educators are engaged in authentic, democratic research with children on a daily basis (Clark, 2017; Moss, 2016; Rinaldi, 2012) as they engage in a continuous process of co-constructing meaning with children. As co-

construction of meaning is a fundamental pedagogical approach in Irish ECE services (NCCA, 2009), educators were considered to be strongly positioned to collaborate in the data gathering process of facilitating children to reflect on their IGL experiences and is further discussed in section 4.4.2.

Finally, understandings of the possibilities and limitations of social research are relevant to how the researcher approached the study. Two fundamental beliefs underpin the study: meanings and perspectives are fluid as children and adults continuously interact with, and interpret, their worlds, and the researcher and those being researched are socially, culturally and historically bound (Bryman, 2016; Horgan, 2017b). Arising from these two beliefs, the purpose of the research was to record and interpret multiple social subjectivities, while acknowledging that the knowledge created by the study was partial and conditional (Beazley et al., 2009; Pawson, 2006). Nonetheless, the meanings and understandings arising from the study have an important value in promoting reflection and debate on the role of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in Irish ECE services.

4.2.1 Reflexivity in the research process

The researcher believed that commitment to critical reflection at every stage of the research process is a significant indicator of the transparency of the research process and plays a key role in safeguarding the validity of qualitative research (Patnaik, 2013). This perspective acknowledges the influential role that the researcher's position and perspective play in relation to the research study and makes explicit the subjectivity of social research (Moss, 2016). The qualitative and interpretive nature of this study involved the researcher becoming the key research instrument in the study (Denzin & Lincoln 2018). As such, the researcher recognises that meanings are diverse and open-ended and the researcher is involved in the construction and interpretation of knowledge, rather than in the extraction of knowledge (Bryman, 2016; Flick, 2018). Moreover, the particular role of reflexivity in promoting the validity of research

with children has been highlighted, so it was important that the researcher's assumptions about childhood, children and their views were continuously questioned (Kellett, 2011). Recognising this subjectivity served as a first step in managing it, and the researcher adopted an ongoing reflexive approach to ensure continual awareness of the researcher's own beliefs and impact on the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam, 2009). Importantly, the researcher, while recognising the value-laden nature of research and the potential for bias, viewed subjectivity as a useful resource in the construction of research knowledge (Kagan et al., 2016). The researcher was aiming for what Lather refers to as "rigorous subjectivity through critical reflection" (Lather, 1991, p. 52, as cited in Moss, 2016).

Of particular concern was the possibility that the researcher's position in the TOY project might influence educators' responses and behaviour. Because of their involvement in the TOY project, educators may give more positive feedback to this researcher than they would to an unknown researcher or through the use of an anonymised research instrument. Bergen and Labonte (2019, p. 783) have termed such potential influence a "social desirability bias". The possibility that educators may seek assistance or approval in relation to their IGL practice was also considered. Cognisant of these challenges, these issues were discussed with educators, highlighting the value of objective responses and the importance of boundaries with the researcher to ensure the reliability of the study. Additionally, specific interview questions were developed to promote critical perspectives among the educators.

4.3 Methodological principles guiding the study

The methodological issues and key principles that guided the study, including the epistemological framework, the theoretical context of the study and the role of reflexivity, will now be outlined.

4.3.1 Epistemological framework of the study

The epistemological stance informing the study is based on the premise that social reality has a subjective meaning for human beings and that a person's understanding of reality is constructed within the context of social and cultural experiences (Bryman, 2016; Gergen, 2009).

Ontology, the form and nature of reality, is inextricably linked to the epistemological position on the nature of knowledge and what counts as knowledge (Punch, 2003). In attempting to address the ontological question, "what is reality?", the researcher adopted the position that social phenomena do not have an existence separate from social actors and that knowledge is socially constructed in a community of participants in a specific time and value context (Bryman, 2016; Dahlberg et al, 2013). The epistemological and ontological positions adopted gave direction to a number of choices made in designing the study and these choices are outlined below.

4.3.2 An interpretive framework and a constructionist approach

An interpretive framework focusing on understanding the subjective meanings of the social world for individuals and highlighting the contextualised nature of knowledge and reality (Bryman, 2016) was deemed appropriate for the study, the central aim of which was to explore the meaning of IGL experiences for educators and children. Criteria of an interpretivist approach considered central to the study included: people are studied in their natural social setting; the focus is on the uniqueness of each situation; data is produced as part of the interaction between the researcher and participants; and multiple interpretations are possible and acceptable (Kroeze, 2012). A phenomenological philosophy, describing and interpreting phenomena according to the meaning they have for the participants (Cohen et al., 2018), and which is closely aligned with interpretivism, also informed the study. A phenomenological approach is particularly valuable in interpreting the meaning children attach to their

observations and commentary and goes some way to addressing the issue of the fragility of children's views, a significant challenge identified in the literature (Colliver, 2017). The aim of the researcher was to interpret participants' perspectives, that is, their interpretations of meaning, as represented in the semi-structured interviews with educators and the data gathered with children of their IGL experiences. In doing so, a largely inductive approach considering the meanings of the data in a bottom-up process was adopted. Following this process, meanings were further interpreted against the backdrop of the study's theoretical framework and principles (Bryman, 2016), highlighting the creative and constructive role of the researcher in interpretive research practice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The study is situated within a constructionist perspective that is well aligned with the sociocultural theoretical framework guiding the study. A constructionist approach reflects an
ontological position that if knowledge does not exist, except as an interaction between the
objective and the subjective, then knowledge is understood as a construction rather than a
discovery. In arguing for an understanding of reality based on construction rather than an
objective reality, constructionism highlights the key role of collaboration and sharing, and the
fact that meaning is constructed with others and realised in relationships with others (Gergen,
2009). Furthermore, constructionism contends that the social interactions people engage in are
the appropriate focus of study. The methodological principles underpinning the study outlined
above served as a basis for the development of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that
informed the research and guided the design.

4.3.3 Theoretical and conceptual framework and research methodology

The theoretical framework for the study, which serves as the foundation from which the knowledge is constructed, draws broadly on socio-cultural theories of human development. Simply stated, these theories contend that development and learning is embedded in the context

of social relationships in children's social and cultural settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 1990).

Interpretivism, which focuses on understanding a pluralistic world made up of multiple subjective realities, is closely aligned with socio-cultural theories, which contend that all learning and development occurs through interactions in the social and cultural context (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). Constructionism, with its focus on perceptions of the world and knowledge being constructs of participants and their interactions (Flick, 2018), is also closely aligned with socio-cultural theories. Concepts such as scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978), learning as a social activity (Bruner, 1996) and guided participation (Rogoff, 2014) highlight the constructionist nature of development outlined by theorists in the socio-cultural tradition. The conceptual framework, which created the infrastructure for the study (Adom et al., 2018), was developed based on a synthesis of the epistemological principles underpinning the study and key ideas drawn from socio-cultural theories relating to children's learning. Based on extensive reading of relevant literature, the concepts deemed most useful in exploring the research questions included: the child as citizen; the role of relationships in learning and development; learning as a collaborative process; the community as a locus and resource for learning and development; and the role of the educator in supporting children's learning. The positional, methodological, theoretical principles and concepts informing the study outlined above illuminate the lens through which the researcher viewed the topic and gave direction to the design of the study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014), and will now be reviewed in the context of their role in developing the research design.

4.4 Research design

A key stage in the research process was the identification of a research design, which then guided all elements of the research process from the selection of the research tools to the writing of the report.

4.4.1 Research design: a qualitative methodology

A qualitative design, reflecting the social constructionist paradigm in which the study was situated, was deemed an appropriate fit for the theoretical and methodological principles underpinning the study and to meet the research objectives of obtaining a relatively complex picture of the topic under study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2016). A qualitative research design focuses on the insider perspectives of the participants, giving voice to individuals and encouraging reflection as they attribute meaning to their experiences (Lapan et al., 2012). Qualitative approaches not only acknowledge but seek to illuminate the personal, social, cultural, economic and historical contexts that impact on the participants as they construct their worlds. Importantly, this approach offered promise in realising the central aim of the study, which was to access the unique perspectives of educators and children on their IGL experiences, rather than seeking common experiences or ideas. The research design pointed to the appropriateness of a small, purposive sample to ensure that rich data would be gathered from individuals who had experienced the same phenomenon. Reflecting the researcher's view of meaning-making as a collaborative process, a key element in the research design in relation to gathering data with children was the decision to work collaboratively with educators, an approach that will now be discussed.

4.4.2 A collaborative approach to gathering data with children and parents

The researcher believed that the participation of educators in gathering data with the children would add significant value to the authenticity of the study. The educators were willing and

enthusiastic to participate as collaborators and worked with the researcher to agree guidelines that informed the data gathering process with children. Importantly, educators were, themselves, interested in researching children's views on what was a relatively recent and innovative practice in their ECE services. In agreeing to collaborate with the researcher, educators would gather data with children in their natural environments, without the researcher's presence in the ECE service. Educators were already regularly engaged in coconstructing knowledge with children and were experienced in listening to, clarifying, interpreting and documenting children's views and experiences. Pedagogical documentation of children's lives and learning (Sommer et al., 2013) was, therefore, a form of research embedded in the daily life of their ECE services, a well-established tool in ECE contexts and a key process and requirement in the implementation of Aistear and Síolta (CECDE, 2006; DES, 2018; NCCA, 2009). These same skills and competences were deemed by the researcher to be central to accessing children's views about their IGL experiences and making those views accessible to others (Clark, 2017). Importantly, adopting a collaborative strategy in data gathering with children benefits significantly from the trusting relationships that exist between educators and children, the natural contexts in which educators can gather data and the extended time available to educators in which to gather data.

The *trusting relationships educators had with children* played a key role in creating a positive emotional climate, acknowledging the research process as one of relationship (Fleer & Li, 2016), which is crucial to successful research practice with children (Johnson et al., 2014; Kellett, 2011). Moreover, it avoided the researcher being parachuted in to "do" interviews with children following a process of building up relationships with them (Horgan, 2017b, p. 251). This would result in the researcher becoming part of the context (Wright, 2010), potentially changing the power dynamics between children and adults, whereas the process being facilitated by a trusted adult goes some way to addressing this issue (Johnson et al., 2014).

Additionally, educators gathering data could address an important issue in participatory research with children, that of inclusion of children who may need particular support to participate (Horgan, 2017a).

The natural contexts in which the educators gathered data with children enhanced the authenticity of the study, in a way that would not have been available to the researcher. Educators had understandings of children's socio-emotional dispositions and the contexts in which they made meaning (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2016; Rinaldi, 2012), creating a rich context for intersubjectivity (Fleer & Li, 2016), crucial in illuminating the authentic meanings of the children's IGL experiences. Drawing on the concept of "funds of knowledge" (Hedges & Cullen, 2012, p. 932), educators were well positioned to be attuned to the understandings and meanings that children wished to communicate and ways of supporting them in forming and expressing their views by reference to, for example, incidents, activities or relationships. Moreover, children's drawings, which were a central element of the study methodology, are not easily understood without a context (Hall, 2009) and educators had opportunities to adopt a reflexive approach to understanding children's meanings in the context of their individual lives (Colliver, 2017). Well documented in the literature on drawing as a methodology is the crucial importance of including children's observations and interpretations contemporaneously as they represent their meanings through drawing, rather than attempting to interpret what they have drawn out of context (Einarsdottir, 2007; Merewether & Fleet, 2014). The holistic nature of young children's learning also highlighted the benefits of a contextually-based approach to data gathering (Miles, 2018), because children may reflect on the IGL experience in unrelated contexts, for example, through an association with the food that they enjoyed in the older adults' service while eating their lunch in the ECE service. Contextually-based data gathering may also help to achieve a more realistic understanding of children's worlds and help to

counteract an adult-centred hierarchical understanding of children's interests in any particular activity (Miles, 2018; Ruscoe et al., 2018).

The benefits of children having *extended time* to process experiences have been advanced in the research literature as yielding more in-depth and nuanced understandings of their experiences (Dalli & Te One, 2012). This finding strengthened the case for collaborating with educators to gather data with children because they have access to children before, during and after the IGL experiences in natural contexts over days, weeks and months, which facilitates the gathering of rich and authentic data in unpredictable moments and through varied means of communication (Miles, 2018). Sustained and prolonged periods of data gathering also create possibilities for less overt messages to be heard, which may not have been central to the research agenda (Stephenson, 2009; Dalli & Te One, 2012).

Educators also agreed to gather data with parents about their children's IGL experiences. The benefits of educators, rather than the researcher, collecting data from parents had many of the same benefits as those in relation to children, including a trusting relationship, a context in which to understand the data and the possibility of data being collected over an extended time period, as well as expertise in communicating with parents. Furthermore, consulting with and seeking feedback from parents is a requirement of the frameworks and Regulations governing the Irish ECE sector. As with children, educators were particularly interested in getting feedback on parents' views because IGL was a relatively new practice in the ECE services.

4.4.3 Challenges of a collaborative approach to gathering data

While acknowledging the benefits of a collaborative approach between the researcher and the educators in gathering data with children and parents, a number of challenges should also be noted. Supporting children as research participants requires an appropriate balance between children being supported in forming and expressing their views, yet not compromising children's independence in expressing their views (Kellett, 2011). Children's views being

influenced in their interactions with educators is one such risk, with a further risk arising if educators knowingly or inadvertently speak on behalf of the child. An additional challenge is the possibility of children feeling that they should comply with a trusted adult in what was considered the normal daily routine of expressing their views, so that educators could be construed as taking advantage of children's docility (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). The researcher was confident that the choices offered to children by educators as part of their normal daily routines would also apply to children's participation in IGL experiences and in reflecting on those experiences later. Importantly, the researcher requested that educators ensure that no child participated in the study against their will. Having discussed these potential challenges with educators, the researcher believed that they were committed to a process that valued the authentic representation of children's perspectives and their choice to participate or not.

Potential challenges of data gathering with parents included the possibility that parents might be reluctant to refuse to participate or to express negative views of the IGL experiences and these issues, and how they might be addressed were also discussed with educators.

These challenges point to a fundamental issue in the research process: sharing control of the data gathering process (Kieser & Leiner, 2012) with educators, because the researcher is then no longer fully in charge of the process. The researcher trusted that educators would gather the data in an ethical manner and, in working to assure this, she regularly reviewed the process with the educators.

4.5 Conducting research with children

Exploring IGL experiences from children's perspectives was a central focus of the study, acknowledging the importance of understanding children's views of IGL and their right to participate in research about their lives. Consequently, children's participation in the research

process was considered to be an essential component of the research design and methodological approach (Clark, 2017; Dockett et al., 2017). Principles underpinning the researcher's position in relation to conducting research with children are now addressed and include key ideas about young children and their participation in research; co-construction as a valid approach to researching with children; and challenges, including ethical issues, in research with children.

4.5.1 Key ideas about young children and their participation in research

How children and childhood are viewed, and the theoretical perspectives underpinning those views, had a direct impact on the approach taken in the research (Broström, 2012; Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). Three key ideas about young children and research that are well documented in the literature informed the study: children are rights-holding citizens in research; children are competent subjects in research and children require participatory methods to effectively participate in research (Farrell et al., 2016; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015).

Viewing children as citizens with rights from birth to have their perspectives represented and to influence decisions that affect their lives is a principle now well-established in law and policy in the Western world and was an important principle informing the study (Broström, 2012; Colliver, 2017; Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Working within the framework of the UNCRC (UN, 1989), inviting children's perspectives is no longer an option based on the discretion of adults (Lundy, 2007) but is a legal or, in the case of Ireland, a national policy objective (Government of Ireland, 2018). Moreover, contemporary Irish policy places a strong emphasis on the right of children to have their voices heard in their daily life in the ECE service (NCCA, 2009; Government of Ireland, 2018), challenging the idea that young children lack capacity (Christensen & James, 2017; UN, 2005). The potential benefit to children of their participation was an important consideration in designing the study, based not only on their rights or as a process with a value in itself in empowering children, but importantly to influence their IGL experiences and any further development of IGL practice in ECE services. The results

of this study will be shared with all research participants, as well as with the wider ECE and IGL communities through journal articles and conference presentations. This commitment acknowledges that giving children a voice is just one element of children's participation, but they also have a right to an audience if their participation in research is to influence policy and practice (Horgan, 2017a; Tisdall, 2016).

Viewing children as full subjects, rather than objects, of the research process and working *with* children, as opposed to *on* children, led to the development of a participatory research process (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011; Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013). Importantly, rights-based research with children is both good research and good human rights (Beazley et al., 2009), with Kellett (2011) further arguing that research that does not involve children in any role undermines the legitimacy of the research.

Viewing children as competent co-constructors of their social worlds, experts with unique views on their own lives and with many languages of communication (Alanen, 2014; Malaguzzi, 1998), was the second belief underpinning the role of children as research participants in the study. The researcher supported the epistemological argument in favour of children participating in research based on the claim that the child can contribute better, more nuanced knowledge and understanding of complex social phenomena based on first-hand experiences (Harcourt & Hägglund, 2013; Smith, 2011), and would, therefore, contribute significantly to the authenticity of the study (Mayne et al., 2018; Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Importantly, children's perspectives were deemed crucial for the role that they played in augmenting and challenging the original focus of the study (Miles, 2018) and it was expected that children would provide new insights on the meanings of IGL experiences that might not be reflected in the current research literature. Moreover, a considerable gap exists in the literature as IGL has not been studied from the perspective of young children in the Irish or international context (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020) and the research more typically reports

adults' views of children's IGL experiences, which could be considered "a proxy for children's experiences and views" (Tisdall, 2016, p. 78). This gap also raises a question about whose knowledge is considered more important, with this researcher adopting the position that children's expertise is critical to the knowledge created by this study (Clark, 2017; Merewether & Fleet, 2014).

The importance of participatory methods to authentically access children's perspectives (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011; Martin & Buckley, 2018) was the third idea underpinning the researcher's approach to research with children. Acknowledging that children are trusted experts on their own lives, the researcher focused on methods that emphasised knowledge production rather than knowledge gathering (Einarsdottir, 2007; Fleer & Li, 2016). Consequently, methods that supported children in thinking, reflecting and communicating about their IGL experiences, based on children's differing types and levels of knowledge and understanding (Christensen & James, 2000), were identified as crucial in facilitating this process (Clark, 2017). Importantly, supporting children to participate as experts relied not only on appropriate methods but also on the pivotal role of the adult in creating a supportive environment in which children could participate effectively (Bae, 2010).

In analysing the first phase of data collection, all educator narratives demonstrated a view of children as fully-fledged citizens with rights to participate in all aspects of their lives, including a right to have their voices heard, supported by educators. These views were important in influencing the researcher's decision to invite educators to gather data with children about their IGL experiences. These views also highlighted the close alignment that existed between routine practices in the ECE services, based on the idea of the competent child constructing meaning about all aspects of their lives in the ECE services, and the participatory methods designed by the researcher to conduct research with children about their IGL experiences. Children in this study were, therefore, offered opportunities to express their views in a positive climate in

formats that could be spontaneous and enjoyable and were part of familiar routines of the ECE services involved in the study. A further important issue in considering a participatory research approach with children centred around how children's participation is conceptualised by educators. Evident from analysis of the first phase of data collection was educators' understanding of participation as relational and primarily embedded in children's daily lives (Bae, 2010). Children's everyday interactions and reflections with educators about all aspects of their lives using a variety of media were routine practices in the ECE services in the study and, importantly, were understood by educators as valuable participatory strategies. Consequently, the research methods adopted for the study reflected practices already in use and which formed part of children's daily experiences in the ECE services. The methods of draw and talk, and of talking and listening, were the main methods used in data gathering with children and are closely aligned with a children's rights perspective and the concept of children participating in all aspects of their lives (Broström, 2012).

4.5.2 Co-construction as an approach to gathering data with children

Children's participation in research was understood by the researcher to be a co-constructive process between the child and the adult in a relational context, reflecting a belief in the social construction of meaning (Clark, 2017; Dockett & Perry, 2007). Concurring with this view, Clark (2017) suggests that research with children is a process more akin to co-construction rather than collection of data. This view points to the key role of educators or "wise people" who scaffold and facilitate children as they construct their understandings (Dahlberg et al., 2013, p. 114). A co-constructive approach to research with children, aligns with key ideas of the Mosaic approach and mirrored practices already being implemented in the ECE services in the study, including viewing children as experts, involving key individuals in children's lives in a reflexive process and focusing on children's lived experiences (Clark, 2017). The Mosaic approach mirrors the epistemological approach underpinning the study about the nature of

knowledge and aligns with the methodology adopted for data gathering. Importantly, the Mosaic approach addresses a question central to this study: how can children's perspectives become the focus for an exchange of meanings between children, educators, parents and researchers? (Clark, 2017). Key elements of co-construction in the data gathering process focused on children feeling empowered to develop and communicate their views and meanings in a supportive environment, without prescribed outcomes. It was envisaged that educators would respectfully help children to piece together their views and understandings, through a reciprocal process of sharing and developing their thinking together, using methods that played to their strengths (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011; Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013). Crucially, the researcher emphasised that children should not feel under pressure to participate in any element of the IGL experience related to the study, including the expression of their views. The researcher and educators discussed practical strategies of working with children to co-construct meanings and to document and record these meanings, an example of which is now described. The educator could invite the child to talk about the IGL experience or to draw in the "IGL book"⁵ after an IGL experience. If the child was drawing (or later), the educator might invite the children to share their thoughts and feelings. The educator might explore with the children aspects of the drawing or ideas presented by children in informal conversation, in order to better understand their meanings. Through the process of documenting the children's ideas, explanations and commentary alongside the drawings (Rintakorpi, 2016), the educator would gain insight and understandings of children's perspectives of their IGL experiences. The importance of including children's narratives and interpretations of their drawings was emphasised by the researcher as a crucial process in understanding contexts and authentically interpreting children's meanings (Einarsdottir, 2007) and was a practice already in use by the

⁵ The IGL book was a large drawing book used by children and educators to record children's IGL experiences.

educators. Following these discussions, guidelines for using this approach were drawn up in consultation with educators (see Appendix A).

4.5.3 The role of parents in gathering data with their children

Parents played a crucial role in helping to understand and interpret the views and perspectives of their children's IGL experiences. Feedback from parents about their children's IGL experiences was routinely requested from parents before this study began and was elicited by educators in a number of ways, including text messages, WhatsApp messages and through informal conversations with parents, for example, when collecting their child from the ECE service. Educators were requested to continue this process and to include parents' textual feedback in the IGL book. Additionally, parents were asked to invite their child to talk and/or make a drawing about their IGL experience and for the parent to then note the child's comments on the drawing. Through this process, the parents participated in the co-construction of the meaning of the IGL experiences as they worked with educators to interpret their children's perspectives, based on their drawings and conversations. Additionally, parents were asked to note their personal views of the meanings that the IGL experiences had for their child. The layering of strategies through gathering children's, educators' and parents' perspectives created opportunities to build a rich and nuanced overview or mosaic of children's IGL experiences (Clark, 2017).

4.5.4 Challenges of conducting research with children

Researching the perspectives of young children's lives is at an early stage of development in the world of research (Mayne & Howitt, 2015) and the researcher recognised the challenges of carrying out such research in what Beazley et al. (2009, p. 365) refer to as a "messy, real world". Two fundamental challenges in research with children centre on understandings of the concept of participation and the more practical challenge of identifying appropriate and valid

methods. While participation is itself a contested concept, it has also been critiqued in relation to follow-up activity, because giving children a voice, has, arguably, not addressed the issue of hearing children's voices (Harwood, 2010; Lundy, 2007; Ruscoe et al., 2018). A further critique, focusing on what has been considered the limiting role that adults can play in relation to children's participation, has been addressed in the literature (Mannion, 2007; Schiller & Einarsdottir, 2009). Interestingly, a counter argument has emerged, cautioning that the pendulum has swung too far, with children being seen as the sole interpreters of their own standpoints and adult perspectives being marginalised (Wyness, 2012).

Closely related to the concept of participation are the methodological challenges of research with children, including the fact that validated, authentic instruments, as well as methods of analysis, are at an early stage of development (Alanen, 2010; Landsdown et al., 2014; Punch, 2002; Tisdall, 2016). Other challenges in conducting research with children include power differentials between children and researchers; accessing meaningful, informed assent; interpretation of children's meaning and informing children of research outcomes, which are addressed throughout this chapter.

4.6 Study sample: profiles of study participants and services

The study sample comprised five educators who had completed the TOY pilot training programme and were implementing IGL in their ECE services, 70 children attending those ECE settings and 43 parents of those children.

As the aim of the study was to explore the IGL experiences of educators and children, the researcher set out to identify ECE services in which IGL was being implemented. Additionally, as this study was, to the researcher's knowledge, the first study exploring IGL with children in ECE services in Ireland, she believed the aims of the study would best be realised by focusing on participants who not only had experience of implementing IGL but who also had undertaken

training in IGL. Educators with training and experience of IGL would, the researcher believed, be best placed to offer rich data on IGL as a pedagogical strategy. The researcher acknowledges that including only educators who had undergone TOY training and were implementing IGL would result in a sample that might be positively oriented towards IGL. However, informal exploration by the researcher in the Irish ECE community, combined with exploration of published research, revealed that IGL was largely an unknown area of practice within Irish ECE services (Finn & Scharf, 2012). The TOY pilot course in 2016 drew interest from 21 educators working in Irish ECE services who went on to complete the course. The researcher contacted all 21 educators who had completed the TOY pilot training programme, inviting them to participate in the study if they were implementing IGL practice in their ECE service, with no further criteria set in relation to their IGL practice.

Furthermore, due to the very limited number of Irish ECE services in which IGL was being implemented, no attempt was made to recruit a representative sample of either older adults' or ECE services. This resulted in a purposive sample of five educators who were willing to participate and who met both criteria. The five educators worked in five different ECE services, were implementing IGL in a variety of services for older adults and for varying amounts of time. The heterogeneity of types of ECE and older adults' services, length of time IGL had been implemented, types and frequency of IGL contact, different types of interactions across settings, were not variables addressed in this exploratory study as the focus was on identifying key themes in relation to the concept and role of IGL as a pedagogical strategy. Nonetheless, the researcher acknowledges that each of these variables could play a significant role in educators', children's and parents' views and experiences of IGL and on IGL as a pedagogical strategy and would be important considerations in further IGL research. Moreover, further research on individual children and individual older adults' perspectives, as well as comparative studies across experiences and settings, would enrich the IGL knowledge base.

4.6.1 Profile of educators

The five educators who participated in the study were female, four of whom were aged 41-50 years with more than 20 years' experience in ECE services. The youngest educator aged 31-40 had 11-19 years' experience. Three educators were managers of their ECE services, while two worked as room leaders although they did not hold that title.

Table 4.1 Profile of educators in the study

Service	Gender	Age	ECE qualifications	ECE experience	Role in
					service
A	Female	41 – 50	NQF ⁶ Level 6 (studying	20 years +	Manager
Ciara			for NFQ 7)		
В	Female	41 - 50	NQF Level 6 (studying	20 years +	Manager
Mary			for NQF 7		
С	Female	41 - 50	NQF Level 8	20 years +	Room Leader
Deirdre					
D	Female	41 – 50	NQF Level 8 (studying	20 years +	Manager
Ruth			for NFQ Level 9)		
Е	Female	31 – 40	NQF Level 7	11-19 years	Room Leader
Eileen					

Educators varied in the levels of ECE qualification they held, ranging from NFQ Level 6 to NFQ Level 8. Two educators held bachelor's degree in ECE at Honours level (NFQ 8); one held a bachelor's degree in ECE at Ordinary level (NFQ 7). Two held qualifications in ECE

⁶ The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a 10-level, single national entity through which all learning achievements are measured. Level 6 is a Diploma, Level 7 is an ordinary bachelor's degree, Level 8 is an honours bachelor's degree and Level 9 is a Master's degree. www.qqi.ie

/Montessori at Diploma level (NFQ 6). Interestingly, three of the five educators were pursuing higher-level qualifications at the time of data collection. One educator with a BA degree (NFQ 8) was undertaking a master's degree (NFQ 9). The two educators with NFQ 6 qualifications were undertaking BA degree programmes at Ordinary level (NFQ7). These three educators were working full-time while studying part-time. Educators worked in a variety of ECE services, details of which are outlined below.

4.6.2 Profile of ECE services

The ECE services in the sample were the five ECE services where the five educators were working. A relatively varied range of ECE services was represented in the sample and included services of varied sizes, locations, age groups of children attending, socio-economic status and hours of opening, as presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Profiles of ECE services in the study

Service	Type of service	Total number	Age range of	Location of	Funded under
		of children in	children	service	social
		service			disadvantage
					criteria
A	Sessional	40 - 59	2.5 - 5 years	Commuter	No
				town	
В	Sessional	60 - 79	2.5 - 5 years	City suburb	No
С	Sessional	20 - 39	3 - 5 years	Large rural town	Yes
D	Full daycare	120	0 - 10 years	City suburb	Yes
Е	Full daycare	80 - 99	0 - 5 years	City suburb	Yes

Three of the ECE services offered sessional services of a maximum of 3.5 hours daily, while two services offered full day services. While the age range of children in the participating services was birth to 10 years, only children aged five years and under were included in the sample. The rationale for only including children aged five and under is that, in Ireland, five years typically marks the end of a child's ECE experience and their transfer to primary school (Pobal, 2019). Interestingly, no child under 2.5 years was reported by the educators to have participated in the IGL experiences. Three services were located in city suburbs, one in a commuter town and one in a large rural town. Included in the sample were three services that received funding under national schemes supporting ECE services in socially disadvantaged areas (Pobal, 2019).

4.6.3 Profiles of child participants and older adults' services

Child participants were recruited from within the ECE services in which the five educators worked. The criteria for children to be included in the sample were: children were aged 5 years or under, were participating in the IGL experiences and had the permission of their parents to be invited to participate. Once children met these criteria, they were invited to participate in the study. Seventy children aged between 2.5 and 5 years who had agreed to participate contributed to the study.

The older adults' services participating in the IGL experiences comprised three nursing homes, one day centre for older adults, one men's shed⁷ and one independent living centre for older adults. Significantly, while this represents a wide variety of the residential and day services available for older adults in Ireland, this was coincidental because the absolute priority for all educators was the proximity of the ECE service to the older adults' service. The older adults in the nursing homes and day centre were typically in the 70-90+ years age group. The older

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⁷ A 'men's shed' is a community-based project, where men can come together to learn, share skills and make friendships together. https://menssheds.ie/about-mens-sheds/

adults whom children met in the independent living centre and the men's shed tended to be the 'younger old'. In relation to physical and cognitive abilities, adults in the nursing homes were more likely to have relatively high levels of physical and/or cognitive needs, including dementia. The older adults attending the day centre varied in their physical and cognitive abilities. A pre-requisite of the independent living centre was that the older adults were relatively well both physically and cognitively. Men of all ages, abilities and interests attended by choice at the men's shed.

Four of the ECE services were linked with a single older adults' service each, while one ECE service visited both a nursing home and an independent living centre, resulting in a total of six older adults' services being included in the sample.

Table 4.3 Profile of child participants and older adults' services in the study

Type of older adult service	Number of children participating in IGL experiences who contributed to study	Age of children participating in IGL experiences who contributed to study
	(approx.)	
Nursing Home	13	2.5 - 5 years
Nursing Home	18	2.5 - 5 years
Men's Shed	12	3 - 5 years
Day Centre for Older Adults	12	2.5 - 5years
Nursing Home and	15	2.5 - 5 years
Independent Living Centre for older		
adults		

Total number of children participating in study: 70.

4.6.4 Parent participants in the study

The parent participants comprised any parent whose child was participating in the IGL experiences and who wished to contribute to the study. In total 43 parents gave written feedback (including text and email) on their children's IGL experiences.

4.7 Research instruments and data gathering process

This section outlines the research instruments developed to gather data from educators, children and parents. The data for this study was gathered over a 9-month period (September 2018 – June 2019), beginning with two interviews with educators, approximately 4 to 5 months apart. This was followed by data gathering with children and parents, which occurred simultaneously over a 4-month period approximately.

4.7.1 Research instruments and data collection with educators

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method best-suited for data collection with educators primarily because of their flexibility and adaptability in facilitating educators to provide insight into how they viewed the world (Bryman, 2016). While the interviews were organised around guiding topics, they allowed for the educators to elaborate and digress and for the researcher to follow up and clarify particular issues, thereby balancing the pre-set topics with educators' particular interests. The first interview focused on the educators' constructions of childhood, their perspectives on learning in the early years and their views on the roles and functions of the ECE service (see Appendix B). The second interview focused specifically on the educators' views and experiences of IGL (see Appendix C). The interview topics were evaluated firstly in relation to their relevance to the research objectives and the underpinning theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The structuring of questions was then reviewed for clarity and usefulness. Attention was given to the positioning of questions in the interview

guide starting with factual, descriptive questions, which were followed by more abstract and thought-provoking questions.

Pilot studies

Each educator interview schedule was piloted with one educator (not in the study), who was similar in levels of ECE experience to the educators in the sample. The first pilot interview, focusing on childhood, ideas about learning and roles of the ECE service, but not on IGL, was conducted with an educator who did not have experience of IGL practice. The educator who completed the second pilot study, focusing on the topic of IGL, had considerable experience of IGL practice. The pilot interviews served to test if questions were understood, if the language used was clear and if all ideas being discussed were understood. The pilot studies were also used to review the logic and flow in the sequencing of questions. Importantly, piloting the interview schedules served to ensure the research instruments as a whole functioned well, to avoid the possibilities of incomplete or misleading data being collected and to test if the research questions could be answered by the data which had been gathered (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, the pilot interviews were useful for ensuring the researcher was confident with the interview schedule, for testing the recording device and for estimating the time required to complete the interviews. Following the pilot interviews, the researcher discussed in detail all aspects of the interview with the pilot interviewees. The changes made to the interview schedule included the clarification and simplification of a number of terms, a revision of the sequencing of some questions and the removal of a small number of questions which were found to be repetitive.

Data collection with educators

The interviews were carried out in the ECE services in which the educators worked, and each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. A primary consideration of the researcher in setting the scene for data collection was the importance of creating a space in which the participants felt comfortable to share all aspects, both positive and negative, of their IGL

experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded, with the educators' permission, using a small tabletop digital recorder. Following the interviews, notes of events/issues not captured by the audio recording were made. One example of this was when the interview was suspended for a short time because the educator needed a break after a bout of coughing.

4.7.2 Research strategies for data gathering with children

Two primary strategies were used to gather data with children: draw and talk methods and talking and listening, both of which were already being used by children and educators in the ECE services in the study. The researcher discussed the strategies with each of the educators as part of the preparation stage in gathering data, addressing issues, including how they fitted with children's strengths, interests and levels of engagement (Einarsdottir, 2007; Merewether & Fleet, 2014). Shortly after data gathering began, the researcher reviewed the data gathering documentation and discussed progress with the educators, following which no changes were made to the data gathering strategies, which will now be outlined.

4.7.2.1 Draw and talk method for gathering data with children

Children's drawings, and the opportunities they create for listening to and reflecting on what children say and mean, are well-established methods for co-constructing meaning with young children (Clark, 2017; Einarsdottir et al., 2009; Martin, 2019). Drawing, through making the abstract concrete in an enjoyable way, can reveal more about what young children know, think and feel than can expressive language. Importantly, through drawing and talking in a supportive environment, children can explore quite complex ideas (Brooks, 2005; Eldén, 2012). While drawing is a valuable method in itself, recent research has identified the importance of listening attentively to children's accompanying narratives through the draw *and* talk method, rather than the draw *followed by* talk method (Coates & Coates, 2006; Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013). Young children frequently talk and narrate stories about what they are drawing

(Kukkonen & Chang-Kredl, 2018; Wood & Hall, 2011) and, in their study of children in early years services, Coates and Coates (2006) concluded that it was the children's utterances that illuminated their intentions and thought processes. Drawing and the accompanying conversations can, therefore, be understood as two sides of the one coin, which together contribute to the meaning-making process of the child (Einarsdottir et al., 2009; Wright, 2007). The approach adopted in the study was to focus on the importance of seeking children's meanings while drawing, rather than focusing on the tangible outcome of the drawing (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). These relational views of drawing and talking highlight the key role of skilled educators in carefully attending to the meaning-making process as it unfolds (Sunday, 2017). A further role of drawing in the study was its use as a shared point of interest between children and educators for discussion and to clarify and extend understanding of children's meanings (Lipponen et al., 2016). An important strength of the draw and talk method is its potential in offering children a verbal and a non-verbal mode to create and share meaning. This cross-over of modes acknowledges young children's use of many literacies to organise their thinking and their feelings (Malaguzzi & Gandini, 1993; Wright, 2007) and acknowledges what the Reggio Emilia approach refers to as "the hundred languages of children" (Edwards et al., 1993, p. 12). Other advantages of the draw and talk method include its familiarity to children who are used to drawing, expressing a meaning and an adult ascribing text to their drawing (Einarsdottir et al., 2009) and that it is a typical practice in Irish ECE services. Crucially, as an open-ended method it allows children to explore issues that they themselves identify as relevant and to communicate their understandings of those issues (Ring, 2006; Wright, 2007). A significant strength of the method is its role in redressing the power imbalance that exists in research with children (Merewether & Fleet, 2014; Ruscoe et al., 2018). Giving children a level of control and possibility, it allows children to opt in or out of drawing activities, they can choose to interact and talk or not and they can seek the support of peers if they choose. The draw and talk method is not without challenges, specifically that, in order to be effective, drawing and talking requires the skill of attunement, time and attention from the educator. Other challenges include the possibilities that children may not enjoy drawing, may not wish to talk about their drawings (Einarsdottir et al., 2009) and that drawing, rather than removing the adult gaze from the child (Eldén, 2012; Horgan, 2017b), in reality, could increase the extent of the adult gaze.

4.7.2.2 Talking and listening as a method of gathering data with children

A second method of data gathering with children involved children talking and educators listening with intent in informal and naturally occurring interactions over time. Importantly, listening as a method was understood as part of an ongoing, open-ended, shared interaction between children and educators, rather than as a form of consultancy where the adult listened to children's responses to the adult's questions, such as "what do you think about this?" (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 12). Active listening informed the talking and listening method, drawing together the processes of listening, researching and learning in co-constructing meaning with children, a principle underpinning the Reggio Emilia approach (Rinaldi, 2012). Educators were requested to listen intently to children with an open attitude and to interpret and make visible children's ideas (Broström, 2012). Importantly, the rich opportunities created for careful listening in diverse contexts, including when children and educators were already engaged in an activity like walking, have been noted in the research literature (Holland et al., 2010). Finally, educators were requested to include data gathered in any way that children chose to communicate, including recording informal remarks children made during free play, when looking at photos, during mealtimes or at circle time.

Data gathering process with children

The researcher provided the educators with large documenting notebooks (A3 size), in which to document and collate children's drawings and conversations, educators' observation notes and parents' feedback. Educators were requested to offer time, space and attention to any child who chose to reflect on their IGL experiences. Educators typically sat with children, and, using a co-constructive approach, which included drawing and talking, supported children to reflect on their experiences. While children frequently reflected on their IGL experiences with educators in the ECE service, rich data was also gathered during the journeys to or from the older adults' service and in informal interactions in the ECE service over days and weeks. Informed by their professional competence and experience in eliciting children's perspectives and the guidelines agreed with the researcher, educators gathered data with children, noting the words and conversations that accompanied children's drawings and any contextual issues. Educators then reported as accurately as possible in the IGL notebook or in short reports (see Appendix D). An example of the data gathered through the draw and talk method is outlined in the drawing and comments made by a child in response to one of her visits to the older adults' service (see Figure 4.1 below). In this drawing, the child depicts herself doing Irish dancing while an older adult is clapping during a St Patrick's Day celebration in the older adults' service. The child's comments in response to her drawing and experiences and in conversation with the educator are annotated by the educator.

Figure 4.1 Example of draw and talk strategy

... our granny clapping when we were dancing ... first I was shy and didn't want to dance coz all the nannies were watching but then I wasn't shy anymore, so I danced ...



4.7.3 Research instruments for data collection with parents

In consenting to participate in the study, the educators also agreed to gather data from the parents about their children's IGL experiences. The ECE services regularly sought and received feedback from parents about all aspects of their child's experiences in the ECE service, so this was a familiar practice for parents and educators. Typical strategies used to elicit feedback included text, WhatsApp, email messages and handwritten notes, as well as verbal feedback, although parents' verbal feedback was not included in the study. Educators often texted parents on the day that children had visited an older adults' service requesting feedback and a sample of messages sent by parents can be seen in Appendix E. Data was also gathered by parents through the use of a documenting sheet devised by the researcher as a method for children and parents to co-construct meaning about children's IGL experiences.

Parents were given the documenting sheet on the day that children had visited the older adults' services (see Appendix F) and were asked to invite their children to reflect on the IGL experience, through talking and/or drawing, and to make a note of the children's comments and drawings. Parents were also invited to note their personal views (as parents) on what they thought the IGL experiences meant for their child.

Data collection with parents

Educators regularly requested feedback from parents over the 4-month period when educators were gathering data with the children. Forty-three parents in total contributed, using texts, emails and short written notes. Most parents contributed once with a small number doing so on two or three occasions. Educators printed parents' electronic responses and pasted them into the documenting notebook. Educators also distributed and collected the parents' documenting sheets and returned them to the researcher with the documenting notebook (see Appendix G).

4.8 Data analysis

An open analytic strategy was adopted, in order to allow for new and unexpected meanings and issues and to capture, from a bottom-up perspective, educators', children's and parents' personal experiences, views and perspectives on IGL (Bryman, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017). This strategy reflects the open-ended inquiry focus of the overall study.

4.8.1 Thematic analysis as an underpinning strategy for the study

Thematic analysis was deemed to be an appropriate and well-suited analytic strategy to meet the aims outlined in section 4.8, because it offers a systematic framework for coding qualitative data and identifying patterns, using a constructionist framework to explain the social processes under study (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). Importantly, thematic analysis was adopted as a strategy that was suitable for analysing educators', children's and parents' data. A process of inductive reasoning, in the form of coding, was used in analysing the data to

ensure that meaning was derived from the data, rather than from any pre-defined categories (Robson & McCartan, 2016). A rich thematic presentation of all data, ensuring that key themes were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was particularly important because this study was investigating an under-researched area. Thematic analysis also facilitated a deliberative, reflective and thorough description of the entire data set, representing the first step of the analytic process (Bazeley, 2013).

The importance of identifying the theoretical framework within which thematic analysis is used has been highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 97), who point out that thematic analysis has "limited interpretive power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims that are made". The researcher believed that thematic analysis reflected the ontological and theoretical frameworks underpinning this study and which were developed within a social constructionist perspective. Thematic analysis aligns with the phenomenological perspective underpinning the study: to understand and to remain true to the first-hand experiences and meanings of those participating in the IGL experiences. Importantly, it has the flexibility to analyse questions related to the construction of meaning, a central aim of the study, so that it works not only to reflect reality but also to understand how that reality is constructed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is highly dependent on a rigorous coding process as a means of identifying themes in the data (Bryman, 2016; Nowell et al., 2017) and one of the strengths of the thematic approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) is a clearly delineated 6-phase framework to guide the process (see Table 4.4). While the phases are not unique to thematic analysis or indeed to qualitative research, the framework offered clear guidelines to the researcher, as well as providing a robust audit trail (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 4.4 Phases of thematic analysis⁸

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the
with your data:	data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion
	across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data
	relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts
	(Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a
	thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and
themes:	the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions
	and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid,
	compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected
	extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question
	and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

4.8.2 Analysis of educators' data

While the researcher was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework in undertaking each phase of the analysis, in reality the analysis was an iterative process which will now be outlined. Firstly, the interview transcripts were studied until the researcher was familiar with the content of the interviews. The researcher gave close attention to this crucial phase because decisions made during familiarisation and initial thinking about codes represents a key stage of analysis, which would impact on the reliability of the overall study (Miles et al., 2014). While the researcher was committed to implementing an inductive approach to developing codes, she was inevitably informed by her background knowledge of the topic, as well as the research

⁸ Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87.

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literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Greene & Harris, 2011). However, openness to the emergence of new, anomalous or contradictory ideas was prioritised by the researcher who applied a system of checks and balances to the coding process. This included recording how a piece of data was coded and then outlining other possible codes that could have been attributed to the same piece of data. Generating initial codes across the data set marked the second phase, resulting in a wide range of non-hierarchical codes representing all the units of meaning contained in the interview transcripts (Gibbs, 2007). An important feature of this phase was to verify that the codes created were broadly aligned with the research questions and the conceptual framework of the study (see Appendix H). However, the importance of keeping an open mind for unexpected ideas was a key concern in this phase and was reflected in the iterative approach adopted to coding. In phase three, the researcher further analysed the data set by searching for themes through grouping codes, or coding on, in a framework that would form the basis of the study's findings. A theme was understood by the researcher as a construct or patterned response that captured a key idea about the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The fourth phase involved drilling down through the themes for more nuanced views and meanings that were subsumed under each theme. Defining and naming the themes at a more abstract level, with reference to concepts and literature, marked the fifth phase, creating the basis for the final opportunity for theoretical analysis in the writing of the report, which represented the final phase.

While manual coding was the primary approach used to analyse the data, NVivo was used as a supplementary tool in supporting the analysis and in managing data storage and retrieval. In using NVivo, the researcher acknowledged, that, while data analysis software can support the researcher during the process, the researcher must remain in charge of the analytic process, committed to making sense of all the data and the context of the phenomenon being studied (Ishak & Bakar, 2012). Importantly, however, NVivo was identified as a useful tool for

contributing to the trustworthiness of the study. The use of NVivo highlighted the transparency of the data analysis process and ensured that a clear audit trail existed, particularly at the early stages of analysis (Bryman, 2016). Samples of coding and theme development using NVivo software can be seen in <u>Appendix I</u>.

4.8.3 Analysis of children's data

In the study, children themselves, educators and parents played a key role in interpreting the children's data. The co-constructionist approach brought together, to some extent, the data gathering, interpretation and analysis processes, reflecting the reality of examining data as a recursive process of analysis and interpretation (Clark, 2017; Sirkko et al., 2019). Children were actively involved in the interpretation and analysis of their perspectives because educators clarified with children the meanings that they wished to attribute to their comments and drawings, all of which contributed to the authenticity of the data analysis process (Broström, 2012; Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011). Similarly, parents were requested to invite their children to represent their IGL experiences, through drawing and talking and parents were requested to then write a note, if possible, to explain the comment or drawing (see Appendix G).

However, while the co-constructionist approach helped move from listening to understanding children's meanings, the fragility of young children's perspectives, when interpreted and analysed by others, remains a constant concern (Colliver, 2017; Hviid, 2008). The drawings, conversations and annotations documented by children, educators and parents were then studied and reviewed for understanding by the researcher. Queries arising at this stage were then clarified by the researcher with the educators. The next stage of analysis focused on identifying the main ideas and patterns discussed or visually represented by children in the data. The researcher's priority was to keep an open mind on the meanings ascribed by children to their IGL experiences and to consider the possibility that key concepts underpinning the study might be challenged by children's perspectives. In adopting this approach, the researcher

proceeded on the basis that children freely represented their feelings and experiences (Sirkko et al., 2019). Bearing this in mind, the researcher undertook an open coding process following familiarisation with the data (see Appendix J). All items of data were reviewed by the researcher asking, "what is this and what does it represent?" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 63, as cited in Merewether, 2015) and what possible meaning did it have for the child. The researcher then identified themes, based on what she believed that children found significant about their IGL experiences. Frequency of an idea represented by children was one guide to identifying meaning for children but was not an exclusive guide, concurring with the view that such an approach misses the point of qualitative research (Pyett, 2003). The process of reviewing and reflecting on the children's data and the meaning it had for each individual child formed the basis of the analysis.

4.8.4 Analysis of parents' data

Data collected through the parents' documenting sheets, texts and emails was transcribed into a single document and analysed manually. Having familiarised herself with the data, the researcher assigned initial codes to the data following which she identified the key themes.

4.9 Ethical considerations for study

The ethical issues pertaining to the study were addressed at an early stage in the development of the research strategy and ethical considerations remained active throughout the study. While the ethical considerations for each group of participants are outlined separately below, a number of common ethical principles guided the study. The overarching ethical principle pertaining to the study, considered an imperative by the researcher, was her responsibility to engage in an ethic of care. An ethic of care served to ensure that all participants were protected, and that no participant would suffer through participation in the study (Einarsdottir, 2007; Flewitt, 2005). In relation to children, the researcher believed that the study met the

internationally recognised minimal risk standards, so that the probability of risk was no greater than that encountered in daily life (DCYA, 2012). The right of all participants to be adequately informed about all aspects of the research was a priority of the researcher as a basis for ensuring valid, informed consent. Participants' right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality were assured so that no individual participant or service could be identified throughout the research process or in any material associated with the study. All data produced by educators, children and parents, which were presented in the documenting notebooks and parents' documenting sheets, would remain the property of the ECE services. Additionally, data would only be used for the purposes of the identified research and would be stored, managed and disposed of in compliance with TU Dublin regulations. Once the research design was completed and the ethical principles and practices in relation to adult and child participants as set out by the Research Ethics Committee (DIT, 2015) were addressed, an application for ethical approval was submitted to TU Dublin Research Ethics Committee9. The study was fully approved by the Committee in November 2017.

4.9.1 Ethical considerations in relation to educators

The educators who responded to the invitation to participate in the study received information about the purpose and nature of the study, and the commitment required, to enable them to make an informed decision about participation. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage, without explanation. Additionally, they were offered the opportunity to review and amend their interview transcripts. Their role as gatekeepers in seeking the participation and consent of parents and children was also clearly outlined (see <u>Appendix K</u>). The study was organised on the basis that educators would act as gatekeepers in accessing child and parent participants, a

⁹ https://www.dit.ie/researchenterprise/researchsupport/integrityethics/

process which is not without ethical concerns. Parents may feel that their relationship with educators, and/or their children's position in the ECE service, may be negatively impacted if the parent refuses to participate (Flewitt, 2005). This issue was addressed with educators and the researcher requested that educators emphasise that parents themselves and their children were under no obligation to be involved in the study. Educators were offered an opportunity to clarify queries and given time to consider the commitment involved before making a decision, following which they were requested to sign the consent form (see Appendix L). The researcher clarified at an early stage that the educators and the ECE services in which they worked met all requirements of the Regulations (DCYA, 2016a) and were fully compliant with Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children (DCYA, 2017), including, in all cases, that they held up-to-date Garda Vetting. A vetting disclosure in compliance with the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts, 2012-2016 and the Regulations (DCYA, 2016a) was also procured by the researcher before data collection began.

4.9.2 Ethical considerations in relation to parents

Parents' written consent was sought, requesting permission for their child to be invited to participate in the study (See <u>Appendix M</u>). Educators acted as gatekeepers in seeking parents' consent, providing parents with written information prepared by the researcher and also providing this information verbally. Educators were requested by the researcher to assure parents that they themselves could withdraw or that they could withdraw their children from the study at any time, without explanation. Importantly, parents were informed that, even if they had given permission for their children to participate in the study, the final decision to participate or not rested with children.

4.9.3 Ethical considerations for child participants

In her commitment to including children's voices in the research, the researcher was guided by her beliefs that children have a right to participate, are competent to do so and that children's perspectives are not only worthy of study but would add considerable value to the study. While acknowledging that children could be positioned as vulnerable, children's need and right to protection was not perceived to be a deterrent to their participation in the research study (Arditti, 2015). The researcher was committed to ensuring that the balance between children's right to participation and protection was borne in mind at all times. Guided by these beliefs, a carefully designed ethical research process was planned to ensure the respectful and nontokenistic participation of children in the study (Dockett et al., 2017). Working collaboratively with educators aided the researcher in addressing some of the ethical concerns in relation to research with children. Children were in familiar surroundings with adults with whom they already had trusting relationships and who valued them as competent participants (Martin & Buckley, 2018), thereby avoiding the involvement of an unfamiliar researcher. As a result, a number of the issues relating to power inequalities, inherent in the relationship between children and an unfamiliar researcher (Einarsdottir, 2007; Horgan, 2017b), were minimised. Allied to the natural setting of the ECE service and the familiar strategies being used in gathering data, children had access to the support of other children, if they chose, which may also have served to minimise power differentials (Einarsdottir, 2007; Merewether & Fleet, 2014). While the researcher acknowledged that the educators were already experienced in gathering data with children in an ethical way, she discussed with them the specific ethical guidelines underpinning this study. These guidelines included the researcher's ethical principles based on TU Dublin requirements (DIT, 2015) and DCYA (2012) recommendations in relation to children's ethical participation in research.

Seeking children's involvement and initial assent to participate in the study involved three steps: informing the children about the study, seeking their initial assent and seeking ongoing

assent (Dalli & Te One, 2012) for their continued participation in the study. In inviting children to participate, educators were requested to explain the study to the children by reading from the information/assent sheet (see Appendix N), which stated that the researcher was writing a book about the children's IGL experiences and would like to hear what they wished to say about their experiences. Following this explanation, the educator would answer any questions that children had and discuss their options to participate or not in the study. If a child wished to participate, the child would be invited both to verbally respond and to make a mark on "thumbs up" happy face or 'thumbs down" sad face to indicate their preference on the information and assent sheet. The assent process remained active throughout the study, with the researcher acknowledging the provisional nature of children's assent and the requirement of ongoing agreement for a child's continued participation in the study. Educators were specifically requested to regard children's assent as an ongoing, negotiated process, in which assent was always provisional (Flewitt, 2005). The principle of ongoing assent fitted well with educators' declared views about children's right to choose what activities they participate in during their time in the ECE service. Educators were asked to be sensitive to children's verbal and non-verbal behaviour in order to ascertain children's interest in, and comfort with, their ongoing participation in the study. Examples of children's withdrawal of assent were discussed with educators (Merewether & Fleet, 2014) and included children's lack of interest in any aspect of participating in, or reflecting on, their IGL experiences.

4.10 Limitations of the methodology

The small size and type of the sample was both a strength and a limitation. The educators who participated in the study had completed IGL training and were actively implementing IGL practice and, therefore, could be perceived as highly motivated and passionate about the

concept. The small sample size reflected the dearth of educators in Irish ECE services who were implementing IGL.

A second limitation relates to research that seeks to access and represent children's views. Focusing on children's views, even when it adopts a participatory and co-constructive approach, is always limited by the fact that children's views are subjected to the mediating effects of adult interpretation and analysis, filtered through the research methodologies offered (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). Furthermore, children co-constructing meaning with other children, which could offer another opportunity for children's meaning-making, was not offered. Eliciting children's views of negative aspects of their IGL experiences could make an important contribution to a newly emerging area of practice, but it was not clear if the strategies used were effective in doing so. Additionally, observations by the researcher may have offered an additional tool in piecing together children's experiences of IGL.

CHAPTER 5 EDUCATORS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD AND LEARNING IN ECE SERVICES

5.1 Introduction

Findings related to educators' views of children and childhood, ideas about learning and development and views of the roles and functions of ECE services are presented in this chapter. Understanding educators' beliefs, values and attitudes around these key concepts is vital as it illuminates the contexts and practices of their work with children and contributes to the creation of the culture of the ECE service (Smith, 2010). The views of educators on these topics help to shed light on educators' rationale for implementing IGL practice in their ECE services, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Significantly, evidence from the literature has demonstrated that the culture of the ECE service impacts considerably on the success or otherwise of IGL experiences (Campillo et al., 2020; Kaplan, 2002).

This chapter is organised around the following themes: views of the child and childhood; children, participation and the community; views about learning and the roles and functions of ECE services.

5.2 Educators' views of children and childhood

Critical to this study of IGL are educators' views of children and childhood, as these views impact fundamentally on how and why IGL might be considered a potential pedagogical strategy in ECE services (Malaguzzi, 1998; Moss, 2014). More broadly, although not the primary focus of this study, parents' and society's views of children, learning and children's position in society are also centrally relevant to this study, as these views will impact on the context in which the IGL practice is implemented and their support, or otherwise, for IGL as a pedagogical strategy. Strongly reinforced in the study were educators' views of children as strong, competent, participatory meaning-makers and, importantly, fully-fledged citizens

(Malaguzzi, 1998), a perspective that underpins Irish ECE policy frameworks (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Participants responded in absolute terms to confirm their views of children as active, agentic members of the ECE service, capable and competent in co-constructing their lives:

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... I do ... see the child as a citizen ... absolutely ... (Eileen)<sup>10</sup>
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... we have to see them as people with rights and being capable and able ... and just endorse that ... (Deirdre).

Beyond the response to the question on views of children and childhood, educators' views of children as active, agentic citizens were illustrated more fully, and in concrete terms, when they described the policies and practices of their ECE services:

... you are asking them what they want to do ... and we have gone and done things that we would never have done in our lives (Ciara)

... they're not forced to do something they don't want to do ... just having respect and listening to them ... (Eileen).

Significantly, educators acknowledged that they may not always have held these views and, while their thinking changed over time as they adapted to shifting contexts (Alderson, 2010), they perceived this issue as an ongoing challenge within ECE discourse and the wider society:

... the challenges maybe are to us as people, changing our ways and allowing them [children] to do that [make choices] ... (Mary).

¹⁰ Pseudonyms are used for educators throughout this report, while letters are used to denote all others.

Importantly, the complex and sometimes contradictory assumptions about children reflected in contemporary ideological arguments on childhood (Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014; Uprichard, 2008) were noted in the findings. A crucial debate in ECE discourse and beyond centres on the idea of children as beings or becomings and the related views about the extent to which children have a right to participate as citizens in ECE services, families and communities (Malaguzzi, 1998; Moss, 2014), including in IGL experiences. While strongly supporting children's rights to have their voices heard and to make choices, it is worth noting that participants acknowledged that this view of childhood may not be widespread among educators generally (Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013; Sirkko et al., 2019) and, in reality, was one that was subject to change:

... it needs everyone to have an open mind, to be able to accept the child's viewpoint ... (Eileen)

... there are challenges because I think the old-fashioned way of thinking ... still lives in the mindset ... and we take on board the norms and the values and the views of our own parents ... so, if you've come from that background ... that's a challenge you know ... (Deirdre).

The particular challenges of working with colleagues who held fundamentally different views, which in one case led to a staff resignation, were emphasised and reflect an under-researched area of ECE discourse (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005), the expectation that educators will espouse particular "universal" values in their practice (Powell, 2010, p. 213):

... I suppose if you have one person listening and one person not ... it can create a bit of conflict ... (Eileen)

... can I be really honest about this? ... I actually had a staff member who left at the end of last year because she didn't like where I was bringing the service, so I think some people in Early Years don't like it ... (Ciara).

Ciara further stated that she thought that this might not be an uncommon situation among educators and that inconsistencies in values, for example, a focus on individualistic or collectivist values (Moss, 2014; Powell, 2010), could be a challenge for other ECE services:

... I would say in other early years services that is going to be a boundary as well ... (Ciara).

5.2.1 Views of childhood held by parents and society

The belief that parents' views of children and childhood might not concur with the view of the child as citizen, promoted in ECE policy and practice and mediated to them by the educators, was acknowledged in the findings. However, educators believed that they themselves had a significant role to play in sharing the ECE service perspective on childhood with parents and they likened this to the way that they would educate parents on the value of play:

... you have to educate the parents, it's like the Aistear ... you have to help them ... we can be significant in that ... put that out there ... that it's important for children to be able to be active citizens ... because it's going to benefit us all down the line ... (Deirdre).

An example of the potential lack of alignment between the ECE service and the home in supporting children's right to voice their opinion was noted by one educator, reflecting the view that children's participation experiences can be limited by adult processes (Horgan et al., 2017). While educators consulted with children on many aspects of their daily life in the ECE

service, this educator was unsure if some parents would find it acceptable if their children voiced their opinion in the same way within the home:

... I don't know how the families would feel if the child is saying ... 'don't put the TV there, put it over here" ... (Eileen).

Importantly, this finding draws attention to what is considered a key issue in ECE discourse and centrally relevant to the aims and goals of ECE services yet remains an under-researched area: alignment between parents' and educators' values and ideas (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). The findings of this study, in illuminating educators' and parents' views in relation to IGL (discussed in Chapter 7), make an important contribution to this knowledge base.

A more negative picture emerged in relation to society's views of children, with agreement among educators that children were not viewed as citizens with rights within the wider society, were less valuable than adults and were lacking in some way. Moreover, the idea that children should be "seen and not heard" was argued by one educator to be still evident in society:

... I think they are perceived just as children ... not necessarily seen as valuable or capable or confident ... (Deirdre)

... that opinion that kids should be seen and not heard ... there is still a bit of that ... (Mary).

A more negative view of society's perception of children was reflected in some narratives, suggesting that children were seen as a nuisance or even disliked by some in society:

... I just think ... [society] is quite negative on children ... it's a bit like they're a nuisance nearly ... (Eileen)

... some people don't like them [children] ... (Mary).

However, young children's position in Irish society was considered to be improving in relation to achieving the status of citizens with rights. Educators referred to an amendment to the Irish Constitution (Constitutional Amendment, 2012) that came into force in 2015, which acknowledged children as rights-holders for the first time. This was highlighted in terms of enshrining a voice for children in law, although educators also acknowledged children were not yet considered as key players in society:

... we are definitely making strides ... moving towards they are citizens and we need to respect them ... (Ciara)

... there's a lot more there now ... just in terms of children having a voice ... our Constitution ... there's been amendments there ... there is recognition ... maybe not main stakeholders ... yet ... (Deirdre).

The strides made in policy development and service provision for children in ECE services in Ireland in recent years (Hayes, 2019) were also perceived as helpful in enhancing the status of the young children as citizens:

... it's getting a little bit better [how children are perceived in Irish society] ... there's a little bit of an increase in ECE to support staff ... to build quality ... (Ruth).

Significantly, the importance of these developments and advances in the position of children in Irish society, with regard to helping to change views about the rights of children to exercise choice in ECE services, was noted by educators:

... I think that ... a few years ago, it was ... 'you are going to learn what I teach you" ... I think now we are moving towards ... they are citizens and we need to respect them and ... 'what would you like to do and how would you like to get involved?" ... (Ciara).

However, acknowledgement that promoting more positive attitudes was a process that takes time is illustrated in the following extracts:

... even though it might be little steps, I think we are going to get there ... (Ciara)

... it could always be better but ... we're moving in the right direction ... (Deirdre).

Views and practices of educators in relation to what they considered a key element of children and citizenship - children's right to participation - are outlined in the next section.

5.3 Children's participation in ECE services and beyond

In viewing children as fully-fledged citizens, it was unsurprising that educators strongly believed in children's right to participate in ECE services, a view increasingly reflected in Irish ECE policy (NCCA, 2009; DCYA, 2014) and ECE discourse (Alderson, 2010; Bae, 2010). Importantly, children in this study were perceived to have rights to participate not only within ECE services but also beyond the services, a perspective argued in the children's rights literature (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010) but less evident in Irish ECE policy (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Understandings of the contested concept of participation (Horgan et al., 2017; Wyness, 2012), which is fundamentally important to this study, will now be outlined. Exploring why, and how, IGL was introduced in the context of supporting children's participation, a central focus of the study, will be addressed in Chapter 6.

5.3.1 Educators' understandings of the concept of participation

The complexity of how participation was conceptualised and how it unfolded in ECE services, strongly emphasised educators' views of participation as a social process rooted in everyday environments and interactions (Horgan et al., 2017; Kernan, 2010). Key ideas emphasised included children's right to have their voices heard, the relational nature of participation, the informal contexts in which children's participation was enacted and the central role of the educator in supporting children's participation. Central processes, noted by educators in supporting children's participation, included listening to children, giving children choices, acting on their views and allowing them to take the lead (Alderson, 2008):

... I think the children need to know that they are people in their own right and they can make choices themselves ... that we are not dictating to them what they need to do ... how to do it ... they need to make their choices themselves and make mistakes for themselves ... things don't have to be perfect ... they can make those mistakes ... that is what people do ... (Mary).

The value and importance of not only listening to children's views, but enabling these views to be implemented (Alderson, 2008), was reinforced by all educators:

... it's important to hear their voices, to get their feedback and for them to be deciders of what they do ... if we inspire that and encourage that [making choices and decisions] at this age ... you're going to have children who are ... innovative and they're going to be able to take risks ... to be confident ... how are they going to be active agents in their own learning if we decide everything for them? ... you're sending a message to them that ... they are able to make a good decision ... (Deirdre).

The value and importance of supporting children to take the lead as a way of promoting participation was clearly a priority and was evident in the narratives:

... you have to let them be responsible for their own learning because at some stage they are going to be responsible [for their own learning] ... (Mary)

... by letting them take the lead ... just having respect ... giving them time to speak and ... that we are actually listening to them as well ... (Deirdre).

The language of rights and participation underpinning Aistear and Síolta were referenced by all educators, while the emphasis in HighScope on children's role in setting the daily agenda and the freedom of choice in the Montessori¹¹ environment was also acknowledged:

... it makes a nicer curriculum for us all [when children have a right to participate in planning the curriculum] so that you are not bringing in something they don't want to do ... you are asking them what they want to learn ... so they are interested all the time ... (Ciara)

... you're going to get the most learning from when the child is in control and following what they want to do and they're making their choices and decisions ... you've got to follow their lead ... they're the experts, they know exactly what they want to do ... so I think it's our job just to support that ... (Eileen).

Significantly, while supporting children to have their voices heard and to take the lead, it was clear that educators understood children's participation and potential for participation much more broadly, highlighting the importance of informal, relational experiences of everyday life in enacting participation and promoting children's citizenship (Horgan et al., 2017; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010):

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¹¹ A key principle of the Montessori method of education is freedom for children to engage in their own development according to their interests and their own particular timeline in the prepared Montessori environment (Nolan & Raban, 2015).

... we were moving our classroom around ... we gave them [the children] our ideas of why we were going to swap two areas ... and asked them "well, what do you think"? ... (Eileen).

The relational and social nature of children's participation drew attention to the issue of children's responsibility or social obligation in relational contexts, emphasising the 'both-and' perspective, children expressing their own intentions but being sensitive to their interpersonal surroundings through consideration of others (Abebe, 2019; Bae, 2010; Horgan et al., 2017), which was important to the educators:

... they have responsibilities for themselves and for the other children ... and the teachers and everybody that comes in as well ... so we can all work as a little family together ... (Ciara)

... we try to give them responsibility, especially for their actions against other children ... (Ruth).

A strong belief in children's right to be embedded as participating citizens in the community, with an endowment to make a positive contribution to society (Fleer, 2003; Malaguzzi, 1998; Trevarthen, 2011), followed on from educators' belief in children as citizens with rights to participate fully in ECE services:

... I think to encourage [children] that they are part of this [community] ... like doing the fitness, like going to the library, getting the kids out of the school [ECE service] setting, getting them seen in the community ... (Mary).

Supporting children's participation as community members consolidated educators' views of children as fully-fledged citizens, participation as social, informal and community-focused

(Horgan et al., 2017), and, importantly, of the role that they, as educators, played in supporting children's participation (Bae, 2010; Mentha et al., 2015), which will now be addressed. In initiating meaningful opportunities for children to participate *beyond* the ECE service, the particular significance of the educators' role in supporting children's participation came to the fore. Educators vividly illustrated the central and frequently predominant role that they, as educators, played when discussing potential participation beyond the ECE service, reflecting their positive view of intentional teaching (Kilderry, 2015):

... I suppose all the ideas do kind of stem from the adults ... (Eileen)

... it is us having to go out into the community ... to see what we can get [find for] them to do ... we come in with ideas and they [the children] start throwing out ideas and we start circling what they want to do ... (Ciara).

Drawing on these views and practices, participation was clearly understood as an interdependent process that was continuously negotiated between educators and children (Mannion, 2010; Wyness, 2012) and learning was viewed as a co-constructive process (Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 2014). In emphasising their key role as brokers in this process (Mentha et al., 2015), educators referred to the deliberate actions that they took to introduce ideas and challenges to children's thinking, in what could be termed intentional teaching (Lewis et al., 2019). However, within the process of intentional teaching, educators continued to negotiate with children, for example, children in one ECE service regularly negotiated with the older adults about what activity they would do on their next visit:

... at the end of each session we'd always ask what will we do next week and we'd come to some sort of consensus on what we do on the next week ... (Ruth).

Importantly, educators in the study foregrounded the role played by the community, and particularly the IGL experiences, in supporting children's participation and all aspects of their learning and development (Percy-Smith, 2010; Rogoff, 2003).

While educators acknowledged the supportive role that Aistear, Síolta and ECE curricula played in promoting the concept of children's participation at a philosophical level, the complexities of participation and, importantly, participation beyond the ECE service are not elaborated in these documents (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). This suggests that educators drew to a large extent on their knowledge, experience and values, rather than guidance from the frameworks, to promote children's participation in the community.

5.3.2 Children's interest in participating in the community

Children's enthusiasm for participating in the community (see Chapter 7), reported by educators and reflected in educators' commitment to implementing opportunities for community participation including through IGL experiences, added an educator perspective to understanding the concept of participation among children in ECE services. Additionally, it reinforced a finding in the literature about children's interest in participating in the community (Forde et al., 2017; Krechevsky et al., 2014; Nimmo, 2008):

... they're just dying to get out the gates or when people come in to visit they're always real welcoming to it as well ... (Eileen)

... yes, they are [interested in being involved in the community] because ... they are now telling us what they want to do ... (Ciara).

Children's enjoyment of the responsibility that was sometimes associated with participation in the community was noted by one educator: ... I think they do [want to play a role in their community] ... I think they like having that bit of responsibility ... they like visiting the nursing home, they like going to the library, they like being part of the community ... (Mary).

However, in acknowledging the importance of the community as an arena in which children could and should actively participate (Bessell, 2017; Smith, 2010), it is worth noting that one educator highlighted the fact that children's interest in participating in their communities is often not recognised:

... nobody ever thinks of offering [children] one [a role in the community] ... (Deirdre).

The extensive opportunities offered by the community for children's learning and development, as perceived by educators, will now be outlined.

5.4 The role of the community in children's lives and learning in ECE services

The benefits to children of their participation in the community identified by educators included extending children's experiences; enhancing their sense of identity and belonging; supporting children living with adversity and developing children's knowledge and understanding of citizenship. Additionally, educators believed that supporting children's participation created many opportunities for them to contribute in the community (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017; Nimmo, 2008). While the general benefits to children of community participation will be outlined below, the more specific benefits of children's participation in IGL experiences will be revisited in Chapter 6.

5.4.1 Extending children's experiences

Educators strongly endorsed the idea of embedding, rather than distancing, children from the community (Fleer, 2003; Rogoff, 2014), through supporting children to engage with a broader range of people and experiences than was possible within the ECE service. Moreover, the benefits to children of real-life learning in the community and of exposing children to a more diverse and less predictable world (Nimmo, 2008) were highlighted in educator narratives:

... I think it broadens children's experiences to what's outside of their home ... this happens ... that this is in the community ... there are these other people ... because you know children live in a little bubble in a way and if they don't get exposure ... they don't know ... so it's broadening their horizons and their ways of thinking ... (Deirdre)

... there is no point in putting them in this little place [the ECE service] and wrapping them in bubble wrap when the world is bigger than just here ... (Mary).

The interviews provided multiple, vividly described, examples of the informal, unplanned development opportunities that children experienced through their coming and going in the community (Nimmo, 2008), as well as examples of the learning through more formal interactions with individuals and groups (e.g., the librarian, the staff in the older adults' services). This holistic perspective of children's learning in the community reflects educators' understanding of the contextually-embedded nature of children's learning, so that, for example, IGL experiences in the community created wide-ranging opportunities for learning that could not have been planned for or foreseen (Miles, 2018). Children's contextually-embedded learning through their informal participation in the community, illustrating new and enjoyable experiences arising from a chance encounter in the community, is presented in the following example:

... we were walking back from the nursing home a few weeks ago and we stopped off at the market on the way back and we had such lovely interactions ... one of the children spotted these unicorn slippers and she was wondering how much they were and if her mammy would buy them for her ... we had a chat with the stallholder and it was so comical ... he was asking the children their names and they were telling him and he was [saying] ... 'no, no, no, that's not your name, your new name is Kate" ... and the children ... they thought it was so funny ... this conversation about the market stall went on for weeks ... (Eileen).

While the planned activity was an IGL experience, the incidental learning (Rogoff, 2014) extending from the initial plan was evident. Children encountered new people (including men, whom children rarely met in the ECE service); had novel, real life experiences in the community (attending a market); became familiar with the locality and developed a sense of belonging; understood humour (the intersubjectivity required to understand the stallholder's jokes about the children's names); and considered the issue of cost in relation to something they would like. In valuing these informal learning opportunities, educators demonstrated their broadly based views of pedagogy, highlighting learning as a transformative process resulting from participation and relating with others in informal community activities (Rogoff, 2014), ideas that align well with IGL (Boström, 2003). A significant finding also worth highlighting was the potential value and importance of participation in the community for extending the opportunities for children who have limited or no access to the community, a challenge increasingly reported in the literature (Bessell, 2017; Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Children may not be familiar with or participate in the community for many reasons, including parents' lack of time, confidence or finance, as well as children's lack of availability. In these situations, educators believed that the ECE service played a crucial role in broadening children's experiences, supporting their right to participation and to benefit from the opportunities of participation in the community (Nimmo, 2008):

... if there are children who don't get out to be in the community, for whatever reasons ... for them to be able to feel part of it and to get that experience through the [ECE] service is great ... (Eileen).

5.4.2 Enhancing children's sense of identity and belonging

The valuable opportunities for the enhancement of children's sense of identity and belonging created through their participation in the community, and reported in this study, reflected core themes of Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and the key role of belonging in children's flourishing (Gaffney, 2011; Tillett & Wong, 2018). Children having knowledge of, and participating in their social and cultural contexts was perceived by educators to have a positive impact on their developing sense of identity and helped to embed children in communities (Nimmo, 2008; Jans, 2004):

... I remember one little boy whose parents were Filipino and when we took him down to the nursing home, there was a nurse down there ... a Filipino ... and she said ... 'oh, you are Filipino" ... and he said 'no, no, I am from N', [local area name] and it was a definite ... he knew he was from his community because he was ... he is from N and that was just that ... I think that is what we do in the preschool now ... that we are trying to encourage them to be part of communities ... (Mary)

... we are very focused on letting them know they are part of this community as well [as of this world] ... (Ciara)

... the social environment is really important for the child to feel part of it, to feel like they belong ... (Eileen).

The valuable role of the routines associated with children's community participation in enhancing children's visibility and reinforcing their sense of belonging in the community (Cohen & Korintus, 2016) was noted in the study findings. Importantly, arising from children's

increased visibility, people in the community began to communicate with them, acknowledging where they came from and where they were going:

... everyone knows them now ... because we're part of the community, everybody knows the kids in here so when they are walking down the road they will meet everybody ... 'there's the children from [name of ECE service]" so they say hello to them ... (Ciara)

... people are coming over ... "oh where are ye coming from?" ... so it's not just we're in the nursery and that's where we are ... they [children] feel like they're part of it [the community] as well, as they're walking through the community and people are noticing the children as well ... (Eileen).

The significant benefits to children of unrelated adults showing interest in them, as occurs in IGL (Heydon, 2019), which enhances their sense of security and belonging and extends their social networks, were noted in the study findings and, importantly, are reported in the literature as a positive and protective factor in children's lives (Bessell, 2017):

... sometimes ... for children all they would see would be ... maybe, mammy or daddy or us in the crèche ... that's fine but not the whole world ... they have to see that other people are there to support them as well, which is really important for us [in an ECE service in an area of disadvantage] ... (Ruth).

5.4.3 Supporting children living with adversity

The particular benefits of community participation for children living with adversity, including children who were exposed to anti-social behaviour within their communities, were highlighted in the study findings. This finding resonates with an Australian study that emphasised the socially situated nature of children's experiences of wellbeing (Bessell, 2017; Fattore & Mason, 2017). Through supporting their participation in the everyday activities of the

community, children in a community experiencing social disadvantage could benefit from the positive links being created by the ECE service:

... and even visiting the library ... that that's a normal thing to do or go in and get your shopping in the supermarket and actually buy your shopping and just come out and be sociable with neighbours and say hello ... (Ruth).

Importantly, ECE services' involvement in the community in a range of supportive experiences and environments was believed to play a role in raising awareness of positive alternatives that could enhance children's sense of identity and belonging within their community. Moreover, the social networks and social capital experienced by children through participation in the community (Bessell, 2017; Putnam, 2000) were perceived as potential protective factors. Helping children to identify supports to deal with challenges that they may face now and, in the future, is an idea corroborated in the research on the importance of the community in strengthening children's wellbeing, particularly for children living with adversity (Fattore & Mason, 2017). Significantly, the positive impact of intergenerational relationships that are grounded in trustworthy social structures have been identified in a longitudinal study of children's experience of community (Bessell, 2017). Findings in the present study reinforce this potential for children's participation in the community to strengthen children's wellbeing, as illustrated in the following extract:

... barriers have to be broken down because we are in the same community and we need to learn to work together and accept each other ... they [children] can go and get support or ... where they can go and be with likeminded people ... or where they can make changes, that they're seeing things that don't sit well with them or that they don't like as young children ... (Ruth).

Positive community experiences for children not only acknowledge the central role of community in all aspects of the lives of young children and families (OECD, 2018), but also resonate with the research literature on the holistic and affective dimension of children's learning (Hayes, 2013). Affirming experiences in the community contribute to children's sense of emotional security, a prerequisite for deep level learning and positive learning dispositions (Ang, 2014; Laevers, 2002). Importantly, it points to the potential of IGL relationships in supporting children's flourishing (Lux et al., 2020).

5.4.4 Developing experience and understanding of citizenship

Children's participation in the community had, in educators' opinions, both a present and a future focus, aligning with the discourse on the complementarity of the child as both a being and a becoming (Uprichard, 2008). While children's intrinsic enjoyment of community participation was noted, developing knowledge and understanding of citizenship and civic literacy in a bottom-up, ongoing approach to civic engagement (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018) was also valued by participants, reflecting their views that citizens are made, not born (Clark, 2017):

... oh definitely ... I think it [children participating in their communities] will give them skills and understanding as they get older as well ... (Eileen)

... they are the future people who are going to do the Tidy Towns, ¹² do the Meals on Wheels ¹³ ... if we don't do it at this young age, it is not going to happen ... (Ciara).

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¹² Tidy Towns is a national, annual competition in Ireland to honour the work of communities in enhancing their local areas.

¹³ A home delivery service of meals to support individuals, usually older adults, to live independently, and is carried out mainly by volunteers.

5.4.5 Creating opportunities for children to contribute in the community

A key finding in the present study was the significant contribution that children made to the community through their particular, and, sometimes, unique qualities and assets, understandings and skills, which were perceived by participants to be qualitatively different to those of adults. Interestingly, although children are not generally recognised as contributors in communities, their role as sources of social capital has been acknowledged in the IGL literature (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017). The different dynamic, vitality and fun that children brought to an Irish multigenerational art project was considered a key strength of its success highlighting children's unique contribution (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018). While not specifically asking about children as contributors to the lives of older adults through IGL experiences, it was clear that many of the educators' responses referenced the IGL experiences. The value of young children's non-judgemental attitudes and an absence of pre-conceived assumptions and prejudice were qualities identified by educators:

... they don't make assumptions ... they accept everybody for who they are ... they are so accepting ... they just think ... 'my friend" ... that is it ... it doesn't matter how old the friend is ... (Mary).

A further significant finding identified in the narratives was young children's lack of fear, which was perceived as valuable by an educator in relation to interacting with some older adults:

... I have definitely seen it in the nursing home where I would be scared of Y [older adult] ... there are a couple of kids that have broken down that barrier for me so now I am able to interact with him better because they brought down the barrier for me ... I was scared ... they were not scared so they were introducing me to this person who I nearly would have avoided and that is going on a good few months and it was only because X [child] came in and broke down that

barrier, he [Y] would have probably have been the last person I would have gone over to ... (Ciara).

Children's capacity for advocacy was noted by one educator, who cited the example of a child in her ECE service confronting staff when concerned that a child with a disability might not be included in a game:

... "don't forget to include him in this game" ... (Ruth).

Children's creativity in responding to problems was also noted by an educator:

... they can see other ways around doing things ... they can come up with a thousand other reasons ... (Eileen).

Significantly, children's positive contribution was unanimously emphasised when referring to the joy that children brought to the lives of others through their presence in the community:

... they bring joy to everybody's lives ... (Ciara).

An important finding in the study was the valuable role of children's participation in the community for creating social interest in children's lives. Citing the decreasing visibility of young children in the community (Nimmo, 2008), educators reported a positive interest by members of the public when encountering children in the community, who frequently responded to the children with pleasure:

... it's a sight to behold [groups of children walking in the community] because we don't see it loads ... (Deirdre)

... and we have lots of cars beeping at us and waving at us ... (Ciara).

The value of balancing the discourse of concern with one of empowerment through children's interactions with members of the community (Bessell, 2015) was highlighted by educators, for example, when children explained to members of the community that they were visiting the older adults' service:

... they [the Tidy Towns volunteers] would stop and have a conversation and if it was before 10 o'clock Mass, when the older people were going to Mass, they would have a conversation [about what we were doing] ... (Mary).

An interesting and significant finding was educators' perception that seeing children as members of communities with rights to participate was not a view held by many adults (Tisdall & Punch, 2012), apart from those with specialist training such as ECE. One educator reported that her own ideas about children's role in the community had changed as a result of her recent training and practice in IGL:

... a year ago I mightn't have really given it [children's participation in the community] that much consideration but now I can see it is important ... (Deirdre)

... I think a lot of Early Ed people do [see children as part of a community] but I don't know whether people who haven't looked at this do ... (Ruth).

This raises questions about the challenge that exists in relation to social attitudes to children's role in communities, not only in the ECE services but also in the wider society (Smith, 2010). Interestingly in this context, it was also acknowledged by educators that not all individuals or organisations in a community might feel supportive of young children's participation in the community. Despite this view, negative attitudes in the community towards children's

participation were not perceived to be a major challenge and promoting community participation was seen to be slowly changing negative attitudes towards children:

... there's so many who [would welcome it], so yeah...I think it's important for us to get out there and do it ... (Eileen)

... no, [adults do not see children as part of the community] but I think we are slowly changing people's ideas of us ... (Ciara).

5.5 Educators' views of learning

Ideas about learning influence what, where and how learning is recognised and how it is supported (Hayes, 2013; Wenger, 1998), which is a fundamental question underpinning ECE policy and practice, and centrally relevant to the consideration of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECE services. In reflecting on children and learning, participants highly valued the informal and dynamic interactions that children experienced in a wide range of real-life situations, which created rich opportunities for the development of children's learning and life skills (Rogoff, 2014). Importantly, while acknowledging the many opportunities for this type of learning within the ECE service, educators emphasised that bringing children into the community significantly extended children's learning opportunities, highlighting the potential of IGL as one such opportunity:

... the first hand lived experience is so important ... 'I was in the doctor's surgery" ... [they] go into the home corner and they're the patient ... that's consolidating the learning ... because they have a bit of their own experience of it ... because if they don't get these experiences ... if they haven't got a curriculum of life happening outside in their family ... because that's really where a lot of it has to happen...[if they don't get it] then they don't come [to the ECE service] with that knowledge and experience ... (Deirdre).

In emphasising the key roles played by the contexts in which children learned, the spaces and places, as well as the people with whom children came in contact, participants strongly reflected a socio-cultural perspective on learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Rogoff, 2003). However, while this perspective on learning dominated their responses, other pedagogical strategies, for example, outdoor play or play-based approaches, may also have been valued by educators. Interestingly, while emphasising the importance of real-life experiences for children's learning, educators noted the challenges for families as increasingly busy lifestyles and changing socio-economic contexts resulted in some children having limited access to opportunities for real life learning:

... it is [important] ... experiences of ordinary life ... and we have seen a massive difference even since I started here six years ago ... I don't know whether parents don't have time or it is changing environments but they [children] are not getting some of the experiences that other children would be getting or have gotten ... (Ciara).

The key role of the ECE service in offering real life opportunities for learning (Nimmo, 2008), including IGL experiences, to complement those offered by the family was emphasised by educators. In the following sections, educators' views of learning are presented under the broad headings of the content, the processes and the contexts of children's learning.

5.5.1 Views of learning and the young child: the <u>content</u> of learning

Socio-emotional skills were strongly endorsed as the most important focus of children's learning in ECE services, a view reflected in the growing research evidence of the powerful role of emotions on children's cognitive mastery (Banaji & Gelman, 2013; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

5.5.1.1 Social and emotional skills and learning dispositions

A belief strongly reflected in educator narratives was that children who received opportunities for the development of socio-emotional skills, as they did in the IGL experiences, would become competent learners and skilled navigators of their social world (Galinsky, 2010). The ability to manage emotions, behaviour and attention, thereby developing executive functions, is well established in the research literature as being critical to success in life in general. Importantly, the evidence is strong that children who have such skills gain more from future educational opportunities than children who have not had such opportunities (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Hayes et al., 2017):

... I think social skills ... like emotional regulation ... our biggest thing is how to get on with each other ... how to look after themselves ... how to respond to staff ... how to keep themselves safe ... (Ruth)

... one of the most important things for children is building up social skills and emotional skills ... to have a voice ... to be able to speak up and to be able to make a choice for themselves ... (Eileen)

... we focus very much on their independence, their confidence ... (Ciara).

Building on their views of the crucial role of socio-emotional skills in what was important for children to learn, educators firmly emphasised the key role of positive learning dispositions for successful learning (Carr & Lee, 2012; Hayes, 2013). In referencing the importance of positive learning dispositions, it was clear that educators further emphasised their commitment to the *how* rather than the *what* of children's learning by prioritising an enthusiasm for learning:

... to encourage the love of learning ... and let them love learning new things ... (Mary)

... enthusiasm for the world, a love of learning ... (Ciara).

In prioritising the development of socio-emotional skills and positive learning dispositions, the importance of *not* focusing exclusively on academic skills was emphasised by participants:

... if they leave my service and go into school with all them [independence, confidence, kindness] and they don't know any phonics, any numbers ... I have done a great job because that is what I focus on ... (Ciara)

... if the social skills and emotional skills are being fostered early on, these other skills [like ABCs, 123s] will just ... the children will pick them up as they go ... (Eileen).

A critical perspective evident in the narratives, and a key finding of the study, was the importance that educators placed on the happiness of the children attending their ECE services, emphasising their focus on children's wellbeing in the here-and-now (Ikegami & Agbenyega, 2014). Significantly, this perspective further supports educators' belief in a nurturing pedagogy and their understanding of the powerful role of emotions on children's learning processes. Experiences that contributed to the happiness of children were very important to educators:

... it is about them being happy in themselves, happy with each other ... (Mary)

... to be happy ... that is one of the most important things ... (Eileen)

... we don't have major goals for children, once they're happy, once they're learning, once they're engaged every day that's what we want ... we really show them affection and love ... and that's a really big thing for us ... (Ruth).

While the wellbeing of children is a well-established ECE policy priority in the Western world, happiness as a concept is not generally identified in that discourse (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; OECD, 2009). Significantly, emotions such as happiness are not strongly emphasised in policy frameworks and quality standards, including those operating in the Irish context (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009).

5.5.1.2 Factors influencing what is important for children to learn

Not surprisingly, curriculum was identified as an important influence on what educators prioritised in planning for children's learning, with Aistear (NCCA, 2009) being strongly referenced. Educators whose service implemented the HighScope curriculum (Hohmann & Weikart, 1995) highlighted the key role it played in prioritising learning opportunities for children:

... personally, I think it's Aistear ... you're looking at what are the aims and learning goals within the themes ... (Deirdre)

... definitely a combination ... we use HighScope ... obviously underpinned by Aistear ... HSE regulations ... but we really use HighScope ... (Ruth).

Importantly, educators also emphasised that a combination of factors influenced them in identifying priorities for children's learning, with the notion of following children's interests being the most commonly cited factor:

... I think it has to be ... Aistear ... but I think it has to come down to the children we have in our setting each day ... you have to follow their lead ... (Mary)

... I think it is a combination of everybody ... we certainly ask the children, we certainly ask the parents and we link everything to Aistear ... (Ciara).

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, just one educator emphasised the role of the educator as a significant influence (Kilderry, 2015; Mentha et al., 2015) in determining learning priorities and strategies for children. The importance of this finding in a study focusing on an atypical pedagogical strategy, such as IGL, highlights the profound, yet frequently unacknowledged, power of educators in identifying learning goals and strategies for children and is an area worthy of further study (Campbell-Barr, 2019):

... it's a bit of everybody but ultimately it's going to come down to the childcare worker and the parents who are working with that child every day ... (Eileen).

Acknowledgement of the role played by parents in informing learning priorities within ECE services was identified by all educators and a clear illustration of this process was provided by one educator:

... we definitely take our direction from children but certainly from the parents, they'll come back and tell us what children enjoy and then we'll do more of that then ... (Ruth).

However, while educators reported that parents played an important role in influencing the curriculum, the complexities and contradictions around parents' influence was also apparent in educators' narratives and will now be discussed.

5.5.1.3 Negotiating priorities in relation to learning goals for children

While a partnership approach in working with parents to identify priorities for children's learning was considered important by participants, reflecting a principle of good practice in ECE (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; NCCA, 2009), they also articulated the inherent tensions of this principle, well-documented in the research literature (Einarsdottir & Jónsdóttir, 2019).

Parents' desire for a focus on academic learning and preparation for school, frequently prioritised by parents but never by educators, was identified as the main area of difference:

... with parents ... I think [there can be] conflict ... I think it has changed but certainly parents will often be the ones to ask about ... letters and numbers ... I think we have to educate parents ... (Deirdre).

Significantly, all educators believed that they had a role to play in educating parents on the benefits of prioritising socio-emotional development over academic or 'school-readiness' skills, through drawing on curricular frameworks, as well as on their personal and professional expertise:

... some of our parents really wanted the children to do academic learning ... we did focus groups with them ... asked them to look at Aistear from the start, then we tracked them [the children] for a few months and then asked them [parents] to look at it again ... and they realised that ... they're learning so much ... it doesn't have to be academic ... (Ruth).

To conclude, in arguing for the importance of socio-emotional learning as the main focus of learning in ECE services, it could be suggested that educators were building on views of the child as always, and necessarily, both a being and a becoming (Prigogine, 1980; Uprichard, 2008). Happiness in the here-and-now was emphasised (Rouse & Hadley, 2018), while taking cognisance of the importance of socio-emotional development in supporting later learning (Banaji & Gelman, 2013).

5.5.2 How children learn: the <u>processes</u> of children's learning

Play, use of materials, hands-on experiences, modelling and relationships with others were the most frequently cited views about how children learn expressed by participants, strongly reflecting contemporary understandings of young children's learning in the Western world (Osher et al., 2020):

... they learn informally, through play, they learn from their peers ... from watching other adults ... (Eileen)

... they learn through concrete stuff ... they learn by doing ... touching, feeling, using their senses ... (Mary).

Interestingly, while the power of digital media in children's learning was noted by one participant, overall, strongly negative views about use of digital media in ECE services were reflected in the narratives. A preference for hands-on play experiences during the short hours of children's attendance in the ECE service and the opportunities for the use of digital media in the home were referenced:

... they learn ... as much as we don't like it from technology, they're learning from television as well ... (Ruth)

... I think there's enough of that at home ... they come for ... three hours ... your play-based curriculum ... engaging with what children should be engaging with is what's important ... (Deirdre).

A significant finding, strongly endorsed throughout this study was the central importance attributed to the role of relationships in children's learning (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009; Rogoff, 2003), which will now be addressed.

5.5.2.1 The role of interactions and relationships in children's learning

The profound importance of generating opportunities for children's relationships with each other and with other adults, including older adults, was strongly emphasised by educators when considering how children learn (Ang, 2014; Degotardi et al., 2017):

... relationships are huge ... I think the whole collaborative, co-operative learning ... I think it's huge ... it's so important for their wellbeing, for their sense of belonging and their own identity ... to be accepted as part of a group ... (Deirdre).

Specifically, within the ECE service, relationships *among* children and *between* adults and children (not only educators but other adults) and children were viewed by educators as foundational for children's learning (NCCA, 2009):

... they learn from each other ... they are having a relationship ... having a friend ... we are there to support them but they are building their own relationships with each other and us ... (Mary).

The qualities and skills developed through child-child and child-adult relationships and identified in the educator narratives included self-awareness, identity formation, empathy, confidence, communication, conflict resolution and leadership skills (Galinsky, 2010), all of which are closely associated with the development of executive functions:

... they're very capable of being strong leaders in their own lives if there are favourable conditions around ... (Deirdre)

...I think they really know themselves ... sometimes they know each other and they're nearly experts in each other's lives too and that's really important for them ... (Ruth).

The value of relationships with adults, other than the educators, with whom the children come in occasional contact was evidenced by the fact that educators occasionally invited members of the community, including a police officer, a nurse and a firefighter, to visit the ECE service. (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Contacts with other adults whom children interacted with informally were also deemed to be important and included ancillary staff in the ECE service (administrative, catering, cleaning staff), delivery staff and tradespersons:

... a guy comes in and delivers our meat and someone else comes in and delivers our fruit and vegetables and they'll have a chat with the children along the way which is super ... in an ideal world ... the guards [police] would come over to us more ... the fire station would come up to us [more] ... (Ruth)

... even the bin men get a little wave and a hello, and they give it back ... (Eileen).

It was clear from the educators' narratives that these interactions with people in the community, despite their irregularity and brevity, were valued for facilitating the development of children's social skills, enhancing their understanding of real-life experiences and supporting curiosity and positive learning dispositions (Nimmo, 2008).

5.5.3 Children's learning environments: the contexts of children's learning

As might be expected among educators whose ideas about learning were largely underpinned by a socio-cultural perspective, learning environments were understood in the broadest sense and the ECE service, the home and the community were viewed as rich learning environments (Hayes, 2013; Rogoff, 2014). Importantly, nurturing relationships and a positive emotional climate were cited as crucial elements of positive learning environments (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Developing strong links with parents to support the home learning environment (Melhuish et al., 2017), acknowledging the home as the most important learning environment

for children, was strongly promoted by educators, corroborating evidence from the literature and ECE quality indicators (CECDE, 2006; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2011). This commitment to partnership with parents was important to educators when considering the introduction of IGL and will be further discussed in Chapter 6:

... the family and the parents are the primary caregiver of the child so ... we need to see parents and families as partners ... (Eileen)

... we need the families' involvement in their [the children's] learning to help us in here ... (Ciara).

The importance of softening the boundaries between the home and ECE services was also evident across the educator narratives. Examples of this included parents spending time in ECE services and educators investing time in communicating with parents about all aspects of their children's experiences in the ECE services, including IGL experiences and how learning could be supported in the home:

... we invite the parents to come in for "Stay and Play" ... [playtime in the ECE service] ... (Eileen)

... we'd put up a rota and they [the parents] choose whatever day [they wish to spend in the ECE service] ... (Deirdre).

However, educators also acknowledged the challenges of partnership with parents identifying parents' lack of time and lack of understanding of the value of its importance as particular issues:

... sometimes it feels like the parents are very happy to [say] ... 'see you later" ... off they go ... that is the ideal, that you'd want everybody together ... and specially for families as well, to have it as "their" service rather than just "childcare" ... I think there's potential for a bit more [partnership with parents] but it's hard to get the parents to come in sometimes ... (Eileen).

Interestingly, educators noted the positive contribution of the IGL practice to softening the boundaries and easing some of the challenges between home and the ECE service, as IGL was an ECE experience highly valued by parents, a finding that will be discussed in Chapter 6.

5.5.3.1 The role of community environments in children's learning

The significant contribution of a wide range of community environments, including the IGL settings, were acknowledged for the role that they played in children's development (Kaplan et al., 2020; Nimmo, 2008). Community environments were used both occasionally and on a regular basis, with visits to play centres, farms, the zoo and community arts centres reported as examples of occasional learning environments. Visits to playgrounds, libraries and centres for older adults, as well as local walks, were identified as regular learning opportunities offered in the ECE services:

... by bringing them out ... trying to tap into your local resources within the community ... that are appropriate and meaningful for them [the children] ... (Deirdre).

Benefits to children of the learning opportunities in the community noted by participants included social skills, language development, a sense of belonging and confidence (Goldfeld et al., 2015; Malaguzzi, 1998). Familiarity with the physical locality, spatial awareness, geographical location (Kernan, 2010) and knowledge of services within the community were

further benefits noted by educators. The role of community environments in children's learning with specific reference to children's IGL experiences will be revisited in Chapter 6.

5.6 Roles and functions of ECE services

In highlighting the wide-ranging roles, some of which could be termed political, that ECE services played in the lives of children, parents and communities, educators reflected their views of children, the nature of learning, relationships with parents and the place of the ECE service in the community. Importantly, these views also reflected the complexities of contemporary understandings and alternative narratives in ECE discourse, including the idea of ECE services as loci of ethical and political practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). In particular, the role of ECE services in promoting democratic values, supporting parents and promoting connectivity between the ECE service and the community were emphasised by participants as key roles of ECE services (Moss, 2014).

5.6.1 ECE services as models of democratic values

Strongly evident across educator narratives was the belief that ECE services should be based on democratic values, with children's participation as a central value (Dahlberg et al., 2013). Modelling democratic values and supporting the development of children not only as citizens within ECE services but, importantly, within the community (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018), was identified by participants as intrinsic to their role:

... to help children have a voice ... for them to be seen as children, not as these little people who are preparing to be adults ... [for people] to have more of an understanding ... of the importance of the early years for children ... (Eileen)

... children are sometimes forgotten ... (Ruth).

In creating opportunities for children to feel valued and visible in the community, educators reflected their belief in the significant role that the community plays in children's development (Bessell, 2017; Nimmo, 2008) and the key role of ECE services in harnessing community resources (Malaguzzi, 1998):

... they [the children] need to know they are actually really, really important and they have every right to be in the community and in society as well ... (Ruth)

... we want them to know they are little citizens and that they are part of this world ... we are in the community ... we need to bring the kids into the community and that is what we do ... (Ciara).

Promoting children's visibility and participation in the community (Kenner et al., 2007; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010), as well as challenging how children were perceived in the community were identified by educators as functions of ECE services:

... we are focused on letting them [the public] know that they [children] are part of this community as well [as this world] ... we are very visible as we are out there every day ... (Ciara)

... but I don't know if they [adults in general] see children as much as they should be seen as part of the community, the way they should be included and encouraged to be out there ... (Mary).

Educating the community about the value to children of their participation in the community, acknowledging that there was a lack of awareness and that all current participation in the community had been initiated by ECE services, was also considered by educators to be part of their role:

... sometimes we feel like we hound people ... can we come and do this, can we do that ... we can't just sit here and expect people to come to us ... we need to make the links and I think we need to be advocates for that happening as well ... (Eileen).

However, some progress was noted by an educator who reported, that for the first time, a community organisation had approached her to discuss possible opportunities for working together in the future.

5.6.2 ECE services as services to families as well as to children

Providing social, emotional and practical support both to parents as adults and parents as parents, highlighting the multifunctional nature of ECE services (Malaguzzi, 1998; OECD, 2006), was reported by educators in the study. The importance of creating a welcoming and supportive climate for parents in the ECE services and ensuring that staff communicated individually and regularly with parents was emphasised in educator narratives:

... we have an open-door policy ... we'd always invite parents to come in ... we work on a keyworker system so ... the child's keyworker would do most of the interactions with the parents ... (Eileen)

... communication is vital with families ... we have so many [forms of] communications ... I email maybe twice a week to the parents ... (Mary).

The importance of their role in helping families feel part of the ECE service by creating a sense of community was also highlighted by participants:

... we invite parents out on our trips ... (Eileen)

... we're finding ... "oh well my family came here [to the ECE service] and they loved being here so" ... people feel a real ownership and a real sense of community with that ... (Ruth).

The significant role played by ECE services in supporting parents who may be experiencing difficulties in their lives, including isolation and homelessness, was also foregrounded by educators:

... I have always said to the girls [educators] ... at the door ... even if we have twenty kids in the room and a parent comes to you and you know that they want to talk, you stay and talk with them because we could be the only adult interaction they get for the day ... so I think counsellor could be added to your child care job as well ... (Ciara)

... we have families who are homeless ... they have no one else other than, you know, [name of ECE service] to be their support ... it's really important for people to know that they have got that support with us ... that they can trust us and that helps them to encourage their children to come in ... and be part of everything that's going on ... maybe they can just actually go and wash their own clothes in a washing machine [in the ECE service] ... (Ruth).

The role of ECE services in linking parents to other services within the community was noted:

... we would not offer them [parenting courses] but we would say to them ... "what about [name of parenting programme available in the community]?" ... (Ruth).

5.6.3 ECE services as places of encounter in the community

Building relationships between ECE services and the community and viewing ECE services as potential places of encounter, physically or metaphorically, for children, families and

communities was a concept valued by educators (Malaguzzi, 1998; Moss, 2014). Creating connections between children and older adults and the introduction of IGL was an important focus for educators' interest in viewing their ECE services as places of encounter.

Educators' perspective on the ECE service as a place of encounter in the community is strongly aligned with the concept of intergenerational contact zones (ICZ), which highlights the benefits of creating new spaces and transforming already existing ones to facilitate interactions among individuals of different generations (Kaplan et al., 2020). Significantly, educators noted that, viewed in this way, ECE services could not only benefit children but also parents and other family members, other local citizens and the community as a whole:

... we do invite people from the community in just to see what we are doing ... I would love to do more with that ... (Ciara).

Examples of educators' aspirations for promoting ECE services as places of encounter for the parents of the children attending were illustrated in the following examples:

... and as the parents came with us as well [a visit to a community centre], it felt like a real kind of community spirit ... which is really nice ... (Eileen)

... and teaching young parents how to cook for their children or what's the most appropriate thing ... if we had a bigger centre ... that would be something that we would do ... 100% ... because all our staff actually would love to do that ... (Ruth).

In aspiring to link ECE services with the wider community, educators noted that children would be in an environment that welcomed and included community members, with opportunities to encounter and learn from each other (Facer, 2019) rather than in a setting only for children:

... the ideal [ECE service] would be in the community, you know ... it would be lovely in a bigger space where they [the children] could bake with people ... mix with the community ... that they [the children] are not in a setting just for children ... I think it [the ECE service] could be a great community thing ... (Mary)

... I would always say I am going to have a little Shomera [building] down in the nursing home ... I think that is where I would love to see Early Years going ... linking in with communities, linking in with nursing homes, linking in with groups like Rehab [disability sector] in here ... just getting us linked in with the community ... my passion would be to see every early years' service linked up with something in the community ... (Ciara).

However, the idea of ECE services as places of encounter for the community was acknowledged as aspirational, with educators citing the training of educators, time constraints, space, suitability of buildings, funding and regulatory requirements as some of the challenges and these issues will be revisited in the next chapter in the context of developing IGL practice:

... I think services in Ireland are not built to facilitate any of these kinds of things ... (Ruth)

... you have your challenges around ratios, Garda vetting ... who's coming in and who's going out ... the whole health and safety thing as well ... (Eileen)

... in terms of creating ... a community kind of hub ... that would feed in all different aspects of the community, young, old, it would be great but ... it's not an ideal world we live in ... (Deirdre).

5.7 Summary

A key finding in the present study across all participant narratives was the view of children as fully-fledged citizens and as rich and powerful agents in their own lives, a view that educators acknowledged was not necessarily shared within wider social contexts (Moss, 2014). However, the view of children as active agents in their own lives with the right to participate in the community, ideas that educators contended were central to their ECE practice, was, they believed, supported in Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and other rights-based curricula. Importantly, these views of children and participation were perceived by participants as creating an enabling framework on which IGL experiences could be developed (Radford et al., 2016). Educators demonstrated a complex understanding of the concept of participation as both an individual process, but which also involves interdependent and communal processes for children (Bae, 2010; Femia et al., 2008; Rogoff, 2012). These views of children and participation point to the potential of IGL in supporting the development of children's citizenship and participation, through intergenerational dialogue and responsibilities (Mannion, 2010; Wyness, 2012). Highlighting the importance of children participating beyond the ECE service reflected educators' strong belief in both the value of real-life learning and their response to children's enthusiasm for participation in the community. In identifying the potential of real-life learning in the community, educators reflected an openness about how learning spaces are defined and who can be defined as an educator (Boström, 2003; Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010; Sánchez et al., 2018). Significantly, foregrounding the community as a locus and resource for learning is well-aligned with the concept and practice of IGL, expanding the spaces and individuals involved in children's learning (Heydon, 2019; Holmes, 2009). Central to the educators' focus on children as rights-holders and active participants in the real-life of the community was their belief in children as contributors to their communities (Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Nimmo, 2008; Smith, 2010). The role of children's valuable qualities and skills was reflected in the educators' narratives and included the joy that children brought to those they interacted with, as well as their non-judgemental and positive attitudes to others (Clark & Hoover, 2020; Femia et al., 2008).

Based on their views of children and their role in the community, it was unsurprising that participants strongly believed in the holistic, affective and social dimensions of children's learning, with little emphasis placed on cognitively-driven approaches (Banaji & Gelman, 2013) or on school-readiness skills as priorities. In understanding and valuing the connection between the cognitive and affective dimensions of children's learning, educators demonstrated the profound importance of their role in facilitating children's holistic development, a key perspective prioritised in contemporary ECE (Hayes, 2013). Emphasising the holistic development of children, educators reflected a socio-cultural perspective of learning, firmly placing learning in the context of the lived experiences of children in their social world (Rogoff, 2003), a fundamental principle of IGL (Kaplan et al., 2020). Positive socio-emotional development, considered by educators to be foundational in establishing effective learning experiences and dispositions for children, was prioritised in the content, processes and contexts of children's learning (Carr & Lee, 2012). In particular, educators emphasised the importance for children's optimal development of executive functions and self-regulation skills in children and the relational contexts in which they developed (Hayes et al., 2017), including diverse community contexts such as older adults' services. Moreover, the importance to educators of extending the learning environments beyond the ECE service to include the family, the home and the community created opportunities for educators to seek out risk-rich environments, including the real-life learning of the IGL experiences (McAlister et al., 2019).

A significant finding of the study was the educators' broad understanding of the roles and functions of ECE services, with educators highlighting the potential of ECE services to be perceived not only as services to support young children's learning but as supporting the development of the child as citizen in the community (Moss, 2014). Included in the key functions of ECE services outlined in the study findings were their role in modelling democratic values, promoting children as active citizens and generating opportunities for

supporting children's participation in contexts beyond ECE services (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Malaguzzi, 1998). Moreover, the emphasis in this study on the multi-functional character of the ECE services, which encompassed supporting parents and creating connectivity to communities, pointed to educators' belief in the value of ECE services as places of encounter for children, families and communities, resonating with the concept and practice of intergenerational contact zones (ICZ). However, the challenges of achieving these aims were widely acknowledged in the study findings.

In the next chapter, ideas about children, their learning and the role of the community in supporting children's learning will be revisited in the context of IGL as a potential pedagogical strategy.

CHAPTER 6 INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING IN ECE SERVICES

6.1 Introduction

Findings in relation to educators' experiences, understandings and views of IGL ¹⁴ will be presented in this chapter under the following broad themes: overview of IGL experiences in the ECE services; the role of relationships in IGL experiences; key elements of IGL as a pedagogical strategy; social and emotional learning through IGL; the key role of the educator; curricular and regulatory frameworks and IGL; the impact of IGL on educators and ECE services and the challenges of IGL as a pedagogical strategy.

6.2 Overview of IGL experiences

In this section a brief description of the activities and structure of the IGL experiences is presented. Importantly, a description of a typical example of the IGL experiences undertaken by each of the educators, and which mainly took place in the older adults' services, is outlined in <u>Appendix O</u>. A description of the older adults' services involved in the IGL experiences is presented in section 4.6.3.

6.2.1 Types of activities in IGL experiences

The wide variety of older adults' services involved in the IGL experiences resulted in children interacting with older adults of different ages from a wide range of backgrounds socially, culturally and geographically, and with varied life experiences. A wide range of activities were implemented in the IGL experiences, with conversation, music, arts and crafts being the most

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¹⁴ Participation in the TOY pilot training programme was the impetus that was common among educators and identified as central to the introduction of the IGL experiences. At the time of interview, four of the educators were involved in IGL practice for one year or less while one educator, whose father was a resident in a nursing home, had been involved for two years.

frequently cited activities. All educators reported conversation between children and older adults as a regular IGL activity. While all the older adults' services had materials that children could use, educators also brought arts and craft materials, sometimes with a focus on special occasions such as St. Valentine's Day. Singing and the use of musical instruments were reported by educators to be a particularly important and enjoyable activity for children and older adults:

... what's working well is the music ... there's a new man who sings all the time and he sang "Daisy, Daisy" and he asked "do we know it?" and I said "no" ... so we came back and learned it ... (Mary).

Physical activities, which included "tennis" (using balloons and fly swats) and games such as "Ring-a-Rosy", were also cited as examples of activities undertaken. A range of other activities were highlighted, including bingo, card games, reading, seed planting, "show and tell" and using the Montessori materials. Simple cooking activities, floor puzzles, karaoke sessions and delivering a meal to an older adult as part of the Meals-on-Wheels service were other activities undertaken. Carol singing, a visit to a café, a sports day and an intergenerational dance class were once-off activities reported by educators and, importantly, these took place in community venues.

6.2.2 Regularity and frequency of IGL experiences

The regularity of children's IGL experiences varied from weekly, fortnightly, monthly to once or twice per school term:

... once a week [we visit the nursing home] ... so we take two different groups ... so those children go every second week ... (Mary)

... we go down once a week [to the older adult's' service] on a Tuesday ... (Ciara).

While regular IGL visits were viewed by educators to be beneficial to children, they acknowledged a number of factors common to both the ECE and older adults' services, which impacted negatively on the regularity of visits, including staff shortages, illness and competing time demands within both services. The regularity of children's IGL experiences was also conditional on children's interest in participating on any day when the IGL experiences were offered as an option:

... absolutely ... the children are asked do they want to go...and it's an option for them to go ... we just had one little boy... and that was only one day ... he didn't want to go and that's no problem either ... (Mary).

A further finding relating to the regularity of the IGL visits was the importance to educators of the same children participating in the IGL experiences:

... it is the same children, the same core group ... and then one or two [Afterschool children] had asked their parents if they could get a chance to go up [to the older adults' services] ... (Ruth)

... we try to stick with the [same] groups ... (Mary).

To a lesser extent, educators addressed the issue of the frequency of the IGL experiences, with some educators emphasising the importance of frequent visits in the development of relationships between children and older adults:

... and you have to do it every week because if you're not doing it every week, you're not going to create those relationships that we get now ... the first year that

we did it ... we weren't going down every week and we definitely have seen, since we go down every week it is definitely just a little bit different ... (Ciara).

While educators did not emphasise the importance of frequency of visits, one participant, who organised one or two IGL experiences each school term, noted that the children did not form personal relationships with the older adults, but she believed relationships could develop over time:

... we wouldn't have entered that phase [children developing personal relationships with older adults] at all ... (Deirdre).

The size of the group of children involved in the IGL experiences typically ranged between eight and fourteen children, with the exception of one ECE service where a group of thirty children was involved in the men's shed experiences:

... we bring down between 10 and 14 children ... the most would be 14 ... (Ciara)

... a maximum of eight will go to the nursing home and we can bring up to eleven children to the independent living centre ... (Eileen).

Interestingly and worth highlighting, the educator with the most experience of IGL emphasised the importance of regular and frequent visits, as well as the importance of a small group, to ensure a positive IGL experience:

... you definitely have to have a small group ... when you bring down the bigger group ... you kind of lose it ... (Ciara).

While evidence of the impact of specific factors, such as regularity of contact and group size, on IGL experiences is largely absent from the research literature (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017), there is some evidence to suggest that frequent and regular IGL experiences are required in order for young children to benefit (Friedman, 1997; McAlister et al., 2019). Importantly, there is also some evidence to suggest that exposure, but minimal interaction between children and older adults, may have a potentially negative impact on children (Femia et al., 2008).

6.3 The central role of relationships in the IGL experiences

A significant finding of the study was educators' belief in the critical role of the interpersonal and relational aspects of the IGL experiences, reflecting their confidence in the importance of relationships as key drivers in human development and fundamental to children's progress as powerful learners (Osher et al., 2020; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009):

... I don't even think about goals sometimes ... it's only when I sit down ... and [am] doing up a learning story¹⁵ ... that I think about the goals ... when I'm going down there [to the older adults' service] ... I don't think about any goals ... (Ciara).

Educators reflected that, without the development of relationships between children and older adults, the IGL experiences would not be meaningful, reinforcing their views that relationships and learning coincide (Malaguzzi, 1998). Significantly, the importance of relationships, rather than activities, was highlighted by an educator in an Irish IGL study, when referring to activities such as visiting services in the community, including a library or a playground on an occasional basis - "we would spend days in the community, but we weren't forming relationships" (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018, p. 34):

¹⁵ Learning stories can be described as 'identity-referenced' assessment rather than 'norm-referenced' assessment practice written about the child in story format (Carr, 2005, p. 46).

... I don't see much of a point in doing it [IGL] ... if there isn't relationships ... you're just going and having a singsong and then leaving ... I think there has to be ... a relationship to make it more meaningful, more worthwhile and for it to be mutual as well ... that you're building up relationships, with the same people, the same adults and building friendships ... (Eileen)

... [relationships are] ... massively important, you know, because if they [children] don't have a relationship with them [older adults], you wouldn't get the quality of the learning that we get down there ... (Ciara).

Views of learning evidenced in the study are structured around the following ideas: children learn through active participation in relational, collaborative and nurturing experiences with a wide range of individuals in real-life contexts. These views align with contemporary discourse on children's learning, which emphasise engagement, interactions, communications and shared activities as key elements of children's learning (Bruner, 1996; Osher et al., 2020). Importantly, participants' views of the key role of relationships in children's learning through IGL resonate with a defining feature of IGL, the central value of relationships (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017).

6.3.1 Caring, affectionate relationships and children's development

In arguing for the central value of relationships in the IGL experiences, participants acknowledged the crucial role that they, as educators, played in creating a positive context in which the relationships could develop. Shared activities, including sharing food, were perceived by educators as central in supporting engagement and reflected their understanding of the contextually-embedded understanding of children's IGL experiences. Activities, therefore, were valued primarily as vehicles for interactions that would lead to the development of relationships and learning opportunities:

... the engagement [the learning takes place because of the engagement between children and older adults] ... because the activity you could do ... we could do it here [in the ECE service] ... definitely the engagement ... (Eileen)

... we brought up some fancy biscuits ... so the children were going around offering out biscuits to the older people and then the chat started ... (Ruth).

The influential role that educators play in terms of mediating and supporting communication between children and older adults is worth noting as centrally important in the development of relationships:

... the things that we bring down are only little props maybe ... but it's the conversation that those props are encouraging ... (Mary)

... some of the children are straightaway over asking questions ... "do you like my new dress?" ... and one of the girls was wearing a cardigan and they [older adults] were saying "oh your cardigan is beautiful, I used to knit ..." ... and then they'll come back the next week and they'll ask a question about what they've said the previous week ... (Ciara).

In deeming caring, affectionate relationships to be central to the IGL experiences, three key elements of these relationships emerged within the educators' narratives – the affective, individualised and reciprocal nature of the relationships. The developing affective connections between children and older adults were observed in small but significant details within these interactions during the IGL experiences, with many older adults making connections with the children:

... just the little moments ... a handshake, a hug or a little conversation ... things like that with the children and the older people ... this boy in particular is quite

keen to go [to the nursing home] and she [mother] said ... "oh, he just said that the old lady just kept smiling at him" ... (Eileen)

... some of them [children] really chat with people ... they might comment on their jewellery or they might be rubbing their hand ... (Ruth).

The central importance of these relationships in creating a sense of belonging and togetherness for children in space and time was valued by the educators for supporting children's emotional wellbeing and enhancing their confidence to explore and learn (Hayes, 2013; Laevers, 2002):

... the older generation, they bring different values and learning and interactions that extend and elaborate on learning ... emotionally and socially... because I think they're in a different space ... older people ... they bring a lovely gentleness and a different kind of respect ... I think it's lovely for children to get that ... (Deirdre).

Individual attention for a child from an adult, in this case an older adult, who is attuned, responsive, affectionate and available (French, 2019) was identified by educators as a significantly positive experience for children's developing sense of identity and well-being:

... having the time to sit down and actually talk with someone, someone to read you a story, someone to let you pour in all the rice crispies and not have to share [with a group of children] ... (Ruth)

... children just want you [the adult] to play with them, particularly because I think parents are busy ... IT and screens have probably replaced a lot ... [children] all like to participate [if the adult gets involved] because of that adult engagement ... it's more fun learning in that way ... (Deirdre).

A key aspect of these relationships was the reciprocal nature of interaction between children and older adults, emphasising the mutual benefits, including a shared sense of happiness (Ikegami & Agbenyega, 2014), as noted by educators:

... everybody is happy to see each other ... they [the children] sit on their [older adults] laps, they climb on top of them, you know, there's high fives given, there's shaking of hands, there's hugs given ... so definitely there's a lovely relationship between them ... (Ciara).

The mutual benefits of a particular close relationship between a child and an older adult were also noted:

... Y is another lady [with dementia] who, from day one ... X [child] was just absolutely besotted by Y and vice versa ... (Ruth).

In an interesting development of this relationship, the power of the child to impact positively on the relational dynamics of a group is evident, as other children became interested in the older adult as a result, reflecting the relational nature of participation (Bae, 2010):

... the relationship [between child X and an older adult Y] is so nice that everyone wants to be friends with Y now ... (Ruth).

Significantly, many examples of children initiating caring gestures towards older adults were reported by educators, highlighting the opportunities created by the IGL experiences to enable children to contribute to a web of caring, to demonstrate their capacity for empathy and, in the process, to exercise their agency and make a positive contribution to society (Alderson, 2008; Trevarthen, 2011):

... there was a lady that doesn't go into the room [where children congregate in the nursing home] ... she sits outside in a little corridor area and one little boy would have always gone to see her ... the last day that we went he had his coat on ready [to go back to the ECE service] and the next thing he said ... "I have to go and say goodbye to Y [older adult]" and he went running down ... (Mary)

... one lady was asking ... "where's mine [her Valentine card]?"... and of course, hers was on the bottom ... but one of the children said "we have one for everybody"... it was a really nice moment that the child was actually listening ... (Eileen).

The individualised nature of the relationships for particular children, including those experiencing challenges, was valued by educators because it created opportunities for the children to develop relationships with responsive companions of all ages, a fundamental need of all children (Trevarthen, 2011). Additionally, the importance of children having relationships with older adults in the community, highlighting the importance of the social as a protective factor in children's wellbeing, is increasingly recognised (Bessell, 2017). Importantly, educators stressed that children may not experience these relationships in the ECE service or in their extended family:

... there's a little boy who [has difficulties] ... like it's a revelation nearly for him ... having that lovely contact with the [older adults] ... and now I'm looking at him and he's with this one particular woman and he's actually sitting chatting with her ... I've never seen him chatting with an early years staff member ... he'll come over and he'll do whatever he has to do [in the ECE service] but he's sitting chatting with her and he's actually having a face-to-face conversation with her ... (Ruth)

... it's different for all of them ... for the children that have no family in this country ... they seem to really connect ... with the older people ... it's the children that don't have the grandparents that really love going ... (Mary).

Children's and older adults' personalities and dispositions also influenced the development of the relationships. For some children and older adults, substantial time was needed before a relationship developed, pointing to the necessity for educators to be sensitive to the individual characteristics that shape these relationships:

... there was one little girl that didn't actually form a relationship with anyone ... she stood back ... and maybe about week eight or nine I looked around and she was actually sitting on a lady's knee reading a story ... that was absolutely amazing because she hadn't actually been interested ... (Ruth)

... one lady in particular, Y [older adult] ... wasn't overly enthusiastic I suppose about the children in the first few days ... [some weeks later] Y said to me 'where are my girls [the children] ... "oh, make sure they come straight over to me when they come in"... when she saw the girls, she stood up and put her arms out and the two girls came running up ... (Ruth).

Similarly, the nature of the relationship was influenced by children's and older adults' personalities, with some children enjoying personalised relationships and physical contact while others related to older adults as a group:

... I think it depends on the personality of them [children and older adults] ... some are more affectionate than others and we see that with pre-schoolers anyway ... so, you know, some like the cuddles and some don't ... (Mary)

... then [for] other children ... it doesn't matter who is there ... it's just the older people they're visiting ... I would have said more last year the kids [related more

to individual older adults] ... I think it depends on the kid ... but maybe it's this group ... (Ciara).

It is worth noting that educators also reported that some children were not interested in forming relationships at all:

... one other little boy actually said he didn't like it, he didn't like that there was a smell, he didn't like the noise, he didn't like anything and he actually didn't come back up, he only came up once with us and didn't come back up again and that was fine ... (Ruth).

6.3.2 Friendships between children and older adults

An interesting finding, reported by educators and corroborated by children and parents, was children's capacity for friendships with the older adults, despite the research evidence suggesting that friendships typically develop between people of similar ages and that intergenerational friendships are relatively uncommon (Drury et al., 2017). However, it has also been posited in the research that friendships can be constrained by social and demographic factors, including the privatisation of childhood (Gray et al., 2016) and urbanisation (Drury et al., 2017). In the present study, educators noted that, over time, friendships developed based on personality types and shared interests:

... they've started to really gel with certain people ... personalities are starting to really come together ... some of the girls ... they've really gelled with some of the ladies ... (Ruth)

... [there are] ... friendships ... like Y [older adult] is 92 ... X [child], who goes down is 3 and they have a great time together ... X brings down his dinosaurs to show Y and Y probably pretends he knows about the dinosaurs but it's just the friendships ... if there was nothing else it's the friendships ... (Ciara).

These friendships became evident in a number of ways as, for example, children who, independently of each other, brought Christmas presents for some of the older adults in the nursing home, and children who wished to share their excitement of Halloween with the older adults:

... yeah, it is a friendship ... that might sound weird ... but it a friendship ... at Christmas ... a few of the kids ... they didn't even know each one were doing it ... brought in presents for the residents because they knew it was their last visit before Christmas ... (Ciara)

... at Halloween ... [the children asked] 'can we go up to the grannies?'... and they did go up ... dressed up for Halloween ... but as much as Halloween was really exciting, the fact that they were going up to show off their costumes was 10 times more exciting ... (Ruth).

6.4 Key characteristics of IGL as a pedagogical strategy

Having identified the pivotal role of the IGL relationships in children's learning and development, educators went on to identify key characteristics underpinning IGL as a pedagogical strategy for young children which will now be addressed (Cartmel et al., 2018; TOY, 2013).

6.4.1 Learning from real life experiences

Educators strongly believed that embedding children in the dynamic, real life experiences offered by IGL opened up new and different social, emotional and physical environments, not typically available to children in ECE services. This idea aligns well with Rogoff's (2014) idea of LOPI, learning by observing and pitching in. Additionally, educators emphasised that real-life learning created opportunities, including opportunities to develop social skills, that would be difficult to identify, plan for or "teach" in their ECE services:

... it's like a new stem for them to be able to learn from ... that they won't necessarily get in other ways ... so it's like opening up another avenue for them to be able to tap into and I think it's a nice avenue ... there's nice opportunities to ... extend that and develop it ... (Deirdre).

An important benefit of the IGL experiences was the opportunity it created for children to have relationships with people of mixed ages, in contrast to the ECE services where children mainly interacted with similarly aged children and with the staff of the ECE service. The IGL experiences not only responded to the challenge of age-segregation of children and older adults (Nimmo, 2008) but created opportunities for the development of ICZ (Kaplan et al., 2020; Sánchez, et al., 2020) where children and older adults had opportunities to develop relationships simply through spending time together:

... there is a big segregation between younger children and older people and we're trying to bridge that gap ... (Eileen)

... I think the importance of establishing those relationships ... it's not difficult and it doesn't have to be "wow" ... it is just about coming together ... respecting, valuing, appreciating the time and the different generational ages and seeing where they can have benefits to each other ... (Deirdre).

Seeking out relationships in a real-world context, where the relationships have meaning and depth, have been shown to promote positive views of difference (Nimmo, 2008), with children relating to older adults as individuals with strengths as well as challenges:

... they're learning diversity for a start because they [older adults] are all so different ... the kids accept the older people and they accept if they're in wheelchairs or if they have walking frames ... they just accept it ... (Mary)

... there's one lady down there speaks Irish all the time, so they are hearing another language ... (Ciara).

Interestingly, educators also noted that the IGL experiences prompted them, as educators, to think more widely about the concept of diversity and to consider older adults when addressing the issue of inclusion:

... we talk about inclusion ... I suppose you're instantly thinking of people with special needs ... but it's another channel [the IGL experiences] ... the more you expose children to differences ... it's giving them an awareness and an appreciation ... (Deirdre).

The extensive benefits of interacting with people of mixed ages, abilities, cultures and experiences for children's learning were emphasised by educators. The wide-ranging informal learning that children gained included knowledge of geography, history, languages, culture, the environment and ageing. Building on their interests, children drew together their prior understandings with the support of knowledgeable older adults in the community (Vygotsky, 1978), reflecting the strengths of the golden triangle of formal, informal and non-formal learning (Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010). Children's interest in geography was reported by one educator as a result of older adults telling children about where they had previously lived, counteracting the possibility of learning in an abstract context with the more tangible and social elements of this learning experience:

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

An interest in history was sparked by conversations between children and older adults discussing past times:

... somebody [older adult] said something about "during the war" so the children were asking [about war]... we wouldn't really talk about that in the Montessori ... and that emerged in our curriculum because the next day they wanted to know about the war ... (Ciara).

A project on the theme of the "Titanic" was introduced in an ECE service following the interest of a child who had first learned about the Titanic from an older adult in the nursing home:

... X [child] was saying that they were on a boat and one of the residents made a joke ... "was it called the 'Titanic'?"... and now she [the child] wants to build the Titanic so she can bring it down to the nursing home ... (Ciara).

Children learned about culture and traditions through the IGL experiences, with children's exposure to music and song from other eras, a common theme evident across the educator narratives:

... Y [older adult] is a fantastic singer but he sings songs from his era ... so we're learning ..."You Are My Sunshine" and "In Dublin's Fair City" ... and there is another lady who plays the piano ... they wouldn't see [that] here [in the ECE service] ... (Mary)

... [during the singsong] ... there was a lady over at the other side ... she was saying ... "they [the children] don't know those songs ... sing 'Twinkle, Twinkle'" ... but the children were just enthralled in listening to these people singing and it was a different style to what they're used to ... (Eileen).

Traditions around festivals, special occasions and play were shared between the older adults and children, with educators valuing the vital role that older adults played in linking children with their history and acting as guardians of culture, while promoting in them a sense of identity and perspective (TOY, 2013):

... we were talking about what they [the older adults] got in their [Christmas] stocking ... (Ciara)

... the children were asking what the conkers [chestnuts] were and we [educators] were explaining ... Y [older adult] had shared her fond memories of playing conkers with her siblings ... (Eileen).

Children also learned about aspects of the ageing process:

... she [child] can actually tell everyone "well, that happens when you get older, sometimes you can't hear very well or sometimes you can't see very well" ... (Ruth).

Real-life learning in the community created important opportunities for children to learn about contemporary social issues. A nurse's strike that affected children's access to the older adults' services created considerable interest among children involved in the IGL experiences, reflecting the value of real-life contexts in supporting children's learning to live in fast-changing contexts (Mannion, 2016):

... one of the little girls has a mammy who is a nurse and with the nurses' strike she came in one day and said about more money and then the other children said ... "what about the nurses in the nursing home?" ... (Mary) ... when the nurses were on strike ... somebody [child] said "I'd like to work in the nursing home" so you can see it's just coming full circle, you know ... (Ciara).

Educators noted the importance to children of familiarity with the physical environment that they encountered on the journeys to and from the older adults' services and in exploring the older adult's environments, which had not been anticipated nor considered central to the planned IGL experiences. Participating in new physical and social environments not only facilitated children's sense of space and place (Dockett et al., 2012; Mannion, 2010) but also their developing sense of mastery and citizenship (Kernan, 2010):

... even walking from the nursery to the nursing home, the children are pointing out little bits of street art and things like that ... (Eileen)

... they're learning resilience, we're taking them out of the safe, secure environment here ... leaving this place ... they're learning so much ... so they are seeing wheelchairs, seeing nurses ... (Mary).

6.4.2 IGL as an organic learning process

Educators emphasised the natural, organic nature of the learning processes in the IGL experiences, reflecting key principles of socio-cultural theories of learning (Rogoff, 2014):

... it's organic and it's just more natural and mutual ... it's not directed kind of learning ... (Eileen)

... I think the learning happens naturally ... it happens through conversations and interactions ... and seeing different things ... (Mary).

The importance of maintaining a low level of direction, unlike more traditional forms of learning, and allowing the IGL experiences to evolve naturally through "just being together"

(Lux et al., 2020, p. 210), in order to facilitate children to contribute ideas through a natural and gradual process, without over- involvement from educators was emphasised:

... I think if you try to over orchestrate it or direct it, you'll stifle it ... for learning to happen it has to be a little bit free ... the older people they're not here to be in a role of teaching ... it's about allowing it to evolve ... just through the interactions ... and I think that's really the best way ... (Deirdre).

6.4.3 Children as learners and teachers in the IGL process

Children's capacity to be active, self-directed and collaborative learners as children and older adults learned together, from each other and about each other was evident in the educators' narratives. Significantly, there was evidence that, according as children and older adults drew on their respective and joint strengths, they demonstrated abilities that otherwise they may not have had opportunities to show or to contribute to the community of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994):

... making the rice crispies [cakes] ... we actually completely stepped away as childcare practitioners and let the children and the older people manage ... opening the packets ... one holding the bowl ... the bingo game ... having to match, listen, match, ask someone else did you hear that ... you know, those kinds of things are very important ... (Ruth)

... its children learning from older people and older people learning from children ... we've learned so much about them and they've learned so much about us as well ... (Ciara).

Opportunities for children to assume the role of teacher were reported in the reciprocal processes of the IGL experiences:

... the children were leading the way like for these older people that are coming up, you know, they clear this space for them, but they were helping getting chairs ... (Ruth)

... most of them [children] are so outgoing ... confident ... they're not overly analysing, they go straight up and they'll initiate conversation or interactions ... and they teach us a lot really because we become so self-conscious when we get older ... (Deirdre).

Interestingly, one educator observed how children's competence and confidence as active learners developed over time:

... when we first go down [to the nursing home] in September it's a completely different learning, it's a completely different environment ... a little bit more cautious ... it's the adult controlling it where now it's the children controlling what goes on down there ... but that's the relationships that have been formed, you know ... (Ciara).

6.4.4 IGL supports children's experiences of learning and living in the community

Educators emphasised the significant role that the IGL experiences played in enhancing children's participation in the community and in harnessing the community as a locus and resource for children's learning and development. Children developed awareness of the social and cultural life of the community through their presence and participation in the IGL activities and through walking to and from the older adults' services. Aspects of the community with which children became familiar as a result of their participation in the IGL experience were noted, including the sports hall, the church, the Tidy Towns work and the carol service in the shopping centre. Importantly, the IGL experiences highlighted their potential to heighten children's awareness, cultural pride and level of civic involvement (Kaplan et al., 2020):

... the Tidy Towns person came in and talked about recycling ... we had never recycled before ... and she gave us our own little patch that we take care of ... (Ciara)

... we're linking them [children] in with different parts of their community ... they have to know that they're not just this little person, that there is a link outside the school, the library, the GAA [sports] club, the nursing home ... (Mary).

Opportunities arose for children to extend their social networks as a result of the families of some of the older adults becoming aware of the children who visit their older relatives, with one educator reporting that family members asked to meet a child who had developed a strong relationship with their family member. Positive, social feedback, important to children's sense of identity (Murray, 2017), was noted by one educator:

... the family of the older person are coming in to meet that little girl ... they obviously feel that they are getting something from it so it's very important ... (Ruth).

There was a strong belief across all educator narratives that children could and should contribute to the lives of the older adults. Examples included children contributing by their presence, through sharing time and activities with older adults, offering support, respect and kindness to older adults. This perspective reflected educators' strong views of children as fully-fledged contributing citizens (Bessell, 2017; Hart, 1997), contributing to the learning and wellbeing of all (Bertram et al., 2018). Importantly, in contributing to the lives of older adults, children gained knowledge and experience of using their valued competences, a necessary element in flourishing (Gaffney, 2011). By their nature, energy and vitality, children could contribute significantly to the lives of older adults (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018):

... children can give too ... they're nearly like a burst of energy to the older people ... and you could see that from the older people just being so amazed about how great they are ... (Deirdre)

... they [nursing home staff] just love the way the whole ... the atmosphere changes [in the nursing home] and the way it does seem to light up their day when we come ... (Ciara).

A further resource that children offered to older adults was their time. Educators noted that staff in the older adults' centre were frequently busy with practical tasks while children were free to spend time interacting with older adults:

... some of the staff are so busy that ... maybe there's not someone sitting down having a chat ... so the children are actually just sitting there having the chat ... (Ruth).

The importance of children's enthusiasm for joint activities and play resulted in new experiences that the older adults might not otherwise have experienced (specific art activities, a trip to a café and a joint sports day), as well as impacting the relational dynamics of all those involved:

... maybe they [older adults] might not have gotten to these places if the children hadn't been there ... (Ruth)

... they [older adults] were just so delighted to have one [a Valentine's card] and you could see that ... one lady was saying she was going to stick it over her bed and she was going to look at it ... when we went to deliver the card to a gentleman in the bed [the nurse] said ... "oh, he was just ... he was lying there all morning [and when children came in] ... he burst into song" ... (Eileen).

Children became adept in supporting older adults in practical ways, such as listening, to ensure that the older adult was heard in a game, helping them physically and sometimes anticipating their needs. Educators emphasised the role that they, as educators, played in creating and extending appropriate, scaffolded opportunities by building on children' innate abilities, a role considered pivotal in socio-cultural theories of learning and in promoting positive learning dispositions (Carr & Lee, 2012; McNally & Slutsky, 2018):

... they [the children] help the residents into their seats so when the residents come out from dinner time, they will immediately go over to them and say ... "do you want to link my arm or can I?" ... and they'll walk with the walker with them ... it's them helping them ... and it's the same in here [in the ECE service] ... (Ciara)

Offering children opportunities to interact with and contribute to the lives of older adults was seen by educators as supporting children in developing dispositions of respect and kindness towards older adults:

... there is one man that sits in there [another room] actually, and they always go in and they always speak to him when they're taking off their coats ... which maybe before they wouldn't have ... you know, he was just somebody sitting there but now they greet him and they actually shake hands with him actually, so even their manners, you know, their social skills of putting a hand out and shaking a hand [are better] ... (Mary).

Children's capacity and potential to transfer their learning from the IGL experiences to other contexts, reflecting their growing metacognitive abilities (Hayes et al., 2017), was noted by educators, citing children's awareness and understanding of older adults in the wider community:

... even walking down to the nursing home if we meet somebody on the way that is maybe a bit older they would kind of step aside now and it's like they kind of know ... they are probably recognising older people in the community ... (Mary)

... so even if one of those children had a neighbour who was older ... us bringing them down to the nursing home ... that might follow through into their neighbourhood ... (Ciara).

Importantly, one educator noted that children's participation in the IGL experiences had the potential to support their civic behaviour in the future, reflecting a belief that children require opportunities to practise citizenship (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018):

... if the children realise now at three and four that they are part of a community, that they've involved in the community ... just maybe, just maybe this will follow through and when they're teenagers they won't want to be down on the river walk causing hassle ... (Ciara).

6.4.5 Learning in a less hurried environment

A valued element of the IGL experiences noted by educators was the change in pace and the less hurried environment offered in older adults' services, in contrast to the typically hectic pace of ECE services. Importantly, the research literature highlights the importance of a calm, unhurried space for the development of executive functions (Galinsky, 2010):

... in the nursing home it's a slower pace, it's a bit more relaxed ... (Eileen)

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

However, the fact that the atmosphere in some of the older adults' services was not always calm and unhurried was also noted:

... in the independent living centre ... I think the older people just want to get as much as they can from the children in the short space of time ... so it can be quite hyped up ... (Eileen)

... when we went to the sports hall [for a sports day with the older people] it was ... really busy, hectic ... (Ruth).

There was also acknowledgement that the slower pace or change in routine did not suit all children and, as a result, the IGL experiences may have been a less than positive experience for some children:

... some of the children find that [pace in the nursing home] a bit difficult ... they find it hard maybe sitting and waiting for something or if what's happening doesn't engage them as much, they might want to leave or have a little run around ... (Eileen)

... we would have one child and no matter what, if I said we were going down to the PE [sports] hall ... he'd be nearly anxious ... so a child like that always needs a lot of information ... but, you have to just expose and let them understand that it will be fine ... (Deirdre).

However, there was agreement among educators that the change of context, pace and atmosphere was generally a positive experience for most children:

... it's not an issue for children at all [change in routine or location] ... they absolutely love going [somewhere new] ... (Ruth)

... some children are very excited about it [change in routine and location] ... (Eileen)

6.4.6 IGL as an enjoyable experience

A significant finding in this study was educators' belief, corroborated by children themselves and parents, that the IGL experience was enjoyed by most children, including some who found it very enjoyable. Importantly, exuberance and pleasure are increasingly recognised for the role they play in enhancing the cognitive functions of the brain and in collaborative learning (Trevarthen, 2004):

... the feedback I get from the children ... they love it, absolutely love it ... (Ruth)

... the children not originally from Ireland ... they loved going down [to the nursing home] ... because they weren't mixing with their older communities ... they really loved going down ... the children from India, Pakistan and the Philippines ... (Mary)

Further evidence of children's pleasure was IGL as a response to children's sense of curiosity, a learning disposition prioritised in international ECE curricula, including Aistear (NCCA, 2009), and which was identified by educators as an important benefit to children from their IGL experiences:

... they watch everything in there [the nursing home] ... sometimes the nurse comes around with her medicine box and you can see the children watching ... especially the drinks that they [older adults] drink ... they're taking it all in ... they're inquisitive ... they're asking questions ... (Mary)

... [children enjoyed] ... having a little nosy into what someone has in their handbag ... (Ruth).

6.4.7 The role of IGL in enhancing partnership with parents

The IGL experiences received strong parental support, suggesting that IGL was a shared interest and goal of parents and educators, a highly valued principle in ECE pedagogy (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2011), a principle underpinning Aistear and Síolta (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009) and highlighted in the proposed professional awards criteria for educators in the Irish ECE sector (DES, 2019):

... well I can't believe, since we started going to the day centre the amount of people [parents] coming in "oh can they [their child] go, can they go?" ... they [parents] want them to be part of it ... (Ruth)

... I thought I might have got a bit of a negative thing about the men and ... young children and older men [in relation to a proposed visit to a men's shed] ... I didn't get any of that ... the parents are ... seeing the community as ... another extension that can be valued ... (Deirdre).

The opportunities to support parents' wishes for their children and enhance partnership, an important priority among educators in the study and a quality indicator in ECE services (NCCA, 2009), was identified as a benefit of the IGL experiences. Parents expressed their appreciation that IGL was an opportunity that their children were offered, while some parents enjoyed participating in the experiences themselves:

... they [parents] are welcome any day but I knew at Christmas some of them would be off [work] so we ended up with maybe 14 or 15 parents and then it was crazy because there were so many parents ... yesterday, another mother just emailed and said, "I'm off [work], can I come with you?" ... (Mary)

... V [parent] ... one of my parents ... she does nails [a manicurist] so she was asking me could she go in and do their [older adults] nails ... there are parents who want to go in and help ... (Ciara).

The IGL experiences were perceived by educators to be an opportunity for parents to become more involved in the community as a result of their children's involvement in the IGL experiences:

... the children may pass the nursing home on their way home and you can see they tell the parents [about it] or they meet the residents in the supermarket or the library and that community "feel" ... I think parents want that ... (Mary)

... the families are now feeling like they are part of the community as well because we are bringing their children into the community ... (Ciara).

One illustration of a parent's interest in developing her involvement in the IGL practice was noted when a parent asked if it would be appropriate to visit the older adults' service when they were passing it outside of preschool hours:

... I've also had a parent ... and she said "could I just call in, would they think I was weird because X [child] wants to go in when they're walking past the nursing home to the supermarket" ... and I [educator] was going ["yes"] because they know X [child] so just pop in and say hello ... so it is, it's funny the way they [parents] have taken it on board ... (Ciara)

Moreover, parents were sometimes introduced to activities in the community for themselves or family members as a result of their children's familiarity with community activities:

... a few of the parents go out with Tidy Towns now on a Saturday ... as a result of that [ECE service involvement with the Tidy Towns] ... they want Mammy to join Zumba [child was involved in a community intergenerational Zumba class through the ECE service] ... (Ciara)

... this [men's shed] is a service that maybe ... granda might link in with ... [parent comment] ... (Deirdre).

One educator noted a parent's interest in learning more about the ECE service and, in particular, his child's IGL experiences:

... one man [parent] in particular ... came in one day and said, "I got a letter about that nursing home 'malarkey' or whatever" he said to me ... "what are you doing?" ... and he came down to the nursing home ... I didn't think he was paying attention to anything that was going on because he seemed to be on his phone, but he actually said ... "that was a wonderful experience"... so maybe he did take it in ... I don't know ... (Mary).

Interestingly, one educator reported that some parents have enrolled their children in her ECE service specifically because of its community participation policy:

... I am booked out for two years ... I always ask ... why did they choose our service and the nursing home and the links in the community are one of the first things they say ... (Ciara).

The central importance of parental feedback to educators, in terms of facilitating an understanding of the meaning of IGL experiences for their children, was evident in the study findings:

... another girl [child] ... where the incident happened with the resident collapsing, she [child] explained to the mam, she had said ... "oh she [older adult] wasn't feeling well, and I had to help" ... so she was able to verbalise what had happened and how it was all resolved as well ... (Eileen).

The significance of a child telling his parent about his IGL experience was noted by one educator as parents frequently told educators that children, when asked what they did in the ECE service, frequently had nothing to report:

... there was one little boy, he's just gone three ... and the dad came into me the next day and he [said] "Jesus, are you bringing him to play bingo with the grannies!" ... that was very key ... because sometimes parents say "oh they just say they did nothing in the crèche" ... but no ... [the father said] ... "as soon as he saw me, he told me" ... (Ruth).

However, one educator noted the potential existed to develop a stronger connection with parents through the IGL experiences:

... if the families could get a bit more involved in it, it would be great but I think that might come with time ... I think it's still early days ... (Eileen).

6.5 The key role of the educator in implementing IGL

To implement IGL practice based on educators' clearly articulated views about children and what they wanted to achieve with, and for, children and how best to achieve it required particular personal and professional values and skills (Bautista et al., 2016; Cartmel et al., 2018), which were strongly evident in this study. Importantly, it also demonstrated educators' autonomy and the powerful roles that they played as brokers in connecting their values and beliefs with the introduction of IGL practice (Mentha et al., 2015). Introducing a new and

different learning strategy, such as IGL, to an ECE service as a result of personal experience (parent resident in nursing home), or from an idea gained from the media (TV documentary on IGL) or from participation in a continuing professional development course (TOY training course) reflected a significant and valuable characteristic of educators in the study: an openness to new ideas, highlighting that there is no one best way to support children's learning (Coppens et al., 2014; Rogoff, 2014):

... my dad is a resident down in the local nursing home ... so that's how it built from there ... (Ciara)

... [I got interested] after seeing the programme, the Channel 4 programme¹⁶ and I thought, "oh this could work" ... (Mary)

... I thought it would be something nice to do ... something different to just ... break the norm a little bit out of your usual trips out ... (Eileen).

6.5.1 Educators' openness to developing new learning strategies

Significantly, educators reported that, in expanding their professional repertoires through their involvement in IGL experiences, they had changed their views of what constituted learning opportunities for children. As a result, they had a stronger belief in the value of seeking real-life learning opportunities, in risk-rich environments, beyond the ECE service (New et al., 2005). This view further highlights the level of autonomy that educators have in delivering an ECE service to children (Campbell-Barr, 2019):

... this time last year I never would have thought of a crèche visiting a day centre or a nursing home ... why would you do such a thing ... and now I'm asking why would you not do such a thing? ... (Ruth).

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¹⁶ 'Old People's Home for 4 year Olds', Channel 4 TV programme, 2017.

Moreover, educators reflected their commitment to their ongoing professional development, acknowledging the role of the IGL experiences in building their confidence to develop further learning opportunities in the community:

... I think it's probably given us more confidence to leave the service and not just live in this little bubble in here ... and to leave and say, we can do this ... (Mary).

A willingness to take on challenges in developing their ECE practice was evident in the narrative of an educator who acknowledged her concern about sharing her role as an educator with older adults. A fundamental characteristic of IGL and socio-cultural theories of learning is the significant role of others in children's learning, individuals who are not trained, paid or acknowledged as teachers (Boström, 2003):

... I would have been up for going out on walks and things like that ... but letting other people engage with the children ... for other people to take on that role as well ... I think this is possibly the first time that we've done it on this kind of scale ... (Eileen).

6.5.2 Educators' expertise in introducing IGL

Based on their belief in the importance of introducing new ideas to their ECE curricula and, significantly, in their commitment to IGL, educators introduced IGL as a form of intentional teaching (Kilderry, 2015). In introducing IGL as a form of intentional teaching, educators reflected their orientational stance, their values and priorities for children (Anders, 2015) before seeking the support of parents and then children, a process deemed crucial to the success of the IGL practice. Educators demonstrated their respect for parents and their skill in gaining parental trust and support in a number of ways. Firstly, educators introduced the IGL concept to parents variously by focusing on personal connections with services for older adults,

emphasising that IGL was a strategy supported by the ECE service curriculum, and that they had undertaken training in IGL through their participation in the TOY course. Parents' overwhelmingly positive response to the IGL opportunity was a finding across all educator narratives and no parent objected to their child being involved in the IGL experiences:

... some of them were saying 'oh I saw that on Channel 4 [TV] ... oh, that's very interesting that you're going to do that. ... [parents] absolutely love it ... (Ruth)

... even yesterday, I had a meeting with a parent and one of the first things she said was, "will she be included in the visits next year?"... (Mary).

Secondly, educators had the ability to anticipate parents' potential concerns in advance and presented detailed arrangements and safety measures to be adopted when introducing the IGL experiences:

... I told them [parents] exactly ... that we had met with the nursing home ... maybe they [parents] had concerns about where [the children] were going to be ... were they going to be in the [bed]rooms or was it going to be an open room ... they know we're taking them from one safe environment to another one ... (Mary)

... his mam was a little bit concerned would he act up ... but he hasn't ... he's been absolutely fine ... (Ruth).

The extensive and specialised knowledges, skills and practical wisdom required of educators, rarely made visible in ECE policy and practice documents (Campbell-Barr, 2019; Powell, 2010), were strongly evident in the preparation of children for the IGL experiences. Individual children's feelings of ease and comfort in relation to the proposed IGL experiences were prioritised, with educators assuring children of their ongoing right to choose to participate or

not and of the ongoing support of the educators. Information about the lives of older adults and their needs, older adults' services and their location was also introduced:

... we told the children that we would be there with them the whole time and if there was anything that they needed that they could come and talk to us and that if we liked it, we might do it a little bit more often ... (Eileen)

... we had to prepare the children ... this is where we're going, this is what happens, these people live here, this is their home ... (Mary)

The expertise of educators in considering the particular requirements of individual children with additional learning needs, in order to be able to participate in the IGL experiences, as well as the potential of IGL be of value to specific children, was also evidenced in the narratives:

... two children I brought down on their own [as part of the preparation], they had autism ... I felt that was important because of the smells, the sounds ... (Mary)

... one little girl is from [European country] so she wouldn't see her granny often ... and one of the other little boys, his granny actually died ... one of the other little boys ... there's a lot of trauma in the family ... and then one of the other little girls ... we felt that she actually just needed ... to do something different ... the ones [children] who are in our centre all day, it's really nice for them ... (Ruth).

The key role of the educators and their attunement with children (French, 2019) in facilitating the IGL experiences was noteworthy. Additionally, educators' capacity to stand back and allow collaborative, relational interactions to develop, rather than to manage and direct experiences, was notable, reflecting Rogoff's (2014) ideas of learning by observing and pitching (LOPI):

... I think the process of it alone is just what we should value in terms of letting it come together ... not necessarily there having ... to be an outcome or aim ... but just acknowledging that it's part of an interaction process that should be allowed to happen to give both the opportunities to come together ... I know we've set up a few little things but actually ... I think it was really the free flow things that I saw more engagement, just genuine, playful engagement ... (Deirdre).

It was clear that educators prioritised incorporating children naturally into the group with older adults, supporting them in their interactions and trusting children's initiative and their ability to contribute, all key elements of LOPI (Rogoff, 2014).

6.6 Children's learning and development through IGL experiences

In reflecting on children's learning through the IGL experiences, educators emphasised socioemotional development, positive learning dispositions and learning as a predominantly social process. This emphasis pointed to educators prioritising the *how* rather than the *what* skills central to success in life and learning (Galinsky, 2010; Hayes, 2013). Interestingly, educators also suggested that the absence of the range of opportunities that older adults brought to the IGL experiences would result in a loss to children's learning:

... I think if they don't have that exposure ... it's a loss of real learning ... and in terms of emotional and social [development] ... definitely there's threads and links to developing those areas in different ways that they're not going to get if they're not linking in ... because I think they're in a different space, grandparents and older people ... (Deirdre).

Evidence from educator narratives, detailing specific elements of children's learning and development, will now be presented under the following sub-themes: social awareness; critical thinking; taking on challenges; and social skills.

6.6.1 Social awareness

The rich opportunities for children to develop social awareness were described in detail by educators, citing examples of intersubjectivity, perspective-taking and empathy arising through the IGL experiences. Children's capacity for intersubjectivity in joint interactions, central to collaborative learning and improved cognitive development (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009), was evident in educator narratives:

... something will spark something. ... because when we were playing bingo last week, somebody [an older adult] asked us were we playing for money ... the kids were [asking] "what do you mean playing for money?" ... "you know, I have €2 in my piggybank" ... so it just comes from conversations ... (Ciara)

... so, if one [older adult] is getting up on the [walking] frame they're [children] kind of nearly minding them...you can see them minding them and helping them or moving out of the way ... (Mary).

Building on their capacity for intersubjectivity, children demonstrated their ability to take the perspective of another and, thereby, refine their own thinking. This skill, acknowledged as central in later educational achievement (Bruner, 1996; Hayes et al., 2017), was highly valued by educators in this study:

... we didn't go ... [to see the older adults on the scheduled day] and [the child said] "they will be waiting for us and my granny will be waiting up there and ... I miss them and they're going to miss me" [child] ... and they actually were really worried that their grannies were going to miss them ... (Ruth).

Children were also developing empathy with older adults, as reported by educators:

... those [children] going down to the day centre, we're seeing empathy being built up ... some of the [older] people who would attend have no speech and ... to see the children actually understanding that and supporting people to do things ... that's all amazing stuff ... and it's so natural to them ... (Ruth)

... you can see the empathy building up in the children as well ... as soon as she [older adult] seen him [child] ... her whole face lit up and she'd shake his hand and he thought this was great ... he was sitting beside her and he kept tapping her arm and every time she turned, she'd shake his hand and he was delighted with this but as the morning went on she started to fall asleep ... so when he was tapping her arm and she wasn't turning around he was taking her hand and giving her hand a little rub and then putting it back on her lap ... so she could have her little sleep ... (Eileen).

The following examples demonstrate children's skill in transferring learning between contexts:

... they [the children who visit the nursing home] would be [different in the ECE service] ... and it probably is a maturity with them ... they are beginning to show empathy towards each other ... (Mary)

... if somebody is having a little bit of difficulty [in the ECE service] ... it's usually one of my children who's going [to the nursing home], who helps the child ... they're just that little bit emotionally ready ... you'll hear them [children] saying "oh X" [referring to a child with a speech delay] they'll be like ... "you just have to listen a little bit harder" ... (Ciara).

6.6.2 Critical thinking

Children's developing capacity for making connections and testing ideas, a key skill in extending learning (Hayes, 2013), was identified by educators as a significant benefit of their IGL experiences. Children were observed to make connections at a concrete level, and, over time, they made more abstract connections:

... one of the boys just loves pointing out different things about the older people ... "my nanny has a chair like that in her house, we have that trolley in school" ... he's very interested in the thing as a whole ... so for him it's not just about going up and having a visit, it's a bit of an exploration as well ... (Eileen)

... one of the residents said, "Oh I need to go to the toilet", to the nurse and one of the children said ... "does she have to ask to go to the toilet?" ... so I had to explain ... "well, actually she finds it difficult to walk to the toilet so she needs a bit of help" ... (Eileen).

Children's ability to remember and reflect, key skills in critical thinking, were also evident in educators' accounts:

... one of the residents in the nursing home, she asked us for conkers and when we were going up ... one of the children said ... "did you bring that stuff for that lady?" ... and I said, "no, we've the wrong season, we can't get conkers" and she said ... "oh you'll have to tell her" ... (Eileen)

... there was hand cream coming in [as a gift for Y, older adult] because Y always had hand cream so they [the child] had recognised that as well and they'd obviously said it to their mam that she always has some sort of cream beside her ... (Ciara).

Educators reported the extensive opportunities created by the IGL experiences for children to think critically, to consider *why?* and *what if?* questions, reflecting children's skills in developing an ordered understanding of the world:

... and even the knowledge ... that they know ... that they can't be running around ... that people are on frames or ... they're a bit slower to walk or, you know, sometimes they shout a little bit louder [if the older adult does not hear them] ... (Ruth)

... one of the ladies when she holds the children's hands ... she won't let go ... so the children are giving her a wave instead of holding her hand, or they'll know that if they do hold hands that they can call one of us to come over and help the situation ... (Eileen).

6.6.3 Taking on challenges

Children had many opportunities to deal with challenging situations through their IGL experiences, as reported by educators:

... sometimes the children will say ... "that lady was cross with me" and ... we'd say to them ... "she's not really cross ... she just had to understand what you're saying to her" ... (Ruth)

... now, sometimes she [older adult] ... likes to take the things that we bring down and pop them into her handbag to keep and the children say, "no that's ours from school" ... no, there's a little bit of banter going on ... (Mary).

Interestingly, there was agreement among educators that appropriately challenging experiences can enhance children's development, helping children to develop coping skills and confidence and reflecting the important role of challenge in flourishing (Gaffney, 2011):

... the children are developing ... their confidence ... they'd need to have their confidence to be able to stand up for themselves a little bit more [in the nursing home] ... if they don't want to do something or they don't want to shake hands [with an older adult] or something like that ... that they can communicate that with the older people ... (Eileen)

... she [child] actually has a very bad speech problem but she went to tell one of the older people why her arm was in the sling ... she wouldn't be a very confident little girl but it was like she came into her own when she walked in there, you know ... "I fell out of the car ... and I had an x-ray and the doctor had to take a picture"... (Mary).

The challenging experiences were valued by educators for the many opportunities they created for the development of resilience over time:

... and if someone [older adult] was to be a little bit cross with them ... it's the world we live in ... someone is not always going to be using a conflict resolution strategy every single time that something happens ... so you know ... that is part of life as well ... (Ruth)

... to see one of the children being really anxious and really shy on the first visit and not wanting to talk to anybody to standing up and singing along on the third visit ... it's that empowering for her ... (Eileen).

6.6.4 IGL and the development of social skills

Confidence in verbal and non-verbal communicating was identified by educators as a skill that children had many opportunities to develop through their IGL experiences:

... they know how to deal with people who maybe have had a stroke and have a speech problem ... and they know to listen a little bit carefully because somebody doesn't talk the way you and I do ... (Ciara).

The extensive examples not only of social skills but of pro-social behaviour, voluntary behaviour intended to benefit others (Hyson, 2004), was evident in educator narratives. There was agreement among educators that children frequently adapted their behaviour positively during the IGL experiences, highlighting that pro-social behaviour is a skill developed with practice and can effectively be modelled and scaffolded by educators (Florez, 2011). Children regulating their behaviour without prompting from an adult was also noted by educators:

... one little boy in particular ... he'll lash out quite a bit at the staff and the children and we were a little bit hesitant about bringing him to the dementia unit ... we were a little bit apprehensive but I've seen a complete different side to that little boy that I've never seen ... and like the turn-taking ... [the children] have to do that with an older adult ... you can't pull something back from an older adult ... [they] have to be conscious of those kind of things ... so their social, emotional [learning] is definitely coming on ... (Ruth).

6.7 The relationship between IGL and curricular and regulatory frameworks

There was strong agreement among educators that, as a pedagogical strategy, IGL was well aligned not only with Aistear and Síolta but also with the Montessori, HighScope and emergent¹⁷ curricula. Compliance with the Regulations was seen to pose some difficulty, but educators deemed this to be manageable.

6.7.1 IGL, Aistear and Síolta

Educators believed that there was close alignment between principles of IGL and principles, themes and standards of Aistear and Síolta, which were being implemented in all the ECE services in the study. The IGL experiences were seen to fit with the four themes of Aistear: well-being; identity and belonging; communicating; and exploring and thinking. Similarly, while not focusing on specifics within the 16 Síolta standards, educators emphasised how well aligned IGL was with both frameworks:

... I can see all the themes linking in ... wellbeing ... you're able to see [how it fits], identity and belonging ... valuing and respecting and being aware of others in our community ... exploring and thinking ... communicating ... and of course Síolta, there are many standards there [in the IGL work] ... interactions ... the rights of the child ... (Deirdre).

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¹⁷ An emergent curriculum, advocated by Aistear and Síolta, emphasises child-led learning, which evolves from and builds on children's ideas, interests and experiences (NCCA, 2009).

6.7.2 IGL and other ECE curricula

Educators in the study who also implemented Montessori, HighScope and an emergent curriculum, while working within the Aistear and Síolta frameworks, reported a close alignment with IGL principles. In relation to Montessori, educators believed that IGL fitted well with the ethos of the Montessori approach:

...Maria Montessori ... would certainly enjoy what we were doing, definitely ... she thought that children should be with every generation ... they should be outside ... (Ciara).

Children were reported to have had opportunities to introduce the Montessori materials to older adults and this was considered to benefit both children and older adults:

... absolutely [IGL fits with the Montessori curriculum] ... we bring our Montessori equipment down there ... the kids love showing the older people [how to use the Montessori materials] ... (Mary).

Interestingly, positive research on the benefits of Montessori activities as a trans-generational approach in the care and education of older adults, including those living with dementia, has recently begun to emerge (Camp & Lee, 2011; Roberts et al., 2015). There was agreement among educators using the HighScope approach that IGL fitted well with this approach, with one educator focusing on how some children have chosen IGL experiences when they are making their daily plans for activities of their choice:

... HighScope is about children making plans ... they are actually planning to go up and meet the old people ... (Ruth).

The role of the IGL experiences in enhancing the emergent curriculum being implemented in one ECE service was noted by the educator :

... we get a lot of our, our emergent curriculum ... from the nursing home... we wouldn't have talked about the [Christmas] stockings ... so they're learning ... somebody will say something about what it used to be like years ago ... (Ciara).

6.7.3 IGL and the Pre-School Regulations

Compliance with the Regulations (DCYA, 2016a), the statutory requirements for Irish ECE services, was a matter of importance for all educators when they were considering introducing IGL. All educators had consulted with their insurance companies and some had consulted with their Pre-School Inspector in relation to compliance:

... I even rang up the insurance company and they said there's no issue at all, just treat it like an outing I actually did talk to the Pre-School Inspector and she said it's absolutely amazing ... that [was] a great incentive ... (Ruth).

Generally, educators felt reassured as a result of these consultations, but all educators paid particular attention to risk assessment in relation to each IGL experience:

... and with your Pre-School Regulations, you just have to be a little bit [careful] ... we have our outings policy ... I risk assess it ... my insurance is one to five [adult-child ratio] ... so we just have everything in place ... (Ciara).

However, compliance with the Pre-school Regulations remained a concern:

... the Pre-school Regulations, no ... [the IGL experiences do not fit with them] ... with the ratios and health and safety and everything else ... that's probably the

biggest barrier [the Pre-school Regulations] for us getting to the nursing home and the nursing home can't come to visit us ... (Eileen).

6.8 The impact of IGL on educators and ECE services

The impact of the IGL experiences on educators and on their ECE services was reported positively across all narratives.

6.8.1 The impact of IGL on educators

Interestingly, the IGL experiences may be considered in the context of a relational pedagogy not only for children but also for the educators (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). The IGL was perceived by educators to be a very positive experience not only professionally but also personally, because they enjoyed the relationships they developed with older adults:

... I think it probably ... boosts morale a little bit ... it's a bit of a change from the norm ... (Mary).

The positive impact of IGL on educators' morale is an area worthy of further study, particularly as staff morale is a key quality indicator in ECE, yet low staff morale is a significant challenge in Irish ECE services, with almost one-third of staff planning to leave the sector within 12 months (Early Childhood Ireland, 2020):

... [what's working well is] ... the friendships that we as adults have built up with them [older adults] as well ... yes ... we're enjoying it ... (Ciara)

... I don't have older people in my life so I'm actually really looking forward to ... as an adult, having that time to actually sit down and just having a cup of tea, having the chat ... there's nobody expecting anything off you which is so nice and that's the biggest thing for me ... (Ruth).

The change in routine experienced through the IGL experiences, perceived as both a positive and a negative by educators, included a break from routine, a challenge to the daily schedule and a sense of feeling rushed when working within the schedules of both services:

... it's a break away from the normality of school ... of this environment ... it's something different ... (Mary)

... some staff find it difficult because ... the routine, the whole day ... is flipped on its head ... (Eileen)

... you just have to realise the bus is coming at three o'clock [to bring the older adults home from the day centre] ... there's nothing we can do ... (Ruth).

The belief that the IGL experiences enhanced the lives of the older adults was acknowledged as an important benefit and motivating factor for one educator:

... so it's us trying to see how we can involve them [older adults] in the community as well so they're not just down in the nursing home the whole time ... (Ciara).

Educators also acknowledged some challenging impacts of IGL on educators, with the death of older adults highlighted as the most difficult element, while interacting with older adults with dementia was difficult for an educator whose mother had dementia:

... we're finding the death part [difficult] ... to me that's the hardest part ... there was one staff member who went down [to the nursing home] ... she got very emotional going down ... but then her own mother has Alzheimer's so it made an impact ... (Mary).

Support for educators involved in IGL experiences was identified by an educator as a need that should be addressed:

... staff need to look after themselves as well ... you can talk about how the children might find it difficult but staff are finding it difficult as well ... so maybe that could be something that there might be a bit more support around ... (Eileen).

6.8.2 The impact of IGL on ECE services

A finding worth noting in the present study was the perception among educators that IGL had a positive impact on their ECE services, including making the ECE service more attractive to parents and enhancing the reputation of the ECE service in the community. Specifically, the IGL experiences were perceived to make the service more attractive to those parents who wanted their children to be involved in the community:

... well I'm [booked] out the door for the next two years because we're so involved with the community [one child] ... her parents are new to the area and they chose here because they felt that because she was only new ... she would get the best community involvement ... (Ciara)

... [in one family with three children] the second child came with us [to the nursing home] and the third child is coming now on the visits ... but the daddy said, "why didn't my first child do this?" ... (Mary).

Related to this finding, enhancing the reputation of the ECE service within the community because of the IGL experiences was also noted by educators:

... I think it has been a positive ... the community are beginning to say ... "oh that school up there ... they visit the nursing home" ... that's a positive ... (Mary).

6.9 The challenges of implementing IGL experiences

While educators were overwhelmingly positive about the IGL experiences in their ECE services, a number of challenges in implementing IGL were identified. The challenges centred around the following issues: IGL as a neutral or negative experience for some children, the importance of support for educators involved in IGL practice; practical challenges in implementing IGL as a pedagogical strategy and a mismatch between ECE and older adults' services about the aims of IGL.

6.9.1 IGL as a neutral or negative experience for children

The idea that children may not wish to be involved in the IGL experiences was also noted, with educators acknowledging the importance of recognising individual needs, interests and trajectories in development (Osher et al., 2020). The importance to educators of being attuned to children's positive and negative feelings about the IGL experiences was strongly evident in the narratives and educators regularly reviewed with children and parents the children's interest in, and satisfaction with, the IGL experiences:

... some children [one or two] don't seem to be enjoying it ... so we're going to ask them ... "would they like to go ... or would they like to stay?" ... (Eileen)

... we [educators] keep a little diary of how it went and what we think [after each visit] ... (Mary).

Importantly, the view that IGL experiences may not suit individual children at any time and for a variety of reasons was noted by educators. The difficulties posed by IGL experiences for a very active child and an anxious child were noted by an educator:

... no, I don't think it's for every child ... one little girl in particular is really struggling ... [she is] a real livewire and she runs around all the time ... and to keep saying to her ... "you're going to have to sit down" ... that's not enjoyable ... a little boy who was a bit fearful, it's probably not for him ... maybe next year you could bring him back up and then try again ... (Ruth).

A child's home situation could result in the IGL experiences having either a positive or negative impact on the child:

... some of the children had lost grandparents quite recently and we were a bit concerned about how that might affect them ... it hasn't had a negative effect that we can see but I think it could ... maybe with different children ... (Eileen).

Children feeling concerned or worried about older adults, if an older adult was missing, seemed unwell or appeared strange was also noted as a potential challenge:

... one lady that hasn't been there in weeks, she's been in hospital ... and the children would ask "why is she not here?" ... some of the older people might have little sores on them and the children would be a little bit concerned [asking] "why has she got that sore on her" ... they could be worrying I suppose ... (Ruth)

... a parent came to me and said she [child] was talking about it at home and that she, she didn't like going down [to the older adults' service] because she felt the old people reminded her of zombies ... (Ciara).

6.9.2 The importance of support for educators involved in IGL

Importantly, the impact of death and illness of older adults could be a challenge for some educators, with one educator noting the importance of support being offered to educators involved in IGL practice. Moreover, a lack of support from colleagues who were not involved

in the IGL experiences and may have resented their colleagues' involvement, could also be challenging for educators:

... "well they [staff involved in IGL] get to do it ... we don't get to do it", and "because [they] went out, all our breaks are running late" ... it's not all the time ... but it can have an impact on it [IGL] ... (Eileen).

6.9.3 Practical challenges of implementing IGL experiences

While educators did not generally see challenges implementing IGL, they identified a number of issues that impacted on the introduction of IGL in ECE services. The difficulty of identifying older adults' services interested in IGL resulted in limited numbers of children being offered IGL opportunities:

... it's just hard to find organisations ... we could all take part in it but it would [mean] different groups of children going to the nursing home ... and that wouldn't work out ... (Eileen).

The staffing levels required under the Regulations for an outing were also perceived as a potential constraint:

... we're a bit stuck ... we just bring the children that can have a one-to-three ratio but then you're excluding other children ... (Eileen).

Time constraints and aligning schedules in both services was identified by educators as a limiting factor:

... [in the] day centres it's a little bit trickier because of the time constraints ... sometimes the nurses have to come in or chiropodists or a hairdresser ... so we

have to fit into a little window [of time] ... we go from 2pm-3pm so it was the children [mainly in one group] who were actually in at that time [who visited the day centre] ... (Ruth).

Educators noted that a lack of time to plan for IGL experiences was a challenge:

... we're hoping to get ... involved ... in the "knit and natter" group but between one thing or another ... because I'm gone back to do the Degree, I feel a lot of things that I would have been on to have taken a back seat ... (Ciara).

Mobility and transport issues could be problematic for children and older adults and were a particular constraint on older adults visiting ECE services:

... it takes a lot for the residents [older adults in nursing home] to come up [to the ECE service] ... (Ciara).

While funding was not an issue reported, one educator noted that costs could be an issue:

... I suppose finances [could be a challenge] ... we're fortunate now, we haven't had to spend loads ... if you were looking to go out on buses, now that would just eat a huge [amount] ... (Deirdre).

6.9.4 Mismatch between ECE and older adults' services with regard to aims of IGL

Importantly, a fundamental issue identified by one educator centred around a mismatch that could exist in relation to aims and understandings of IGL between ECE services and the older adults' services. While ECE services in the study prioritised the development of relationships between the same groups of children and older adults through regular, scheduled visits, some older adults' services were happy to have casual visits whenever it suited both services:

... I think in the nursing home ... [they] have a different idea of IGL than we do...where we're trying to build up the relationships ... where [as] they really appreciate what we're doing ... I don't think there's as much of an understanding behind it and the benefits so much of it being the same adults and the same children each time ... they're a bit more ... "ah [come] whenever you can" ... (Eileen).

6.10 Summary

The wide range of experiences offered to children in this study, through their interactions with older adults of mixed ages, abilities, cultures and experiences in new and different social and physical environments, reflected educators' deep understanding of socio-cultural perspectives of learning, as well as their capacity to implement these perspectives in practice (Bruner, 1996; Cartmel et al., 2018; Rogoff, 2014). The significant role of people and places on children's learning and development and the implications of this for pedagogical practice (Woodhead, 2006) is reflected in educators' commitment to seeking out new people and places in informal contexts for children to interact with through the IGL experiences (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020; Trevarthen, 2012).

The most significant and highly valued element of the IGL experiences was the relationships between children and older adults, reflecting educators' understanding of the value of relationships for children's overall development (Kickbusch, 2012; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009) and their recognition of the enjoyment that children got from these relationships. Highlighted was the caring, affectionate nature of the relationships and the friendships that had developed between children and older adults (Lux et al., 2020), both of which contributed to children's sense of belonging and wellbeing (Femia et al., 2008; Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013). Additionally, educators identified the following as key elements underpinning IGL as a pedagogical strategy: learning from real life; the organic nature of IGL; children as learners

and teachers; children as contributors in the community; IGL as an enjoyable strategy; IGL as a calm, unhurried environment; and IGL as an opportunity to promote connectivity between ECE services, parents and communities (Cartmel et al., 2018).

The IGL experiences were perceived by educators to embed children in the real life of the community (Nimmo, 2008), which they believed was a right of children. Additionally, through their engagement, children learned much that could not be taught, including the *how* rather than the *what* skills, ideas which dominate contemporary discussions on the aims of education (Carr & Lee, 2012; Galinsky, 2010). The IGL experiences offered rich learning environments for children's socio-emotional development and particularly for the development of executive functions, including social awareness, critical thinking, pro-social behaviour and taking on challenges (Florez, 2011; Galinsky, 2010).

The organic processes of IGL learning (Kaplan & Larkin, 2004) were highly valued by participants as they facilitated spontaneous, contextually-embedded understandings for children around different elements of the experiences, highlighting the strengths of combining formal and informal learning (Miles, 2018; Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010). Additionally, the organic nature of IGL, emphasising the importance of process in children's learning, was reflected in educators' examples of how it took time for children to build confidence and competence in the IGL experiences (Femia et al., 2008). Interestingly, the calm, unhurried environment that children typically experienced through the IGL experiences, offering a contrast to the faster pace of the ECE environment, was identified as an additional benefit of the IGL environment.

The opportunities for children to take on collaborative and empowering roles as learners and teachers in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), enhancing their role as contributing citizens in the community, was a further benefit of the IGL experiences identified by educators (Smith, 2010). Connecting children, parents and communities was considered by

participants to be a significant strength of IGL and, based on parents' positive response and involvement in the IGL experiences, was identified as a valuable vehicle for enhancing partnership between ECE services and parents (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

The significant impact of the educator on all aspects of children's development, well-established in the literature (Hayes, 2013; Katz, 1995) and a strong finding in this study, foregrounded the autonomy of the educator in brokering the IGL experiences offered to children (Kilderry, 2015; Mentha et al., 2015). Moreover, the findings demonstrated educators' confidence and competence that, in introducing IGL, they adequately interpreted and fulfilled the requirements of Aistear, Síolta, other ECE curricula and the Regulations (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009; DCYA, 2016a). The positive impact of IGL, both personally and professionally, reported by participants is worthy of further study, because staff morale, a key quality indicator in ECE, has been identified as a significant challenge in the Irish ECE sector (Early Childhood Ireland, 2020).

While educators were overwhelmingly positive about the IGL experiences in their ECE services, a number of challenges were identified and centred primarily around logistical issues. Additionally, children not interested or losing interest in IGL and educators' need for support were identified as issues that needed further consideration.

Children's perspectives on their IGL experiences will now be addressed.

CHAPTER 7 CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR IGL EXPERIENCES

7.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on how children experienced, reflected on and understood their IGL experiences and addresses a key research question in this study: what are the perspectives of young children on their IGL experiences? In seeking and understanding children's perspectives, the researcher acknowledged the significant roles of key adults in the process. Educators, through their close relationships with children, played a crucial role in supporting children in forming and making their views known. Additionally, parents' understandings of the meanings of the IGL experiences for the children, as well as their perspectives on IGL, are discussed. Children's visual, textual and oral representations and perspectives of their IGL experiences are also presented, primarily as communicated by children independently, but also in a co-constructive process with the educators and parents.

7.2 'I like the sprinkles on the ice-cream': A contextually-embedded understanding of children's IGL experiences

A significant finding of this study was the precise nature and variety of activities that children valued with regard to their IGL experiences. Importantly, children highlighted through their representations a number of activities that could be considered peripheral to the core IGL activities. These included the journeys to and from the older adults' services, the physical environments that they encountered, the people that they met and the food and animals in the older adults' services. This finding aligns well with results of an exploratory study of young children's experiences of theatre which found that the line between "theatre as performance" and "theatre as experience" was particularly loose for young children, so that going to the theatre was always an event beyond simply performance and was irrevocably tied to the context in which it occurred (Miles, 2018, p. 22). Adopting a contextually-embedded understanding of

children's IGL experiences revealed that, in reality, the IGL experiences spilled out and beyond interactions with older adults and incorporated wide-ranging areas of interest to children, combining what Miles (2018, p. 36) refers to as the "familiar and the becoming familiar", in ways that defy adult hierarchies of interest. An interesting example of understanding the IGL experiences through the lens developed by Miles (2018) relates to children's interest in the food associated with the IGL activities in this study, a finding mirrored in her study, where children highlighted the importance of sandwiches ¹⁸ in reflecting on the theatre event. Widely reflected in children's drawings and commentary and noted as important to children by educators and parents in this study was the enjoyment of the food offered to children in the older adults' services. Typically, children enjoyed snacks that were different to those offered in ECE services and they particularly valued treats, all of which were represented in considerable detail in their drawings and commentary:

... I like the sprinkles on the ice-cream ... (Child, A) 19

... X [child] really enjoyed the nursing home today and was full of chat about the ice cream ... (Parent, A $)^{20}$

... the children were very excited to get strawberry ice cream but asked where was the juice ... (Eileen)

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¹⁸ In discussing a proposed second visit to the theatre, all children mentioned eating sandwiches (which children had eaten for their lunch as part of the first visit), while some children omitted to mention the theatre performance.

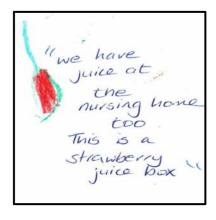
¹⁹ Children are identified by reference to the ECE service they attended, which is denoted as service A, B, C, D or E: see section 4.6.2.

²⁰ Parents are identified by reference to the ECE service their child attended which is denoted as service A, B, C, D or E: see section 4.6.2.

... X [child] said ... we had such a great day ... we got to have a tea party with our grannies ... we had fancy cakes and a nurse gave us juice ... we had special cups ... (Ruth).

Figure 7.1 Food in the older adults' services

... we have juice at the nursing home too ... ".. these are the biscuits and cakes ... this is a strawberry juice box ...





Acknowledging the importance of context and adopting a wide lens with which to consider children's perceptions of their IGL experiences, created opportunities for the researcher to attempt to develop shared meanings with the children. Pink's (2009, p. 67) work on "participant sensing" is useful in the present study, pointing to the importance of the researcher trying to access the embodied knowing of the participants, in this case understanding the possible role that food may have played in creating a familiar routine and sense of security for children in an unfamiliar environment. This view of the role of food is worth considering in light of the following observation made by a parent, who reported that her child always talked about the food he ate on the IGL visit but never discussed any other aspect of it until recently:

... X [child] had a great time today at Z [nursing home] ... he was all about it for the first time ... before this he always just talked about the cookie and juice! ... (Parent, B).

This finding could suggest that children needed time to process novel experiences and that it was only when routines were secure that they could consider new and potentially daunting experiences, in this case the IGL experiences. Interestingly, Miles' (2018) study of children's theatregoing noted that it took time for children to move from these peripheral but familiar activities focusing on the food, the bus journeys and free play to considering the more essential aspects of theatre performance, suggesting that establishing a familiar routine, such as eating, can help children to form a background of safety upon which they can process novel experiences. Consistent with this, once secure and familiar routines were established as part of the IGL visits, the child referred to above was better able to embrace the planned focus of the IGL experiences: the interactions with older adults. Clear from this finding is the crucial role of skilled educators, attuned to children's feelings and thinking, who can sensitively mediate such new experiences for young children (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015):

... the nervousness does ease off ... usually around the time the biscuits and juice come ... (Eileen).

Moreover, this finding highlights the importance of ensuring children are given adequate time

to "settle into" a new experience such as IGL. This finding is reflected in a number of studies, which found that children perceived older adults in a more complex and positive light when studied at the end of a one-year programme (Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Holmes, 2009). Other activities and routines that were important to children, and which may have served a function similar to food, centred around the birdcages and fish tanks in the older adults' services, with children sometimes asking, when an IGL visit was announced, if they would see the birds or fish:

... when we told the children we were going to the nursing home, some got excited and asked if we would see the birds ... (Eileen)

... we are going to see R ... [name of bird, as child climbed into the buggy to go to the nursing home] ... (Child, E).

Interactions with the animals in the older adults' services was a highlight of the IGL experience for some children, which gave rise to conversations about pets before, during and after the IGL visits, as reported by educators. Enthusiasm about seeing the birds and fish could be understood as a secure routine, a novel experience and could also reflect the intrinsic value that animals can play in children's lives (Severson, 2014), with one study of middle childhood finding that pets were more important to children than friends, grandfathers and teachers (Kosonen, 1996). The findings outlined in relation to food and animals reflect contemporary ECE research evidence, highlighting the importance of the integrated nature of children's social, emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual development when considering children's learning experiences (Hanafin et al., 2009; Malone, 2008). The findings also point to the importance of educators exploring which elements of any experiences are meaningful to children and for what reasons. Educators' plans may align with children's priorities, may enhance them but may also be less important or even disruptive to children's priorities at any time (Miles, 2018; Read, 1993). This argument highlights the importance of educators tracing a connection between the experiential and the pedagogical in relation to planning experiences that children will find meaningful (Miles, 2018) and is particularly relevant in investigating a new area of practice such as IGL. Additionally, the argument draws attention to the knowledge and skill required of the educator and the importance of a commitment to listening to children's voices in the introduction and implementation of IGL practice (Radford et al., 2016).

Interestingly, an important meaning of the IGL experience strongly reflected in children's drawings and commentary were the opportunities it created for a social outing away from the ECE service, which will now be discussed.

7.3 'I like that X [child] was my partner on the way down': IGL as a social experience for children

Exploring the world beyond the ECE service, strongly reflected in children's drawings and commentary and corroborated by educators and parents, reflected the importance to them of the IGL experiences as an opportunity to participate in a social outing with peers and adults away from the ECE service (Smith & Kotsanas, 2014). The social elements of the IGL experience that were valued by children in the study included the enjoyment of leaving the ECE service, opportunities for relationship-building and responsibility, as well as the sense of belonging that the social experience engendered:

... the children were very excited leaving the nursery ... (Eileen)

... X [child] likes visiting with her teachers ... it's an adventure ... (Parent, B).

Children expressed delight and excitement at leaving the ECE service, creating opportunities for children to discover what Malaguzzi suggests are the images that are missing from their eyes and minds but that are essential to launch themselves into life (Cagliari et al., 2016). The pleasure and exuberance expressed by children were important for their contribution to the development of positive learning dispositions (Carr & Lee, 2012) and effective cognitive development (Trevarthen, 2004). Significantly, children's enthusiasm for participating in the community is aligned with ideas about the important role that the community can play in children's learning and wellbeing (Malaguzzi, 1998; Nimmo, 2008), yet which remains an

under-researched area (Bessell, 2017). Going on an outing was valued by children for the opportunities it created for relationship-building with peers and educators and the development of a sense of belonging and togetherness (Mortlock, 2015; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001):

... I like that X [child] was my partner on the way down ... (Child, A)

... yay, we can sit on the top (of the nursery buggy) going to the nursing home ... (Child, E)

... I like to go with my teachers ... (Child, B).

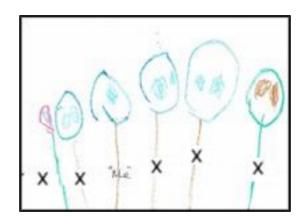
Children's interest in the people that they met on the journey was notable, including adults with whom children had only passing acquaintance, but which led to a feeling of togetherness among the children (De Haan & Singer, 2001; Miles, 2018). However, it is worth noting that, while time spent in the community travelling to and from the older adults' services was centrally important to children in the study, not all IGL experiences would involve such journeys. Moreover, while children could spend time in the community as an activity in itself without it being part of the IGL experiences, further study is required to explore if, and how, the purposeful and regular nature of children's experiences as they journeyed to and from the older adults' services impacted on children. Interesting in this context is a finding from an Irish study highlighting the educator's view that, for young children, forming relationships was essentially what participation in the community was about, "not just a tour down the town or [to] pop into the library" (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018, p. 34).

The opportunities for exercising responsibility and agency in a social context with adults and peers, an enjoyable aspect of the IGL experience noted by another child, has been evidenced in the research with young children (Nimmo, 2008; Smith & Kotsanas, 2014):

... I was on the outside on the walk down today because I'm a big girl ... (Child, A).

Figure 7.2 Journeys to the older adults' services

"... this is us walking down to the nursing home ...²¹



The importance of the new social and physical environments that were opened up to children through visiting the older adults' services, and were reflected in the children's accounts, will now be discussed.

7.4 'It's the building with all the popcorn on it': Children's understanding of space and place

The richness of the environments that the children encountered through their IGL experiences, noted in their drawings and commentary, reflected their developing sense of space and place. Building on their natural curiosity and, using their senses, it was clear from their reflections that children were beginning to understand human-environment relationships (Gandy, 2007). Importantly, children reflected their ability to move from a focus on space, where they

²¹ All names of children, staff, parents and older adults' services have been removed from the Figures and replaced as follows:

X is a child's name; Y is an older adult's name; W is an educator's name; T is a staff member's name from an older adults' service; T is a parent's name.

considered their personal place in the universe, to experiencing a sense of place, an emotional connection and sense of belonging there (Kaplan et al., 2020). Two sub-themes were notable in children's reflections on the new environments that they experienced: children's developing sense of space and the role of the new environments in children's developing sense of place and mastery.

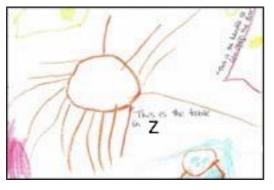
7.4.1 Children developing a sense of space

Children displayed a high level of interest in the physical environments, both within the older adults' services and in the environments they passed though on their journeys, which were mediated through concrete examples and a focus on physical characteristics. The children's drawings and associated descriptions incorporated details of all aspects of the older adults' services buildings, including the various rooms visited, the lifts, the furniture, windows, doors and handles, door keypads, wallpaper, cushions and decorative features.

Figure 7.3 The physical environment of the older adults' services

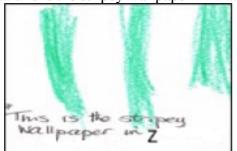
... this is the table in Z ...

... this is the mirror ... this is the toilet and the handle to flush the toilet ... this is the other door ... this is the handle so we can open the door [in Z] ...

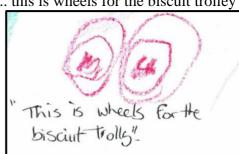




... this is the stripey wallpaper in Z ...



... this is wheels for the biscuit trolley ...



This emphasis on concrete, physical features was also reflected to some extent in the parents' documentation of their child's experiences. A parent who visited the older adults' service at the request of her child also reported her child's detailed awareness of the physical environment:

... X [child] was showing us around, including [showing us] the fish tank, the piano, he even wanted to show us the old folks' bedrooms! ... (Parent, A)

Interestingly, the large size of some of the buildings containing the older adults' services were noted by children, and was viewed as a positive aspect of the IGL experience by one child:

... the nursing home has this many levels ... the toilet is big too ... everything is big in the big house ... [referring to the nursing home] ... (Child, E).

7.4.2 The role of new environments in children's developing sense of place and mastery

Clearly represented in the children's drawings and commentary were the opportunities for children to experience a sense of place, as the spaces became imbued with added meaning and children began to process the interplay between their subjective, concrete view of space and publicly shared meanings (Lefebvre, 1991). This was reflected in children's sense of empowerment, joy and participation (Kernan, 2010), for example, through their familiarity with the environment and their skill in giving directions to their destination. Children

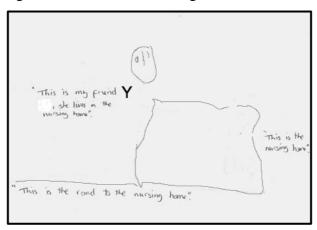
demonstrated significant abilities to locate themselves and the ECE service in relation to the older adults' services:

... the children knew the way, as when asked they were able to direct and remembered from their last visit which way to go from the nursery to Z [older adults' service] ... (Eileen).

Children also represented graphically the route to the older adults' service:

Figure 7.4 The route to the older adults' service

... this is my friend Y [older adult], she lives in the nursing home ... this is the road to the nursing home ... this is the nursing home ...



For example, one parent reported to the educator that her child was able to give directions to the older adults' service, explaining:

... if you get lost, it is the building with all the popcorn on it ... [referring to the pebbledash walls of the building] ... (Child, A).

Children's developing sense of place also represented a sense of connectedness with their environments as they identified significant and personal landmarks in their conversations and drawings:

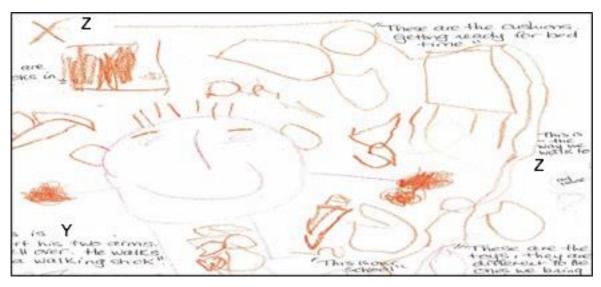
... the children pointed out familiar buildings, shops, granddad's house en route and were excited to see a Garda [police] car leaving the Garda station ... (Eileen)

... it's a rabbit! ... it's a dog! ... [children discussing a public artwork] (Child, E)

... I saw the statue of Jesus Christ ... (Child, A).

Figure 7.5 Children developing a sense of place

... the nursing home ... this is the way we walk to Z ... my house ... this is our school these are the cushions getting ready for bedtime ... these are the toys ... they are different to the ones we bring to Z ... this is Y [older adult] ... he hurt his two arms ... he fell over ... he walks with a stick ...



Experiencing positive relationships with their surroundings and feeling secure in their sense of place are strongly linked to children's need to feel a sense of belonging (Tillett & Wong, 2018) and safety (Bessell, 2015). Importantly, it supports children's overall social and emotional

development, including their sense of identity and mastery (Osher et al., 2020). Children's desire for ownership of the spaces and places that they encountered on the journeys to the older adults' services also raises the question of whether this type of outing could represent a novel experience for them. As children are increasingly assigned to children's spaces, which may separate them from the wider world (Nimmo, 2008), creating opportunities for children to find their place in the community could play a key role in enhancing children's sense of belonging, participation and citizenship (Kernan, 2010). Importantly, children's eagerness and curiosity to explore the rich sensorial experiences of the new environments contributed to their overall wellbeing and was perceived to support their cognitive development (Brillante & Mankiw, 2015). Moreover, this finding resonates with McMillan's view of the community as the best classroom and the richest cupboard, roofed only by the sky (Ouvry, 2003).

7.5 'She has rainbow hair': Children's understandings of and responses to older adults

A significant finding of this study was the high level of interest children had in all aspects of the older adults and their lives. This finding reflects the value of the IGL experiences in supporting children's curiosity, which is crucial to promoting positive learning dispositions (Carr & Lee, 2012) and emphasises the value of intent observation for children's learning (Rogoff, 2003). Two key areas were highlighted within this theme: identification of the physical characteristics of the older adults and recognition of the personal characteristics, abilities, and needs of the older adults.

7.5.1 Children's interest in the physical characteristics of older adults

Children's considerable interest in the physical characteristics of older adults, particularly their hair and teeth, were evident in their drawings and commentary, recorded both in the ECE service and at home with parents:

- ... Y [older adult] gets her hair done just like my Nanny and her hair is very pretty ... (Parent, A)
- ... I was colouring with the lady with no hair and glasses ... (Child, E)
- ... the granny broke all her teeth and had to take them out ... (Parent, D).

Figure 7.6 Physical characteristics of older adults

... she has rainbow hair ...

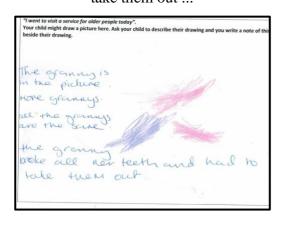


... the granda with no hair ...



... the granny with the broken teeth"
...the granny is in the picture ... more
grannys ... all the grannys are the same ...
the granny broke all her teeth and had to
take them out ...

 \dots this is the granny that has teeth \dots





Children's interest in the physical characteristics of older adults in this study reflected their ability to identify features of the older adults that distinguished them from themselves, which is closely aligned with the processes of cognitive development in young children (Holmes, 2009; Robinson & Howatson-Jones, 2014). However, it was not clear if children in this study perceived positively or negatively the physical characteristics they depicted because, importantly, young children develop stereotypes based primarily on physical characteristics (Dobrosky & Bishop, 1986) and, by age 5, children can develop negative attitudes towards older adults (Aday et al., 1996).

7.5.2 Children's understanding of the personal characteristics, behaviours and needs of older adults

Significantly, children's descriptions of the older adults went beyond physical attributes and highlighted personal qualities of the older adults, reflecting evidence from the literature that children as young as five have relatively sophisticated understanding of personality traits (Yuill & Pearson, 1998):

... Yeh, and I think that lady who always smiles will be there [when asked if he wished to visit the nursing home that day] ... (Child, E)

... the old people are gentle and nice ... (Child, B)

... Y [older adult] smiles all the time ... (Child, B).

Children also noted the behaviours of older adults in their drawings and commentary, who were depicted sitting, singing, helping, eating, colouring, sleeping and clapping:

... the old people sit in the chairs and talk ... (Child, B)

... Y [older adult] was asleep and so was Y [another older adult] ... (Child, A)

... the old people help me ... (Child, B)

... Y [older adult] ... she likes to knit ... (Child, A)

... our Granny clapping when we were dancing ... (Child, D)

... Granny Y waving her hand at us when we were going back to the crèche ... (Child, D)

Figure 7.7 The behaviour of older adults

... our granny clapping when we were dancing ...

... Granny Y waving her hand at us (child X and child X) when we were going back to the crèche...

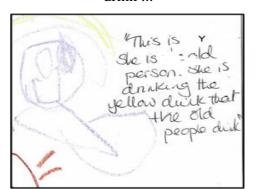




The needs of some of the older adults were also reflected in their drawings and commentary, such as the need for a special drink, a walking stick and to speak loudly.

Figure 7.8 The needs of older adults

... this is Y ... she is the old person ... she is drinking the yellow drink that the old people drink ...



... this is one of the old people in the wheelchair ...



... this is Y [older adult] ... he hurt his two arms ... he fell over ... he walks with a walking stick ...



Children's understanding of the hearing difficulties of some of the older adults were noted, with one child referring to the importance of speaking loudly:

... I was very loud because that is what they [older adults in the nursing home] like ... (Child, A).

These findings provide evidence of the complexity of children's understanding of the older adults and their ability to represent older adults in a multi-dimensional way, emphasising a

finding in the literature of the importance of children having real-life contact with older adults (Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Holmes, 2009). The study findings also challenge research evidence, which suggests that children under 10 years are unlikely to be able to consider psychological and behavioural attributes of older adults (Dobrosky & Bishop, 1986; Robinson & Howatson-Jones, 2014). In reviewing the multi-dimensional observations of the older adults, children in this study generally viewed older adults positively and in relatively complex terms, resonating with the research evidence on children who have participated in IGL programmes (Dunham & Casadonte, 2009; Heyman et al., 2011). Moreover, children who have participated in IGL programmes have been found to see beyond the physical characteristics of older adults and may be more influenced by the strengths that they perceive in older adults, rather than their limitations (Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Heyman et al., 2011).

7.6 'I like Y [older adult] ... and I love going to see her': Children's relationships and friendships with older adults

The caring, affectionate and friendship nature of the relationships between children and older adults and the opportunities that they created for the development of self-esteem and social skills in children were powerfully represented in their drawings and commentary, frequently mirroring educators' views, as presented in Chapter 6.

7.6.1 Caring, affectionate and friendship relationships between children and older adults Highlighted by children were the caring and affectionate features of the relationships and the friendship and companionship offered them through interacting with the older adults.

Children's emotional and affectionate responses to the older adults were represented in simple expressions of love, physical affection, enthusiasm and happiness, as illustrated below in sample drawings and commentary of children.

Figure 7.9 Caring, affectionate features of the child-older adult relationships

...Granny Y, I love you ...

... this is X's [child] picture ... X said ... we are making Easter Bunnies ... I felt happy and gave granny Y a hug ...





... I like Y [older adult] ... and I love going to see her (child X and child X) ...



Children's positive referencing of their relationships with the older adults was characterised in descriptions of the following experiences: visiting, talking and playing with older adults, wearing nice clothes, having fun and laughing with older adults:

... I like talking to Y [older adult] ... (Child, B)

... I liked playing with Y [older adult] ... she is funny ... (Child, A)

... Monday is X's [child] favourite day because she knows she is going to the nursing home. She always wants to wear something nice to go down ... (Parent, A).

It was clear that the caring relationships children experienced with the older adults were highly valued by children, educators and parents. While caring relationships contribute to children's fundamental need for love and affection and are acknowledged as central in relational pedagogy, love and affection as depicted by children in this study are not frequently addressed in ECE discourse (Rouse & Hadley, 2018; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009).

Children related to older adults both as individual persons and as members of a group, with some children clearly identifying individual older adults such as "Granny Y" and other children referring to "the grannies and grandas" or "old people":

Figure 7.10 The nature of children's relationships with older adults

... this is Y [name of older adult] ... this is Y ... Granny Y [name] ... [name] ... this is Y [name] ... this is





... these are the grannies and grandads in the nursing home, they sit on chairs and talk to

... other grannies ...

us ...





Friendships between children and older adults were also evident in the drawings and accounts of some of the children, with the term "friend" frequently used in talking about the older adults. However, it should also be noted that some educators used the term "friends" when referring to the older adults and this could have influenced children's use of terminology. Nonetheless, the importance of the personal friendships to children is clearly portrayed in their drawings and commentary:

- ... will we be going back there again with our other friends? ... (Child, B)
- ... this was a special day because me and my friend got to sit with our granny [name] and we made nice pictures ... (Child, D)
- ... I liked playing with the boy [older adult] at the edge at the door ... it was fun because we were playing with him ... (Child, E)
- ... Y and Y [older adults] are my favourite friends ... (Child, A).

Parents also reported that their children referred to the older adults as their friends and had particular relationships with some of the older adults:

... the people she meets there are "her friends" ... she's very taken by a lady called Y [older adult] ... (Parent, A)

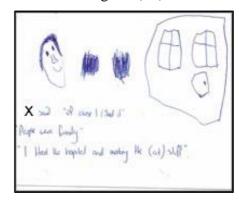
... X [child] always speaks fondly of her friend Y [older adult] and the time they spend together making the rice crispie cakes, playing bingo and putting on an Irish dancing show ... (Parent, D).

Figure 7.11 Friendships with older adults

... I maket nice cakes ... I like Y [older adult] ... she is nice to me and I love going to see her ... I am having fun ... me too ...



... X [child] said of course I liked it ...the people were friendly ... I liked the hospital and making the (art) stuff ...



The profound importance of the IGL visits for some children was illustrated by a child who talked to their mother about how they would like all their family to visit the older adults' service, remembering that their older sisters had never visited:

... [they, child] want us all to visit as a family 'cause [they] think it would be so much fun for the girls to meet all the people that they didn't get to meet 'cause they didn't get to go when they were in Montessori ... (Parent, B).

Similarly, another parent reported that their child wished to visit the older adults' service when the ECE service was on holidays:

... X [child] keeps asking if [they] can visit [their] friends in the nursing home after school ... [they] have been going there for 3 years and can't understand why we don't visit all the time! ... (Parent, A).

Children's abilities and enthusiasm for forming friendships with older adults were clearly evident in their drawings and commentaries, despite research evidence suggesting the rarity, yet beneficial nature, of intergenerational friendships (Bessell, 2017; Gray et al., 2016). This finding confirms that children, if given the opportunity, have an interest in and a capacity to form and benefit from intergenerational friendships, resonating with the evidence that friendships can be constrained by social, cultural and demographic factors (Drury et al., 2017; Gray et al., 2016)

7.6.2 Children's developing social skills

The many processes through which children developed relationships and friendships with older adults were revealed in their drawings and commentary, highlighting their developing life skills and progress in one of the four pillars of education - learning how to live together (Delors, 1996). Three key areas were highlighted - skills related to communicating: sharing news with older adults and developing greater confidence in interactions beyond the IGL visits.

Children's developing competence as skilled communicators was clearly evident in the study findings, with children reflecting on their communication with older adults:

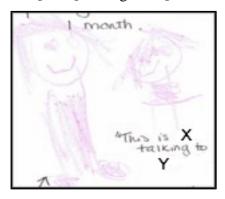
... we talked to the old people ... (Child, E)

... I say "hi" to the people who are sick and in wheelchairs ... (Child, A)

... I talk to the old people and we sing songs ... (Child, B).

Figure 7.12 Talking to the older adults

...this is X [child] talking to Y [older adult] ...



Sharing personal and family news with older adults provided rich opportunities for children to demonstrate and reinforce their cognitive flexibility, working memory and language expression:

- ... I told them I got paper money from the Tooth Fairy ... (Child, A)
- ... I told Y [older adult] my mam is having a baby and I hope it's a girl ... (Child, A)
- ... I told Y and Y [older adults] that Santa is bringing me a baby ... (Child, A)
- \dots X [child] was just back from holidays so was telling them [older adults] about Lanzarote \dots (Ruth).

Reflecting on their children's developing skills, a parent noted her child's positive interactions and contribution with older adults at a recent family wedding, which she attributed to the child's IGL experiences:

... I told you before about X [her child] at a family wedding having chats with all my sister-in-law's aunts (in their 70's) and she brought them out to dance one by one! No prejudice exists, no fear, no negative societal influences, just pure care and joy ... (Parent, A).

The child's social awareness and greater ease, as well as their capacity for empathy, confidence and initiative, is evident in the example outlined above.

Many of the social skills demonstrated by children in the examples can be understood as related to the development of executive functions, the cognitive *how* or skills for life and learning, now recognised as an important aim and critical success factor in education (Galinsky, 2010; UN, 2001).

7.7 "They were good at playing catch": Children's reflections on their playful experiences with older adults

A wide range of enjoyable playful experiences with older adults was represented both in children's drawings and in the commentaries, reflecting children's enthusiasm, resourcefulness and learning in relation to play (Wood, 2013). Three sub-themes were noted: the collaborative nature of the playful activities; the central role of music and singing; and the role of novelty in the enjoyment of playful experiences with the older adults.

7.7.1 The collaborative nature of the playful activities

The collaborative nature of the playful experiences represented in children's drawings and commentary, with drawing and colouring, music, playdough and playing with toys the activities most emphasised, highlighted the socially interactive nature of play and learning (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Interestingly, it also highlighted the ageless nature of playful experiences (Williams et al., 2012). It was clear that, for many children, drawing was a collaborative activity shared with the older adults and other children, and a medium for creating

shared meanings and understandings, a finding also noted in the research literature on drawing (Kukkonen & Chang-Kredl, 2018). The collaborative nature of other forms of play, including play with toys, materials and games, were frequently represented in drawings and comments:

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

This perspective on the collaborative nature of play and learning aligns with key concepts of socio-cultural theories of learning, particularly the view of learning as a process of participation in a community of learning, rather than as a product of acquisition (Colliver, 2017). Other principles of learning evident in the playful encounters included asymmetrical roles and scaffolding, with children and older adults interchangeably taking on the roles of both teachers and learners (Boström, 2003; Cartmel et al., 2018):

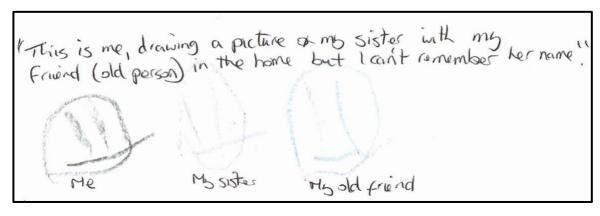
... I liked drawing on the blackboard and showing it to Y [older adult] ... (Child, A)

... she [older adult] was happy when we made love hearts ... (Child, B)

... a child sat up beside the older adult and watched her colour ... the older adult showed her how she was colouring ... (Eileen).

Figure 7.13 Playful interactions with the older adults

... this is me, drawing a picture of my sister with my friend (old person) in the home but I can't remember her name ...



These two-way playful interactions, evident in drawing and playing with materials, created rich opportunities for intersubjectivity with children and older adults absorbed in the coconstruction of meaning, reflecting a key process in learning and development (Bruner, 1996; Hayes, 2013). Importantly, through the playful experiences, it was clear that children began to feel at home, in what could be termed a community of practice, creating a sense of togetherness and contributing to children's wellbeing and development (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016; Wenger, 1998).

7.7.2 The central role of music in the IGL experiences

Singing (and sometimes dancing) were reported as regular, enjoyable activities with children enjoying singing songs for, and with, older adults:

... she [child] likes to sing "Daisy" and "You are my sunshine" and "Molly Malone" she enjoys singing with everyone ... (Parent, B)

... X [child] asked Y [older adult] does she want to see the floss dance ... (Ciara)

...the children sang and danced to "Baby Shark"... (Eileen).

The importance of the reciprocal nature of the communications and activities, which involved scaffolding and bi-directional interactions between children and older adults, contributed to children's learning and was enjoyed by the children:

... Y is a boy [older adult] and he made up "Molly Malone" and "Daisy" and "You are my sunshine" ... (Child, B)

... [I like it] ... when the old people sing songs to me ... (Child, D).

Children enjoyed joining in for "residents' singsong time", being asked by the older adults to sing specific rhymes or songs and being applauded:

... they [older adults] gave us a cheer and a clap ... (Child, E).

Children also associated singing with special events such as birthdays and Christmas:

... the children sang Happy Birthday to an older adult and A [child] asked the older adult to sing Jingle Bells ... (Eileen).

The shared experience of singing, evident in children's conversations, pointed to a sense of togetherness and shared social identity among children and older adults. The importance to children of a sense of togetherness has been shown in the research to provide optimal conditions for children's learning and intersubjectivity as they engage in shared experiences, thinking and understanding (Niland, 2015; Van Oers & Hännikäinen, 2001). Interestingly, the desire to extend the learning and sense of belonging to include parents was evident in one ECE service where educators provided parents with sound recordings and lyrics of the songs that children were singing in the older adults' service.

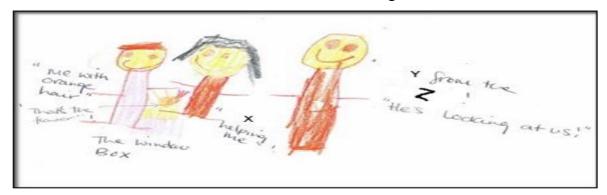
7.7.3 The role of novelty in creating enjoyable play experiences for children

Children also reflected positively on novel activities that provoked their interest (Schomaker & Meeter, 2015) and which were undertaken only in the older adults' services because they were planned to meet the interests of both children and older adults. Particular activities to which children drew attention included making buns, planting flowers, new art activities, singing unfamiliar songs, swatting with balloons, looking at birds or fish and special celebrations:

- ... I maket [made] rice [crispie] cakes ... (Child, D)
- ... I like the cupcake game [making cupcakes] ... (Child, C)
- ... today we did a céilí²² ... we had huge speakers and our teachers and everyone was dancing ... (Child, D).

Figure 7.14 Novel experiences associated with IGL experiences

... me with orange hair ... that's the flower ... the window box ... X [child] helping me ... Y [older adult] from Z ... he's looking at us ...



 \dots I like making the hole \dots I can put the flowers in \dots X [child] helped me and Y [older adult] watched me \dots (Child, C).

²² A céilí is a folk dancing event in Ireland.

Children's interest and enthusiasm for new experiences were frequently showcased in their drawings and commentary, reflecting the evidence that the brain craves new experiences and processes novelty with high priority (Schomaker & Meeter, 2015). New experiences, which facilitate one of the most important lessons of early life, learning how to learn (Carr, 2001), are a key goal in most ECE curricula in the Western world, including Aistear and in the EU quality framework in ECE (European Commission, 2014; NCCA, 2009). The study children highlighted their enjoyment of the high level of collaboration with older adults in experiences that were different or that they experienced differently from those offered in the ECE service, reflecting the potential of play as an ageless experience (Williams et al., 2012).

7.8 'This is me': Children's developing sense of identity and belonging

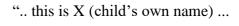
It was evident in the children's reflections that the IGL experiences created significant opportunities for children to build on their sense of physical and behavioural identity, which is central to their well-being and ultimately to their learning and development (Hayes, 2013; Laevers, 2002). Through the IGL experiences, children acquired new ideas about themselves and others and adapted old ideas, reflecting the unending process of personal and social identity formation (Niland, 2015; O'Dwyer, 2006). Three key sub-themes were identified with reference to the theme of identity and belonging: the processes of children's developing sense of physical and behavioural identity; the role of the older adults in contributing to children's sense of identity; and the importance to children of routines and rituals in developing a sense of belonging.

7.8.1 The processes of children's developing sense of physical and behavioural identity
Children's representations of themselves as unique individuals were strongly evident in their
drawings and commentaries, with physical appearance represented in various levels of detail
as can be seen in the examples below. Children's interest in their own developing sense of

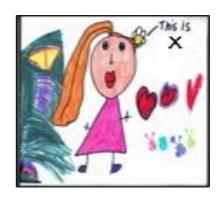
identity resonates with their interest in the physical and behavioural characteristics of the older adults discussed in section 7.5, reflecting the importance of identity formation as a key task of their developmental stage (Banaji & Gelman, 2013).

Figure 7.15 Children's developing sense of identity

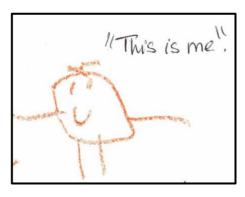
... this is me ... I am wearing an orange dress ...







...this is me ...



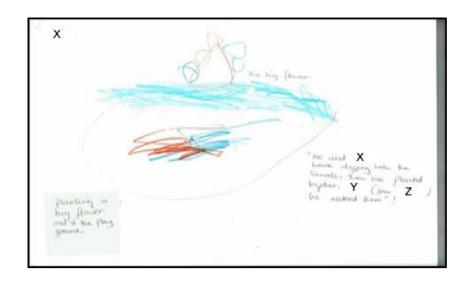
... this is my friend X [child] ... she is outside Z ... she is wearing her uniform and the wind is blowing her hair ...



In addition to the emphasis on physical characteristics, children also depicted themselves through the activities that they undertook, which included eating, singing and dancing, and frequently highlighted their involvement in activities that were new to them, including cooking and gardening.

Figure 7.16 Children's activities in the IGL experiences

".. the big flower ... me and X [child] were digging with the shovels, then we planted together Y [older adult] from Z he watered them ... planting a big flower out in the playground ...



7.8.2 Older adults' role in contributing to children's sense of identity and belonging

An important contributor to children's developing sense of identity, frequently noted by the children, was the feedback that children received from the older adults. Much of the feedback reported by children was affirmative in tone, contributing positively to children's developing self-concept:

... they [older adults] like playing with me ... (Child, A)

... I like Y [older adult] a lot ... she is nice to me ... (Child, D)

... I feel good because it is such a nice place ... (Child, B).

Positive verbal and non-verbal feedback that children received was also noted by educators and included feeling welcomed, demonstrations of interest by older adults through smiles and gestures, and children seeing their drawings displayed on the walls of the older adults' services:

... the joy on the children's and senior citizens' faces when we arrive was heartwarming ... (Ruth)

... X [child] loves to see her pictures on the wall of the nursing home ... (Ciara)

... Y [older adult] told the children how much she loved her Valentine's Card "I still have my Valentine's card, it's the best card ever ... can't buy that in the shops" ... (Eileen)

... every time the children came back from these visits they talked about their experiences and you could see how happy the children were ... they would ask when are we going again ... (Ciara).

Interestingly, an educator reported that one of the children involved in the IGL experiences always phoned her grandmother (in another country) on the evening of the visit as her grandmother was interested in hearing about the visit.

Noted also by a parent was the positive feedback that their child received from their extended family, who regularly expressed an interest in the child's IGL activities:

... her [the child's] grandparents tell everyone about it too and always ask her about her visits ... (Parent, A).

Importantly, social feedback plays a key role in promoting positive self and group identity increasing children's self-confidence and respect for diversity (CECDE, 2006; Murray, 2017). Associated with children's developing sense of identity, was their sense of belonging within the older adults' services and in the community. Examples of children feeling "at home" in the older adults' services were reflected in observations and conversations recorded by the educators, including a child asking to use the remote control for the television and another child asking could they stay for dinner:

... one of our children saw the TV and said "ah, the telly, where's the remote control?" ... and another child asked could they stay there for dinner ... (Eileen)

... they go straight into the big sitting room and they take off their coats ... throw them on the chairs ... and then they march down the corridor to what they call the green room ... (Mary).

Children's sense of belonging was reflected in their "ownership" of their IGL experiences in a community context, which was evident in a number of the parent observations:

... when we drive past the nursing home she tells whoever is in the car about visiting the old people ... "it's my nursing home"... (Parent, A).

Another child reflected a similar sense of ownership when, passing the older adults' service outside of school hours, he asked his mother if they could visit.

7.8.3 The role of routines and rituals in creating a sense of belonging

Children's sense of belonging and togetherness was reflected in the importance to them of the routines and rituals (Miles, 2018) associated with the IGL experiences, which included choosing the play materials, putting on the high-visibility jackets and anticipating the journey that they would undertake to reach the older adults' services. Important to the children also were the people whom they usually saw en route, and the rituals associated with their arrival and departure in the older adults' services, including the welcome song, the High-Fives and blowing of kisses when they were leaving.

Figure 7.17 Routines and rituals associated with the IGL experiences

... I walk to the nursing home ... I wear a Hi-vis [jacket]... I hear the traffic and the cars ...



The importance of the routines and rituals could also be understood in the context of children's developmental stage, for example, in helping children understand time sequences and the shape

of their daily lives (Maloney, 2000), as well as helping children feel secure, particularly in new or unpredictable experiences (Miles, 2018).

7.9 'I don't feel nervous anymore': IGL experiences and children's executive functions Children in the study revealed, in their drawings and commentary, wide ranging and important socio-emotional competences and skills to manage behaviour, emotion and attention (McLaughlin et al., 2015; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The skills demonstrated by children, resonating with educators' views of the benefits of IGL, included emotional expression and regulation, perspective-taking and empathy, cognitive flexibility and making connections, taking on challenges, all of which created opportunities for critical thinking (Galinsky, 2010).

7.9.1 Children's emotional expression and regulation

The significant opportunities created by the IGL experiences for children to identify, understand and express both positive and challenging emotions were evident in their reflections, suggesting that they felt secure in doing so:

 \dots we are making Easter Bunnies (referring to the picture X [child] drew) \dots I felt happy and gave Granny Y a hug \dots (Child, D)

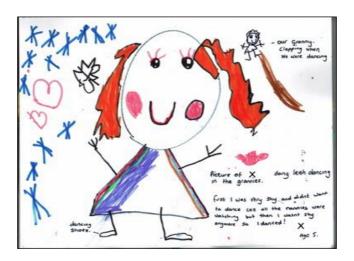
... I'm very excited to see what's in here ... [as the children entered the older adults' service] ... (Child, E)

Importantly, children also represented emotions that they found difficult including nervousness, shyness, worry and dislike. The drawing below reflects the richness of one child's emotional response to the IGL experience and the change in their feelings and responses from being very shy at first and then becoming immersed in the activity of dancing. The use of symbols representing hearts and, possibly, kisses and their portrayal of the older adult clapping

and encouraging the child to dance provide us with possible insight into the positive aspects of the IGL experience for this child:

Figure 7.18 Children's expression of emotions

...our granny clapping when we were dancing ... first I was shy and didn't want to dance coz all the nannies were watching but then I wasn't shy anymore, so I danced ...



A further example of the potential of the IGL experiences to provide children with opportunities to reflect on and express their emotions is illustrated in the following conversation between an educator and child as they made their first visit to the older adults' service:

Child: [On the walk to the older adults' service]: ... "I feel nervous" ...

Educator: ... "Me too, but we will all be there together, and if you still feel nervous when we get there let me know and I'll help you" ...

Child: [On the walk back to the ECE service] ... "I don't feel nervous any more, I'm happy" ... (Child, E).

Similarly, a parent reported her child's reflection in relation to feeling shy during the IGL visits:

... X [child] is always excited to tell us about their visits to the nursing home but reminds us that they are too shy to talk to any of the residents ... (Parent, B).

Other emotions expressed by children included worry:

... I'm worried about getting back [to the ECE service] ... (Child, E)

Children were also capable of expressing feelings associated with the IGL experiences that they did not like:

... I don't like the toilet ... (Child, A)

... I didn't like the dog poo on the way down ... (Child, A).

These examples provide positive indications of the potential of IGL experiences to enable children to explore and develop new understandings of their emotions and, in the process, to enhance their abilities for emotional regulation (Florez, 2011; Robson, 2010). Evident in the children's reflections was their ability to work through difficult emotions, including shyness and nervousness, to feelings of success and mastery. Crucial factors in this process are the pivotal role of skilled, supportive adults, in this case the educators, combined with a positive emotional climate (Bautista et al., 2016; Cartmel et al., 2018). Importantly, overcoming challenging experiences in a positive emotional climate helps children develop critical life skills of resilience and capacity for persistence with problem solving (Denham & Brown, 2010; McLaughlin et al., 2015).

7.9.2 Intersubjectivity, perspective-taking and empathy-building in children

Children's capacity for intersubjectivity, perspective-taking and empathy were strongly reflected in their drawings and commentary, highlighting the considerable developmental value of these skills (Hayes et al., 2017). Children demonstrated their ability to understand and consider older adults' feelings and needs and to show kindness through their gestures and responses, which will now be discussed. The dynamic and engaged interactions with the older adults created a common ground for communication and intersubjectivity as children and older adults perceived and adjusted to each other's perspective:

... the child asked the older person if she was excited about the birds [in the birdcage in the nursing home] ... the older person smiled and held out her hand [but did not speak], the child shook her hand and then threw her a balloon and they played like this for a few minutes ... (Eileen)

... the older adult called the child ... "c'mere here!" ... and gestured to the child to pass him the balloon ... she did and they passed it back and forth smiling at each other ... (Ruth).

These examples reflect children's active role in learning to read the minds of the older adults and in developing shared meaning, processes which are central to collaborative learning and enhanced cognitive outcomes (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Sylva et al., 2010). An interesting example of a child and an older adult working together in asymmetrical roles to solve a problem is evident in the example below where the child is the more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978) and performs the teacher role, highlighting a key characteristic of IGL: children participating as both teachers and learners in the process (Boström, 2003):

... the nursing home staff brought Y [older adult] in a wheelchair into the centre of room and a child passed a balloon to the older person ... the older person asked

"what do I do?" and the child passed the swatter to the older person and the child said ... "yeah, like that" ... another child joined and the game continued ... (Eileen).

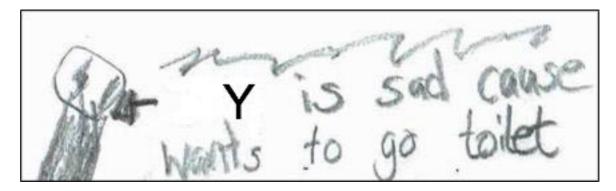
Building on children's social and cognitive skills were their significant abilities to tune into and understand the emotional state of others, as well as possible changes in the emotional states of others. One child, remembering that the wife of an older adult, both of whom lived in the older adults' service, had died recently, reflected after a visit on how she thought the older man was feeling:

... Y [older adult] is happy again but he misses his wife ... (Child, A).

Interestingly, another child anticipated that an older adult might be sad, as he wanted to use the toilet. The educator believed that the child perceived this situation as sad, because children were aware that some of the older adults needed help when using the toilet:

Figure 7.19 Thinking about the emotions of older adults

".. Y [older adult] is sad 'cause he wants to go toilet ...



Another child, on his return from a visit to the older adults' service, reflected his views of the place as a home for older adults, in his conversation with the educator:

... the nurses were nice ... it's a nice home for the grannies and grandads ... (Child, A).

Children's ability to consider what made older adults happy was also reflected in children's commentary, as can be seen in the following examples:

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... Y [older adult] ... she was happy when we made love hearts ... (Child, B)
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... she said a granddad was really happy getting his ice cream and he had a big, big smile on his face! ... (Parent, A).

Children's ability to respond to the complex needs of older adults and to regulate their emotions and behaviour in making an appropriate response (Florez, 2011) was notable in children's, educators' and parents' accounts of interactions between children and older adults.

Children's kindness (Brant & Studebaker, 2019), and ability to adjust their behaviour accordingly, was frequently reflected in their gestures and interactions with older adults, as demonstrated in the following examples reported by educators and parents:

... one of the children brought her baby doll up [to the older adults' service] and allowed Y [older adult] to hold it and she [child] watched what Y was doing and saying to the baby doll ... (Eileen)

... she [child] told me they have to be very careful not to touch their knees or faces ... "we don't want to hurt them" ... (Parent, A).

Children's awareness that older adults were sometimes in bed due to ill-health was noted by children and educators:

... where's that lady gone? ... [child points to the empty chair usually occupied by Y [older adult] ... the educator informed the child that Y was not well and they could not visit her that day... (Mary)

... the children went to visit Y [older adult] in his bedroom [because he was not well] ... he sang a song and the children thanked him, shook hands and said goodbye ... (Eileen).

In the next example, it is not clear what understanding the children had in relation to the ill-health of the older adult and how the response of the older adult in closing her eyes impacted on the children, but it is possible that the children were able to read the signals from the older person (closing her eyes) to understand that perhaps she wanted to be left alone:

... the nursing home staff brought Y [older adult] into the room, explaining to the children that Y was not well ... X [child] went over to see her, she smiled, X put his hand out but Y closed her eyes ... X went back to the table he was working at ... another child stayed at Y's table and said he was colouring a picture for his mammy ... (Eileen).

The examples outlined above demonstrated that children had both cognitive empathy, the ability to adopt the perspective of another, as well as emotional empathy, the affective response that occurs when a person perceives another's need. Empathy, a crucial aspect of children's cognitive and moral development and later academic achievement (McLaughlin et al., 2015), is also positively linked with pro-social behaviour and positive interpersonal and intergroup relations (Dovidio & Banfield, 2015; Delors, 1996).

7.9.3 Cognitive flexibility and making connections through the IGL experiences

The findings highlight the extensive opportunities that children had to actively control their cognitive processes by organising information, describing, explaining and clarifying their

thinking and, in the process, to enhance their metacognitive skills (Chatzipanteli et al., 2014), as can be seen in the following example:

... two children who were drawing with an older person began to tell her about an incident in the nursery that happened a few days before ... a boy had scribbled on another boy's drawing ... when this boy got upset, the boy who scribbled also got "angry" [child's words] ... the child told the older person ... "he threw the glitter everywhere, even on the floor, and he threw the green paper too" ... the older person listened intently and smiled ... she also looked towards the staff member to confirm the details of the story ... the child told the older person that the educators had to tell the child to tidy up ... the children continued to colour and chat about this incident ... (Eileen).

Significantly, this conversation was reported by the educator to have taken place when the children and older adults were absorbed in a drawing activity. Children can use drawing to show how they think, feel and see (Kukkonen & Chang-Kredl, 2018), as in this case where the child was reminded of an upsetting experience. Additionally, drawing with the older adult in an unhurried environment created an opportunity for children to communicate an important event and to discuss difficult emotions (Knight et al., 2015).

Making connections, which represents what a lot of learning is about (Galinsky, 2010; Hayes, 2013), was strongly reflected in the children's drawing and commentary, with children initially drawing on concrete reality to make connections:

... X [child] noticed that the trolley was the same as our one in the nursery ... (Eileen)

... these are the toys [referring to the toys belonging to the nursing home] ... they are different to the ones we bring to the nursing home ... (Mary).

Importantly, children made more abstract connections, reflecting their ability to change focus and draw on working memory and recall, (Hayes et al., 2017). One child noted that new people were now living in the older adults' service, which was accurate:

... and there are new people now living there ... (Child, B)

... look it's a man today ... [child pointing to the chair where a woman usually sat] ... (Child, E).

Another child recalled that he had visited another older adults' service to see his grandmother:

... I went to visit my nanny Y in the nursing home ... (Child, E).

The key skill of applying learning from one place to another (Carr & Lee, 2012) and aligning different expectations in different contexts was clearly evident in the example reported by the parent (in a previous example), whose child drew on skills learned through the IGL experiences when relating to older adults at a family wedding. Importantly, children's ability to make multiple connections highlighted a critical skill in learning and development, the capacity to think about thinking (Hayes et al., 2017; Wenger, 1998).

7.9.4 Taking on challenges: "Maybe she don't know'

Children's ability to respond to challenges, a key skill for life and learning (Galinsky, 2010), was frequently revealed as children reflected on the many puzzling aspects of older adults' lives and behaviours that they encountered. The challenges included a precise understanding of contextual details of older adults' circumstances; expectations that all adults can provide explanations; an understanding that adults may not always be correct; an understanding that

older adults do not always behave as children might like; understanding the humour of less familiar adults and considering the issue of death.

A striking example of a puzzling situation for children is recounted by an educator where it becomes clear that at least some of the children did not understand that the older adults they visited in the older adults' service lived there:

... the children asked the whereabouts of a particular older adult who was usually present ... when told the lady was having a bath, the educator realised from the children's queries that they did not know that the older person lived in the nursing home ... this topic was revisited and discussed by the children later in the day in the ECE service ... (Ciara).

Children's expectations that all adults can provide explanations were challenged, as can be seen in the following example where the child considers the possibility that the older adult may not know the answer to their question:

... the children were excited to see the fish when they got out of the lift ... there were two women [older adults] sitting beside the fish tank [who] smiled at the children ... "what's the fishes' names?" said X [child] ... they [older adults] did not respond ... X looked at the educator and shrugged his shoulders "maybe she don't know" ... (Eileen).

Discovering that adults may not always be correct is also evidenced in the following exchange recorded by an educator:

... the educator asks Y [older adult] ... "what's your name?" ... [in order for the educator to write the older adult's name on her drawing] ... Y replied "[giving her family name]" ... the nursing home staff said ... "her name is Y [giving her first name]" ... the child asked "why did she say a different name when you asked

her?" ... the educator replied ..."maybe she didn't hear the question or got confused" ... (Eileen).

A child feeling unhappy with the behaviour of an older adult was noted by a parent when discussing the IGL experience with her child at home:

... one of the grannies took a unicorn sticker that X [her child] was using ... (Parent, D).

In another example, a child is unsure how to respond to the unexpected behaviour of an older adult, which led to an intervention by the educator to support the child:

... over the other side of the room Y [older adult] was saying "here, throw it to me" ... one of the children passed him a balloon ... he [older adult] started to laugh and hid it behind his back ... the child said ... "no, that's mine" ... the educator said "Y [older adult] ... we need to share the balloons" ... Y laughed and threw the balloon back to the children ... (Eileen).

A lack of interest in children by older adults on a particular day was noted by a child, who reported to their parent that only one of the older adults wanted to play with the children on the day they visited:

... only Y [older adult] with the cup and in the wheelchair wanted to play with the toys with them [the children] ... (reported by Parent, A).

Understanding humour sometimes presented challenges for children, as can be seen in the following exchange reported by the educator:

Older adult to child: Did you drink all my orange?

Child: Shakes their head

Older adult: You did! You drank my orange! ...

Educator: I think Y [older adult] is joking with you ...

Child: Smiles and says: No, I only drank my own juice ... (Child, E).

An older adult who was joking with a child and pretending to take the child's biscuits offered

a similar challenge to a child, who remembered this exchange on the child's next visit:

... the last time we were there that man was trying to take my biscuits ... (Child,

E).

An interesting example of humour presented to the children by a staff member in the older

adults' service was recorded by an educator. The child's response reflects how they take on

this challenge and reflect on it critically:

... as the children were leaving, a member of the nursing home staff asked if the

children would like to stay in the nursing home as they had loads of beds, one

child said ... "no, there's too many old people here ... look... (pointing to the old

person) ... they need those beds"... (Eileen).

Interestingly, a sense of humour is positively linked to children's cognitive, perceptual, and

linguistic development, as well as to their overall social competence (Semrud-Clikeman &

Glass, 2010) and it was clear that the IGL experiences created many opportunities for the

development of humour in children.

The issue of death introduced by a child is reported in the following exchange. The day after

an IGL visit, a child brought from home a Mass card from his grandfather's funeral (who had

died the previous year) to show the educator:

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Child: I miss him up in the sky ...

Educator: Is he watching over you? ...

Child: Yeah, he is up in the sky [child smiled] ...

Educator: Thank you for showing me that ... (Child, E).

While the child had no specific experience of death in relation to the IGL experiences, it

appeared from the conversation reported above that the child made a connection between his

grandfather's death and the IGL experiences. Children's exposure to death and dying has

lessened over the last century and children now acquire their understanding through parental

communication, media and arts and, for some children, through direct experience of death

(Longbottom & Slaughter, 2018). Findings from the children's perspectives on their IGL visits

indicate the potential for IGL to develop meaningful opportunities for children in the early

years to gain understanding of death and dying, a finding reflected in the IGL literature

(Heydon, 2013).

Taken together, the IGL experiences provided children with new and unexpected opportunities

in a positive emotional climate for the development of their executive functions, self-regulation

skills and resilience (NSCDC, 2011). Significantly, also evident in the children's reflections

was their motivation to understand these challenging experiences and ideas, highlighting the

role of reciprocal and responsive relationships in the development of children's learning

dispositions (Carr, 2001). Strongly evident in children's accounts of their IGL experiences was

the pivotal role of the educator in supporting children's development as critical, responsive

learners in fast-changing and complex contexts, a key aim of ECE and aligned with ideas about

the importance of lifelong learning for people of all ages (Hayes, 2013; Katz, 1995; Siraj-

Blatchford, 2009).

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7.10 'I told them the name of all the dinosaurs': Children's contributions in the IGL experiences

While the wide-ranging contributions children made to the IGL experiences have been documented throughout this chapter and in the previous chapter, two particular areas of contribution, reflected in the drawings and commentary of the children, will now be outlined. Firstly, children's contribution of ideas, energy and skills in the IGL experiences and, secondly, children's contribution to the social life of the older adults' services, both of which align with ideas about children as citizens, as well as principles of IGL practice (Alanen, 2014; Boström, 2003).

7.10.1 Children contributing ideas, energy and skills in the IGL experiences

Contributing ideas, facilitating activities and offering help to older adults in a variety of ways were strongly represented by children themselves and in educators' and parents' observations. These findings resonate with ideas of children as active, contributing citizens (Bessell, 2017; Hart, 1997) with a zest for learning (Trevarthen, 2012) and IGL as a strengths-based learning environment (Rogoff, 2003). Children contributed ideas about what activities they believed older adults might enjoy, while demonstrating awareness of practical issues:

... a child spotted a bowling game and they made a plan to do bowling on the next visit ... (Ciara)

... initially, the children chose the large blocks but then decided they were "too big and heavy" ... so one child went to the press and took out the mini Lego ... (Eileen).

Children's drawings and commentary also reflected the asymmetrical roles (Carpendale et al., 2018) that children undertook during the play activities, highlighting a key characteristic of

IGL that places equal emphasis on learning together, learning from each other and learning about each other (Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2014). Children's roles as adjuvants in the learning of others, as well as the potential for synergies that these roles created (Bertram et al., 2018), were reflected in the types of play and activities undertaken in the older adults' services. Children's play roles varied from playing independently, seeking feedback or help from the older adults, playing with older adults, to helping older adults to play, as illustrated in the examples below:

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... "I was colouring with Y (older adult)" ... educator asks ... "was Y colouring with you?" ... child replies ... "no, I think because I can colour myself" ... (Child, E)
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... I made the Titanic out of Lego and showed it to Y [older adult]... (Child, A)

... I love colouring pictures in the nursing home ... the old people help me ... (Child, B)

... [we were] ... all sitting together playing bingo ... (Child, D).

Children seeing themselves as helpers and contributors to older adults was a frequent theme in children's drawing and commentary and was corroborated by educators and parents:

... I told them the name of all the dinosaurs ... (Child, A)

... X [child] told me she loves helping the old people that she will miss not seeing M [older adult] anymore [child was moving on to primary school] and said she makes some people smile with her dancing ... (Parent, A).

Importantly, the research literature reports that children who participated in IGL experiences had higher levels of social acceptance, a greater willingness to help and greater empathy for older adults (Fair & Delaplane, 2015; Femia et al., 2008).

7.10.2 Children contributing to the social life in the older adults' services

Children contributing to the social life of the older adults' services offered them opportunities for participation in the community (Ang, 2014; Nimmo, 2008), contributed to children's sense of identity and belonging (NCCA, 2009) and created opportunities for the development of social skills (Durlak et al., 2011). Marking the birthdays of older adults and events, such as Christmas and St. Valentine's Day, was a frequent and enjoyable IGL activity, referenced in the children's drawings and commentary and in the reports of the educators and parents:

... the children sang Happy birthday to Y [older adult] who was 96 ... X [child] said "wow" ... (Eileen)

... they loved being there for the birthday of the lady with the red handbag ... (Parent, B).

The pro-active role of children in planning a party for older adults that would be held in the ECE service and the opportunities for the development of initiative and social skills was reflected in the following account as children prepared the surprise goody bags²³ for the older adults:

Child: ... "I can't do it" ... (packing goody bags) as children work together to pack goody bags

Older adult smiles as he arrives

-

²³ A small bag of treats which children often bring home from a birthday party.

Children watch older adults arriving

Child holds his goody bag waiting ...

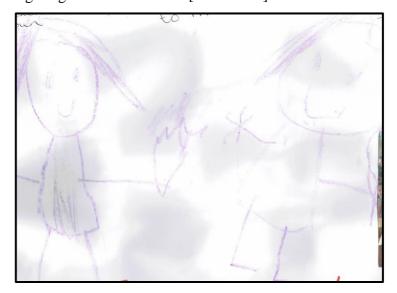
Child says ... "surprise!"... (older adult looks in his goody bag) (Children, E).

A further example of children's enthusiasm for participating in social events with older adults is evident in an end-of-term party in the older adults' service that was organised by an ECE service, in conjunction with an ice cream parlour owned by one of the children's parents. Children played active roles in hosting the ice-cream party

... I loved eating ice-cream with the old people ... (Child, A)

Figure 7.20 Children hosting a party for the older adults

... this is me giving an ice-cream to Y [older adult] ... she likes to knit ...



A parent also reported that their child spoke about the ice-cream party at home:

... X [child] told me that they went around asking the old people which ice cream they would like and they all said they didn't mind so they got them all an ice

cream ... then [child] got some ... [they] said they were to tell them their news but they didn't have enough time with getting ice cream ... (Parent, A).

7.11 Parents' views of the IGL experiences

Parents' perspectives on the meanings and experiences that the IGL activities had for their children were an important focus of this study, valuable in providing another layer of meaning and, therefore, better understanding of the IGL experiences of their children. While the parents who contributed to the study were overwhelmingly positive in outlining what they thought the IGL experiences meant for their children, it should be noted that parents may be reluctant to comment negatively on the IGL or other experiences in the ECE services. Additionally, it could be argued that only parents who felt positively about the IGL experiences participated in the study. The views of the IGL experiences identified by parents could be summarised under the following sub-themes: a source of pleasure and enjoyment for children; an opportunity for children to engage with older adults; a good learning and development opportunity and a good thing for children to do.

7.11.1 IGL as a source of pleasure and enjoyment for children

An enjoyable experience was the most typical response of parents in relation to what the IGL experience meant to their children. Parents noted what their children said they enjoyed about the IGL experiences which included excitement about visiting the older adult's services, the people they met, the activities they undertook and the food they were offered:

... X [child] does speak a lot about how she loves playing the bingo there, also how she enjoys going to see Y [older adult] and seeing her pictures on the wall of the nursing home [children's drawings are displayed on the nursing home walls] ... she really enjoys going every week ... (Parent, D)

... it's [the nursing home visits] been absolutely amazing for her... she was thrilled with herself ... (Parent, A).

Figure 7.21 The Christmas party in the older adults' service

... the Christmas party in the older adults' service ... and she still remembers the fun she had ... (reported by Parent, D)



Having considered the IGL experience from their children's perspectives, parents also presented their own views of the IGL experiences, as set out in the following subsections.

7.11.2 IGL offers opportunities for children to engage with older adults

Opportunities to interact with older adults were valued by parents, with some parents noting their children had fewer opportunities to interact with older adults, due to grandparents being relatively young, grandparents living at a distance or no longer living, a situation that is also reflected in the research evidence (Gray et al., 2016):

... as X [child] has younger grandparents I think it is important to engage with the elder generation and bring a different element into his life ... (Parent, B)

... this is one of X's [child] limited access points to our elders as her only surviving grandparents live in [name of distant county] ... (Parent, A)

... we found it hugely beneficial as our children lost a set of grandparents in the space of 5 months ... our children went from weekly contact with their grandparents to losing them ... (Parent, B).

7.11.3 IGL offers learning and development opportunities for children

Parents strongly believed that the IGL experiences offered valuable learning and development opportunities for their children (Cartmel et al., 2018; Lux et al., 2020). Social skills and confidence were noted by parents, suggesting that they supported an emphasis on the development of socio-emotional skills in their children:

... to build relationships and social skills gain confidence ... (Parent, B)

... I can first hand see the benefits to my daughter ... empathy, compassion, to name just a few ... (Parent, A)

... I think that this would boost X's [child] confidence and make it easier for her to make friends ... (Parent, D).

The opportunities created by IGL for their children's learning, through interactions in environments beyond the ECE service, was also valued by parents:

... experiencing opportunities to interact with people outside of the school environment ... (Parent, B)

... I think it was a lovely experience for them to see activities outside of school ... (Parent, C)

... it was great seeing X [child] and his friends chatting with the men [older adults in the men's shed] ... definitely a good idea ... (Parent, C).

The particular contribution made by older adults to their children's lives, through their presence and through their children being welcomed into the older adults' services, was appreciated by parents and reflected a key principle of IGL, the mutual benefits to children and older adults (Boström, 2003; Kaplan & Larkin, 2004):

... older people have more time to spend with children than when their own children were young ... (Parent, C)

... the older generation have great patience and stories to tell ... (Parent, C)

... Dear grannies, I want to thank you all for opening the door to the children at [name of ECE service] ... (Parent, D).

Children learning about their cultural heritage, as well as being introduced to topics different from those included in the ECE service, or topics that were familiar to parents, was valued by some parents, reflecting a benefit identified in the IGL literature (TOY, 2013):

... I loved how the men from the men's shed interacted with the children and the children enjoyed listening to and watching the men making stuff ... they learn a lot from each other ... (Parent, C)

... that's a brilliant idea about the songs [children learning the songs older persons sing in the nursing home] ... I grew up with all these songs myself ... (Parent, B)

... they [child] says they have chats about things that interest them so they [child] went through a tractor phase and they [older adults] were talking to them about tractors ... stuff I'd know nothing about ... we've been city people so they're getting to broaden their knowledge, vocab and ask questions to others who can give them answers I can't ... (Parent, A).

Parents also noted the mutual benefits of learning about cultural change:

... I think it is important for the old and young to know the difference of the change over time ... (Parent, C)

... the older people can share great stories and young people can educate the older people about technology ... (Parent, C).

7.11.4 IGL as an experience parents want for their children

Importantly, many parents identified the IGL experience as one that they valued for their children, not only for the opportunities and benefits outlined above, but also for the opportunities it offered their children to actively contribute to the lives of others through participation in the community (Bae, 2010; Forde et al., 2017). Parents valued the joy and happiness that their children brought to the older adults through the IGL experiences (Bottery, 2016):

... young children bring so much joy to those around them ... (Parent, C)

... V [mother of child] accompanied the group to the nursing home as part of "Parents' Participation" month ... she said it was such a lovely experience, you can sense the happiness in the room from both the children and the residents ... (Ciara, reporting a parent's feedback)

... it was wonderful to see how happy the older people were to see the younger children coming ... (Parent, C).

Parents also valued the opportunities that the IGL experiences created for their children to practise care and kindness:

... I think it is a great idea ... the experience is great for them [children] in terms of enhancing their opportunities of caring and being kind to others of all ages ... (Parent, D)

... stories, creating something together, may help older people remember their childhood, can distract the older people from everyday problems or stresses, a really brilliant project to be part of ... (Parent, A)

... I am delighted that my girls are involved ... and to know they may put a smile on someone's face ... (Parent, D).

A significant benefit of the IGL experiences in this study, which became evident through the parents' responses, was the congruence it reflected between the aims of the ECE service for children's learning, development and flourishing and the values and aims that parents held for their children. Consequently, IGL practice could offer significant opportunities for the development or enhancement of partnership with parents in the ECE services in the study, reflecting a key principle of ECE practice and a quality indicator in Irish and international ECE policy and practice (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; NCCA, 2009).

7.12 Summary

Children's perspectives highlighted the contextually-embedded nature of the IGL experiences, with children expressing their interest in and enjoyment of activities that could be considered peripheral to the core IGL experiences. These included the journeys, community contacts, physical environments, snacks and interactions with animals that were considered by children to be significant elements of the overall experience. This finding, reflecting a holistic understanding of children's learning (Hanafin et al, 2009; Hayes, 2013) and identified in studies of young children in IGL and in theatregoing, makes an important contribution to

understanding the broad nature of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECE services (Lux et al., 2020; Miles, 2018).

The detailed and complex understanding of older adults and their lives demonstrated by children in this study reflected their enthusiasm for being active partners in seeking out cultural knowledge and skills (Bruner, 1996) and having a zest for learning (Trevarthen, 2012). Importantly, the IGL environment offered a dispositional milieu that encouraged the exploration and construction of new knowledge and ideas and supported the development of positive learning dispositions (Carr & Lee, 2012; Nimmo, 2008). Moreover, participation in the new and challenging environment of the older adults' services was perceived by children to be empowering, reflected in their examples of thinking critically, demonstrating initiative and enjoying and contributing to the IGL experiences (Nimmo, 2008; Rogoff, 2014). Children in the study demonstrated vividly the wide-ranging power of nurturing relationships, a key principle of IGL (Boström, 2003; Kaplan & Sánchez, 2014), as a catalyst in supporting their learning and flourishing (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Children highly valued the caring relationships that they experienced with the older adults, drawing attention to the issue of how caring affectionate relationships are promoted in ECE services (Rouse & Hadley, 2018) and the potential role of IGL in this context. Reinforcing educators' trust in the compelling research evidence that learning is socially situated and mediated through relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Rogoff, 1998), children demonstrated the extensive opportunities for socio-emotional development offered by the IGL relationships and pivotal to optimising children's learning and development (Hayes et al., 2017; Housman, 2017). Of critical importance to children in this study was the positive sense of identity and belonging that they experienced, reflected in their emphasis on space and place both in the community and in the IGL environments, highlighting the potential of IGL experiences to

support this key competence and curricular goal in children (Niland, 2015; O'Dwyer, 2006).

Contributing to children's feeling of belonging and togetherness was the emphasis that they placed on IGL as a social experience with friends and educators (Smith & Kotsanas, 2014), a finding corroborated by parents.

Rich evidence of children's ability to manage behaviour, emotions and attention, key executive functions and foundational for critical thinking (McLaughlin et al., 2015), were reflected in examples of children's ability to communicate effectively, switch perspectives, demonstrate empathy and deal with challenge (Galinsky, 2010). This finding suggests that the real life IGL experiences created opportunities for children's socio-emotional development that would have been difficult to create within the ECE service (Nimmo, 2008; Rogoff, 2014).

Parents, in highlighting the enjoyment that their children gained from the IGL experiences, and in emphasising how important it was to them that their children were happy and felt cared for, drew attention to this under-researched area of ECE discourse (Page, 2018), which is centrally relevant to consideration of IGL as an enjoyable experience, as well as an effective pedagogical strategy. Moreover, in valuing IGL for the learning opportunities it offered, parents reflected a broad view of what is important for young children to learn, suggesting that they believed in both the learning outcomes and enjoyable experiences that the IGL experiences in their children's ECE services provided.

CHAPTER 8 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

8.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to explore the concept, role and potential of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in Irish ECE services, with a particular focus on educators' perspectives on children, learning and experiences of IGL and, crucially, on children's experiences of IGL. Parents' perspectives on their children's experiences of IGL were also an important element of the study. In this chapter, the learnings from the research will be revisited in the context of the research questions and the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

8.2 Immersion in a sea of relationships: educators' trust in IGL as a relational pedagogy

A key finding of the present study is that learning and development were not simply facilitated *through* relationships, but that, significantly, educators understood the power of the IGL relationships *as* a valued pedagogy in itself (Degotardi et al., 2017). This idea resonates with what Siebert and Seidel (1990), as cited in Schmidt-Hertha et al. (2014), suggest is the true form of IGL: learning about one another where generational perspectives are not only used for learning but are part of the learning content and learning objectives. This significant finding, relationships *as* pedagogy, foregrounds the belief that relationships and learning coincide (Malaguzzi, 1998; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Placing their trust in the profound role of IGL relationships in children's learning and development, educators reflected and, importantly, extended the compelling evidence from a wide range of theoretical and disciplinary sources that learning is socially situated and mediated through relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; NSCDC, 2004). Moreover, in placing relationships at the centre of learning, educators in the study strongly reflected the emphasis placed on relationships in ECE pedagogical principles and in Irish ECE policy documents (Hayes et al., 2017; NCCA, 2009).

Significantly, however, in drawing attention to relationships as pedagogy, educators' belief in the centrality of relationships in learning goes beyond what we already know from the literature about the role of relationships in children's learning. In emphasising relationships as pedagogy, the IGL relationships were perceived by educators to be central to supporting not only social and emotional competences in children but also cognitive development as evidenced in the development of executive functions in children in the early years (NSCDC, 2011). This finding also highlights the complexity of the relationships as perceived by educators, who emphasised both the intrinsic value of the affectionate relationships for enhancing children's wellbeing and their instrumental role as a strong pedagogy. The familial nature of the child-older adult relationship evident in this study was a characteristic highly valued by educators, and one that they deemed similar to the positive role of the grandparent relationship (Geraghty et al., 2015). Importantly, educators emphasised the uniqueness of this type of warm and affectionate relationship experienced by children attending ECE services where IGL was offered (Clark & Hoover, 2020). In creating opportunities for children to have companions of older ages with varied abilities and interests (Trevarthen, 2011), in what could be termed intergenerational contact zones (ICZ) (Kaplan et al., 2020), educators valued the enriched and unique opportunities for children's learning, development and sense of perspective (Gallagher, 2020). The calm, unhurried environments that facilitated the development of relationships in a positive emotional climate was a further distinct characteristic of the IGL experiences (Mendelson et al., 2011) valued by educators in the study, a characteristic that has been identified as a key contributor to quality ECE practice (Hayes et al., 2017). Clearly emphasised by educators in this study was their belief in the interdependent nature of cognitive, social and emotional development (Banaji & Gelman, 2013) and their belief that IGL effectively facilitated this intertwined process (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Building on this belief and valuing the richness of the IGL relationships, educators reflected the view that the richer the relationships

are, the better the conditions are for children's flourishing (Bae, 2010; Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013). Placing their trust in the value of IGL relationships, educators emphasised the importance of these relationships in children feeling loved and happy, having a positive sense of identity, a link to their cultural heritage (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020) and, importantly, facilitating the development of strong executive functions (Carr & Lee, 2012; Galinsky, 2010). Significantly, educators believed that the IGL relationships offered benefits that went beyond key skills and competences typically outlined in much of the ECE literature and offered within ECE services (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020). Worthy of note was educators' belief that the benefits gained by children would otherwise be difficult to imagine, create or facilitate within the ECE service. Highly valued by educators and perceived as a key characteristic of the unique benefits of the IGL relationships was the loving, caring nature of these relationships, which will now be discussed.

8.2.1 IGL foregrounds the role of affectionate relationships for children's flourishing in ECE services

Educators' strong belief in the unique contribution of the IGL relationships to helping children feel loved and happy, fundamental to children's learning and development (Bruner, 1996; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), formed the basis of their powerful commitment to IGL as a valuable pedagogical strategy. Specific characteristics of these relationships were noted by educators, with a particular focus on how they contributed to children feeling loved and valued. These characteristics included the ready availability, enthusiasm and responsiveness of the relationships, individualised attention and being listened to, in addition to the caring and affectionate nature of the interactions (Dalli, 2003; Hayes, 2019). Importantly, the educators recognised the benefits to children of the emotional modelling of the older adults, and for the significant opportunities that the relationships created for children to express their love and care and, importantly, to build empathy for others (O'Connor et al., 2019). The concept of the

social grandparent (Boström, 2003), clearly operationalised in this study and highly valued by educators, reflected educators' belief in the benefits of the grandparent-grandchild relationship for children. Highlighted particularly in this study was the value of the protective role of the social grandparent in the lives of children who had experienced adversity, including loss, separation from grandparents and environmental stress (Huffman et al., 2000). Other benefits of the grandparent-grandchild relationship identified in the literature and evidenced by educators in this study included improved resilience and pro-social behaviour (Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2018; Geraghty et al., 2015; Noddings, 1984). As the buffering role of the grandparent relationship in mitigating the negative impacts of social, emotional and environmental challenges is increasingly recognised (Geraghty et al., 2015; Grandparents Plus, n.d.), the role of the social grandparent in IGL merits further study (Boström, 2003). Moreover, the role of the social grandparent becomes increasingly significant in light of recent evidence presented by children themselves of the importance to them of social relationships in the community for their wellbeing (Fattore & Mason, 2017). Additionally, the particular value of extra-familial intergenerational relationships in shaping children's experience of community and their role in community-strengthening initiatives is worthy of note (Bessell, 2017). In foregrounding the importance to educators, parents and children themselves of children feeling loved and happy in ECE services, this study makes a significant contribution to the ECE discourse on love and happiness, concepts that are largely absent from the discourse and rarely considered as pedagogical tools (Dalli, 2008; Page, 2018; Osgood, 2010; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). Importantly, these findings highlight the value of accessing educators', children's and parents' lived experiences. Educators provided rich evidence of how the IGL relationships contributed to children feeling loved. The importance to parents of the role of the IGL relationships in helping their children to feel loved and happy in the ECE service was also strongly evident in the study. Significantly, children themselves reflected the importance to

them of caring relationships with older adults, through vividly expressing feelings of love, physical affection, enthusiasm and happiness in their commentary and drawings. Despite this strong evidence on the importance of love and happiness to all stakeholders in ECE, there is limited research on the issue in theory or practice (Page, 2018). Educators in the limited body of existing research emphasised their belief in the importance of love as a concept in ECE practice (Dalli, 2008; Page, 2018). Similarly, and consistent with the present study findings, the existing research indicates that parents prioritise their children being known and loved by those caring and educating them, placing less emphasis on qualifications and expertise in considering components of effective ECE (Rouse & Hadley, 2018; Ward, 2017). Research on children's views of love and happiness in ECE services, in common with children's views of other aspects of their ECE experiences, is notably underdeveloped (Barblett & Maloney, 2010; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). Related to this, the lack of focus on love and happiness in ECE discourse, despite its importance to children, parents and educators as evidenced in this study, could serve as a challenge to IGL being considered as a potential pedagogical strategy. An increasingly instrumental view of ECE (OECD, 2018), allied to concerns over child protection issues in the context of affection and the difficulties of defining and measuring love and happiness (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Rouse & Hadley, 2018), have led to tensions around the legitimacy of love as a pedagogical concept. Policy makers in ECE in the Western world, in minimising the concept of love in pedagogical policy, negate, or at best undermine, love as an important concept and practice of educators. Moreover, disaffirming love as an essential pedagogical concept valued by educators for its emotional, intellectual and cognitive value could serve to de-professionalise the core activities and identities of educators (Page, 2018). Importantly, it can also undermine a key finding of this study: the professional knowledges of educators, particularly phronesis, the practical wisdom that recognises the need to value characteristics beyond knowledge and skill, much of which relates to emotional responses to

children (Campbell-Barr, 2019). Significantly, as the professionalisation of the ECE workforce has become a policy priority in the Western world in the early 21st century, progression in the career of the educator has moved away from roles that are characterised by emotional connection and nurturing children and has become more focused on knowledge, competences and qualifications (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015; Dalli, 2003), despite the research evidence on the importance of both (Dockett, 2019).

It is worth noting that the attitudinal competences of being caring, supportive and empathetic, which are required to support children to feel loved, are not reflected in standards of quality provision in the UK (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015), nor are the concepts of love and happiness prominent in Aistear and Síolta (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Nonetheless educators in this study used IGL, an innovative strategy, to operationalise a core aim of Aistear and Síolta: to support children's wellbeing. Importantly, in implementing IGL, educators extended the interpretation of children's wellbeing presented in Aistear and Síolta to include a focus on children feeling loved and happy, despite it not being reflected in a concrete manner in curricular and quality frameworks (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Educators' deep trust in the role of the IGL relationships in contributing to children feeling loved reflected a key value that educators believed was foundational in relation to planning for children's learning and development. A strongly held view among educators was envisioning ECE services as environments in which warm and loving relationships would facilitate children's exploration and learning, based on what could be termed a relational or nurturing pedagogy (Hayes, 2013; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). In promoting IGL relationships to support children's learning and development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), educators not only operationalised a key element of contemporary ECE discourse on young children's learning (Trevarthen, 2011; Whitebread et al., 2015), the role of relationships, but did so by expanding on the relationships typically offered to children in ECE services. Building on these views of learning and their

positive regard for the IGL experiences, educators revealed their general views about the aims of education in relation to young children. In resisting an instrumental view of education, educators supported a humanistic view of education, embodying ideas about education proposed in the Delors Report (1996), with its focus on learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be, and reflected a commitment to a relational pedagogy (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). Moreover, it could be argued that educators in the study reflected Bronfenbrenner's (1979) views of a sustainable society as one that relies on citizens who "have learned the sensitivities, motivations and the skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings" (p. 53). Importantly, these views on the aims of education resonate strongly with principles underpinning IGL practice, which include the central role of relationships in developing understandings, learning with and from each other and promoting wellbeing among individuals at different stages of development (Boström & Schmidt-Hertha, 2017; Cartmel et al., 2018). In strongly espousing principles of IGL, as was evident in this study, educators demonstrated two key beliefs: balancing children's happiness in the here and now with future outcomes (Elfert, 2015; Hayes, 2013) and the importance of the how of learning, rather than focusing on academic or cognitive outcomes, which could be understood as the *what* of learning (Ang, 2014; Carr & Lee, 2012).

8.2.2 IGL enriches opportunities for children's developing sense of identity, belonging and togetherness

The power of the IGL experiences in supporting children's sense of identity and belonging, a catalyst for children's wellbeing and development (Niland, 2015; O'Dwyer, 2006) and an Irish and international curriculum goal (Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013; NCCA, 2009), was significant. Moreover, the fact that the IGL experiences were offered at a critical stage in children's developing sense of identity and belonging enhanced their value (Cartmel et al., 2018; McLaughlin et al., 2015). Additionally, the IGL experiences, which facilitated real-life

relationships in mixed-age communities beyond the ECE service, significantly enriched the contexts in which children's sense of identity and belonging developed (Nimmo, 2008). The IGL experiences created opportunities for children to develop a sense of identity and belonging that extended insight into these concepts beyond what appears to be understood and required by Aistear, Síolta and the Regulations. In highlighting relationships with the community, the frameworks include library visiting or community representatives (e.g., firefighter) visiting the ECE service, with less emphasis placed on developing ongoing relationships with individuals or groups within the community (NCCA, 2009; DCYA, 2016a). However, the research evidence demonstrates that what is important for children's developing sense of identity and belonging are relationships with non-family members and the community that are secure, ongoing and meaningful (Bessell, 2017; Elfer et al., 2012) and, crucially, which take time to develop.

Importantly, introducing the context of relationships with older adults and their environments operationalises a fundamental concept of socio-cultural theories: the role of multiple and increasingly complex layers of contexts and cultures that influence children's learning and development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 1990). The IGL experiences supported children in building a range of images of themselves and the worlds to which they belonged (Cartmel et al., 2018). Of particular significance was the opportunity that IGL created for children to receive social feedback and approval (Banaji & Gelman, 2013), valued by children themselves, educators and parents and substantially enhancing children's developing sense of identity and belonging. Importantly, the IGL experiences in the community extended considerably the opportunities for social approval that were available within the ECE service and that are particularly valued by children (Nimmo, 2008). Highly valued by the older adults, staff in the older adults' services, educators and parents and evidenced in the findings were children's energy, enthusiasm, curiosity, care, acceptance, skills and knowledge (Nimmo,

2008; Rogoff, 2003). The affirmative verbal and non-verbal messages and personalised attention that children received from the older adults and children's extended families represented significant social approval and contributed uniquely to their views of themselves and their place in the world. It was clear from their drawings and commentary that children reflected deeply on the positive feelings of identity and belonging that they experienced through the IGL relationships (Bennett, 2004; Niland, 2015; O'Dwyer, 2006). The importance of this finding cannot be underestimated as how children feel about themselves is not innate but learned, and it is through evaluation of their position within any social context that children estimate their importance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; O'Dwyer, 2006).

The important link between children's sense of belonging and their capacity to participate was highlighted in the study. Children's positive sense of identity and belonging, reflected, for example, in children feeling at home in new and sometimes challenging environments, as was evidenced in the study findings, empowered children to increasingly participate in these environments (Horgan et al., 2017). Moreover, participation in, and having an influence on the activities and the people they interacted with, as was evidenced in the study, created further opportunities for children to construct powerful identities (Wastell & Degotardi, 2017). It is worth noting that the IGL experiences offered to the study children, and driven by children's need and desire to belong, aligns with the relational view of participation as essentially a sociocultural product (Guo & Dalli, 2016; Horgan et al., 2017). Children's perspectives on their IGL experiences in this study also generated greater understanding of the unique ways in which children use their agency to negotiate a sense of belonging when they encounter unfamiliar experiences, highlighting belonging as a multi-layered concept (Wastell & Degotardi, 2017). For some children, their sense of belonging was determined by what might be considered peripheral aspects of the IGL experiences, the rituals and routines associated with the IGL experiences (Guo & Dalli, 2016; Miles, 2018; Niland, 2015). This finding is important in

illuminating how children experience diverse relationships and contexts and, importantly, the multiple ways that children enact belonging (Giugni, 2011), which ultimately affects their capacity for participation. It may also point to the security provided by routines and rituals in supporting children to manage new and potentially challenging situations (Miles, 2018), an area worthy of further study. Crucially, this finding points to the importance of seeking out the meaning that children attribute to any experience, in this case, the importance of rituals and routines, by creating a conceptual space around how children view the world (Pink, 2009). It also required the researcher to review fundamental concepts underpinning the study, including, as in this example, children's agency in drawing on routines and rituals to manage and contribute to their own wellbeing (Colliver, 2017).

Positive experiences of identity and belonging have been associated with promoting inclusive attitudes and behaviours in other contexts, a finding reflected in this research and valued in contemporary ECE curricula and policies, including Aistear and Síolta (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009; Tillett & Wong, 2018). The notion of children learning about difference in environments that promote respectful views of themselves and others has been found to be empowering (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Importantly, children who have experienced a sense of belonging through the IGL experiences may begin to understand how others experience inclusion and exclusion (Woodhead & Brooker, 2008) and they may, as a result, develop positive views of difference and a sense of social responsibility in their communities (Nimmo, 2008). This is an area worthy of further study.

The heightened sense of place that children in the study experienced through their involvement in the IGL experiences (Cartmel et al., 2018; Schmidt-Hertha et al., 2014; Lux et al., 2020) plays a crucial role in how children define their identities and feel a sense of belonging and togetherness (Kernan, 2010; Mannion, 2010). This finding resonates with a study by Dockett et al. (2012), which found that, while young children are knowledgeable about and interested

in interacting in their own communities, they may be limited in exploring these interests by educators' doubts about their competence to do so. As a result, children's sense of identity and belonging is frequently developed within the ECE service alone, despite research evidence to show that children can simultaneously have a sense of belonging to a variety of places and environments. (Miles, 2018; Wastell & Degotardi, 2017).

8.2.3 IGL relationships are valuable in supporting the development of executive functions The real life, shared IGL experiences, with their emphasis on the collective nature of knowing and which were particularly valuable for the development of executive functions (Mercer, 2013; Ring et al., 2018), is an important finding of this study. Extensive evidence of executive functions (Galinsky, 2010; UN, 2001) was demonstrated by children and corroborated by educators. The dynamic and discontinuous contexts in which children interacted with older adults enhanced children's self-awareness, creating authentic opportunities to develop their skills, to test the usefulness of their knowledge and understanding and to manage their behaviour (Brant & Studebaker, 2019). These processes are particularly useful in supporting children to make connections with what they already know and to critically evaluate that knowledge leading to fresh perspectives (Carr & Lee, 2012). This study provided evidence that the distinctive environments associated with the IGL experiences heightened children's opportunities for higher order thinking, as children identified and communicated their thought processes and adopted the perspectives of older adults (Vygotsky, 1978). Importantly, the unique opportunities for the development of the critical skill of intersubjectivity (Bruner, 1996) with individuals who were very different to themselves offered rich and challenging learning opportunities. Children's capacity to read and respond to the thinking of older adults, which was evident in their ability to switch perspectives (Galinsky, 2010) and see things from the viewpoint of older adults, a crucial skill in understanding and getting along with others, was strongly reflected in the findings, particularly when children found the older adults' behaviour

challenging (Femia et al., 2008; McKee & Scheffel, 2019). Reflecting children's developing theory of mind abilities, a key task of early childhood, (Saxe, 2013), children theorised that perhaps older adults could not hear, may have forgotten or were tired when they (the children) tried to understand particular behaviours, such as a lack of response or interest, or when older adults forgot information previously shared. Highlighting these unique opportunities for the development of intersubjectivity created by the IGL experiences, emphasised the value of viewing the worlds beyond the ECE service as rich resources for learning. Children's capacity for intersubjectivity was revealed in their ability to adjust their expectations and behaviour in IGL contexts, reflecting their high levels of cognitive flexibility, attention and self-regulation, all of which are key executive functions. This ability to function effectively in different environments and to adopt multiple perspectives ensures that children are better placed to benefit from other educational contexts than children who have not had such opportunities (Galinsky, 2010; Hayes, 2013).

A link between children's executive functions, their capacity to take on challenge and their flourishing (Gaffney, 2011) was strongly evident in the study. The extent to which children explored and negotiated the environments, sought out relationships and took risks in relating to older adults reflected children's view of the IGL environment as a safe place in which to deal with challenge. Dealing with real-life challenges, a necessary element of flourishing, facilitated children to practise their socio-emotional skills, including problem-solving and getting over obstacles, all of which enhanced their capacity for resilience, which is a key life skill (McLaughlin et al., 2015). As children in the study developed these life skills, they became more adept in responding to challenges and, in the process, became more resilient, consistent with the research findings on the development of resilience in children (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Children's developing capacity for resilience was extensively demonstrated in the strategies that they used when they encountered uncertainty, for example, in taking an initiative

to change their behaviour or in seeking the support of other children, older adults, the educator or their parent.

The valuable role of IGL in supporting children's socio-emotional competence, which is increasingly perceived as critical to success in life and particularly to school success, was foregrounded by educators and reflected by children and parents. This is particularly significant because socio-emotional competence is increasingly perceived as one of the most important contributions ECE can make to children's learning and development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; McLaughlin et al., 2015; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Importantly, the knowledge, skills, values and competences developed through the IGL experiences are well aligned with the concept of the "self-actualised child" proposed by Maslow: a child capable of dealing with uncertainty, problem-centred rather than self-centred, concerned for the welfare of the wider world, outward rather than inward-looking and who enjoys satisfying interpersonal relationships (Hayes, 2013, p. 42).

8.3 The double lens perspective: IGL enhances children's opportunities for participation

The double lens or a both-and perspective in relation to children's participation, strongly evident in this study, allowed children to be seen both as individuals with a right to self-determination and also as group and community members (Bae, 2010). The views and experiences of participation demonstrated by educators and children in the study strongly emphasised two key features that extend our understanding of young children's participation: the usefulness of adopting a relational perspective on participation in the context of young children's lives and the crucial importance of children's social contexts in effecting children's participation (Bae, 2010; Horgan et al., 2017). This understanding of participation also expands notions about citizenship and the young child, viewing citizenship as an embodied, relational and lived experience in everyday life (Horgan et al., 2017; Wood, 2016).

Moreover, it aligns with Wyness's (2013) argument that children's participation should emphasise their social, political and economic activities, as well as the more typical focus on the discursive, individualistic and decision-making processes of participation. Importantly, the extensive understandings and opportunities created by IGL experiences for children to participate as active, contributing citizens go beyond ideas underpinning Aistear and Síolta about the child as citizen. Specifically, while Aistear and Síolta include as learning goals children seeing themselves as part of a wider community and knowing about their local area, they do not elaborate the concept or practice of children's participation in the ECE service or beyond (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). However, the goals of children respecting the needs of others, helping others and having a sense of social justice, identified as important in helping children to understand rights and referenced in the guide to implementing Aistear and Síolta were found to be well served by children's IGL experiences. Linked to the requirements of Aistear and Síolta for children to experience responsibility, the IGL experiences not only provided meaningful social roles for children to exercise responsibility but also enhanced their visibility and capacity for civic engagement (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018; Kenner et al., 2007). Importantly, these experiences would be less likely for children attending ECE services that did not offer a social vehicle such as IGL for the enhancement of the child as citizen (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018).

8.3.1 IGL as an effective vehicle for children's participation

A relational perspective on participation, strongly reflected in the IGL experiences, afforded children opportunities to participate effectively in social contexts (Bae, 2010; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010) and, importantly, created unique opportunities for children to be attuned to and caring of others (Femia et al., 2008). The IGL experiences, as reported in the study, align with contemporary understandings of the reality of children's participation, which emphasise participation as ways of being, relating and acting in everyday life (Horgan et al., 2017;

Mannion, 2010). Additionally, the IGL experiences highlighted the importance of the informal in creating opportunities for children to participate effectively. In the spaces children passed through as they journeyed to the older adults' services, and through the relationships that children and older adults constructed together where the emphasis was on dialogue in informal spaces, children in the study exercised what Abebe (2019) refers to as thick agency. In taking actions and making contributions within the real-life world of older adults, and through their enhanced visibility, children had considerable opportunities for active citizenship through the exercise of thick agency (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Significantly, while there are many affordances for children's thick agency created within ECE services, children generally have fewer opportunities to participate and feel powerful in social contexts beyond the ECE services (Bae, 2010; Carr & Lee, 2012). Children, parents and educators in the study demonstrated that children's power and competences were considerably enhanced through their presence in the world of older adults, particularly when children played authoring roles in the social contexts of older adults' lives. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) argument - that the greater degree of power socially sanctioned in a given role, the greater is the tendency for the occupant to use and exploit that power - is a useful perspective in considering how children in the study may have perceived their roles in the IGL experiences. The heightened opportunities for children to play meaningful social roles in real world contexts evidenced in the findings created a number of further benefits for children that would not have been available to them in the more typically generationed contexts of ECE services (Alanen, 2009). Importantly, children in the study represented themselves holding authoritative and accountable positions, taking individual and collaborative initiatives, offering knowledge and care and powerfully influencing the adult world (Rogoff, 2014). It is worth noting that these positions reflect closely the elements crucial for flourishing: challenge, connectivity, autonomy and using one's valued competences (Gaffney, 2011). In a similar vein, Carr and Lee (2012) highlighted the importance of children's ability to be authoritative and accountable as central to their development as powerful learners, reflecting Rogoff's (2014) views of transformative learning. Carr and Lee (2012) also suggest that children's perceptions of themselves as powerful learners create opportunities for participation, as they exert control over their learning and persist in the face of challenges, highlighting the transactional nature of the process. Exchange and reciprocity, as demonstrated in children's interactions with older adults in the study, and key characteristics of both relational participation and IGL, highlighted the opportunities for children and older adults to play complementary roles in the IGL experiences. Children and older adults, in assuming the roles of teachers and learners in this study, highlighted the permeability of the boundaries between being (a fully-fledged citizen) and becoming (a citizen in the making) in the lives of both children and older adults (Uprichard, 2008). Importantly, it posited that children and adults should both be seen as beings and becomings as the findings of this study highlighted the assets and expertise of both children and adults and the capacity of both to play meaningful social roles (Prout, 2011). Consequently, the IGL experiences operationalised the important concept of interdependence in relation to the agency of children and adults (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Through participating in IGL experiences, children had real-life experience of the concept of the personhood of every human being, with their strengths and challenges and their relative competences at different life stages, rather than a focus on the adult-child binary (Lee, 2002; Uprichard, 2008). Importantly, and reflecting this view of personhood, children experienced at first hand the idea of learning as an endeavour for life, thereby operationalising in a concrete manner the concepts of lifelong and lifewide learning (Sánchez et al., 2018) and the concept of a community of learners (Wenger, 1998). Significantly, viewing children through the lens of personhood, rather than as beings and becomings as evidenced in the IGL experiences, has the potential to impact positively on how children are perceived and positioned in society (Uprichard, 2008). Moreover, the IGL experiences in facilitating children

to participate effectively in the social arena (Malaguzzi, 1998) enhanced children's capacity for civic engagement in a bottom-up approach (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018), reflecting the view that citizens are made not born (Clark, 2017).

8.3.2 The role of IGL in challenging perceptions of children's position in society

The opportunities, contexts and expectations that children experienced through their participation in IGL experiences created a fresh perspective from which to view young children: children as persons in their own right, socially active protagonists with rights to civic engagement and with much to contribute in the world (Malaguzzi, 1998; Moss, 2014). Children's increased visibility and embeddedness in the community, evident in the study findings as a result of the IGL experiences, has the potential to challenge perceptions of children and their symbolic position in society, marked frequently by a deficit view of the child, the child as a becoming, preparing for future membership of society (Clark, 2017; Prout, 2011). Additionally, children's visibility in the community may also serve to assuage concerns about children's safety in public spaces, which has resulted in children becoming more removed from public spaces and spending more time in spaces designated for children (Bessell, 2017; Jenks, 2005). Importantly, the study findings highlight the potential of IGL to challenge a perception of children as a disruptive presence in public spaces in what is sometimes understood as adult territory (Bessell, 2017; Qvortrup, 2005). Critically, children's experiences of citizenship in this study, as facilitated through IGL, could be framed in political terms, as it challenges ideas about citizenship being positioned in complex institutional and global spaces and, in doing so, contends that the ordinary is also political (Wood, 2016). The citizenship opportunities experienced by children in this study through IGL are important for the role that they play in challenging reductionist perceptions of children's position in society. The importance for children's lives of altering public perceptions of childhood and citizenship cannot be overemphasised, as social structures play a significant role in shaping the contexts in which children

are supported to participate (Horgan et al., 2017; Qvortrup, 2014). Through their participation in IGL, children in the study had opportunities to act as agents of social change, not only in their own lives but also in the lives of others. Consequently, children had the potential not only to change social expectations about children's competences and position in public spaces (Mannion, 2010) but, crucially, to change social attitudes about the lives and care of older adults (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020). In initiating and facilitating IGL experiences, it could be argued that educators, knowingly or unknowingly, played a political role. Educators, in promoting views of children as rich, strong, powerful, competent and connected to others (Malaguzzi, 1998; Moss, 2014), believed that children had a right to be supported not only to participate in the community but that, in doing so, they could contribute significantly to their own lives, the lives of others and the life of the community (Clark, 2017; Prout, 2011). This perspective demonstrated the knowledges, skills and, importantly, the values of the educators that were reflected in their ability to enrich children's lives and learning, while reimagining the role of the ECE service in the community. In introducing IGL, educators reflected a nuanced understanding of childhood and agency, balancing respect for children's right to make choices about their lives (children were also given the option of declining the opportunity to participate in IGL experiences) with children's right to participate in the wider social arena. In this study, children's active participation in the everyday life of their communities was understood by educators both explicitly and implicitly as crucially important in implementing real citizenship for children (Abebe, 2019; Bae, 2010; Horgan et al., 2017). Importantly, as implemented in this study, IGL reflects the greater success of participation that is embedded within communities in spaces created for joint projects of mutual interest, where children and others can speak and be heard (Moss & Petrie, 2002; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010).

8.4 The curriculum of ordinary life: IGL as a pedagogy of the community

A noteworthy finding of this study was the joy and happiness expressed by children of their participation in everyday experiences in the community and in their interactions with older adults. While socio-cultural theories of learning emphasise the contribution of ordinary life experiences to young children's development (Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 1998), a significant contribution of this study is highlighting the level of enjoyment children experienced through learning in these real-life learning contexts. Significantly, ordinary life experiences, which are also central to the concept of IGL (Boström, 2003; Nimmo, 2008; Rogoff, 1998), challenge ideas about what constitutes a stimulating learning environment (Malaguzzi, 1998). The importance of non-traditional learning spaces and the contribution of people not acknowledged as teachers, a key finding of this study, is substantial in a study focusing on children's learning and development. More specifically, it points to the value of softening the boundaries between formal and informal learning (Jilk, 2005) and acknowledging the strengths of the golden triangle of community-based ECE services, which draw together informal, non-formal and formal approaches (Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010).

8.4.1 IGL as a curriculum of ordinary life aligns with socio-cultural theories of learning While socio-cultural theories of learning have dominated theoretical debates about young children's learning in the Western world since the 1990's, the extent to which these ideas have been translated into ECE practice remains unclear (Edwards, 2006). Additionally, a focus on how to ensure that children's ECE experiences are not decontextualised from their daily lives is not well developed (Guo & Dalli, 2016; Rogoff, 2003). Considerable importance is attributed to the concept of the community as a co-educator in ECE discourse, curricula and quality indicators (De Visscher & Bouverne-De Bie, 2008; Malaguzzi, 1998), yet research on the exact mechanisms or the impact of the community is limited (Cohen & Korintus, 2016). The study findings go some way in addressing this issue because IGL is based on the belief that learning

in the community can significantly extend the learning opportunities offered by formal ECE services (Cohen & Korintus, 2016; Goldfeld et al., 2015). The study findings endorse a central tenet of socio-cultural theories of learning (Hedges & Cullen, 2012; Rogoff, 1998): the relational and collaborative nature of learning, driven by children's everyday interactions in social contexts. A key mechanism of relational and collaborative learning, particularly important in this study, was the concept of children learning by observing and pitching in (LOPI), reflecting a participatory and transformative model of learning (Rogoff, 2014). Characteristics of LOPI highlighted in this study included the belief that learning is not a separate activity from ordinary life that requires adults to create child-centred activities and prescribe learning outcomes (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016). Significantly, this perspective reflects the trust educators in the study placed on IGL relationships as a pedagogical strategy. An important finding of the study was the rich source of learning demonstrated by children through intent observing and modelling (Fleer, 2003), which is significant because the emphasis in contemporary ECE discourse is on the importance of play and the use of materials, rather than modelling by adults and the corresponding observation, which is considered a passive and less valued learning process (Fleer, 2003; Rogoff, 2014). Key to LOPI was the importance of children being enmeshed in the social and cultural worlds of the community, a situation that was strongly evidenced in this study of children's IGL experiences. It was clear that, when children collaborated with older adults in interactions and activities that were of value to participants, such as conversation, singing and social events like parties, and which were, therefore, imbued with respect and responsibility, children were eager to contribute and belong, were keen observers and took collaborative initiative without adult direction (Rogoff, 2014). Valuing and interpreting the ECE curriculum through a socio-cultural lens that emphasised IGL, required educators to adopt a new paradigm through which to interpret their ECE curricula (Ang, 2014; Genishi, 1992; New et al., 2005). This paradigm, involving the risk-rich

environments of the IGL experiences, clearly led to unknown territories, new ideas and new relationships for children in the study (New, et al., 2005), requiring them to negotiate emotional and social relationships and physical spaces that were diverse, unpredictable and sometimes challenging (Moss, 2014; Nimmo, 2008). In implementing a pedagogy of real-life experiences in risk-rich learning environments, educators reflected their commitment to a key principle of socio-cultural theories: balancing risk with challenge (Eun, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Importantly, the risk-rich environments that children experienced in older adults' services supported their capacity for resourcefulness and risk-taking in making sense of the world around them, a disposition and skill that is prioritised in international ECE curricula and policies, including Aistear, (NCCA, 2009). Going beyond the confines of the ECE service through the IGL experiences strengthened the capacity of the ECE services to offer opportunities for children to test their knowledge in the real world and to develop their resourcefulness and ability to take risks in real contexts (Malaguzzi, 1998; Nimmo, 2008). While the Irish frameworks primarily focus on relationships and environments in the ECE services, evident in this study were the many benefits of developing these skills in the community, not least of which was the pleasure and enjoyment that children experienced through participation in the community. Importantly, in offering children opportunities that would have been difficult to create within the ECE service, children's integration in the community was supported, a principle underpinning Aistear, Síolta and the Regulations (CECDE, 2006; DCYA, 2016a; NCCA, 2009). Furthermore, the ordinary, everyday IGL experiences demonstrated clearly the valuable role that they played in children's learning how to learn. Key among those skills were critical thinking, perspective-taking, focus and selfcontrol (Galinsky, 2010; Nimmo, 2008), which were richly evident in children's and educators' data.

8.4.2 The curriculum of ordinary life supports children to become powerful learners

Creating affordances for children to operate in increasingly complex dispositional milieu (Carr & Lee, 2012) and extend their capacity as capable learners (Hayes, 2013), as was evident among children in this study, is strongly aligned with bioecological theories of development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Clearly, the dispositional milieu of the older adult environments, offering rich learning environments to explore and construct new knowledge and ideas, reflected a concrete example of Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theory of human development. Crucial to Bronfenbrenner's theory is the importance for children not only to have opportunities for interactions that are repeated over time but that the nature and quality of the interactions should increase in complexity over time and should be in environments that invite exploration and challenge (Hayes et al., 2017; Lux et al., 2020). These ideas link closely with a key finding of the study: the importance of adopting a contextually-embedded understanding (Miles, 2018) of children's IGL experiences, and the value of children and educators coconstructing what is meaningful for children in their IGL experiences. In managing their new, and potentially challenging, experiences of the increasingly complex dispositional milieu of the older adult environments, children drew on the familiarity of routines associated with food, physical environments, animals and journeys. These ordinary, everyday familiar routines played a significant role in supporting children to feel comfortable and safe as they settled in to the new experiences of IGL and highlighted important learning for educators: children need time and secure routines as they establish themselves as powerful learners in new contexts. In the present study, the individuals, experiences, behaviours and values that children encountered through the IGL experiences exposed them to elements of society's diversity and complexity (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010; O'Dwyer, 2006) in a supportive environment (Femia et al., 2008). Critical thinking, a key skill evident among children in the study findings, has been identified as useful in lessening the likelihood of children practising discrimination (Sánchez et al., 2018). In the supportive IGL environment, children experienced difference and

inclusion in relation to age in real-life contexts and while positive experiences of diversity and inclusion are aims of Aistear, Síolta and the Regulations, the frameworks do not refer to age inclusion (CECDE, 2006; DCYA, 2016a; NCCA, 2009). Enthusiastic participation in the positive emotional climate afforded by the IGL experiences, reflected in children's keen observations and their alertness to their surroundings (Rogoff, 2012), encouraged their exploration and construction of new knowledge. Children in the study had opportunities to take on the IGL community's perspective, to test the relevance of its knowledge to themselves, to take the opportunity to risk being wrong, to position themselves as leaders or as followers, to confront new ideas with enthusiasm and to discuss what might be (Carr & Lee, 2012). Importantly, the joy and happiness that children expressed when they were offered opportunities to access the world beyond the ECE service contributed to their development as powerful learners. Children's response to participating in the community through the IGL experiences highlighted the powerful role of emotions in learning (Whitebread et al., 2015), characterised by the positive learning dispositions that children displayed of being ready, willing and able to learn (Carr, 2001) when offered the IGL opportunities. The issue of power in child-adult relationships (Hill et al., 2004), which impacts children's views of themselves, also warrants further attention with reference to the present study findings. An interesting argument proposed by Nimmo (2008) suggests that children are already aware that the domain of adults is more powerful than their own, recognising that adults have access to decisionmaking, resources, literacy and networks that are not available to children. The collaborative nature of IGL learning could, therefore, play a role in enhancing children's views of themselves as powerful learners because children took the role of both teacher and learner and felt empowered to take the lead and to act as adjuvants in their own learning and the learning of others (Cabanillas, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). While children have many opportunities to feel empowered through collaborative learning with other children within the ECE service,

collaborative learning with older adults may have been perceived more positively by the children in the study. A number of key concepts in the ECE discourse on learning, which are also reflected in the principles underpinning IGL (Dayton & Rogoff, 2016; Kenner et al., 2007), were synthesised in the collaborative and empowering nature of the IGL experiences. These include the role of relationships in learning; the role of informal learning and learning as a lifelong and lifewide endeavour (Boström, 2003; Bruner, 1996; Malaguzzi, 1998). Together with the evidence of children's learning through the IGL experiences, these concepts create a strong argument for considering the potential of the ordinary life of the community as a rich and empowering learning environment. However, despite the high priority placed by educators in this study on children's learning through participation in ordinary life (Nimmo, 2008; Rogoff, 1998), and children's enthusiasm for real-life learning, this approach is not strongly reflected in Aistear, Síolta or the Regulations (CECDE, 2006; DCYA, 2016a; NCCA, 2009).

8.4.3 IGL as a pedagogy of the community

The IGL experiences, as described by educators and children, reframed understandings about children and learning, including what could be considered a learning experience, where children learn, and who can teach, by highlighting the role of the community in children's learning. Importantly, learning in the ordinariness of everyday life created synergies that extended the opportunities and reach of the formal curriculum so that the study children benefitted significantly from learning with and from older adults in the community. Moreover, this golden triangle of learning, encompassing formal, informal and non-formal learning (Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010), broadened the range of children's learning, focusing not only on learning how to learn but also introducing children to history, crafts, music and stories from other times and cultures. The value of involving people not formally acknowledged as teachers, in this case, the older adults, and experiences not generally part of curricular frameworks as effective resources for children's learning, key characteristics of socio-cultural

theories, were strongly reflected in the IGL experiences (Boström, 2003; Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010; Rogoff, 2003). Harnessing the resources of the community to support children's development addresses a contemporary challenge in children's lives: the contracting number of social interactions and experiences that children have, due to the increasing amount of time they spend in dedicated children's spaces, as well as increasing concern about their safety (Bessell, 2015). The particular value of the IGL experiences for enhancing and extending children's opportunities for social experiences and for civic participation in the community (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018; James et al., 1998) were also foregrounded. Children's contribution to the learning of the community, an important strength of IGL evidenced in this study, was demonstrated in children's competence and eagerness to contribute their attributes, knowledge and life experiences in the IGL experiences. Drawing on their personal resources, the cultural practices of their homes, ECE services and communities, children contributed to the enhancement of the lives and learning of the older adults (Hedges et al., 2011). Thus, the IGL experiences, in shifting the focus from the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world, highlighted the key role of the community in the learning of all individuals, resonating with ideas of communities of practice and the importance of ordinary life as a learning context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2014). Crucially, this perspective aligns strongly with Delor's (1996) ideas about the aims of education for the 21st century: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together, and with the aims of education declared by the UN (2001), with its strong emphasis on life skills. The valuable life skills demonstrated by children in the study highlighted the power of IGL in supporting their development in what is an aim of internationally regarded curricula (HighScope; Te Whāriki). However, the application of this aim is relatively underdeveloped in practice (Edwards, 2006), including in Aistear (NCCA, 2009). Nonetheless, the commonalities demonstrated in the study between principles of learning and development underpinning IGL and those underpinning

Irish policy frameworks, both of which draw on socio-cultural theories of learning (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020; Kuehne & Melville, 2014; NCCA, 2009), suggest that the national frameworks provide an enabling context for the implementation of IGL. This position was endorsed by educators in their expressions of confidence that the IGL experiences effectively met the requirements of Aistear and Síolta. Significantly, the findings of the study highlighted the wide-ranging and unique opportunities offered by IGL not only to operationalise but, importantly, to extend and enhance the principles underpinning Aistear and Síolta, while fulfilling the requirements of the Regulations.

8.5 Embedding children in the community through IGL

The IGL experiences highlighted the many benefits that accrue to children when they are embedded in the life of the community. The IGL experiences reported in the study reflected educators' strong commitment to practice that prioritised child-embeddedness, rather than child-centredness. Child-embeddedness works towards ensuring that children are central to and included in the activities of families and communities, and contrasts with child-centredness where children are central, for example, in age-segregated spaces, but separated from the real world (Fleer, 2003; Rogoff, 1990). Importantly, in positioning children as central to the everyday life through the IGL experiences, educators challenged views of children as separate to the daily life of families and communities through being placed in age-segregated spaces (Rogoff, 2014). Additionally, embedding children in the community through IGL experiences was argued by educators in this study to be an effective strategy in supporting children to actively participate as democratic citizens in public spaces (Dahlberg et al., 2013).

While socio-cultural theories of learning have brought some focus to the role of the community in supporting children's learning and wellbeing, there is limited research on all aspects of the relationship between children and community (Bessell, 2017). Findings from Bessell's (2017)

Australian study highlighted wide-ranging benefits not only to children but also to families and communities, when children were embedded in their communities. Child-embeddedness in communities, while aligned with socio-cultural theories of learning and promoted in ECE discourse (Malaguzzi, 1998; Rogoff, 2003), is an under-researched area and not strongly reflected in curricular guidelines. The significance of the social for child wellbeing, which was strongly evident in the present study, aligns with a growing emphasis on the socially situated nature of children's experiences of wellbeing (Fattore & Mason, 2017).

8.5.1 Children as beneficiaries and contributors to social capital through IGL

A noteworthy finding of the study was the extent to which children's development and wellbeing was enriched through the social capital they accessed and contributed to through the IGL experiences (Bessell, 2017; Morrow, 2008). Interestingly, while nurturing relationships beyond their families and primary carers and links with the community are referenced in both Aistear and Síolta for the role they play in extending children's social networks and for their overall development, there is little acknowledgement of children's significant role in enhancing the social networks of others or as contributors to social capital (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009). Through the significant contribution to the social networks of their families and communities, as well as the older adults, children in this study challenged dominant ideas about social capital as a resource created by adults (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008; Nimmo, 2008). Additionally, the study findings confirmed the claim made by Bronfenbrenner (2005) that children, by their presence in the home, affected a family's social network by providing a motivation to seek relationships and resources. Based on the findings of this study, which also echo recent research (Offer & Schneider, 2007), it could be argued that children do more than motivate families to seek relationships and resources. It was clear that children in this study played an active role in the creation of social capital, generating social networks and resources for themselves, and for families, who could accrue benefits from having their children socially involved in the

community. Children can, therefore, serve as important social brokers for their parents, particularly when time pressures make it difficult for parents to establish social ties in the community (Offer & Schneider, 2007). Children in the study also benefitted significantly from the social capital of the older adults' community: the trusting relationships they developed with a wide range of adults, the resources the adults had within and outside the older adults' communities and the social norms and behaviours that the children experienced through the IGL relationships (Coleman, 1988; Nimmo, 2008). Importantly, access to the social capital of the older adults' worlds, which strengthened children's social networks, contributed to their sense of identity and belonging and enhanced their participation in democratic life (Nimmo, 2008; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). In positive reflections on their affective relationships with older adults, children in this study revealed the importance of the social to their sense of wellbeing. In an Australian study of wellbeing (Fattore & Mason, 2017), which noted the marginalisation of the social in children's wellbeing, children discussed wellbeing in a relational context. Caring and being cared for connoted affective solidarity and created a sense of belonging, suggesting that affirmative connections with others were associated with increased levels of emotional wellbeing (Mashford-Scott et al., 2012). The importance to children in this study of relationships beyond their families in supporting a sense of belonging, has important implications for supporting children's development and wellbeing, and particularly the role of IGL in doing so. This resonates with the findings of an Irish study of youth work practice, which found that IGL enhanced wellbeing and community capacity (Walsh et al., 2012). It is worth noting that a recommendation from the Australian study suggested that community-strengthening initiatives should focus on children's experiences of relationships within their communities, as well as the more typical focus on the role of services and the role of professional relationships in supporting children (Bessell, 2017). The potential of IGL to contribute to the social capital of communities experiencing poverty and exclusion,

which was noted in this study, is supported in the research literature. Importantly, social capital plays a significant role in creating resilience in communities experiencing poverty and exclusion, the impact of which has been found to be markedly negative during early childhood (Chetty et al., 2016). While communities can impact both positively and negatively on children's wellbeing (Katz et al., 2017), for children whose early environments are compromised, informal learning in the community and the associated social capital can contribute to the development of positive self-identity, learning dispositions and executive functions, all of which influence successful school outcomes (Heckmann & Mosso, 2014; Pascal & Bertram, 2013). Through the IGL experiences, children in this study gained access to positive experiences of life in their community through connecting with what may have been the less visible strengths of that community, for example, the social grandparent, who could be considered to represent a strong social model (Gallagher, 2020). Through strengthening IGL bonds in the community, children in the study were exposed to positive experiences of life within their communities and accumulated personal and social capital, which may nurture their resilience and act as a protective factor in the future (Putnam, 2000; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004), and is an area worthy of further study. Additionally, the IGL experiences created opportunities for the growing number of children separated from the social capital of the community as a result of spending more time in services for children and as a result of declining levels of social capital in the Western world (Nimmo, 2008; Putnam, 2000). This situation raises the question of what, if any, role the ECE service could play in connecting children with their communities, noting that educators in this study reported that, generally, children in their ECE services were not strongly connected in communities. Educators in the study argued that ECE services had considerable potential and responsibility to connect children with communities and valued highly the IGL experiences for their role in connecting children with the community. Significantly, this study highlights the importance that children, educators and parents attach

to community connectedness and also the power of IGL experiences in supporting children to feel a sense of belonging in the community.

8.5.2 Children as contributors to the transformation of communities

The impact of children's participation in communities through IGL highlighted their role in the transformation of communities, an idea that aligns with and extends understandings of sociocultural theories (Rogoff, 2003). In Rogoff's (1994) research on a participatory model of development highlighting the breadth of knowledge and skills that are taught and learned in communities, children can and do, through their relationships with individuals of all ages, extend the ways of the communities (Carpendale et al., 2018). Children's participation in communities of practice with older adults, drawing on the idea of "constellations of cultural practices across generations" (Rogoff, 2014, p. 77), highlights the interrelatedness of cultural practices, rather than viewing them as independent variables (e.g., older adult's keen attention or child's disposition to take initiative). Children's IGL experiences in the study demonstrated how shared cultural activities moved and shifted, with children and adults adding layers of meaning (Ochs, 2014). The meaningful intergenerational engagement, based on LOPI, which was evident in this study, created many opportunities for children to contribute to the enhancement and invigoration of the community (Cohen & Rønning, 2014; Kaplan et al, 2017; Rogoff, 2014). Children and older adults had unique resources that they brought to the learning experiences, highlighting how community resources could be harnessed to benefit both age groups (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020). For example, children brought innovative thinking, energy, curiosity and new cultural knowledge, while older adults brought knowledge, life experience, calm, wisdom and expertise in areas including history, crafts, music and food (Boström, 2003; Walsh et al., 2012). Significantly, if adults were to form more powerful images of children, this could contribute to changing social attitudes towards children and to the transformation of communities (Nimmo, 2008). Additionally, the IGL experiences could

serve to influence social perceptions of learning for both young children and older adults. For example, acknowledgement of the role of relationships, fun, informality and everyday environments associated with IGL has the potential to challenge in a unique and insightful way how the community views where and how young children's learning takes place (Moss, 2014). Similarly, learning could begin to be perceived as a lifewide and lifelong endeavour, with older adults both benefitting from and contributing to learning with and from children (Boström, 2003). Importantly, it was clear that the IGL experiences impacted positively on parents' views of how and where children's learning takes place, which could ultimately have a long-term impact on children's learning (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

The value and importance attributed by educators, children and parents in the study to placebased learning, a pedagogy of the community where the local community and environment is the starting point for hands-on, real world learning experiences, is a key finding of this study (Cohen & Rønning, 2014). Importantly, it draws attention to the idea that learning is distributed across and benefits from the involvement of children, families and communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Place-based learning, a term that is frequently used interchangeably with community-based education and draws on the ideas of Dewey, Vygotsky and Rogoff (Cohen & Korintus, 2016; Smith & Sobel, 2010), transforms ideas about what constitutes an effective learning environment (Kernan, 2015; Malaguzzi, 1998). Significantly, place-based learning is part of a social movement that aims to reconnect the processes of education, enculturation and human development to the wellbeing of community life (Gruenwald & Smith, 2008), on the basis that that, unless children engage with community, they cannot have empathy for it (Boyd, 2019). Moreover, place-based learning connects strongly with ideas about ICZ, spatial focal points for different generations to build relationships and, if desired, to address issues of local concern (Kaplan et al., 2020). It was clear that the IGL experiences in this study strongly emphasised the rich potential of ICZ and the pivotal role that they could play in any consideration of IGL as a pedagogical strategy (Sánchez et al., 2020). Place-based learning and IGL principles have considerable potential to create effective ICZ and, significantly, could contribute to a new social model embedding intergenerational engagement as a fundamental, crosscutting policy objective that could have a profound effect on the quality of life for all (Kaplan et al., 2020).

However, what may be the most fundamental question about young children's learning comes under the spotlight in considering IGL and children's connections in the community: what is important for children to learn? (Delors, 1996; UN, 2001). While identifying what is important for children to learn is a multi-layered process framed by curricular guidelines, the key role of the educator in the process has been acknowledged and will now be revisited.

8.6 The educator as broker in children's experiences

The pivotal role of the educator in what and how they provide for the optimal development of children was a key finding in the study and one that is well-established in the literature (Campbell-Barr, 2019; Hayes, 2013) and reflected in principles of Aistear (NCCA, 2009). More specifically, the present study found that the educator's beliefs and values played a unique and central role in introducing and developing the IGL experiences, suggesting that only educators who are interested in IGL will create opportunities for children to interact with older adults as part of their ECE experiences. This finding points to the importance of considering the educators' orientation, their beliefs and values in relation to children's learning and development, as this study clearly demonstrates the considerable autonomy of the educator in relation to how children's development and wellbeing is supported in the ECE service. However, this position does not negate or under-estimate the impact of factors, including sociocultural contexts, national frameworks, funding organisations and parental expectations, on children's experiences and choices in ECE services (Genishi, 1992; Mason & Bessell, 2017).

A further important consideration in relation to the role of the educator as broker is the educators' views of intentional teaching.

8.6.1 Educators' orientation to their professional roles in relation to children's lives and learning

The importance of educators' orientation in identifying IGL as a strategy to support children's learning, which is a key finding of this study, points to the central importance of interrogating the educators' orientation in relation to all aspects of children's lives and learning. Educators' implicit socio-cultural beliefs and understandings of children and learning impacted powerfully in guiding their work (Freire, 1972), in what Ang (2014, p. 194) refers to as the "unofficial curriculum" with children and what Bruner (1996) refers to as folk pedagogy. However, while educators' orientation in relation to all aspects of children's lives contributed to the implementation of IGL, two particular elements central to educators' professional role in the introduction of IGL will now be addressed: educators' belief in the importance of weaving professional knowledge and personal experience in delivering the curriculum and, related to this, their willingness to try new pedagogical strategies. Educators' ability to weave professional and socio-cultural knowledge with personal experience to develop new and innovative practice, identified as a key skill of the educator (Ang, 2014), was strongly evident in the study findings. Significantly, educators demonstrated knowledges beyond pure knowledge and skills, that of practical wisdom (Campbell-Barr, 2019), which they drew on to create meaningful opportunities for children's learning. Moreover, the introduction of IGL practice by educators in the study represented a strong example of how the educators' characteristics, knowledges and values came together as practical wisdom (Ang, 2014; Campbell-Barr, 2019). Practical wisdom was evident in the rationale for the IGL experiences articulated by the educators. This included the educators' perceptions of IGL as a positive socio-emotional experience for children, for example, in creating social grandparenting

relationships for children who do not have a relationship with their grandparents. Importantly, educators viewed the IGL experiences as opportunities for children to contribute in social contexts, for example, in enhancing the lives of older adults attending day and residential services (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020), which interestingly was a view also held by some parents. Involvement in IGL practice reflected the educators' views of the potential of ECE services to respond to social challenges, including social inclusion, migration, family breakdown and loneliness among older adults, pointing to educators' view of the ECE service reimagined as a place of encounter for individuals (Moss, 2017). Significantly however, educators articulated the importance of the rich learning opportunities created by the IGL experiences across all domains for children in their ECE services (Cartmel et al., 2018). Interestingly, the acknowledgement by educators that the IGL experiences were an enjoyable and empowering experience for themselves, personally and professionally could, arguably, also be considered an example of educators' wisdom. While educator morale and high staff turnover, key indicators of quality in ECE services (OECD, 2006), are challenges in the Irish ECE sector (Early Childhood Ireland, 2020), the implementation of IGL may have been perceived by educators in this study to enhance their morale. Arguing then, that "knowing" for the educator is complex, Campbell-Barr (2019, p. 142) suggests that "knowing" involves not only theory but depends on personal characteristics, life experience and experience gained through working with children. Emphasising the importance of "knowing" has implications for how ECE professionalism is understood and, importantly, it recognises the complexities of the knowledges required to work with young children (Osgood, 2010; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). Based on the study findings, there is an argument to be made that the concept of professionalism in ECE should be revisited to reflect more fully the multiple ways of knowing required for working in ECE services (Campbell-Barr, 2019; Urban et al., 2017). However, while articulating and critiquing these knowledges is vital to more fully understand the impact

of educators' knowledges, interests, orientations and skills on children's learning and wellbeing, they are rarely perceived as legitimate contexts for critical reflection within the official curriculum (Ang, 2014; Hayes, 2013) nor as issues for research (Anders, 2015; Campbell-Barr, 2019).

Developing innovative practice such as IGL highlighted the particular characteristics of educators that made it more likely for them to adopt a reflective and innovative approach to their practice. These included a willingness to take risks in relation to children's learning by thinking differently and going beyond what was safe in order to discover what might be possible in a process of experimentation (Moss, 2014; New et al., 2005). In doing so, educators demonstrated what Moss (2009, p. viii) argues are essential characteristics of early childhood educators, to be "open-ended (avoiding closure), open-minded (welcoming the unexpected) and open-hearted (valuing difference)". Expanding the space of the possible, evident in this study, revealed educators' high level of knowledge and skills as they worked to ensure that the IGL experiences met all Irish policy requirements. Educators in the study demonstrated their skill in negotiating the requirements of Aistear and Síolta, in the way they were designed to be implemented, which was to serve as a guide rather than as a programme for practice. This finding resonates with the view of the educator reflected in Te Whāriki, which assumes that the teacher possesses the sophisticated levels of cultural knowledge and theoretical understandings to weave their own curricular patterns, rather than teachers being prescribed about what they should do (May & Carr, 2016). Crucially, educators in the study demonstrated their skill and confidence in working with the frameworks, through their deep understanding of IGL as a pedagogical strategy, and through careful attention and competence in planning for its successful implementation. Important to educators, and reflecting the principles underpinning the frameworks, was a partnership approach with parents in relation to the care and education of their children (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009), strongly reflected in their implementation of IGL in their ECE services. Educators' careful introduction of IGL as a choice offered to parents reflected educators' recognition of parents' pre-eminent role in their children's wellbeing and development. Critically, the study clearly demonstrated educators' willingness and expertise in negotiating with parents around the most fundamental of questions: the purposes of education, as well as how those purposes could be realised through IGL practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; New et al., 2005). The overwhelmingly positive views of parents in relation to IGL led to a strengthening of the educator-parent partnership, widely acknowledged in ECE discourse as an indicator of quality and, importantly, one which confers considerable benefits on children's learning and development (DES, 2019; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

8.6.2 The educator as intentional teacher

In viewing themselves as brokers in the context of children's learning, educators in this study clearly demonstrated their belief and confidence in intentional teaching and the role of the educator and ECE service as co-educators (Bae, 2010; Malaguzzi, 1998; Wyness, 2012). While acknowledging children as active agents in their learning, educators emphasised the central importance of their own role in identifying meaningful opportunities to support children's learning. It was in this context that IGL was introduced to children, reflecting explicitly or implicitly educators' belief that the most effective learning requires conscious effort through intentional teaching (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). The significance of this finding is noteworthy. Although Aistear emphasises the reciprocal relationship between children and adults, acknowledging that the adult sometimes takes the lead in a role that could be understood as intentional teaching (NCCA, 2009), children-initiated learning in the natural context of play is, arguably, the dominant discourse in ECE in the Western world (Kilderry, 2015). Significantly, evidence suggests a reluctance among educators to undertake intentional teaching, a concept that has arguably, been silenced (Kilderry, 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2015), despite evidence

demonstrating that the most effective pedagogical practice balances child-initiated learning and intentional teaching (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). Significantly, educators' deep understanding of the concept of intentional teaching, combined with their practical wisdom, was reflected in their acknowledgement that children are intentional learners, as they ensured that only those children who freely chose to participate in the IGL experiences did so.

8.7 Challenges of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECE services

The challenges of IGL identified by educators offer important insights into what is a new and hitherto unresearched area in Irish ECE services. The challenges focused on two main areas, practical issues and the specific challenges of IGL for some children, both of which are reflected in the IGL literature in relation to young children (McAlister et al., 2019; Holmes, 2009). Educators reported that, while practical challenges arose, including accessing older adults' services interested in IGL, scheduling pressures, illness among children and older adults, staffing requirements for trips and transport issues existed, they were not so great as to deter educators from introducing IGL experiences. However, educators acknowledged that these challenges may have impacted on the frequency of the IGL experiences, a challenge also reflected in the literature (Lux et al., 2020; McAlister et al., 2019). Specific challenges for some children noted by educators included children, from time to time, not being interested in, or losing interest in the IGL visits; children's personal circumstances, such as the death of a grandparent, impacting on the IGL visits; IGL not suiting a very active or anxious child or a child with challenging behaviour; and children worrying about older adults between visits. Again, while these were challenges identified by educators, they were not seen as deterrents. Importantly, children participated in the IGL experiences if and when they chose, reflecting an underpinning principle of the frameworks and a well-established principle in ECE discourse: children's right to choose the activities in which they participated. However, this right to

choose has implications for IGL practice, particularly in the context of relationships with older adults, a key strength of IGL and foundational to its benefits for children. Irregular and/or infrequent interactions between children and older adults is an issue that is likely to be significant in the development and intensity of relationships. Critically, Nimmo (2008) argues that, for relationships between children and members of the community to be meaningful, they need to comprise the following characteristics: intimacy; continuity; complexity; identity; diversity and reciprocity, any of which may be difficult to achieve if interactions are irregular. However, it is critical to note that, while familiarity with older adults is required if children are to develop positive attitudes towards them (Park, 2015; Robinson & Howatson-Jones, 2014), infrequent contact can result in more negative attitudes (Femia et al., 2008; Middlecamp & Gross, 2002). Although no research literature could be found, the range of strengths and challenges of the older adults with whom children interacted may be significant in children's developing attitudes to ageing. Children in this study related primarily to adults with some level of physical and/or cognitive impairment and some with high levels of needs, and it could be argued that IGL experiences should reflect a broader spectrum of older adulthood. Additionally, research is required to understand the processes and supports required, as well as the challenges of relationship development between young children and older adults. For example, while children in this study developed relationships with older adults who had impaired cognitive or language functions, the possibilities of neutral or negative impacts of such relationships on children requires further study (Lux et al., 2020).

The perception of IGL as a valuable response to contemporary social issues, including an ageing society, social and age segregation (Kaplan et al., 2020; Radford et al., 2016), could also represent a potential challenge. Children's participation in IGL experiences, where the benefits to older adults are prioritised at a policy level, or by educators, could be perceived as privileging one generation over another (Rumble, 2017) and could result in children being

manipulated for adult agendas (Shier, 2010). For example, an agenda driven by the benefits of IGL to older adults could give rise to attempts to make IGL attractive to children, although Shier (2010) argues that a bottom-up approach to children's participation would help to avoid this.

A significant challenge to the development of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in Irish ECE services, clearly evident in this study, relates to the key role of the educator. The significant competences and skills of the educators in this study may not be easily replicated as they reflected particular personal and professional values, interests, experience, and, it could be argued, courage on the part of the individuals concerned. This finding is particularly significant at a time of concern about relatively low levels of training and low morale in the Irish ECE sector (Early Childhood Ireland, 2020).

Timing may also have played a role in supporting educators to introduce IGL and in minimising possible concerns or challenges associated with introducing an innovative practice in ECE services. A positive media focus on young children's participation in an IGL project in a UK nursing home raised awareness of the benefits of IGL not only among educators but also among parents, older adults' service providers and the broader community (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020). Additionally, educators who introduced IGL at that time may have benefitted personally and professionally from being perceived as innovators within the ECE and broader community. In considering the challenge of embedding or scaling up IGL as a strategy in Irish ECE services, its absence from the Irish frameworks and the lack of pre- and/or in-service training in IGL could be key issues (McAlister et al., 2019). The lack of clear guidelines in the frameworks on the nature of community involvement could also be perceived as a challenge. Importantly, preservice training for educators is unlikely to be prioritised in the absence of a strong community focus or an emphasis on the role of IGL in young children's learning in the frameworks. Inservice training through the TOY pilot training programme had been undertaken by all

educators in the study, suggesting that interest in IGL may be more likely to come from educators already working in the ECE field, who were exposed to the concept of IGL and the possibility of IGL training. Moreover, based on the findings of this study, where all educators had relatively high levels of training and lengthy experience of working in ECE services, the question could be raised in relation to the possibility of educators with lower levels of training and experience being interested or confident in implementing IGL.

The increasing focus on professionalisation of the ECE workforce in Irish ECE services could pose a further challenge. The professionalisation of the ECE workforce in other countries has tended to place a stronger focus on outcomes and less emphasis on life skills and informal learning for children (Moss, 2014). Importantly, professionalisation may not recognise the many different knowledges required of educators, including the wisdom of educators attuned on a daily basis to the needs of children, parents and the wider society (Campbell-Barr, 2019). However, current work on the development of professional award criteria and guidelines for degree level training for the ECE profession in Ireland highlights the inseparable dimensions of knowledges, practices and values, and emphasise professional and personal values as the lens through which knowledge is interpreted (DES, 2019; Urban et al., 2017). Combined with a further development in the professionalisation of the ECE sector in Ireland - the introduction of a code of professional responsibilities and code of ethics (DCYA, 2020) - these could create an enabling climate for consideration of IGL as a pedagogical strategy.

Nonetheless, as regulation of the ECE sector increases internationally and in Ireland, the difficult to measure and assess skills and competences such as initiative, empathy, critical thinking and social skills, which focus on the holistic development of children and education as learning for life, may receive less attention (Adams et al., 2015). Importantly, as regulation and professionalisation increases, the discourse of love as a contentious and difficult to measure concept may receive less consideration (Page, 2018; Rouse & Hadley, 2018). The issue of love

and care as pedagogical concept raises a fundamental challenge to the development of IGL in ECE services. While educators, children and parents valued the caring and affectionate aspects of the IGL relationships, tensions exist around the legitimisation of these concepts, both in the theory and practice of ECE (Page, 2018). This tension draws attention to the image of the ECE service and what it should do, challenging society's views of what is valuable to learn and where (Moss, 2014). Addressing this question raises a significant challenge for the field of IGL: robust, empirical, interdisciplinary, longitudinal research evidence about all aspects of IGL is weak and, as a result, the role of IGL is limited in debates about all aspects of learning for individuals of all ages (Kuehne & Melville, 2014).

8.8 Re-imagining the ECE service as a place of encounter in the community

In introducing IGL as a pedagogical strategy, educators were addressing questions about childhood and learning, including who ECE services are for and what purpose do they serve, which are fundamentally political and ethical questions (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Urban, 2015). Espousing IGL as a valuable pedagogical strategy in their ECE services, aligned with Irish policy frameworks, educators acknowledged that not only can the rich resources of the community be harnessed to support children's learning and wellbeing but also that the ECE service could be reimagined as a place of encounter in the community. A strong message arising from the study was educators' vision of the ECE space, in contexts where IGL was implemented, as a place of encounter, an inclusive public space that was open and welcoming to children, parents and others. The ECE space as a place of encounter where individuals can meet and support each other reflects key ideas of the reconceptualist movement in ECE (Cannella, 2010; Moss, 2014). Drawing on this vision of the ECE service, associated ideas about children, learning and the role of the ECE service held by educators who espoused IGL will now be discussed.

8.8.1 Children feeling loved and happy as central aims of the ECE service

Perceptions of children and childhood in the present study were generated through many prisms: the child as citizen, a being and a becoming, and as an individual with rights and responsibilities (Uprichard, 2008). Importantly, children were viewed primarily as relational members of a community, rather than as consumers of a service (Dahlberg et al., 2013) and, combined, these views strongly impacted on the aims and goals that educators held for children in their services. The primary goal for educators in this study was for children to feel loved and happy and to experience a flourishing childhood, which was valued in its own right as well as for the role it played in children's long-term development (DCYA, 2014; Hayes, 2013; Kickbusch, 2012). Significantly, the primary aim ascribed to IGL experiences by educators was the role that the affective relationships played in contributing to the happiness and wellbeing of children (Bessell, 2017; Lux et al., 2020). Additionally, educators emphasised the role of the IGL relationships in broadening children's experiences, supporting their developing sense of identity and belonging in the world and in creating opportunities to participate and practise citizenship (Hanmore-Cawley & Scharf, 2018; Kenner et al., 2007), all of which contributed to children's flourishing (Hayes, 2013). Building on their belief that the most important role of ECE services was to support children's overall happiness and wellbeing, educators in the study deemed that the IGL experiences contributed significantly to this aim. While children feeling loved and happy is not strongly referenced in Irish frameworks, and love and happiness are considered contentious concepts in ECE discourse (Rouse & Hadley, 2018), IGL could contribute to legitimising what has been demonstrated in this study to be an important issue for educators in relation to effective ECE practice (Page, 2018). Based on the evidence of this study, it could be argued that the concept of IGL and, in particular, relationships with older adults and connections in the community could augment the aims and goals of Aistear and Síolta. Prioritising children's happiness and flourishing as the most important aim of educators in this study had significant implications for all elements of the organisation, delivery and potential role of the ECE service, as well as ideas about knowledge and learning which will now be discussed.

Knowledge as a tangle of spaghetti and learning as a relational, open-ended process Learning was perceived by educators in the study as an open-ended journey, full of new directions and uncertainty, with educators and adults playing key roles in listening and participating in children's meaning-making processes. Importantly, educators reflected their belief that children developed their ideas and concepts through their encounters with difference, resonating with Malaguzzi's metaphor of knowledge as "a tangle of spaghetti" with no beginning and no end (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 118). This perspective on children's learning, which highlights the centrality of the relationship and the encounter in learning, helps to explain the important value that educators placed on IGL experiences. Children's encounters with older adults were valued as rich learning experiences, reflecting ideas of a relational pedagogy with its focus on processes rather than educational goals, confirming educators' view of relationships as pedagogies (Degotardi et al., 2017; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009). This view of learning contests what has been a dominating discourse in ECE in the Western world, what Facer (2019) refers to as the defensive position of future-proofing children rather than future-building. Future-building searches for possibilities in the present, questioning what we might desire for an unknown future, arguing that education is a site for future visions. Importantly, future building identifies gaps and opportunities to move towards those future visions. Referring to the dominant discourse of future-proofing as the story of quality and high returns, it focuses on the assessment of pre-determined outcomes, with ECE positioned as a form of human capital investment framed in an economic paradigm (Moss, 2017; Penn, 2008; Urban, 2015). Critiqued by Moss (2015) and others (Cannella, 2010; Penn, 2008) in the reconceptualist movement of ECE, this reductionist view of education focuses on regulating childhoods, with an emphasis on producing subjects fitted to the needs of the market. Instead,

reconceptualists propose democracy as a fundamental value of education, experimentation as a fundamental principle of pedagogy and potentiality as a fundamental belief of children and adults (Moss, 2014). This alternative view, in what became known as the progressive movement in education with roots as far back as Comenius, is characterised by five recurring themes: criticism of traditional education; the nature of knowledge; human nature; democracy; and the development of the whole person (Darling & Norbeno, 2003; Moss, 2015). These themes were strongly evident and endorsed in this study, with educators extending traditional views of education and knowledge, focusing on human development principles, democracy and the development of the child as a whole person. In promoting IGL, educators reflected a belief in the unknowable potentialities of children (and older adults) and the importance of creating opportunities to enhance their capabilities, ideas central to the Reggio Emilia approach to ECE (Malaguzzi, 1998). Educators' perspectives on children and learning reflected a broad understanding and re-imagining of the roles and functions of the ECE service, while drawing on innovative approaches to fulfil curricular guidelines. A significant element in the reimagining of the ECE service was educators' commitment to human development principles and lifelong learning, where attention in the IGL experiences was given not only to the needs and rights of children but also to those of older adults (Haddad, 2006; Hatton-Yeo, 2015). This finding highlights the key role that educators' values and expertise play in planning the curriculum (Powell, 2010) as educators in this study enhanced opportunities and benefits for older adults as well as for children, in what they believed was a win-win situation (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018).

8.8.3 Not only children can benefit from ECE services

In highlighting their perspective that ECE services can embrace a broader focus than on young children's learning and development alone, educators reflected a view of effective ECE services as one of collaboration between ECE services, parents and communities, a perspective

strongly supported in the research evidence (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). The ECE service, drawing on the example of the IGL experiences, was envisioned by educators as a social space, relational, heterogeneous and constantly changing as children and older adults interacted and built intergenerational solidarity (Moss, 2014; Cartmel et al., 2018). In doing so, educators reinforced their view of ECE services as not only for the benefit of children. This perspective is underpinned by a view of children as active citizens contributing to, and benefitting from the community, ideas that were strongly evident in the study. Opening up the ECE and older adults' services to each other, exploiting social networks (Gallagher & Fitzpatrick, 2018) and facilitating cross-fertilisation of values and sub-cultures, highlighted the role that the ECE service can play as a democratic forum, for what could be considered micro-communities in diverse societies (Cohen & Korintus, 2016).

Interestingly, this perspective on the potential of ECE services poses a challenge to the very concept of IGL, by raising the question about the benefits of an approach that is multigenerational (Watts, 2017), rather than intergenerational, a core principle of IGL. It could be argued that an intergenerational focus "others" people by generation (Watts, 2017, p. 46), with generation being perceived as "a particular kind of social location" (Fattore & Mason, 2017, p. 276).

Adopting a multigenerational approach has important benefits and might more accurately reflect the reality of communities and the benefits of cross-community involvement, while enhancing social cohesion (Watts, 2017). The IGL practice reported in the study in reality reflected many elements of a multigenerational approach, highlighting the potential of ECE services to act as resources to parents, as well as benefitting children, educators, staff in older adults' services and communities (Malaguzzi, 1998). Parents reported a greater knowledge and sense of belonging in the community as a result of their children's participation or their own

participation in the IGL experiences. The impact of the IGL experiences on older adults, staff in services for older adults and the broader community is an area worthy of further study. Linking ECE services to the community through IGL, as was evidenced in this study, created a bridge between the private worlds that young children typically inhabit, which are separate, protected and containing spaces, with what could be considered socially constructed public spaces (Kernan, 2010). Significantly, this highlights the benefits of ICZ, which are about creating new spaces and transforming already existing ones to facilitate interactions among individuals of different generations (Sánchez et al., 2020). Connecting the concepts of IGL and ICZ broadens the concept of IGL from experiences between young children and older adults to one that considers how intergenerationally-enriched environments could enhance the lives and learning of all human beings (Sánchez et al., 2020). As spatial points for different generations to interact, ICZ go beyond a focus on IGL programmes to consider the extensive benefits of intergenerational sites that can be created in a range of community settings, including services for children, older adults and others (Kaplan et al., 2020). Childhood and ECE could then be reimagined as a community project, with many possible variations drawing on social, cultural and historical circumstances (Ang, 2014; Malaguzzi, 1998; Millei, 2012). Importantly, the community-based IGL experiences reported in the study created opportunities for individuals and communities not directly linked with the care and education of children to participate in and contribute to children's development and wellbeing (Kernan & van Oudenhoven, 2010), while highlighting the benefits of informal, non-formal and formal learning. Moreover, the IGL experiences, reflecting a social view of learning (Wenger, 1998), created innovative opportunities for building on the strengths and resources already existing in the community (Heydon, 2013), but which may not be acknowledged for the potentially important and sometimes unique roles that they could play in young children's lives (Malaguzzi, 1998; Nimmo, 2008). The ongoing debate on childcare and socialisation as a

private matter or a professional and a community task (Lamb et al., 1992; Malaguzzi, 1998) is an interesting and significant issue that is illuminated by findings from the present study. The contribution of the IGL experiences to the learning and wellbeing of children highlighted in this study points to the usefulness and strengths of reframing child socialisation on a continuum between private and public arenas (Bessell, 2017; Haddad, 2006; Nimmo, 2008).

8.8.4 The ECE service can contribute to social transformation

The IGL experiences in the study foregrounded the potential of ECE services to act as forces for change or continuity, reflecting Bruner's (1996) consideration of the school as a servant of society or a means for social reform. Critical perspectives on the role of ECE services proposed by the reconceptualist movement have also highlighted their role in responding to the social, cultural and economic contexts and aspirations of contemporary societies (Ang, 2014; Melhuish et al, 2017; Moss, 2014; OECD, 2017). Societal challenges, such as the ageing of Europe and the separation of families and generations due to migration and institutionalisation of care of young and old, were identified in the TOY Project (TOY, 2013). Educators in the study identified the transformative role IGL played at an individual level for children who spend extended time in age-segregated settings or who are separated from grandparents through changing family structures, distance or migration (Kernan & Cortellesi, 2020). At a social level, educators identified the transformative role that IGL played including developing social capital and solidarity between generations (Millei, 2012; OECD, 2006) and as a positive contribution to the lives of older adults (Hatton-Yeo, 2006). Importantly, the literature suggests that the benefits of IGL for individuals also impacts at family, school and community levels (Springate et al., 2008). An interesting example from this study of how ECE services can act as a force for change relates to parents' positive views of the IGL experiences, which resulted in a meeting of minds between educators and parents. Well-documented in the research literature (Einarsdottir & Jónsdóttir, 2019) are the tensions around the division of power,

knowledge and values between the two groups, which frequently centre on parents' desire for educators to focus more on pre-academic learning. Educators in this study had also experienced this tension, yet parents who participated in the study valued the learning offered by the IGL experiences. The resulting congruence between children's, parents' and educators' positive interest in IGL created an opportunity for democratic practice, as the interests of each of the stakeholders' interests were reflected in the pedagogy of the ECE services (Moss, 2014). The strong interest of children, educators and parents in IGL raises an interesting question about time and pace in children's lives, which has given rise to concerns about the hurried child (Elkind, 2007). Children's IGL experiences mainly occurred at a slow and unhurried pace, resonating with the "slow education movement" (Holt, 2002), which emphasises self-actualisation rather than achievement through deep reflection and savouring the moment rather than focusing on progressing children rapidly through a programme. This perspective on children's learning, reflecting key elements of IGL, presents an opportunity for reflection on all aspects of ECE provision.

Finally, an important issue, when considering the potential of the ECE service for social transformation, is the impact of the IGL experiences on the conceptualisation and delivery of services to older adults and, importantly, on the needs and rights of older adults to a flourishing life, an area worthy of further study.

8.9 Limitations of study

This exploratory study focused on gaining a broad understanding of a new and, as yet, unresearched area of practice in Irish ECE services, which carried with it a number of limitations. The educators who participated were a self-selected, highly motivated, highly trained, experienced group of educators, who had recently completed IGL training and had chosen to introduce IGL in their ECE services. Researching the experiences of IGL with these

participants resulted, intentionally, in the acquisition of rich data about the concept and practice of IGL. However, research with this particular sample was also likely to reflect a positive perspective on IGL, which represents an important limitation of the study. A sample of educators and ECE services, including educators who had no training in IGL, had considered introducing IGL or had implemented and later discontinued IGL, would present a more comprehensive understanding of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in Irish ECE services. However, due to the relatively recent introduction of the concept and practice of IGL in Irish ECE services, such a sample was not available to the researcher. Significantly, the level of training, experience and expertise of educators was identified as a key factor in the successful implementation of IGL in this study, yet it is acknowledged that the Irish ECE sector is characterised by low levels of training among educators, high staff turnover and no IGL training. Importantly, this raises the question about the possibility or likelihood of educators with low levels of training and experience implementing IGL. Additionally, this study raises the question if age could be a factor in educators' interest in IGL, as the educators in the study were mainly aged between 41 and 50 years and some had personal experience of older adults' services, which may have contributed to their interest in IGL. Moreover, the study presents a snapshot of IGL in a short timeframe so does not reflect how the IGL experiences may change, positively or negatively, for educators and children over time. For example, the novelty factor of IGL as a new practice may have heightened the positive nature of the experiences for educators, children and parents. Additionally, the study could not address sustainability issues that may arise over time, for example, in relation to the continuation of the IGL experiences if management or staff changes occurred in the ECE or older adults' services. While the study provides a broad overview of IGL as experienced by educators and children, it did not allow for a more detailed exploration of key issues, including, significantly, all aspects of the interactions, relationships and levels of engagement between children and adults. Investigation

of how individual children and older adults experienced and viewed IGL would greatly enrich understandings of the relational nature of IGL. Furthermore, while children in this study interacted with older adults in a variety of settings who had a range of cognitive and physical strengths and challenges, detailed study on how these variables impact on children's experience of IGL and their interactions with older adults would be valuable. Additionally, attention to the spaces and places in which IGL is undertaken, whether in public spaces, in ECE or in older adults' services, could critically inform the development of IGL practice. Further study on the relative strengths of the various activities undertaken during the IGL experiences would contribute to understandings and development of IGL as a pedagogical strategy. The impact of frequency and regularity of IGL visits, the views of children on ageing over time and the need for support for staff implementing IGL are further issues requiring investigation. Importantly, further research is required on how IGL could be mapped, in detail, onto requirements of the national frameworks. An important limitation of the study is the fact that the research did not include a focus on children and educators who had participated in IGL experiences, but for whom it was not a positive experience.

Finally, an important limitation of the study was that it did not focus on the views and experiences of individuals in older adults' services, both older adults and staff, an area of crucial importance.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Conclusions

Responding to the growing interest in IGL in ECE internationally (Lux et al., 2020; McAlister et al., 2019) and in Ireland, and acknowledging the lack of research on IGL, this study set out to explore the concept, role and potential of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in Irish ECE services. The findings suggest that IGL as a pedagogical strategy, has the potential to powerfully impact on children's learning, development and wellbeing in Irish ECE services in the following ways:

IGL aligns closely with theories and principles underpinning Irish ECE policy and practice and offers an innovative strategy in the implementation of Aistear, Síolta and the Regulations

Principles and practices of IGL, as evidenced in the study findings, are closely aligned with key principles of Aistear, Síolta and the Regulations and, significantly, demonstrate the potential of IGL to enrich and extend the aims and objectives of the frameworks. This was particularly true in relation to the effective role that IGL played in supporting the foundational elements necessary for children to become powerful learners: nurturing relationships; socio-emotional competence; and executive functions. The central role of relationships in children's experiences of IGL in the study mirrored contemporary understandings of children's learning, which places relationships at the heart of learning. Moreover, IGL offers a strong model for operationalising and extending the collaborative, real life, social and community elements of socio-cultural theories of learning, which were highly valued by participants in this study and which underpin the Irish frameworks. The IGL experiences drew particular attention to the richness of the community as a resource for children's holistic learning and for children to experience, at first-hand, learning as a collaborative, lifelong and lifewide endeavour.

Crucially, the study findings highlighted that ECE services are well positioned to offer opportunities for IGL that reflect the broad aims of Aistear and Síolta, with their focus on learning *how* to learn, thanks to the flexibility of the guidelines and the relatively small group sizes in ECE services. Such opportunities may not be as readily available in primary schools, where the curriculum is more heavily loaded and tightly scheduled, with greater emphasis on outcomes, and where group sizes are larger.

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

The IGL opportunities in this study were developed in response to educators' strong commitment to viewing children as active, contributing citizens embedded in communities. Through IGL, children in the study powerfully enacted their citizenship in real life contexts, operationalising effectively contemporary understandings of participation as relational, interdependent and rooted in everyday interactions in ordinary life. Importantly, in this study, IGL foregrounded the collectivist nature of participation that includes the concept of social obligation and the potential of children's participation to impact positively on the wider community through their contribution. Moreover, children's enhanced visibility through their participation as embedded members of the community created opportunities for social perceptions of young children to be challenged. Specifically, children could be seen not only as individuals in need of care and protection but as active, contributing citizens to their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of older adults in the community. In facilitating children as both beneficiaries and contributors to the social capital of communities, IGL has considerable potential to reframe children as key partners in strengthening and transforming communities.

IGL is a pedagogical strategy enjoyed by children

The importance to children of the caring, affectionate relationships that they enjoyed with the older adults, through a social grandparent type of relationship, highlighted the contribution of IGL to children's happiness and flourishing. Children's enjoyment of leaving the ECE service, going on a social outing, experiencing the new environments and activities associated with IGL, all confirmed the effectiveness of IGL as an enjoyable pedagogical strategy. Importantly, IGL was not only enjoyed by children but was enjoyed by educators, and valued by parents and the older adult service providers, which could contribute to its sustainability as a pedagogical strategy.

IGL offers particular benefits to some children

The potential of IGL to respond to the diverse needs of children in this study points to its use not only as a mainstream strategy that could be offered to all children in ECE services who wish to participate, but one that is valuable in meeting the particular needs of some children. These included children who particularly enjoyed spending time with older adults, children whom educators believed would benefit from supportive, individualised attention, children living with adversity and children who do not have contact with their grandparents.

IGL requires educators attuned to the holistic development of children, skilled in negotiating with parents and other service providers and willing to adopt innovative pedagogical strategies

As an atypical strategy in Irish ECE services, IGL is likely to be implemented only by educators with particular attitudes and values about children and learning and who are courageous, visionary and skilled in their approach to ECE. This raises the issue that, unless IGL is reflected in national policy and practice guidelines, it is unlikely to be mainstreamed in Irish ECE

services. It also points to the issue that training in IGL at pre-service and/or in-service level may offer an impetus to the implementation of IGL. Moreover, educators need to be willing and competent to access potential IGL partners in the community, negotiate with parents, adopt a multidisciplinary approach to working with staff from other agencies and, importantly, be willing to work with a wide age group in community contexts.

IGL foregrounds the potential of ECE services not only to support children and families but to act as a force for positive change in society

The potential of IGL to reconceptualise the role of ECE services as one that can empower families and communities as well as children fulfils a key role of education, which is to act as a force for improvement in society. For example, evidence from this study demonstrated that IGL as a model in ECE and older adults' care contexts not only benefitted children and parents but strengthened relationships within the community and contributed to the wellbeing of older adults and other members of the community. Additionally, IGL created opportunities for the community to contribute to the development and wellbeing of children. Through this reciprocal process, IGL created opportunities to address societal challenges, including age segregation and isolation. In opening up the spaces, physically and metaphorically, where children and older adults spend much time, the extensive opportunities of ICZ were accessed. Moreover, doing so facilitated the contribution of ECE services to the realisation of the UN Sustainable Goals, including quality education and sustainable communities and cities (UN, 2015).

IGL raises philosophical questions about the education of young children

Considering IGL as a pedagogical strategy raises important philosophical questions in imagining learning priorities for young children now and into the future, which may involve extending or challenging contemporary ideas of ECE practice. A humanistic rather than

instrumental view of education reflected in the life skills and potentialities evident in children's interactions with the older adults, demonstrated educators' commitment to education as future-building rather than future-proofing. This perspective understands education in the broadest sense as fostering children's development and wellbeing and their ability to live a good life, with the goal that both the individual and society will flourish, and, importantly, views education as life and not merely preparation for an unknown kind of future living.

9.2 Recommendations

- A practice guide to implementing and evaluating IGL for the Irish ECE sector, drawing on the study findings, aligning it with quality dimensions of IGL programmes and the requirements and guidelines of Irish ECE legal and policy frameworks, should be developed. Educators currently implementing IGL should be invited to contribute to and to pilot the guide.
- The TOY online training programme should continue to be promoted as an in-service training opportunity, while the value of including IGL as a module in pre-service ECE training in Irish educational and training institutions should be further explored.
- Interdisciplinary, empirical, longitudinal research on all aspects of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECE services is required to develop a solid theoretical basis and to identify key processes for successful practice.
- A strong and ongoing focus on seeking children's unique perspectives of their IGL experiences should be prioritised in IGL research, in order to better understand the individual meaning that IGL has for children, its impact on their lives and learning, and to develop understanding of IGL as a pedagogical strategy. Frameworks supporting the implementation of IGL practice as a pedagogical strategy in ECE should emphasise the

importance of accessing children's perspectives on their IGL experiences on an ongoing basis. Educators, as competent and experienced researchers through their daily practice with children, are ideally placed to research children's perspectives.

- Research on the perspectives of older adults and staff working in older adults' services is crucial if IGL is to be considered as a pedagogical strategy that enhances the lives and learning of both young children and older adults, and to avoid a mismatch between the aims of ECE services and older adults' services in relation to IGL.
- The importance of children being exposed to older adults across a broad range of ages, strengths and challenges in a variety of contexts from active retirement groups to residential care should be prioritised in IGL practice, in order to promote increased understanding of ageing as a process, as well as offering opportunities for a wide range of interactions and relationships.
- The significant role of IGL as a model for operationalising the concept of community as an opportunity and a resource for enhancing the lives and learning of young children in ECE services would benefit from further exploration. While the role of the community is central to socio-cultural theories of learning and is strongly reflected in the Irish frameworks, the practical application of the concept is underdeveloped.
- The concept of professionalism in the ECE sector should be revisited to better acknowledge the complex range of knowledges, skills, values and wisdom that educators bring to their work, and to highlight the rich potential of these knowledges to enhance and extend the role of ECE services in relation to young children, families and communities.
- The potential of a multigenerational approach and the strengths of ICZ as a conceptual, programming and design tool should be considered in the development of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECE services.

- The strengths of IGL as a pedagogical strategy in ECE services, combined with the general principles and practices underpinning ECE, could inform and transform practices of care for older adults. Moreover, in considering the synergies between the two sectors, IGL acknowledges young children and older adults as lifelong learners with a right to appropriate and enjoyable learning experiences.
- Finally, the concept of IGL should be promoted more widely within the education and
 community sectors and in organisations supporting the growing population of older adults
 in Ireland as an opportunity that is enjoyable and benefits children, older adults and
 communities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A Information sheet for educators on gathering children's views of their IGL experiences

Study on intergenerational learning between young children and older people: Information sheet for educators on gathering children's views of their IGL experiences.

Dear

Thank you for your very valuable contributions to the study so far through sharing your experiences of IGL. Another important aim of the study is to get the perspectives of the children in relation to their experiences of IGL and the meaning it has for them.

Having carefully considered possible options, I would respectfully like to ask you to act as a co-researcher to gather children's views which would involve you documenting children's views and experiences of their intergenerational experiences over time.

I know how busy you are and that you might not always have time to document the children's comments etc. but all contributions will add to the study.

In taking on this role, I would ask you to help children "piece together" their views with each other and with you as the co-researcher. To do this I would ask you to seek the children's views in any way that suits the child - verbally, through painting/drawing, looking at photos, role play, etc. It would also be very useful if you/your staff would record your own reflections on the children's experiences (see tip sheet attached).

Parent's feedback reporting on their children's experiences would also be very valuable.

Asking you to act as a co-researcher has many benefits for the child and the study including that you already have a trusting relationship with the children; access to the experiences/emotions of the children before, during and after the IGL experience and in natural contexts; better understandings of the meanings children wish to communicate and different

ways of encouraging individual children's voices; ways of supporting children to form and

express their views by reference to incidents/activities/names of older adults, etc., as well as

methods of eliciting feedback from parents. This approach where you gather children's views

may also have benefits for the children, the staff and the parents given their active participation

in the study.

If you agree to take on this role, I would ask you to inform children and parents about the study

and seek their consent.

All the information/material collected by you will remain the property of your early education

service. It will be kept in strictest confidence and no names of staff, parents, children or the

service will be used in reports. I will make a copy of the documents gathered and these copies,

on completion of the study, will be disposed of in accordance with TU Dublin (formerly DIT)

regulations.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (email address provided).

Thank you,

Anne

Tip sheet for educators: Gathering children's and parents' views about their IGL experiences

What you might gather

- Notes of individual and group conversations before/after/when appropriate to explore children's experiences of IGL (might use photos/drawings or other prompts)
- Drawings or artwork (explanatory notes would be very valuable where possible)
- Photos to highlight activities/interactions etc. (these photos will not be used in the research report)
- Parents' feedback of their children's experiences/comments (please record in back pages of notebook)
- Staff observations of the visits/contact between children and older people, e.g., activities; enjoyment; engagement/responsiveness; type of interactions one-to-one/group? (please record in back pages of notebook)
- Any material, such as learning stories, diaries, scrapbooks, reflective journals, which you have already made and continue to make documenting your IGL experiences.

Ways for educators to gather children's view and experiences

• Offer opportunities for individual/group conversations e.g., circle time, snack time. Staff might start a conversation by remembering something and sharing it with the children. Staff could also ask open-ended questions such as "do you remember when we visited/met the older people in the nursing home/daycentre/grandparent's day; can you remember what you did; what was your favourite part of the visit/day; was there anything you did not like about it; what else you would like to do there and anything else you would like to say?" (if possible one staff to facilitate discussion and one to record in a group situation)

- Invite children to paint/draw their experiences (the power of artwork is often in the words/notes that accompany the drawings/paintings/playdough)
- Invite children to look at photos of their IGL experiences to facilitate discussion
- Invite children to make a book of their IGL experiences (choosing their favourite photos, drawings, etc., could highlight their priorities/interests)
- "Interview" (have a chat with!) children about their IGL experiences

General tips for gathering children's views

- Try to gather children's views shortly after the IGL activity and to revisit this information so you are building on what children actually remember
- Avoid leading questions instead use terms such as "do you remember when...'tell me about...'
- Use prompts (e.g., photos, drawings, your memories) to help children recall
- Do not put pressure on children to respond/contribute
- Be open to unexpected comments/responses (please record both positive and negative comments)
- Include child's name and age (no child will be identified in the research report).

Ways to seek feedback from parents

- Ask parents at drop-off/collection time (soon after an IGL experience) about their child's experience
- Offer a sheet (provided by researcher) which parents could use at home to discuss/record child's views

 Beside your noticeboard/display of photos of IGL experience leave post-it notes for parents to write comments (could use other ideas such as luggage labels to be hung on a branch...)

APPENDIX B Topics addressed in Interview One with educators

Information about you and your ECE service

Views of the child, rights and responsibilities

Views on learning and the young child

How children learn and ideas about learning environments

Relationships with families in your ECE service

Relationships in and associated with your ECE service

Curriculum in your ECE service

Learning environments outside of your ECE service

The role of the community, if any, in young children's learning

Views on the role and function of ECE services

Vision for your ECE service

APPENDIX C Topics addressed in Interview Two with educators

Description of the IGL work being undertaken in ECE service

Development of interest in IGL

The nature of the relationships in IGL experiences

The role/function of IGL relationships for young children

The role of the children in the IGL experiences

The role of parents in the IGL experiences

Benefits of IGL

Challenges of IGL as an approach

IGL as a pedagogical approach

APPENDIX D Educator report of an IGL experience

On our last visit to Nwow Home. The asked would we like to make valentine's Day cards for the residents. The children were very busy this week making cards and pictures for each of the resident. When we told the children, we were going to the nursing home, some got excited and asked if we would see the birds. We brought some blankets that William had we brought us upstairs and we see the first fish tank, we had our usual biscuits and we see the first fish tank, we had our usual biscuits and we made our way downstairs. Yill said Hello and was happy to

Y was chatting to X about what Santa had brought. We began to nive out the Y was chatting to X about what Santa had brought. We began to nive out the cards Y said. "I hope you have one for me" X, had a card for Y but he was was in his room. T brought X, to Y he was very happy to see the children and delighted with the card. He began to sing a Valentines Song and W said "Ah we enjoyed your singing the last time too" Y said "Ah yeah" and he began to sing 'Over the Rainbow. X, X and X stood by his bed as he gave a beautiful rendition of the song finishing with "And Happy Valentines".



The children said "Thank You" to Y and X , shook his hand and we said "Goodbye".

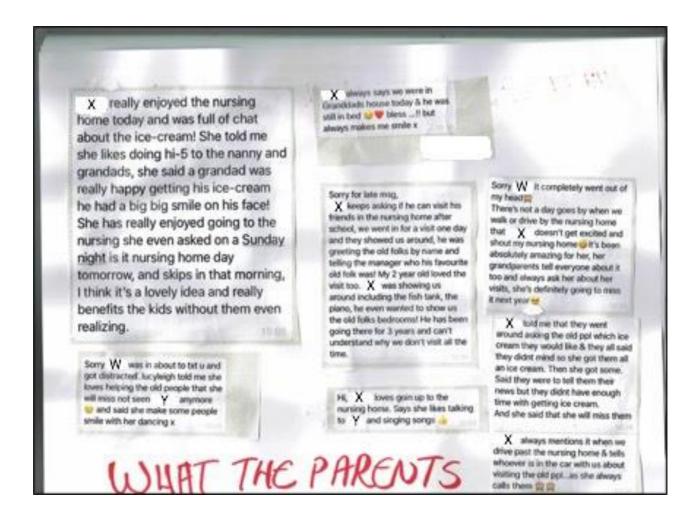
We went back to the sitting room and gave out the rest of the cards.

To reminded us that it was Y's 96th Birthday so we sang 'Happy Birthday' for her; she had a big smile and said, "The Children were lovely". Then it was time to go, the residents told us it was time for them to go to Mass. We said "Goodbye" and that we would organise another visit soon.



APPENDIX E Text messages from parents

Sample 1

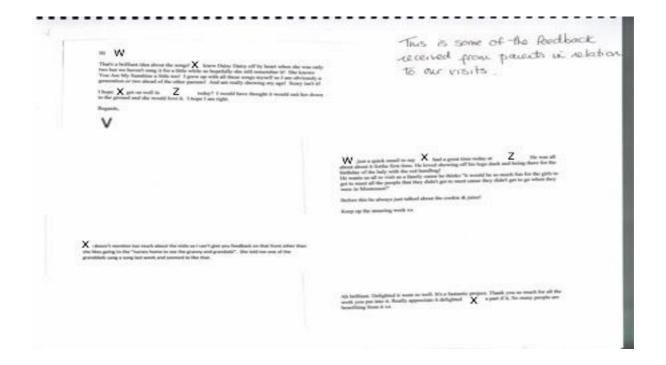


Text of Sample 1: Parents' Comments

- X really enjoyed the nursing home today and was full of chat about the ice-cream! She told me she likes doing hi-5 to the nanny and grandads, she said a grandad was really happy getting his ice-cream he had a big big smile on his face! She has enjoyed going to the nursing [home] and she even asked on a Sunday night is it nursing home day tomorrow, and skips in that morning, I think it's a lovely idea and really benefits the kids without them even realizing.
- Sorry W was [in] about to txt u and got distracted..X told me she loves helping the old
 people that she will miss not seen Y anymore and said she make some people smile
 with her dancing x

- X always says we were in Grandads house today & he was still in bed bless...!! but always makes me smile x
- Sorry for late msg, X keeps asking if he can visit his friends in the nursing home after school, we went in for a visit one day and they showed us around, he was greeting old folks by name and telling the manager who his favourite old folk was! My 2 year old loved the visit too. X was showing us around including the fish tank, the piano, he even wanted to show us the old folks bedrooms! He has been going there for 3 years and can't understand why we don't visit all the time
- Hi, X loves goin up to the nursing home. She says she likes talking to Y and singing songs
- Sorry W it completely went out of my head. There's not a day goes by when we walk or drive by the nursing home that X doesn't get excited and shout my nursing home. Its been absolutely amazing for her, her grandparents tell everyone about it too and always ask her about her visits, she's definitely going to miss it next year
- X told me they went around asking the old ppl [people] which ice cream they would like & they all said they didn't mind so she got them all an ice cream. Then she got some. Said they were to tell them their news but they didn't have enough time with getting ice cream. And she said that she will miss them.
- X always mentions it when we drive past the nursing home & tells whoever is in the car with us about visiting the old ppl...as she always calls them.

Text messages from parents Sample 2



Text of Sample 2: Parents' Comments

• Hi W, That's a brilliant idea about the songs [ECE service had sent recording of songs children were singing in older adults' service to parents]! X knew Daisy Daisy off by heart when she was only two but we haven't sung it for a while so hopefully she still remember it! She knows You Are My Sunshine a little too! I grew up with all these songs myself so I am obviously a generation or two ahead of the other parents! And am really showing my age! Scary isn't it! I hope X got on well in Z? I would have thought it would suit her down to the ground and she would love it. I hope I am right. Regards,

V

- X doesn't mention too much about the visits so I can't give you feedback on that front other than she likes going to the "nurses home to see the granny and grandads". She told me one of the grandads sang a song last week and seemed to like that.
- W, just a quick email to say X had a great time today at Z. He was all about it for the first time. He loved showing off his Lego duck and being there for the birthday of the lady with the red handbag! He wants us all to visit as a family cause he thinks "it would

be so much fun for the girls [his sisters] to get to meet all the people that they didn't get to meet cause they didn't get to go when they were in Montessori"

Before this he always just talked about the cookie & juice!

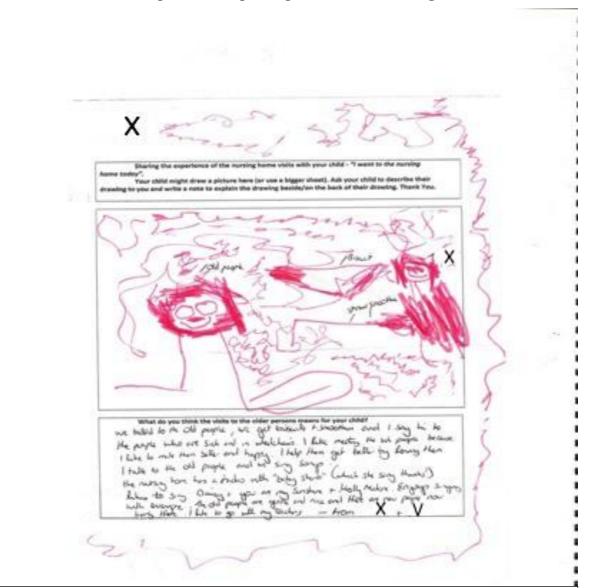
Keep up the amazing work xx

• Ah brilliant. Delighted it went so well. It's a fantastic project. Thank you so much for all the work you put into it. Really appreciate it delighted X is a part of it. So many people are benefitting from it xx

APPENDIX F Documenting sheet for parents about their children's IGL experiences

Sharing the experience of the intergenerational visits with your child - "I went to the
nursing home today".
Your child might draw a picture here (or use a bigger sheet). Ask your child if they
could describe their drawing to you and you write a note of this beside or on the back
of their drawing.
What do you think the visits to the older persons means for your child?

APPENDIX G Sample of a completed parent's documenting sheet



What do you think the visits to the older persons mean for your child?

"We talked to the old people, we got biscuits and smoothies and I say 'hi' to the people who are sick and in wheelchairs. I like meeting the sick people because I like to make them better and happy. I help them get better by loving them. I talk to the old people and we sing songs. The nursing home has a video with 'Baby Shark' (which she sang, thanks!). Likes to sing "Daisy' and 'You are my sunshine' and 'Molly Malone'. Enjoys singing with everyone. The old people are gentle and nice and there are new people now living there. I like to go with my teachers."

From Child X and Parent Y

APPENDIX H Creating initial codes for educator interviews (manual coding)

The role of the social environment in children's learning

Educator 1 The social environment is very important for children's learning

Everybody in the community knows the children from seeing them out and about

Children identified persons in the community they wished to be kind to during

Kindness Elves month

Children know people in the community

Children are little citizens, and we have to treat them like that

Educator 2 The social environment is important for children

The children meet a variety of people when out in the village going to the library or nursing home

The adults in the village have conversations with the children

The people the children meet are older people going to Mass and local men doing the Tidy Towns

The ECE service is based in a small village so the social side is important

Educator 3 The social environment is very important

Children learn through other people and from being around people

It is very important for the child to feel part of the social environment, to feel like they belong

Educator 4

Educator 5 The social environment is very important for children's learning

Children understand that everything that happens in the family, even something bad, can nearly be sorted out within the ECE service

There are many anti-social activities which children may see in their community There are many children who do not see anti-social activities and the ECE service is also important for them

The ECE service visits the library regularly - The active citizens group reads stories in the library and the ECE service sometimes attends

The ECE service visits the opera in the park, which involves older people coming to sing in the park

The ECE service visits the local festival

The ECE service encourages the parents to bring their children to the local festival

The ECE service visits the nursing home (preschool children and afterschool children)

APPENDIX I Coding on and searching for themes using NVivo (extract)

Nodes\\Phase 3 - Searching for Themes (Developing Categories)

Name	References
AGENCY	28
CHILDREN AND LEARNING	91
Change and learning	5
Children active in their learning	12
Conflicting ideas re children's learning	5
Description of Curriculum	7
Digital media	9
How children learn	11
Learning and young children	4
Learning through emotions	1
Most important things for children to learn	6
Personal views reflected in curriculum	7
Qualities that help children learn	5
Role of family in children's learning	7
What is important to learn	5
What is not important for children to learn	2
Who decides re children's learning	5
CHILDREN AS CONTRIBUTORS	11
Benefits to children of contributing to lives of others	6
Children's special expertise	0

Name	References
Role of ECE service in creating opportunities for contribution	2
Views on ECE service creating opportunities to contribute	3
CHILDREN'S POSITION IN SOCIETY	8
Children's position in Irish society	6
Children's role in society	2
COMMUNITY AS A LOCUS AND RESOURCE FOR LEARNING	162
Adult view of child role in community	5
Benefits to child of community involvement	2
Benefits to ECE service of community involvement	4
Benefits to family of community involvement	4
Children's interest in playing role in community	5
Children's understanding of "community" concept	5
Children's view on their community role	4
Community Spirit	3
ECE enhancing family links with community	6
ECE service as a place of encounter for children and community	7
ECE service as a place of encounter for children and families	6
ECE service as part of community	4

APPENDIX J Sample of initial coding of children's data

Physical features of the interior environment of older adults' services noted in children's conversations and drawings

Mirror, handle on door, toilet; a bed; books; cushions for bedtime; this is the nursing home; the chair; the table; the girls' toilet in the nursing home; the room we go into; the wallpaper in the nursing home; older adult, table and child; it looks like a palace, it's so pretty; the grannies' house; the day room in the nursing home with windows; our cress seeds; 2 older adults; the sun.

Observations of older adults noted in children's conversations and drawings

M's biscuits; B, she was happy when we made love hearts; picture of M - a lady; M, A, J, R and D; drawing of my older friend; one of the old people in a wheelchair; J, she lives in the nursing home; M; D; Granny C; five other grannies; me and my favourite granny; all the people; me and M as a princess; J.

Children's observations of older adults' behaviours noted in children's conversations and drawings

F sitting in a chair singing "Jingle Bells'; old people help; older people sit in chairs and talk; M who sings "Molly Malone'; older adult drinking the yellow drink the old people drink; our granny clapping; granny waving at us going back to crèche; M and J were asleep; she likes to knit.

Children sharing news with older adults noted in children's conversations and drawings

I told them I got money from the Tooth Fairy; I told them about being in hospital with concussion; I told K my mam is having a baby and I hope it's a girl; I told A and K and I that Santa is bringing me a baby.

APPENDIX K Information sheet about the study for educators

Title of Study

'Intergenerational practice – an investigation into the concept, role and potential of intergenerational learning (IGL) in Irish early childhood education (ECE) services leading to the development of IGL policy and practice guidelines for Irish ECE services'.

About the study

I am undertaking a Ph.D. study under the supervision of Dr. Ann Marie Halpenny, School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences in DIT on the topic of intergenerational learning between young children and older people. The study has been informed by the work of the Together Old and Young (TOY) project consortium of which I am a member http://www.toyproject.net The study is based on the idea that by bringing people from different generations together for enjoyable activities, they learn from each other and develop mutual understanding. In this way, intergenerational learning promotes lifelong learning and helps to build inclusive, age-friendly communities. The ultimate aim of the Ph.D. study is to develop IGL policy and practice guidelines for Irish ECE services. Through the research the following questions will be addressed:

What does the research literature tell us about IGL between young children and older people?

What types and levels of IGL practice are being undertaken in Irish ECE services?

What knowledge, skills and attitudes are required for educators to undertake IGL work?

What are the experiences and perspectives of children and educators of IGL work?

What factors should be addressed in developing IGL policy and practice guidelines for Irish ECE services?

Your role in the study

If you agree to participate in the Ph.D. study, I would ask you to commit to the following:

Complete the TOY online training course.

Implement one or more IGL initiatives following the online course.

Agree to be interviewed about your experiences before and after undertaking the IGL

initiatives.

Facilitate the researcher to complete interviews/focus groups with the children in your service

who have participated in IGL activities. Permission will be sought from parents and children

to participate in the study.

Participate in a focus group to consider ideas on how guidelines for IGL practice in Irish ECE

services might be developed.

If you are willing to participate in this study or to find out more, please contact me at (email

address and phone number provided).

Thank you,

Anne Fitzpatrick

APPENDIX L Consent form for educators

Research Topic:	
Researcher's Name:	
Researcher's Organisation:	
Researcher's Contact Details:	
To be completed by the Educator	
Have you been fully informed about this study/read information sheet?	Yes □ No □
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study?	Yes □ No □
Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily?	Yes □ No □
Do you know that you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason?	Yes □ No □
Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published?	Yes □ No □
Do you agree to have your interview audio-recorded?	Yes □ No □
Have you been informed that the researcher will keep this consent form in confidence?	Yes □ No □
Have you been offered the opportunity to review and approve words/meanings from your interview/focus groups?	transcripts of your Yes □ No □
Signed:	
Name in Block letters:	
Date:	
Signature of Researcher:	
Date:	

APPENDIX M Information and consent sheet for parents and guardians



Information and consent sheet for parents and guardians

Dear Parent or Guardian,

As you know, your child's early education service has been engaged in intergenerational (IGL) activities for some time now. I would like to find out more about the children's views of these visits for a Ph.D. study I am undertaking in the Technological University Dublin (formerly Dublin Institute of Technology).

I have spoken to the staff in this service about the IGL activities and now I would also like to get the views of the children about their experiences. My plan is for the staff to keep notes on what the children say (and draw or paint) about their visits to the older people's services and for staff to share these notes and drawings with me. Examples of the questions I would like staff to ask the children are:

What was it like when you went to visit the older people? What did you do when you were here? What did you like about the visit? Were there things you did not like?

I would also like to gather feedback about your child's views of the IGL experiences. Staff in the service have been asked if they could help gather your views so all feedback, positive or negative, would be welcome. I know how busy you are, but any feedback would be welcome. Please be assured that any information your child gives will be kept in strictest confidence and no names of individual children or services will be used in the reports that will be publicly available.

If you were willing to give permission for your child to be invited to give their views on IGL, the staff would then explain the study and invite your child to take part. Your child will not

participate unless he/she wishes to do so, even if you have consented. Further	rmore, if	you, or
your child, wish to withdraw from the study at any time you may do so without	ut explan	ation.
If you have any questions or would like to discuss further please contact	t me at	or my
supervisor, Dr. Ann Marie Halpenny at (email address provided).		
If you are happy to give consent for your child to be invited to take part, please	sign the	consent
form below		
Thank you,		
Kind regards,		
Anne Fitzpatrick		
To be completed by the Parent/Guardian		
Have you been fully informed about this study/read this information sheet?	Yes □	No □
Do you consent to your child being invited to take part?	Yes □	No □

Signed (Parent/Guardian):

Child's name in Block capitals:

Date:

Parent/Guardian's name in Block capitals:

APPENDIX N

Information and assent sheet for children



Information and assent sheet for children

Anne is writing a book about what it is like when we visit the older people.

Anne would like to hear about the times you went to visit the older people.

She wants to learn more about what you do when you visit the older people.

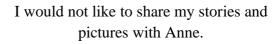
She would like me to chat about it and ask you some questions about what you did and also what you liked. She would also like to see your pictures.

If you do not want me to tell Anne now, or at other times, about your visits and show her your pictures, that is not a problem. I will check with you often to make sure you are still happy about this.

Consent (please tick beside appropriate image)

My name is: Date:

I would like to share my stories and pictures with Anne







APPENDIX O Overview of IGL experiences in the ECE services

Service A (**Ciara**): A sessional preschool (serving 40-59 children aged 2.5-5 years) based in a community centre in a commuter town which is linked with a local private nursing home:

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

Service B (Mary): A sessional pre-school (serving 60-79 children aged 2.5-5 years) in a city suburb which is linked with a local private nursing home:

... normally what happens is I email the parents the night before and say which group is doing down ... so they have normally told the kids because they come in excited ... "oh we're going to the nursing home today." ... and then we'd get ready ... walk down there ... they go straight into the big sitting room and they take off their coats ... throw them on the chairs ... and then they march down the corridor to what they call the green room ... so they know the whole routine now of going down ... they are delighted going down ... when they first go down ... sometimes the nursing home have colouring templates ready for them and the kids, because we don't do them [colouring templates] here [in the ECE service] ... so the kids are so excited to see Peppa Pig [on colouring pages] ... so we let them do that for a few minutes because they're

dotted around near the older people ... because it is a great icebreaker initially ... and then we might give them some of our stuff and say ... "do you want to show your friend this?" or, by that stage the conversation is starting with the groups anyway ... (Mary).

Service C (**Deirdre**): A sessional preschool (serving 20-39 children aged 3-5 years) in a designated disadvantaged primary school in a large rural town which is linked with a local men's shed:

... our first one [IGL experience] was with the men's shed and it really was linking in and the lovely thing is that it's not far away from the school but yet it's nearly hidden in one sense ... I was quite surprised that a number of our parents didn't know about it ... but we linked in with the [men's shed] because they're on our doorstep, it's kind of a nice ... [to give them] a bit of awareness from our setting ... then linking in with them and letting them show us what they do ... and what we discussed in our meetings together ... the idea was that we would visit them and then we would commission them to actually make something for our outdoor play area ... window boxes so the follow-on idea is that they would come down in Spring and reciprocate that visit ... and they'd come up to us, a few of them ... and that again we'll take all the children ... and parents are welcome to come in be a part of that like they did going down to the visit and that they'd [all] do some Spring planting ... (Deirdre).

Service D (**Ruth**): A full daycare service (serving 120 children aged 0-10 years) in a city suburb designated as disadvantaged which is linked with a day service for older adults:

... so when we started going up the older people had just finished dinner ... and then the older people had a choice ... to come in to us ... or if they didn't want to come in, they'd stay in their

own area ... most of them ... there was maybe about 20 [older] people so probably about 18 came in ... and we found out then some of the other ones who didn't come in may have had hearing aids and it was a little bit noisy for them when we were all there ... so a typical day ... they'd come in and meet us, then we'd play different games but at the end of each session we'd always ask what will we do next week and we'd come to some sort of consensus on what we do on the next week ... so the main ones [activities] are ... we play bingo, we did cooking, we did colouring, that really didn't go down very well the colouring one ... we did story time, we did just general sitting and chatting ... like just chatting about the old days ... we had a karaoke one of the days, we had a sports day another day ... we used the hall beside us to do that so it was a proper sports day in there ... we visited Santa in the local supermarket ... we did carol singing in the supermarket as well ... (Ruth).

Service E (Eileen): A full daycare centre (serving 80-99 children aged 0-5 years) in a city area designated as disadvantaged linked with a local private nursing home and a community-supported independent living centre for older adults:

... with the nursing home, we let the children know first thing in the morning ... that we're going over for a visit ... we let them know what we're going to do when we get there ... the children have their breakfast ... we have a bit of a chat around it ... we get on our high-vis jackets, bundle into the bus [large school buggy] and off we go ... we meet M, the activities coordinator at the reception and she brings us down to what they call the sitting room ... it's like your large TV room ... the residents might be having their snack, having a cup of tea and some biscuits and the children get to have some juice and biscuits, which is always the highlight ... the children are always asking ... "are we going to get those pink biscuits?'... usually we'll have an activity planned ... we might have some colouring or some play dough or sing some

songs ... we spend between half an hour and 45 minutes there in the centre, then we'd head back ... (Eileen).

LIST OF RELATED PUBLICATIONS

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