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To cite this article: Margarita Campillo , Mariano Sánchez & Pilar Díaz (2020): Present and future of school intergenerational programmes: A study from Spain, Educational Research, DOI: [10.1080/00131881.2020.1819847](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2020.1819847)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2020.1819847>



Published online: 16 Sep 2020.



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# Present and future of school intergenerational programmes: A study from Spain

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** International research suggests the value of school Intergenerational Programmes (IPs) and intergenerational schools. However, there is a scarcity of studies at country level exploring the process of expanding from the introduction of intergenerational activities to adopting an intergenerational school model.

**Purpose:** This study sought to further the understanding of the ways in which IPs are being incorporated into schools in Spain.

**Method:** Primary and secondary schools in Spain that were carrying out intergenerational activities with educational purposes were identified. A sample of 25 schools was examined and key personnel were interviewed. Data from seven schools which had incorporated intergenerational work in the format of a programme were selected for further analysis. Qualitative thematic analysis of the seven selected cases ensued, in order to describe IP features including programme content and integration of the IP in the school curriculum.

**Findings:** The analysis of the data from key personnel interviews found that intergenerational programmes were only partially integrated in the everyday life and academic activity of sampled schools. However, it was evident that key personnel also considered that the children who were participating felt affection for the older people involved and appeared to enjoy an authentic relationship with them; older participants also registered some apparent benefits. Key personnel concluded that these programmes did achieve their goals and bring about a high level of satisfaction. However, the study also indicated that the school IPs that were analysed were the fruit of individual rather than institutional interests, suggesting limited stakeholder involvement on the part of public authorities.

**Conclusions:** Our study suggests that schools in Spain have not yet developed sufficiently to implement intergenerational education projects in line with international intergenerational schools elsewhere. Further analysis would be necessary to better comprehend the reasons for what seems to limit the integration and embedding of IPs into the curriculum. The study highlights a need to understand further how to infuse an intergenerational component in current formal pedagogical and educational school practices, with the aim of utilising the benefits of IPs for the improvement of compulsory education.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 February 2020

Accepted 2 September 2020

## KEYWORDS

Intergenerational learning; intergenerational schools; intergenerational programmes; educational leadership; school development

## Introduction

The backdrop to this article is an earlier research project entitled ‘Improving our education system: a model for an Intergenerational School in Primary Education’ (hereinafter ISCI), which took place in Spain between 2014 and 2018. Its objectives were to design, pilot and validate an intergenerational school model in three primary schools in Spain – two in Granada (Autonomous Community of Andalusia) and one in the Region of Murcia. All three schools belonged to the public education system and had students aged 6–12 (Sánchez et al. 2017; Sánchez et al. 2018). The ISCI project was inspired by the experience of *The Intergenerational Schools* (TIS) in the USA, a non-profit charter school network which was founded in the year 2000 in Cleveland, Ohio. As its name suggests, TIS puts intergenerationality at the heart of its programmes and activities and its educational praxis is based, among other elements, on building connections in the school environment between adults, older people and the school’s student body (Whitehouse et al. 2000). The aim of the ISCI project was to promote an intergenerational school model in Spain, following the pedagogical and educational criteria in place at TIS. More specifically, ISCI hoped to find out whether the application of such a model in the Spanish educational system could improve students’ maths skills and reading comprehension – areas in which performance had been poor in recent evaluations (Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa 2014). Building on the aforementioned research, this article presents the findings of a preliminary exploration into the ways in which Intergenerational Programmes (IPs) are being incorporated into Spanish schools.

## Background

### *Intergenerational programmes in schools*

Insufficient attention has been devoted to the specific subject of intergenerational education (Mannion 2012). In an early study on the topic, however, Kaplan found that there was growing interest in devising ways to integrate intergenerational activities into education systems. He also pointed out that the success of IPs in an institutional setting – such as a school – depends on careful examination of the connection between the type of programme and the model, philosophy and education culture of the specific school environment in which it is to be implemented (Kaplan 2002).

Among the studies examining IPs in schools, of particular interest is the work by Rosebrook (2002), which indicated that the personal and social development of schoolchildren aged three and four improved when they engaged in intergenerational interactions. Komosa-Hawkins (2009) reviewed some intergenerational experiences that involved ongoing mentoring between schoolchildren and elderly people. This author observed that intergenerational mentoring at schools increased children’s self-esteem and had a positive impact on social and academic skills, heightening motivation and educational engagement in the classroom. Liou, Mendes, and Jarrott (2011) reported that the parents of children attending pre-schools linked to senior citizen centres observed that their sons and daughters were more assertive and surer of themselves in their interactions with elderly people since participating in intergenerational activities. In addition, Femia et al. (2008) found that the children attending an intergenerational pre-school attained 50%

higher scores in their level of social acceptance of the elderly, compared to another group of children attending a traditional pre-school. Based on their observations made about the Experience Corps programme, Fried et al. (2013) concluded that at the base of intergenerational school mentoring is the use of the generative capacity of older people – that is, their desire to feel useful and guide the lives of younger people. Regarding the potential for improvement that this programme had for the elderly people and children involved, they pointed out on the one hand, the positive impact on senior volunteers' health, and on the other, the improvement in children's behaviour and academic achievement.

Also of interest among the studies on schools and intergenerationality is the work by Park (2015), which aimed to 'explore the literature on the effectiveness and economic aspects of intergenerational interventions among children and young people in terms of academic performance and psychosocial outcomes' (1). This author located 251 articles on the subject published between 1986 and 2014 and selected the eleven most relevant studies. Park concluded that the results were as expected: IPs bring a change in children's attitudes towards the elderly, with a clear reduction in stereotypes about them, and contribute to a better mutual understanding between the older adults and the younger people. The effects of these programmes on the children were related to improved classroom behaviour and higher self-esteem. The observation of similar effects and results over time and in different places has demonstrated the great potential of intergenerational interventions in formal education (McAlister, Briner, and Maggi 2019; Mannion 2018; Sánchez, Whitehouse, and Johnston 2018).

In Spanish schools, the IPs about which we have the most scientific/technical information are those that put intergenerational mentoring in the centre of the educational relationship (Molpeceres, Pinazo, and Aliena 2012; Sánchez et al. 2017). It is evident that some students, thanks to the guidance provided by an older mentor, feel more a part of their school and even obtain better academic results during the years of compulsory education (Pinazo et al. 2009). Moreno, Martínez de Miguel, and Escarbajal (2018) analysed the educational impact of IPs in social institutions, including schools. These authors highlight, on the one hand, the 'personal satisfaction that older individuals experience when they feel useful and continue learning' (31) and, in addition, that children and adolescents become more attentive to older people and develop a 'more positive image' of them (31). Furthermore, Eiguren and Berasategi (n.d.) have identified, compiled and analysed many of the different intergenerational experiences in schools in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. Among the findings emerging from their work, the following are particularly noteworthy: many of these intergenerational experiences are not part of the school curriculum; with the progressive ageing of the elderly, the possibilities of undertaking this type of experience diminish; IPs implemented in schools have still not been the object of solid and rigorous evaluation as to their effects.

Advocates of intergenerational relations no longer work primarily in extracurricular settings and in community sites (e.g. residential and activity centres for the elderly, libraries, trade unions, clubs, associations, foundations and so on) to carry out their projects, as schools have now opened their doors to intergenerational practice as well. This is for a number of reasons, including perceptions of students' low levels of sociability, rising rates of academic failure, growing demotivation, etc. More and more schools have expressed the desire to organise educational projects that involve intergenerational interaction (Orte and Vives 2016), making the research presented in this article all the more pertinent.

## **Purpose**

The broad aim of the research was to describe, analyse and evaluate the IPs currently being implemented in Spanish schools. By doing so, the idea was to build an image of the influence that this relational approach can have, when it is used as a resource to define projects and activities which are focused on older people and children or adolescents, and built into the school curriculum. More specifically, there were three objectives: (1) to identify Spanish schools that have made the decision to include intergenerationality in their annual School Educational Project (SEP); (2) to describe certain elements (time, space, coordination, initiative, participants, content, resources/economic support, objectives and evaluation) of the IP implemented in classrooms for educational purposes, and (3) to learn how those involved in these IPs envision the present and future of these programmes, in terms of expectations, training needs, participants' interest in mutual interaction, identifying relevant illustrative examples to better understand their value.

## **Methods**

### ***Ethical considerations***

A self-evaluation form for compliance with the protocols of ethics in research issued by the University of Murcia was completed, with details on the exploratory study to be carried out. Ethical procedures were implemented accordingly. A formal report by the university's research committee was not deemed necessary, as the study aimed to gather information on programmes. In addition, the anonymity of educational centres involved was guaranteed through the use of case numbers to identify these centres. Finally, all interviewees gave informed consent for their participation in the research, and were assured of the full anonymity of their personal details.

### ***Data collection***

Initially, an internet search for IPs that were underway in primary and secondary schools in Spain was undertaken. In this search, the dimensions of convenience and accessibility indicated by Mertens (2015) (as quoted in Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza 2018) were taken into account. Regarding the convenience criterion, social networks and institutional websites facilitated the location and identification of numerous cases of intergenerational actions carried out in primary and secondary schools. Likewise, as regards accessibility, the internet search made it possible to look closely at each case and gain access to baseline data needed for this study. In total, 25 schools were identified in different parts of the country as having an IP underway whose details were available online.

Next, the person responsible for the IP at each of these schools was contacted and invited to be interviewed. In total, 25 interviews were carried out at this stage. The interviews followed the guidelines of semi-structured interviews, which are commonly used in this type of qualitative research (Gil 1994) and were selected as the most suitable format for the purposes of our study. The interview script was developed in advance. In developing the script, the type of school personnel who would be best placed to provide information (i.e. one of the school directors or the teacher in charge of the IP; in other words, key personnel), and the study's research objectives were key considerations. The

script was therefore structured according to some pre-established thematic categories. Thus, it included questions such as ‘Has the IP been integrated formally in either the curriculum or the school’s Educational Project?’ as a way to connect with the ‘integration’ category, and ‘What impact has the IP had so far on the participating elderly people and school children?’ . All the interviews were carried out in Spanish, over the telephone, and recorded. On average, each interview lasted 76 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed by two researchers who were involved in the fieldwork.

### **Data analysis**

Having examined the information obtained from these 25 schools, 7 schools were selected for further analysis. This was because they had incorporated intergenerational work in the format of a programme; that is, they had not reduced intergenerational work to an isolated, once-a-year activity but, rather, had engaged in a series of intentional and organised activities over a period of more than one year. Analysis of the seven key interviews was mainly approached deductively, in accordance with the procedure proposed by Ezpeleta (2006). Consequently, the coding of transcriptions into a set of preliminary categories – which would later be included in an analytical matrix – was guided by a list of themes and elements delineated in the research objectives. During the coding process of each transcribed interview, pattern codes were given preference for their capacity to transform original narratives into a more meaningful and succinct unit of analysis (Saldaña 2009). In order to guarantee maximum consistency and reliability, two researchers worked independently to review and code the entire corpus; differences in coding were reconciled through discussion.

A matrix was created (see Table 1) and used to condense the data according to the themes and aspects being studied. The information provided by each interviewee (e.g. explanations, descriptions, anecdotes, opinions, assessments, evaluations) was entered into the matrix. A decision was made to follow Miles and Huberman’s criterion (1994) that priority should be given to the overall vision of the issue at stake. Therefore, just one matrix was built, which included all the categories under analysis. In this way, data pertaining to the research objectives, which had been organised into the corresponding matrix categories, could be analysed.

### **Findings**

Table 1 gives a summary of the matrix that was built from the analysis of the seven selected cases. In the subsections below, the findings from the matrix are discussed in relation to the study’s three objectives outlined earlier in the article: i.e. (1) to identify Spanish schools that have made the decision to include intergenerationality in their annual School Educational Project (SEP); (2) to describe elements of the IP implemented in classrooms for educational purposes; and (3) to learn how those involved in these IPs envision the present and future of these programmes. Where relevant, translated quotations from the transcribed interview data are included to illustrate and contextualise some of the points.

Table 1. Matrix built from the analysis of the seven cases.

	CASE 1	CASE 2	CASE 3	CASE 4	CASE 5	CASE 6	CASE 7
<b>School type</b>	Early Years and Primary School	Secondary Education School	Early Years, Primary and Secondary School	Early Years and Primary School	Early Years and Primary School	Early Years and Primary School	Early Years and Primary School
<b>IP coordinators' professional role</b>	Teacher	Teacher	Director	Teacher	School Guidance Counsellor	Director	Teacher
<b>Initiative</b>	Project initiated by coordinator. Aim: to create links between age groups.	Project initiated by coordinator. Aim: to counteract school inertia.	Project began with a one-time activity related to Christmas.	Project initiated by coordinator and other teachers from different schools.	Project initiated by coordinator. Aim: to combat high drop-out rates.	Project initiated by coordinator. Aim: to connect generations.	Project initiated by coordinator.
<b>IP participants</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Family members</li> <li>Elderly people from a care home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Elderly people from a care home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Elderly people from a care home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Family members</li> <li>Elderly people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Staff at a care home for elderly people</li> <li>Elderly people from the care home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Elderly people from a care home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Elderly people from a care home</li> </ul>
<b>Content</b>	Education in values.	The town's cultural heritage.	Culture connected to curriculum (Social Studies and Science).	Language learning and language skills.	Connecting two generations through games, music, etc.	Connecting generations through traditional games.	Connecting generations through shared actions.
<b>Duration</b>	One activity per month. Started 4 years ago.	3 days per week (2.5 hours total). Started 5 years ago.	1 activity per month. Started 14 years ago.	1 activity per month, during 3 to 6 months per academic year.	1 or 2 activities every 3 months.	18 activities per year. Started 3 years ago.	6 activities per year.
<b>Integration in the curriculum</b>	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
<b>Implementation place</b>	At the school	At the care home	At the care home	At the school	At the care home	At the school	At the school
<b>Funding</b>	None	Some assistance from the Regional Department of Education.	None	None	None	None. However, they won an award of 1,000 euros.	None

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

	CASE 1	CASE 2	CASE 3	CASE 4	CASE 5	CASE 6	CASE 7
<b>Objectives</b>	To create relationships, bonds between generations.	Educational. To create an intergenerational network.	Educational, but not within the curriculum.	Educational. To improve language skills in both young and old.	To improve the memory of both young and old.	To bring generations together, to create bonds.	To bring generations together through cultural activities.
<b>Effects</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elderly felt useful and more alive.</li> <li>• Children received affection and felt close to elderly people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elderly people did a service to the community.</li> <li>• Children received affection from the elderly people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elderly people appreciated the affection shown by the children.</li> <li>• Children changed their perception of the elderly.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive stimulation and affection for the elderly people.</li> <li>• Children developed closer relationships with the elderly people and received affection.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive stimulation for the elderly people.</li> <li>• Children developed respect and affection for the elderly people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elderly felt better.</li> <li>• Children developed a better image of the elderly people, felt tenderness towards them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the elderly people, a new experience that made them feel better.</li> <li>• For children, it brought a change in their perception of elderly people.</li> </ul>
<b>Anecdotes</b>	The elderly people asked not to be 'left aside.'	Insistence on working with the university. Reinforced the IP underway.	Children preferred going to the care home where the IP is done rather than going to the swimming pool.	The elderly people were concerned that the experience might not be repeated.	One of the elderly participants was blind. She used the Braille system to work with the children.	At first, some children did not like the aroma of the elderly people, but affection won out in the end.	Mass media have showcased the IP many times.
<b>Evaluation</b>	Assessment was carried out as a group.	Results were so good that a formal or academic evaluation was not necessary. Only the elderly people have been asked for their opinions.	Everyone likes it, the elderly people and the students.	Group assessment was carried out to improve the experience.	Everyone likes it, the elderly people and the students.	Everyone likes it, the elderly people and the students, but a more objective evaluation would be useful.	Satisfaction on part of the elderly people and children.

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

	CASE 1	CASE 2	CASE 3	CASE 4	CASE 5	CASE 6	CASE 7
<b>Training</b>	None. They acknowledged that it would be good for them.	They have not needed training to date but recognise that it would be good for them.	Considered unnecessary. They have not contemplated it.	Considered unnecessary.	Considered unnecessary.	Yes. It is considered necessary.	They believe it would be worthwhile to receive training.
<b>Children's interest</b>	Children liked receiving affection and the authenticity of the interactions.	Children liked the sensitivity of older women in the IP.	Love.	Affection.	Love and affection.	Warmth and affection.	Warmth and affection.
<b>Elderly people's interest</b>	They received warmth and affection.	They could express maternal instinct and tenderness.	They felt useful and they liked helping young people.	They liked to recall their childhood and they felt useful.	They liked looking at children through the wisdom of the years.	They felt useful and more alive.	They felt useful and more alive.
<b>IP coordinators' expectations</b>	They would like more institutional support to improve. They do not intend to create intergenerational school.	They would like to create an intergenerational school.	They do not intend to create an intergenerational school. They hope to address social problems.	They have not considered creating an intergenerational school. They want to improve their activities.	They have not considered creating an intergenerational school. They want to improve the intergenerational activities at the school.	They hope to improve and spread the word about the intergenerational activities they currently do.	They have not considered creating an intergenerational school. They would like to repeat the IP every year but with different themes.

### *Identification of integration into the curriculum*

Of the seven schools selected for further analysis, case 6 was the only one in which intergenerationality was mentioned explicitly in its SEP, although the initial information from websites suggested that there may have been more. As the 'Integration into the curriculum' row in [Table 1](#) demonstrates, case 6 was the only case in which the IP had been formally incorporated into the school curriculum.

### *Description of characteristic elements*

In four of the seven cases, the IP was taking place at the school. In the other three – cases 2, 3, and 5 – the programme was implemented within the premises of a care home in the vicinity. The matrix category 'Initiative' focuses on whether the IP entered the school thanks to an external mandate or by means of internal actions undertaken by people at the school who were interested in such activities. As shown in [Table 1](#), in all cases except case 3, personal reasons and the interests of specific people at the school had led to the implementation of the programme. According to our analysis, the individuals who coordinated the IP were the ones who really pushed for implementation in their respective schools. Even in case 3 – in which the person interviewed explained that 'the [ongoing IP] began with a one-time activity' – it cannot be ruled out that the initiative was also personal, despite unwillingness of the IP coordinator to admit it, perhaps out of modesty. Motives to implement an IP included the desire 'to create links between generations' (case 1), 'to combat school inertia' (case 2) or 'to fight against the "abandoned grandparent" syndrome' (case 5). Clearly, the reasons put forward – except for case 2 – were not related solely to schooling. In summary, our analysis suggested that individual interests rather than institutional interests played a substantive role in getting the IP underway.

A fundamental role in the development of these IPs was that of 'coordinator'. In two cases, the person coordinating the IP was the school director; in one case, it was the school guidance counsellor and, in the four remaining cases, the coordinators were teachers especially motivated by the issue of intergenerationality. The role of the participants is of equal importance to the coordinator. The participants were teachers of different levels, elderly people from care homes or senior citizen centres, and school-children of different ages. The role played by families was only acknowledged in cases 1 and 4. This finding is understandable, inasmuch as it is the encounter between the older and younger people themselves, with their respective reasons for interacting, that makes the connection between generations more rewarding. According to our analysis of the interviews with key personnel, while affection and warmth predominated in the behaviour of the children towards the elderly people, it was evident that the elderly people themselves brought into play a number of intentions and hopes. These were expressed and articulated in the following ways: 'to feel that they are useful' to the children (cases 3, 4, 6 and 7), to show warmth and affection for them (case 1), to express the maternal instinct that many women feel towards children (case 2), the wish to help and be present in the lives of children (case 3), to bring to the present a past time when the older people were children (case 4), to view and treat children with the wisdom that comes with the years (case 5) or 'to feel more alive' (cases 6 and 7).

As shown in [Table 1](#), the content of the IP is the variable which articulates each programme's focus on intergenerational relationships and the actual possibility of connecting young and old participants. The seven cases revealed that content of educational IPs can be quite varied: specifically, working in the area of values (case 1), showing the cultural heritage of a village (case 2), teaching elements of Social Studies and Natural Sciences from the school curriculum (case 3), language learning (case 4) or connecting generations (cases 5, 6 and 7). In the cases studied, no evaluation had been undertaken of the IP's design or process, or of its activities, let alone its aims, content and achievements. However, all the people interviewed expressed a very positive assessment of the experience. With regard to the 'duration' of the IP, as [Table 1](#) demonstrates, the activities had very different timelines. Some were over several years, with fixed or variable periodicity, spanning from one to twelve activities per month, except for case 5, with one or two activities per quarter, and case 7, with six activities per year. The school that had been organising this kind of programme the longest was case 3, with a duration of 14 years; cases 1 and 2 went back four and five years respectively, with case 6 having three years of experience. In all cases, what the duration category reflected was the wish to repeat the experience year after year because, according to the coordinators, these IPs were achieving their goals and the level of satisfaction was very high, despite the fact that they were receiving almost no funding, suggesting limited interest and engagement on the part of the public authorities (as [Table 1](#) demonstrates, according to the analysis, five of the seven cases received no funding).

### *Present and future vision*

The final objective of the research was to get an idea of the vision of those who had promoted these IPs. This was specifically in terms of the present and future of their programmes and of intergenerationality in general. The matrix's category most directly related to this objective is 'Expectations' ([Table 1](#)). In all cases but case 2, the IP coordinator had not considered launching a specifically intergenerational school, while the coordinator of case 2 expressed a hope to set up one 'sometime in the future'. Most of the interviewees, when contemplating the future of their respective IP, underlined the need to heighten intergenerational activities: that is, they appreciated the intergenerational spirit because, according to them, encounters involving elderly people and children 'always turn out well'. At the same time, they truly believed in the importance of putting in place and enriching educational intergenerational programmes. Each of the coordinators thought differently about how the content and development of IP should be oriented. For example, the coordinator of case 3 said that the IP could address 'social problems' or could focus each year on 'different topics.' However, IP coordinators seemed far from imagining the possibility of having not just an improved IP but an intergenerational school.

In relation to this final objective – learning how the coordinators envision their IP – some questions were asked that, in fact, had more to do with the IPs as they were at the present time: i.e. training needed, IP effects and anecdotes that happened as these programmes were implemented. As regards 'training' on how to work intergenerationally – especially when addressed to teachers and older participants –, the analysis revealed a broad range of positions among the interviewees. On the one hand, the

perspectives represented by cases 2, 3, 4 and 5 are illustrated by the following quotation: 'Neither the elderly people nor the teachers need training'; cases 1, 6 and 7 were in favour of training the different participants in the programmes. Coordinators of these three cases considered that training 'would be worthwhile' (case 7) or that it 'would be good for them' (case 1) because, up to now, they had not had any training. Perhaps the most interesting observation was made in respect of case 2, as the interviewee stated 'we have not needed any training so far' but soon afterwards added a nuanced comment, reflecting that some training would perhaps 'not be a bad idea'.

Next, we consider the 'effects' of the selected IPs according to the interpretations of their coordinators. In terms of the potential effects on the older participants, coordinators' points of views in cases 1, 2, 6 and 7 were similar to one another: the coordinators explained that the elderly people had felt useful and more alive in a phase of life in which they needed to feel good about themselves, as a response to a series of difficulties and limitations of different types. It was, thus, easy to understand why they wanted to repeat what they described as a 'marvellous experience.' A similar interpretation can be made of cases 4 and 5, as their coordinators explained that the elderly people were glad to have been involved in this experience because participation had meant a 'cognitive and emotional stimulation' that they had loved. For this reason, almost with no exception, it was evident that the elderly wanted to repeat the experience and stay involved in the IP. Case 3 added a particular aspect to the emotional dimension implicit in the effects of these programmes: the coordinator of this IP explained that the elderly people valued very highly the 'affection shown by the children'.

In terms of the younger participants, it seemed evident from the analysis that something similar had occurred. In the words of the coordinators, the children had gained respect and 'affection for the elderly people'. The experience had allowed the children to be pleasantly surprised when they got to know members of an age group previously quite unknown to them. The initial image that children had of elderly people was rather blurry and vague, but thanks to the IP, they developed a more compassionate and affirmative vision, which could heighten their feelings of tenderness and affection towards older individuals involved in the programme.

The interviewees were also asked to comment freely on some 'anecdote', detail or relevant illustrative example connected to the IP, in order to round off the description they had given of their programmes. Here are a few of the comments offered in this regard: some of the older participants had expressed the wish 'not to be left aside' (case 1) or wished that the experience was repeated (case 4); there were children who admitted they would rather go to where the IP was held than to the swimming pool (case 3). [Table 1](#) contains more examples. In short, it was clear that, from the perspectives of the key personnel, the participants had derived a great deal of pleasure from their involvement in these programmes.

### **Limitations**

This study provided in-depth, qualitative analysis and generalisation is not intended. In terms of the criteria for the selection of schools as case studies, it was unproblematic to access this information from the person in charge of coordinating each IP (key personnel). However, for all the other categories of information, the study would undoubtedly have

been enriched with testimony from other perspectives: i.e. the elderly people, children, adolescents, teachers, parents and any others involved in the IP. In addition, in studies seeking to analyse what happens in a school when the curriculum is permeated with intergenerational philosophy, it would be helpful to employ additional research activities to assess the distance between the original intentions behind the IP and their actual implementation. For example, in addition to interviews, some on-site observations could have been used to provide confirmatory analysis. However, this was not possible, due to the scale and scope of the current study.

## Discussion

The findings from the in-depth analysis presented above is an effort to further the understanding of IPs in place in a small subsample of Spanish schools, in order to address the general objective of this research. Acknowledging the preliminary nature of the findings and the need for further research, we now discuss the findings in the context of how to support the integration of intergenerational activities in schools and enhance research into IPs.

Although all seven schools carried out some kind of intergenerational activity, it was noteworthy that only one school in our subsample had actually *integrated* intergenerational activities formally into its curriculum. The important implication here is that the approach and spirit that promotes intergenerational relations as a way of life for people of different generations was not embedded in the everyday life and academic activity of the other schools. If this were to be the case for Spain as a whole (and further research would obviously be needed to evaluate this), the impression would be that Spain has not yet developed sufficiently to implement intergenerational education networks such as *The Intergenerational Schools* in Cleveland, Ohio, mentioned above. A careful analysis of the economic, political, cultural and educational variables that predominate in Spain's particular national and regional contexts would be necessary to better understand the reasons for this apparent lack of embeddedness. It cannot be denied that the schools in this sample engaged in intergenerational activities through programmes that were designed, planned and implemented with great interest and motivation, and this explains the enthusiasm with which some of the coordinators defended and promoted such activities. Certainly, it was apparent that, whether they were short-term activities or year-long IPs as part of the school's regular schedule, these activities were often undertaken thanks to the initiative of a single teacher or director at the school who was able to recruit other staff members to assist in carrying them out. On other occasions, and after an initial start, intergenerational initiatives were abandoned due to lack of support.

According to our analysis, the ultimate goal behind the incorporation of IPs into the education system was always to create more and better links between different generations, using games, cultural heritage and some academic subjects. In principle, key personnel considered intergenerational work to be worthwhile and positive, no matter how long the activities at school lasted. There were indications from key personnel that intergenerational relationships were deemed positive by IP participants too, although further research to elicit and examine participants' reflections and observe the activities would be necessary to explore this fully.

It was interesting that none of the interviewees except one (case 2) has considered the possibility of transforming the school in the future into a specifically intergenerational school. Such transformation had not even occurred to most of them, and their ideas to this regard did not change either when discussing the subject during the interviews. In addition, most coordinators did not consider that special training in the subject of intergenerationality was necessary to plan and implement IPs. They expressed an interest in continuing to carry out their intergenerational programmes just as they have done up to now. In this sense, there was no indication of a broader horizon: the interviewees did not explore thoughts about how far it could go, in terms of transforming the education system, if serious efforts were made to incorporate an intergenerational approach into all levels of compulsory education.

## Conclusions

Many of the questions arising in relation to this study can be posed as possible starting points for the future development of this field of education and educational policies, in line with previous studies (Sánchez et al. 2018). For instance, one necessary step would be to look closely at precisely what it is about intergenerational relationships that gives rise to a teaching-learning environment that is so markedly different from the one that characterises the relationship between teachers and students within the more typical education system, which does not have such intergenerational relationships at its core. For example: *What does really occur within intergenerational relationships – in terms of their specific features – to make them so highly valued?; What conditions are necessary for these relationships to thrive?; and, finally, What positive consequences may arise by promoting intergenerational education, not only in terms of educational outcomes and cultural outputs, but also in political and economic terms?*

However, as indicated above, this study in itself cannot address these wider questions. Its overarching intention has been to offer a contribution to the debate around school IPs by presenting an analysis of a small number of selected cases deemed to be of special interest in this regard. Despite these limitations, our study shines a light on the potential benefits that deepening the relationships between generations may have for improving compulsory formal education and community more generally. It is hoped that the analysis will be of interest to those involved in setting up IPs in educational settings elsewhere. Further research is necessary to develop understanding of how introducing such relationships in the form of programmes of different types, and making them a more integral component of the current pedagogical and educational model, may bring numerous individual and group benefits for participants, along with organisational benefits for schools – both in Spain and internationally.

## Disclosure statement

The authors report no potential conflict of interest.

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