An Leanbh Óg

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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to welcome this first issue of An Leanbh Óg, the first peer reviewed Journal of OMEP (Ireland). This builds on the very successful OMEP (Ireland) Proceedings of Annual Conferences which have been published since 2002.

OMEP (Ireland) was first launched as a result of a Social Science Conference in University College Dublin in 1966. Its founding members, including Sister Simeon and Ann McKenna, could never have anticipated the impact of their decision on Irish Society. At the OMEP meetings of 1967/1968 an increasing demand for the training of early years practitioners was articulated. As a result Molly Walmsley approached the Council of the Civics Institute of Ireland and asked them to organise a series of talks which might meet some of these concerns. The Irish Pre-School Playgroups Association, which was founded in 1969 was one of the legacies of these early initiatives.

OMEP (Ireland) actively advised RTE on the development of the children’s programme BOSCO and, in addition, was responsible with the Eastern Health Board and the DIT for the establishment of the first training course for people working in day nurseries and other early childhood settings in 1977. This embryonic course led to the Degrees in Early Childhood Studies which have mushroomed in Ireland since the mid 1990s. OMEP has also been very influential in the area of policy development. Its influence can be seen in many documents and reports published over the past twenty five years. For example, OMEP was active in the establishment of the Children’s Rights Alliance, an NGO with an important role in furthering the issue of children’s rights in Ireland.

Thus, OMEP (Ireland) has been a key player in promoting the importance of Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland and raising the profile of young children. OMEP (Ireland) is part of the worldwide OMEP organisation and has always shared its research ethos. Indeed, Dr. Ann McKenna, one of the founders of OMEP (Ireland), edited the International OMEP Journal for eleven years.

An Leanbh Óg could not have been published without the able support of my fellow patrons –Dr. Nóirín Hayes and Dr. Mary Horgan and the enthusiastic Editorial Board, Editorial Associates and design team. However, our special thanks must go to the Editor...
Dr. Rosaleen Murphy and to the President of OMEP (Ireland) Dr. Anna Ridgway.

It is my belief that, over the coming years, this Journal will provide a forum for debate in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector, articulating the thoughts, concerns and aspirations of all involved.

Francis Douglas
Professor of Early Childhood Studies
University College
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Ireland
Editorial

This first issue of *An Leanbh Óg, the OMEP Ireland Journal of Early Childhood Studies*, brings together a selection of papers that reflect many of the current concerns of those working in the early childhood field in Ireland.

Many of the papers included in this issue are based on presentations made at the 2006 OMEP Ireland conference in University College Cork in April 2006. The decision to send papers for peer review before publication, and to publish them in the form of a journal rather than as a set of conference proceedings as hitherto, was influenced not only by the absence of such an early childhood journal in Ireland but also by the very high quality of papers submitted. OMEP Ireland has always been anxious to include the voice of practitioners as well as academic papers in its publications, so this issue also includes some papers based on perspectives from practice in its final section. We would encourage early childhood practitioners to continue to participate in our conferences and to submit papers based on their experience.

The two opening papers were given as keynote addresses at the OMEP Ireland conference in April 2006. Ursula Kilkelly of the Faculty of Law in UCC discusses the implications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child for children in Ireland, while her colleague Frank Martin addresses the implications of two recent law cases for children and parents.

A common theme across the next three papers is the concern that children should receive care and education of the highest possible quality in the early years of their lives. Irish preschool services have by and large developed in an ad-hoc and fragmented way, but recent initiatives are attempting to bring greater consistency and continuity to the sector. The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) has been developing *Siolta*, *the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*, which is described in the paper from Maresa Duijnan and her colleagues in the CECDE. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is currently developing the *Framework for Early Learning*, a national early childhood curriculum framework which will complement *Siolta* in bringing greater continuity to early learning. The paper in this volume from Mary Daly, Arlene Forster and their colleagues in the NCCA describes how
a portraiture study was used to include children in the development of the Framework for Early Learning. These frameworks are expected to make a major contribution towards raising quality standards across the early years sector, although all of the national voluntary childcare associations have already implemented quality improvement programmes for their members in recent years. One of these organizations, the National Children’s Nurseries Association (NCNA), has instituted a Centre of Excellence award which is used as a tool for assessing and improving quality in daycare settings, as described by Aisling Hooper in her paper.

Some other contributions reflect the huge social and demographic changes that Ireland has undergone in recent years. Three papers reflect on the challenges faced by those working in early years and school settings that include children from a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Brian Murphy gives an overview of these changes. He goes on to suggest that incorporating the teaching of a foreign language for all children in Irish primary schools (which would in fact be English for those children whose first language was other) would be one way of helping all children to cope with this diversity. Brigid Nagle, in a review of the literature from the USA identifies some strategies that have been found effective in a country where these challenges have been debated for much longer. Máire Mhic Mhathúna and Una Hill describe how experienced practitioners in four early years settings in the Dublin area draw on their existing knowledge of early childhood care and education to facilitate children learning English as a second language.

The need for greater continuity is highlighted by Mary O’Kane and Nóirín Hayes in their research on teachers’ views on the transition from preschool to school for young children. They found that independence, social skills and language and communication skills were viewed by teachers as vital for young children in the transition from pre-school to primary school. However, they call for better communication and improved continuity between the pre-school and primary school sector, which would be facilitated by the development of a common professional language between the two sectors.

It must not be forgotten that children themselves are active participants and actors in their own lives, as illustrated in the paper by Carmel Brennan and Nóirín Hayes. This paper describes how young children through their social pretend play construct an
individual and group identity, discusses the role of the adults in this play and illustrates how they were observed to manipulate and manage adults in this context. Anna Ridgway, in her reflection on the experience of visiting Infant-Toddler centres and pre-schools in the Reggio Emilia area of Italy, also challenges us to recognise our children as citizens, not as citizens-in-waiting, who participate in the construction of knowledge. This must happen however within our own social and cultural context, just as the Reggio Emilia pre-schools are embedded in theirs. Indeed, in a paper reflecting on the teaching of Irish folk dance to young children, Sharon Phelan suggests that it can be taught in an innovative way that allows young children to be creative.

Some of the concerns expressed by contributors to this first issue of An Leanbh Óg are universal and timeless. Francis Douglas discusses the issue of discipline and young children, and in a paper that includes a wide-ranging review of the literature, makes a powerful plea for the children’s moral and spiritual development to be given the priority it deserves. A subject that is often not thought of in connection with childhood is death and bereavement; nevertheless it is a fact that some children in any group are likely to suffer bereavement in some form during their schooldays. Mary Daly discusses the way in which children experience and respond to bereavement, and makes some suggestions for ways in which the significant adults in their lives can help them to deal with it. Edel Daly in her paper looks at another aspect of the same topic: the lack of support and training for adults working with young children who find themselves dealing with children who are bereaved. She puts forward the plea that this reality should be acknowledged in at all levels, including policy, training and support services. Peadar Donohue tackles another emotive topic, that of bullying, and presents a detailed account of a methodology that he has developed which will enable teachers to help children to recognise and deal with bullying.

The last papers in this issue, in the section entitled From the Field: Perspectives on Practice, come directly from the experience of working with young children. This section is designed to allow the voice of practitioners who do not necessarily wish to submit a highly academic paper to be heard. A captivating example of this is the paper by Karen Meikle, who gives us some suggestions on story-telling with young children based on her own experience. Finally, the report on the survey of their members carried out in 2005 by Childminding Ireland gives some interesting insights into the concerns of people who
work in the area of family day care. Childminding/family day care is an important part of the lives of many young children and their families but one that has hitherto been largely neglected in this country in terms of research.

The papers included in this first issue of *An Leanbh Óg* reflect the many-faceted nature of early childhood care and education in Ireland. They all have in common a concern for the well-being of young children, and in keeping with the National Children’s Strategy (2000), a wish that children’s lives should be better understood. It is hoped that this journal will play its part in achieving that goal, and thereby improving the lives of children.

Rosaleen Murphy
Editor,
*An Leanbh Óg*
*The OMEP Ireland Journal of Early Childhood Studies*
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Children’s Rights in Early Childhood

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Introduction
Children’s rights are now well established at international level and in some states at domestic level. They are set out in impressive detail in the widely ratified United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other instruments and regional instruments and domestic constitutions now recognise that children have rights of various kinds. For many, this has resolved the dilemma as to whether children have rights and what particular rights they possess. At the same time, there is an implicit acceptance that children’s rights refers and is applicable only to children who have acquired a certain level of capacity to exercise their rights for themselves. It is in this context that this paper aims to address the issue or children’s rights in early childhood addressing why rights are important in early childhood, what rights are important in early childhood, how such rights can be protected and promoted and finally, who has responsibility to do this and where must it be done.

Why are Rights important in Early Childhood?
The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights to which all children are entitled in all areas of their lives. According to Article 1 of the Convention a child is every human being below the age of 18 years and Article 2 establishes that every child is entitled to enjoy his/her rights without discrimination on any ground. It is clear from the Convention that children’s rights are guaranteed to all children without exception. The Convention makes clear that all children are rights-holders and it is clear from practice that the rights-approach is an effective way to meet children’s needs and interest and to address gaps that exist in services provided to children.¹

The Committee on the Rights of the Child set out its interpretation of the application of children’s rights in early childhood in its 8th General Comment, published in 2005.²
Although non-binding in nature, the General Comment recognises the importance of the Convention’s principles and provisions to children in their early years and makes it clear that early childhood is a critical period for the realization of these rights. Its origins lie in the failure of state parties to the Convention to focus fully on the rights of children in early childhood during the reporting procedure and the need to initiate a discussion on the broader implications of the Convention for young children. This debate took place during the general day of discussion on the topic in September 2004 and it is thus important that the General Comment was developed via dialogue between the Committee, states parties and other interested parties and experts. In this way, it can be said to reflect wide consensus on the topic and it also enjoys the legitimacy of having been generated via a consultation process at international level.

The Committee’s working definition of ‘early childhood’ is all young children: at birth and throughout infancy, during the preschool years as well as during the transition to school. The General Comment is written against the backdrop of research on early childhood and a clear understanding of early childhood development. It identifies a number of features of early childhood – the rapid period of growth, the strong emotional attachment to their parents and others, their relationships with other children, the foundation it provides for children’s physical and mental health, identity and competencies – which explain why it is such a critical period for the realisation of children’s rights.

What Rights are Important in Early Childhood?
Once children in their early years are recognised as rights holders, it is important to address what rights are important to children at this time. According to the General Comment, young children are entitled to all the rights under the Convention. It is thus important to note that the Convention is a detailed and comprehensive catalogue of children’s rights containing 42 substantive provisions. For ease of reference, Convention provisions are often divided into the 3 Ps of Protection, Provision and Participation rights. Protection includes the child’s right to protection from all forms of harm, abuse and neglect (Art 19) and from exploitation through work, substance abuse or sexual exploitation (Art 32-36). Children without families (art 20 and 21), refugee children (art 22) and children with disabilities (art 23) are all entitled to special protection under the Convention. The General Comment pays particular attention to the needs and rights of
these children in recognition of the fact that children in early childhood are particularly susceptible to the risks posed by poverty, family breakdown and violence. Provision rights includes those rights which make provision for children's basic needs such as the right to an adequate standard of living (art 27), the right to health and health care (art 24) and the right to education (arts 28 and 29). For children in their early years especially, it is important that the right to play is given express recognition in Article 31. Participation rights reflect the child’s capacity as a participant in society and in school and in the family. It is epitomised by Article 12 of the Convention which guarantees the right of the child to be heard in all matters concerning him/her. This category also includes the right to information (Art 17), the right to freedom of expression (Art 13) and the right to privacy (Art 16).

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has established that the Convention has four guiding principles: the right to enjoy Convention rights without discrimination (Art 2); the right to the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all matters concerning the child (Art 3); the right to life, survival and development (Art 6) and the right to be heard (Art 12). According to the Committee, these general principles are particularly important for children in early childhood. Of special relevance here is the Committee's guidance on the application of Article 12. Often considered of little or no relevance to children too young to articulate their views like adults, the General Comment highlights how young children ‘very rapidly acquire understanding of the people, places and routines in their lives, along with awareness of their own unique identity’. The Committee makes clear that children ‘make choices and communicate their feelings, ideas and wishes in numerous ways, long before they are able to communicate through the conventions of spoken or written language’. Accordingly, states are recommended to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the concept of the child as rights-holder with the right to be consulted in all matters affecting him/her is implemented at the earliest stage and in a manner appropriate to the child's capacities, best interests, and rights to protection from harmful experiences. This onus to listen to children, respect their views and adapt expectations to a young child’s interests, levels of understanding and preferred ways of communicating is also placed on parents. Overall Article 12 requires adults to adopt a child-centred attitude, listen to young children and respect their dignity and individual points of view, and show patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to a young child’s interests, level of understanding and ways of communicating.
The crucial role that parents play in the exercise of a child’s rights is also recognised as vitally important for children in their early years. As the General Comment recognises, the relationship between babies and young children and their parents or caregivers is central and it is important for this reason that the Convention contains several provisions in recognition of this relationship. In particular, the Preamble to the Convention recognises that the family is the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members. For this reason, family members particularly children should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community. In addition, Article 18 of the Convention recognises the state’s duty to support the family in rearing their children and also provides for the right to child care services for working parents. Significant too are Articles 8 and 9 which recognise the child’s right to know and be cared for by his/her family and provide that children shall have the right to contact with their parents unless it is contrary to their best interests. Respect for parental roles and for the principle of evolving capacity – whereby parents first exercise their young children’s rights on their behalf but then gradually relinquish this responsibility where the child acquires the maturity to undertake this role for themselves – are also recognised as explicitly important in the Convention. According to the Committee, this involves recognition of the need for parents to be supported and assisted to enable them to involve their young children in programmes aimed at their health, care and education in the early years.

Who must implement these rights?
The Convention makes clear that the vindication of children’s rights is the responsibility not just of states parties and government agencies but of parents, families and society as a whole. This is no different where the rights of young children are concerned. Clearly, the primary duty falls on government and state agencies to promote and protect the rights of children in early childhood. However, family members, educators and carers also have a responsibility to incorporate the values of children’s rights into the relations with, treatment of and attitudes towards children. Finally, it can be argued that once they have acquired sufficient capacity, children themselves must take some responsibility for the exercise of their rights. The principle of evolving capacity (Art 5) is key here as it recognises that while it is entirely appropriate for parents and carers to exercise their children’s rights on their behalf, as children progressively acquire competence and understanding to realise their own rights this responsibility should be shared and then eventually passed to children themselves.
How must these rights be implemented?
In recognition that in many countries and regions, early childhood has received low priority in the development of quality services, the General Comment urges states parties to develop rights-based, coordinated, multi-sectoral strategies based around a systematic and integrated approach to law and policy development in relation to all children in the early years. According to the Committee, these programmes must focus on health-care provision (Art 24), social security and family support (Art 18, 26), and early childhood education (Arts 28, 29); the services, which must be accessible to all children including the most marginalised, must be appropriate to the circumstances, age and individuality of young children and must be implemented by staff trained to work with this age group. These programmes must be community-based and ensure sufficient attention is focused on the child’s right to rest, leisure and play in accordance with Article 31. The role of private bodies as service providers must be supported and monitored and the potential for media to contribute positively to the realization of children’s rights in the early years is recognised under Article 17.

The Committee has also made several recommendations under the heading of capacity-building for early childhood and notes, in particular, the importance of ensuring sufficient resources are made available for this critical stage of a child’s development, maintaining comprehensive and up-to-date quantitative and qualitative data on all aspects of early childhood to inform law and policy reform and ensuring that such policies are evidence-based particularly given the wealth of research now available on early childhood development. Given the knowledge and expertise about early childhood changes over time, the Committee recommends that systematic child rights training be provided to children and their parents, as well as for all professionals working for and with children, in particular ‘parliamentarians, judges, magistrates, lawyers, law enforcement officials, civil servants, personnel in institutions and places of detention for children, teachers, health personnel, social workers and local leaders.’ It concludes with a recommendation for international co-operation and assistance and by urging states and non-governmental bodies to continue advocating for the establishment of independent institutions on children’s rights and to foster continuous, high-level policy dialogues and research on the crucial importance of quality in early childhood, including dialogues at international, national, regional and local levels.
Ireland before the Committee on the Rights of the Child

When Ireland reported to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2006, little discussion focused on the rights of children in early childhood. However, that is not to say that many of the general recommendations made by the Committee are not also relevant to this crucial stage of a child’s development. Thus, recommendations to increase awareness of the Convention among children and adults, enshrine the best interests principle is set out in all legislation and to accelerate the process to give children’s rights expression in the Constitution are all directly relevant to children in their early years.

Within the context of family support, the Committed recommended that the Government undertake an extensive review of support services to address their quality and reach and to address possible shortcomings. Extensive recommendations are made with respect to the prevention of child abuse including the establishment of police vetting procedures, the revision of Children First Guidelines and the development of a comprehensive child abuse strategy. In the particular area of poverty, the Committee recommended that the Government introduce a supplement to the existing universal child benefit payments as an additional and targeted allowance to assist families which experience highest levels of poverty and implement fully existing polices and strategies and increase budgetary allocations for and subsidization of services, including childcare, healthcare and housing, for families with children who are particularly vulnerable. Finally, on the issue of education, the Committee recommended that the Government address the ‘real’ cost of primary education and provide targeted assistance in this area while also addressing the lack of safe, recreational and play space for children. These recommendations all have clear import for children in Ireland in their early years and may be useful in lobbying for change in this area.

Conclusion

The Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment is a very welcome and innovative document which set out clearly how the Convention’s principles and provisions apply in the area of early childhood. It is written in practical terms, which offer clear guidance to states parties and others involved in implementing the Convention, and most importantly, it are grounded in the established consensus in both areas in a way that ensure their relevance to and acceptance by those working in the respective fields of refugee law and early childhood.
In addition to the General Comment, the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s Concluding Observations make it clear that it is incumbent on everyone working with and for children in early childhood settings, including researchers, to raise awareness about the rights of children and to match what they know to be best practice with the rights-approach. Awareness as to the importance and relevance of children’s rights to young children in their early years is a first step. It is only through application of the rights-approach that the rights in children in early childhood will be fully addressed.

1 See, for example, Kilkelly, ‘Operationalising Children’s Rights: lessons from research’ Journal of Children’s Services forthcoming December 2006.
3 The report of this discussion and the recommendations made subsequently can be read on the website of the Committee on the Rights of the Child found at www.ohchr.org (12 Nov 2006).
4 General Comment on Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood, para 1.
5 Ibid., paras 3-8.
6 Ibid., paras 9-15.
7 Ibid., para 14.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., para 21.
10 Ibid., paras 22-35.
11 Ibid., paras 38-43.
12 See Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations: Ireland
Keynote Presentation 2: OMEP Ireland Conference, UCC, 28-29 April, 2006

Judges, Parents and the Child: A Tale of Two Child Law Cases

Frank Martin

Introduction

a (2006), unequivocally asserted the principle that the rights of a child in the context of adoption law (intercountry/foreign adoption) are paramount and are to be constitutionally protected and promoted. Both legal cases have given rise to some unsettling aspects of the role of the Irish courts and the State in intervening in the context of the family unit and in ordering and regulating some of those socio-familial legal relationship.

The First Case: The Tristan Dowse Case

The Tristan Dowse case was the subject of major publicity in the Irish media.\(^1\) Judgment was delivered on this case on 31 January 2006. It attracted massive national publicity, which was unusual for a family law case. Family law cases are nearly always held in camera in order to protect the anonymity of the parties. In other words, they are heard in the judge’s chambers, in private or otherwise than in public. The High Court judge, Justice MacMenamin, decided to put this written judgment into the public domain but only those aspects of the case which contained relevant facts as well as general legal principles. The judge was also guided by the jurisprudence of the European Convention on Human Rights Article 6(1), which requires the courts of State Parties to make judgments public unless such a course of action would constitute a denial of justice. Prior to this judgment, the facts of the Tristan Dowse case were already very much in the public domain since they were the subject of extensive public discussion and comment. A similar approach (about publishing family case details) was adopted by the English High Court, in 2005, in relation to a former Home Secretary in the U.K., namely David Blunkett, who sought a Parental Responsibility Order and Contact Order in relation to his putative child. The rationale underpinning the justification for such limited publicity is that such publicity can correct any false impressions and/or misconceived facts and can also stop further speculation and adverse comment.
The Dowse case was a very unusual one in terms of the court orders sought as well the range of parties who appeared in the various set of proceedings. Firstly, it was the Irish Attorney General, the Irish Adoption Board and the Dowse marital couple who took the case and sought the following orders and declarations.

1. A declaration that Mr/Mrs Dowse failed in their Constitutional duty to care and provide for their son,
2. An order to provide appropriate accommodation, suitable care and facilities;
3. An order to provide periodic payments and lump sums for their son;
4. An order cancelling the entry of the foreign adoption of Tristan in the Irish Adoption Register; and
5. Orders in relation to the Guardianship custody, maintenance and citizenship of Tristan Dowse.

Factual Details in the Dowse Case
The factual details in the Dowse case are relatively straightforward. Joseph and Lala Dowse were a married couple who were resident in Indonesia since 1999. The husband was Irish and an accountant and the wife was a native of Azerbaijan and a medical doctor. Both were Christians. They adopted Tristan (a Muslim child) on 10 August 2001 in Jakarta, Indonesia by means of an adoption order being made by the South Jakarta District Court. At that time, Tristan was a mere two months old. They told the court that they wished “to raise Tristan as if he was their own flesh and blood”. The foreign adoption was recognised by the Irish Adoption Board and registered in the Register of Foreign Adoptions. Almost immediately, an Irish passport was procured for Tristan so that he was now an Irish citizen. For nearly two years, Tristan resided with the Dowses as a family unit. However, almost within a month of the actual adoption, the Dowses claimed that there was no positive bonding by Tristan with them. Consequently, the Dowses considered placing Tristan in long-term foster care or alternatively returning Tristan to his natural mother if her whereabouts could be ascertained.

In May 2003, Tristan was placed in an orphanage in Indonesia. There were 22 other children in this long stay institution. In January 2004, the Dowses left Indonesia to commence residing in Azerbaijan. In April 2004, the Dowses contacted the Irish Adoption Board seeking the removal of Tristan from the Register of Adoptions. This was
refused at that stage. At this time also, they returned Tristan’s passport to the Irish Passport Office, Dublin. In May 2005, (two years later), Tristan was moved to another orphanage exclusively for Muslim children. By the mid-2004, the Irish Ambassador in Jakarta under instructions from the Irish Attorney General and a member of the Irish Adoption Board, took immediate steps to enquire about the circumstances of an Irish citizen, namely Tristan. In October 2005, Tristan was reunited with his mother near Jakarta, Indonesia and was living with the extended family in circumstances slightly above the poverty level. The mother worked part-time making pillowcases for 70 U.S cents per day. At the time this case was heard in Ireland, Tristan was attending a local kindergarten school. Tristan’s mother never met the Dowses as the adoption was organised by an intermediary.

High Court Decision: Constitutional and Statutory Ramifications
According to Article 42.1 of the Constitution of Ireland “parents have a duty to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children”. Accordingly, on the basis of all the evidence, the High Court held that there had been a clear unequivocal breach of this constitutional duty owed to Tristan by both parents as they had deliberately abandoned him. Such parental abandonment, the court held, had amounted in law to a breach of the child’s constitutional right to be cared for by his adoptive family as well as losing the society of those parents. The failure of the Dowses towards Tristan was manifested in their failure to carry out their day-to-day care of Tristan as well as neglecting his religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social education. Furthermore, the court held that if there has been such parental failure then under Irish constitutional law, the State is obliged to supply the place of the parents “having regard to the rights of the child”.

Secondly, under Irish domestic statutory law, the net legal effect of an adoption order was that Tristan was deemed to be the child of the adoptive parents, having the same legal status as if born to them in lawful wedlock. His natural mother would thus lose all parental rights and duties. Therefore, as Tristan was deemed to be the marital child of the Dowses, they therefore owed constitutional duties to him and Tristan in turn ought to enjoy constitutional rights in respect of them. Furthermore, if the Dowses’ application to cancel the adoption registration was successful, then Tristan was deemed not to have been validly adopted; he would not be the marital child of the Dowses and Tristan would therefore not enjoy the constitutional protection attributed to marital children.
The advantages of Tristan remaining a member of the Dowse family were that he would:

- Be fed and clothed and enjoy middle class social status,
- Reside in comfortable accommodation,
- Be formally educated, probably to third level,
- Receive parental financial support to purchase property, and
- Inherit assets from his parents

If the adoption registration were cancelled the following disadvantages would follow for Tristan:

- Would be fed and clothed to a minimum level,
- Have cramped accommodation,
- Would be unlikely to be educated beyond first level,
- Have poorly paid employment; and
- Would not inherit significant assets

It is submitted that in the Dowse case, the High Court seemed to have adopted a compensatory model of justice for Tristan’s loss of any legal rights (constitutional and statutory) and his loss of any materialistic advantages which would have accrued with membership of the Dowse family unit. The High Court made the order cancelling the Adoption registration entry but went on to make some quite robust and innovative orders of quite extraordinary nature some provided for under statute law and others from the inherent discretionary jurisdiction of the High Court. In particular, the Irish High Court stated that:

- Tristan’s mother was declared to be the sole legal guardian and custodian of Tristan. Consequently, the Dowses were no longer the parents nor guardians/custodians of Tristan.
- Tristan was to receive an immediate payment of a lump sum of €20,000 for the provision of accommodation.
- He was to receive monthly payment of €350 until he reached the age of 18 years.
- An additional lump sum of €25,000 was to be paid on Tristan reaching the age of 18, and
- Mr. Dowse was also directed to take out an insurance policy for the term of Tristan’s childhood to the age of 18 years so that he would be the beneficiary of the sum of $120,000 should Mr. Dowse predecease Tristan.
It would appear that the High Court’s objective was to place Tristan in such comparable circumstances as if he had not been abandoned. Thus, the orders of the court would do no more than feed, clothe, house and educate him. In this writer’s view, two final aspects of the Dowse case give rise to significant legal difficulties, public policy difficulties and residual practical problems. As the guardianship rights of the Dowses were extinguished once the adoption entry was cancelled, Tristan could not as a matter of fact and as a matter of law be entitled to any automatic mandatory statutory inheritance rights vis-à-vis the Dowse’s estate. Nevertheless, the Irish High Court ordered that Tristan was to enjoy rights to the estate of both Mr and Mrs Dowse. It would seem as if the High Court was exercising its inherent jurisdiction to make some unique common law orders. As the case was not appealed since the Dowses were more than willing to cooperate with the authorities to resolve Tristan’s difficulties, the matter is now settled and binding. It is submitted, however, that this expansive and liberal interpretation given to succession rights under the Succession Act 1965, is rather dubious and probably confined to the particular facts of the case.

The second unsettling feature of the Dowse judgment concerns Tristan’s citizenship rights, if any. As the adoption was effectively terminated, it followed that any citizenship right should also lapse. However, quite extraordinarily, the court held that Tristan retained his Irish citizenship for when “Tristan becomes an adult his continued Irish citizenship would give him access to job opportunities in the EU”. This writer has some reservation about this type of judicial activism. The granting and withdrawal of citizenship is exclusively a matter for the Government/Executive. Perhaps, this is a breach of the well-established ‘separation of powers’ doctrine whereby the judiciary does not impinge on the functions of the Executive.

Of course, the child was not a party to the proceedings. Indeed he was never present, or ordinarily resident or habitually resident in Irish jurisdiction. The outcome of the case is of course a fair and just one. However, in terms of a strict application of the law, the decision is rather indulgent. Nevertheless, the judge clearly was of the view that the rights of Tristan should be explicitly protected and vindicated. As the child did not have separate legal representation in the proceedings it would appear as if the judge acted as champion for the child. Enforceability of the orders however will be a problem. If the Dowses fail to adhere to any of the orders what contempt proceeding would succeed?
They now reside in Azerbaijan and intend to reside there indefinitely. What if the insurance policy is allowed to lapse intentionally or unintentionally what will the court do? In the final analysis, this case is a classic example of how the Irish courts have endeavoured (through the exercise of robust judicial activism) to protect a child who within the context of adoption proceedings is clearly voiceless and vulnerable. In a very recent Law Society of Ireland Report, (March, 2006), Rights-Based Child Law: The case for reform, the issue of unregulated adoptions was addressed and the Law Society concluded that: “The Abuses arising in unregulated adoption through the internet and commercial adoption agencies are well documented. It is important that Ireland should do what it can to foster international standards for the children’s protection [in the context of inter-country adoption]”.

The Second Case: The North Western Health Board Case

However, on the other side of the legal line, there has been a relatively recent Irish Supreme Court judgment, which has legally privileged the position of the parents vis-à-vis their child. The case raised the fundamental question of the right of the State to intervene to protect children from unwise decisions of their parents. The case is titled North Western Health Board v. H.W. and C.W. [2001] 3 IR 622. The question for resolution by the Supreme Court (8 Nov 2001) was whether the parents of Paul, a 14 month-old child (born early 2000) (classic early childhood example) could be mandatorily required by an order of the court to permit a State agency (Health Board now the HSE) to conduct a medical test on a child, known as the PKU screening test. There was then and is not now legislation requiring such test to be performed. The PKU test enables a doctor to ascertain whether a newborn child is suffering from a biochemical or metabolic disorders which can be extremely serious and which can have serious implications for a child but which are treatable if identified at an early stage. The test is carried out on newborn infants between 72 hours of age and 120 hours of age. The PKU test is a blood test, the blood being extracted from the child by puncturing the heel of the child. This is an invasive procedure such that consent of the parents is required. Minimal risk to the child is involved, as is merely requires a pinprick to the child’s heel. In the case of a positive result, it has enormous benefits for the child, who can, with early immediate treatment be protected from such short and long-term consequences as mental handicap or a life-threatening illness.
The parents, (H.W. and C.W.) being Jehovah’s Witnesses, refused to allow the screening medical test to be administered on their son as they considered it to be overly intrusive involving, potentially, a risk of pain and suffering to the child. Instead, the parents offered to supply the Western Health Board with hair and/or urine samples (which are less reliable indicators) for the PKU test. The Western Health Board regarded the parents consent refusal to the PKU test as a failure of Paul’s personal constitutional rights to good health, bodily integrity and life. Therefore, the WHB sought a mandatory injunction requiring the parents to give their consent to the PKU test. The PKU screening test was not made compulsory by legislation in Ireland, nor in any other country in which the test is routinely administered. Therefore, the net legal question for the court was whether a court could order a child to undergo a minimally invasive medical test despite the strong objections of the parents. Essentially, the Supreme Court was required to undertake a balancing of the rights of the parents as opposed to the rights of the child.

The Supreme Court, by a four to one majority held that parental rights in relation to their children were dominant and privileged and manifestly protected by Articles 41 and 42 of the Constitution of Ireland. Consequently, the parental refusal was not unlawful and the State intervention sought was not justified. It would now seem that the Supreme Court has set the threshold for State intervention into the family domain at a very high level. It is worth noting and commenting on some of the five judgments delivered by the Supreme Court which in itself was a most unusual jurisprudential step in the context of a Family/Child law case.

Firstly, Denham J. took the view that to order the PKU test in this case would establish a very low threshold for court intervention in future cases relating to children. Thus, she went on to set down the requisite appropriate legal test for any State intervention. State intervention should, she argued, arise only in ‘exceptional circumstances’. In her view, what constituted exceptional circumstances would depend upon the particular facts of every case. Examples of exceptional circumstances, she contended, might include a threat to the health or life of the child. On the basis of this spectrum of exceptional circumstances this case was not an exceptional circumstance case warranting intervention.

Denham J further stated:
“The decision as to the PKU test is one of the very, very many which parents make about their children every day. These decisions, medical and otherwise, are usually not challenged by anyone even if they are not in accordance with specific expert advice. It is only in exceptional circumstances that courts have intervened to protect the child in order to vindicate the child’s constitutional rights. The court will only intervene, and make an order contrary to the parents’ decisions, and consent to procedures for the child, in exceptional circumstances. An example of such circumstances in relation to medical matters may be a surgical or medical procedure in relation to an imminent threat to life or serious injury ... Responsibility for children rests with their parents except in exceptional circumstances.”

Secondly, according to Murphy J. the system of substituting a court’s judgment for that of the parents would inevitably “damage the long-term interests of the child by eroding the interest and dedication of the parents in the performance of their duties... and would result in numerous applications being made to the courts to overrule decisions made by caring and misguided parents”. He tersely analysed the question in the following terms:

“I do not accept that a particular ill-advised decision made by parents (whose care and devotion generally to their child was not disputed) could be properly categorised as such a default by the parents of their moral and constitutional duty as to bring into operation the supportive role of the State.”

Thirdly, Hardiman J referred to the legal presumption that the welfare of the child is generally to be found in the family exercising its authority. He went further by stating that: “to permit too readily State intervention in this case would result in the court becoming involved in a sort of micro-management of the family ... I do not view a conscientious disagreement with the public health authorities as constituting either a failure [of a parental] duty or an exceptional case justifying State intervention.” In addition, he went on to express the view that the Constitution of Ireland plainly accorded a primacy to the parents and this primacy gave rise to the presumption that the welfare of the child is best to be found in the family exercising its authority freely.

Fourthly, Murray J. (as he then was) eschewed any legal formula for governing State
intervention in matters affecting the functioning of familial relationships. Yet, he went on to deliver some judicial guidance for so-called State intervention which in his view required the following non-exhaustive circumstance:

“There must be some immediate and fundamental threat to the capacity of the child to continue to function as a human being, physically, morally or socially, deriving from an exceptional dereliction of duty on the part of parents to justify such an intervention.”

He also agreed that from an objective point of view, the parents’ decision was manifestly unwise and disturbing. However, this parental decision was one that parents had the liberty to take.

The Chief Justice Keane J., vigorously dissented from the majority in a robust judgment. Having reviewed Australian, Canadian and English case law, he concluded that essentially the parents’ decision was irrational as well as being a particularly ill-advised decision. In addition, he held that the Constitution of Ireland never envisaged that the wishes of parents should prevail where there was a threat to the health of a child. This threat therefore violated the constitutional rights of the child and it was up to the courts to protect and vindicate the right of the child to a happy, healthy and risk free life to which s/he was entitled to as a member of the family.

**Critical Commentary**

The striking feature of the *North Western Health Board/PKU* case is the strong degree of patriarchal benevolent protectionism adopted by the court in the regulation of the parent/child relationship. The shortcomings of the judgment is that it errs too far in the direction of protection and is, on the whole, unreceptive to the claims of the child for his rights to be vindicated. In the U.K., the legal test adopted for such State intervention is not so much whether the wishes of the parents should be respected but whether it is the best interests of the child to have medical treatment.

The development of children’s rights in Ireland requires a new bold and radical approach and can no longer be identified exclusively with parental rights. In this case, the refusal to allow the test to be carried out amounted to a failure on the parents’ part to vindicate the
constitutional rights of the child to be guarded against unnecessary and avoidable dangers to his health and welfare. In the final analysis, the case reaffirmed the constitutional autonomy and privileging of parents in determining the welfare and/or the best interests of their children. Many might not object to the ultimate decision arrived at in the case, nonetheless the Irish Supreme Court would appear to have set the bar for State intervention at a fairly high level. It is now time perhaps to have a change of language which might well mitigate the issues raised in the PKU case. It might now be preferable to move towards replacing the language of parental rights with ‘parental responsibility’ which places the parents, in consultation with their children, in the position of educating and maintaining them, not because of the authority conferred on parents but in the interests of the child. This model would recognise children as persons to whom duties are owed, as opposed to possessions over which power is wielded. (Madden: 2002: 464-465)

What if the Irish Supreme Court ordered the PKU test to be administered, what would be the consequences for the rule of law, the parents, the child and the State? Would this involve the courts in what Hardiman J. classified as ‘micro-management of the family’? Such a decision would have far-reaching effects in terms of its application to other tests and medical procedures which a child might have to undergo. In two recent English High Court cases, it was directed that children should be given the 3 in 1 vaccines despite the objections of their mothers. There are a number of significant differences between the English cases and the PKU Irish case. Firstly, and most obviously the Irish decision derives mainly from the provisions of the Constitution which plainly have no relevance to English cases. Secondly, in the English cases the parents in each case were not married and the respective fathers, who disagreed with the decision of the mother, made the applications to the court.

Conclusions
This paper critically evaluated two major Irish legal cases which had a direct impact on the lives of children. In both sets of proceedings, the voice of the child was not heard. The children were not parties to the proceedings. Solicitors or barristers or guardians ad litem did not represent them in court. Their voices were only heard vicariously through their parents, health boards or the judiciary. Critically, children in Ireland do not have an automatic right to be heard in legal and administrative proceedings which affect them. It would now appear that Ireland is in breach of Article 12 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which provides that; “The child shall be provided
with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting
the child, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner
consistent with the procedural rules of the national laws”. Perhaps, had Tristan Dowse had
a voice in the legal proceedings, he might have stated that he did not wish his adoption
registration to be deleted thus retaining his citizenship as well as his other familial rights.
The child in the PKU test might also have indicated that he wished to have the test done
in order to ensure his future health and well-being.

If the Supreme Court’s statement in DPP v. Best [2000] 2 ILRM 1, especially at p.41, that:
“Children are citizens and persons … They have added rights given to them by the
Constitution and by law for their well-being and protection during their infancy”, is to
have legal substance then it is imperative that courts give weighty and genuine
consideration to the rights of the child in such medical consent circumstances in order to
look after their well-being and protection during their infancy. A true and accurate
balancing test requires that the various elements be equally considered by the Court. A
tokenistic nod in the direction of nominal rights of children is, according to the UN
Committee on the Rights of the Child, no longer acceptable in this the New Millennium.

What then are the legal ramifications of the North Western Health Board case for teachers,
lawyers, medical personnel and general health service executive staff? Parental opposition
to the medical intervention in the North Western Health Board case was one in which there
was genuine scope for a difference of opinion between the parent and the judge. The risk
involved was also one within the permissible range of risk that on the facts did not affect
the very life and bodily integrity of the child. However, the lofty constitutional position
of the family under Irish law, does however privilege the authority of parents which is a
major legal factor to be considered by Irish courts. Are children’s rights therefore
significantly diminished by the North Western judgment? Throughout the judgment the
child is referred to as ‘the child’. If there is substance to the idea of children having ‘added-
rights during their infancy’ (as stated in DPP v. Best [2000], above) then it ought to
include a child’s right to avail of the full range of orthodox medical remedies available
(including a PKU test) and validated by the medical profession as necessary and desirable
for children in order that they can live their childhood years with the optimum of health
and happiness. This would be entirely consistent with the ‘common good’ rationale so
often expounded in our legal system.

32   An Leanbh Óg
In the *North Western Health Board* case, McCracken J was presented with a scenario where the risk seemed to be minimal and was not analogous to a child requiring a life-saving blood transfusion. In terms of the risk spectrum it was on the lower side. Added to this was McCracken J’s view that the objective benefit to the child could not on the facts here have overridden parental rights. The approach adopted by English/Welsh and Irish courts are broadly similar where there is an extreme risk to a child such as the necessity to have a blood transfusion. In such circumstances, the autonomous right of the child to life, good health and bodily integrity displaces the pivotal rights of parents. According to a recent academic analysis on the point:

“Parents cannot determine life and death matters whatever their convictions and whatever their religious or cultural imperatives. The small child’s physical integrity must prevail”.

In the final analysis, it is certain that the legal boundary between parental autonomy and a child’s welfare in medical consent matters will continue to be a difficult judgment call for the judiciary particularly as one moves away from the extreme side of the risk spectrum. The present position in Ireland is that parents are within their constitutional rights to decline to have their child participate in public health programmes. If, as McCracken J stated, in the High Court, the absence of legislation implied that the *Oireachtas* intended the matter to be one solely for parents, it would be interesting to speculate what approach would have been adopted by the courts had non-mandatory legislation existed for such public child health programmes? Parental consent to medical treatment for their child will continue to remain a contentious issue particularly as Irish society becomes more culturally diverse (immigration into Ireland has increased, numbers of asylum seekers and refugees have escalated). Therefore, there may be an increase in the circumstances where medical norms may be challenged by parents from diverse backgrounds concerning their children’s health and well-being. In a very recent Law Society of Ireland Report (March, 2006), *Rights Based Child Law: The case for reform*, it was recommended that: “The State should have the capacity to intervene to protect the best medical interests of a child in the event of a long-term threat of a deteriorating nature, which could be prevented by early intervention. Proportionate intervention should be permitted where the effects of not intervening are severe, and best medical practice suggests that intervention is necessary for the future health of the child”. This writer concurs with this recommendation.
One of the leading experts in Ireland on children’s rights is not overly optimistic about the future legal direction for the evolution and enforcement of children’s rights. Shannon concludes:

“The rights of children should be taken seriously. Despite protestations to the contrary, the law in the area of child rights in this jurisdiction still falls far short of our international obligations, including the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.”

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Notes
Peer Reviewed Papers
Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

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Abstract
This paper introduces Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (NQF) that has been developed under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science (DES). Síolta is a quality assurance programme that has been developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), in consultation with the wider early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector in Ireland. It is applicable to all settings in which children aged from birth to six years are present and therefore crosses many of the traditional divides between care and education and between the formal school sector and the informal ECCE sector. The Framework has been produced at a time when national and international attention is focused as never before on the issue of quality ECCE services, and their role in enhancing the lives of our youngest children. It distils and captures the concerted momentum of the sector in recent years towards the attainment of quality and provides a reference point for all those involved in ECCE services towards this end.

The paper begins by detailing the development process involved in creating Síolta. The substantive focus pivots on the content of Síolta, namely the Principles, Standards and Components of Quality. This is followed by an overview of the assessment and support systems proposed for Síolta. The paper concludes by describing the national testing and evaluation process envisaged for Síolta.

Introduction
This paper introduces Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (NQF) that has been developed under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science (DES). Síolta is a quality assurance programme that has been developed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), in consultation with the wider early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector in Ireland.
It is applicable to all settings in which children aged from birth to six years are present and therefore crosses many of the traditional divides between care and education and between the formal school sector and the informal ECCE sector. The Framework has been produced at a time when national and international attention is focused as never before on the issue of quality ECCE services, and their role in enhancing the lives of our youngest children. It distils and captures the concerted momentum of the sector in recent years towards the attainment of quality and provides a reference point for all those involved in ECCE services towards this end.

The paper begins by detailing the development process involved in creating Siolta. The substantive focus pivots on the content of Siolta, namely the Principles, Standards and Components of Quality. This is followed by an overview of the assessment and support systems proposed for Siolta. The paper concludes by describing the national testing and evaluation process envisaged for Siolta.

The Development Process
The process of developing Siolta has been underway since the CECDE was established in 2002. From the outset, the CECDE has ensured that the NQF is evidence-based and builds on existing national and international experience and expertise. As one of the core objectives of the CECDE’s work programme, the production of the NQF has informed a significant body of research and development work and has, in particular, yielded four specific research projects. These were identified as instrumental in underpinning the development of Siolta. While important and valuable publications in their own right, collectively these documents provide a solid foundation of research evidence on which to base the development and implementation of Siolta in the Irish context. The main focus of the four pillars of research was quality in the Irish context, while an international perspective was also included to enhance this particular viewpoint. This culminated in the following publications:

- *Talking About Quality* is the report of a nationwide consultation undertaken by the CECDE in late 2003 (CECDE, 2004a). Approximately four hundred stakeholders (including practitioners, parents, policy-makers, researchers, health professionals and students) in the ECCE sector were consulted with regard to defining, assessing and supporting quality practice in Ireland.
Insights on Quality is a literature review of policy, practice and research in relation to quality in Ireland since 1990 (CECDE, 2004b). It examines in excess of three hundred publications from both statutory and non-statutory agencies and draws implications and recommendations for the development of Síolta.

Making Connections is an international review of quality in ECCE relating to six countries worldwide, namely; Norway, Sweden, Germany, Portugal, Northern Ireland and New Zealand. It examines policy, practice and research in these countries on a thematic basis and concludes with implications for the development of Síolta in the Irish context (CECDE, 2004c).

Early Childhood in Ireland - Evidence and Perspectives is a thematic consideration of child development and learning in Ireland based on an extensive literature review (CECDE, 2005).

Síolta has been developed in relation to the three strands of defining, assessing and supporting quality. The main focus of the initial stages of the development process concentrated on the definition of quality, namely identifying and agreeing the Principles, Standards and Components of Quality. Drafts of each of these elements were circulated to each of the members of the CECDE Consultative Committee between November 2004 and June 2005, which is comprised of fifty stakeholder representatives of the ECCE sector. A number of organisations suggested word changes, additions and omissions within these drafts, which were subsequently implemented by the CECDE. This process of consultation greatly enriched and strengthened their wording and clarity, and helped to ensure the materials produced were reflective of the various stakeholders’ views. A specific and focused consultative process was undertaken with parents in March 2005 in recognition of their primary role in the care and education of their children.

Contents of Síolta – Standards, Components and Signposts for Reflection

Síolta is designed to allow ECCE settings to evaluate the quality of the service they are providing. Accordingly, the framework recognises elements of practice that are successful within the setting, as well as identifying aspects in need of attention and improvement. In this way, it acts as a tool to promote continuous quality improvement and planning. The NQF is comprised of three distinct but interrelated elements, namely Principles, Standards and Components (and their associated Signposts for Reflection) of Quality (see Figure 1).
Figure 1: Elements of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

The Principles form the overall vision of the Framework, within which all other elements are couched. The Principles contained within *Síolta* span twelve general areas:

- The value of early childhood
- Children first
- Parents as partners
- Relationships
- Equality
- Diversity
- Enriching environments
- Safety, welfare and well-being
- Role of the adult
- Teamwork
- Pedagogy
- Play
Each of the Principles is presented individually and includes explanatory notes, intended to inform and guide the practitioner. They are inter-dependent and not intended for use in isolation. For example, while one Principle refers to the role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences as fundamental, it should be viewed in the context of another Principle which re-iterates the pre-eminent role of the child’s parents in their well-being, learning and development. Furthermore, the role of the adult is also influenced by the environment in which adult/child interactions take place, and the extent to which play is incorporated into that environment.

The detailing of all twelve Principles is not facilitated within the confines of this paper and so, by means of practical example, one of the Principles can be highlighted. In keeping with the example outlined above, the Principle states:

Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his well-being, learning and development.

The explanatory note that accompanies that particular principle then offers the practitioner a more detailed interpretation:

Quality early childhood care and education must value and support the role of parents. Open, honest and respectful partnership with parents is essential in promoting the best interests of the child. Mutual partnership contributes to establishing harmony and continuity between the diverse environments the child experiences in the early years. The development of connections and interactions between the early childhood setting, parents, the extended family and the wider community also adds to the enrichment of early childhood experiences by reflecting the environment in which the child lives and grows.

The sixteen national Standards translate the vision of the Principles into the reality of practice in settings where children aged from birth to six years are present. They are broad-based and comprehensive in nature, and represent an agreed framework for quality practice within settings. As with the Principles, the Standards are interrelated and interdependent and should not be viewed in isolation, as only together do they form a cohesive and comprehensive framework for quality practice. Each Standard is
explained by a statement agreed by the representative Consultative Committee of the CECDE, with the sixteen national Standards being:

- Organisation
- Professional practice
- The rights of the child
- Parents and families
- Environments
- Curriculum
- Consultation
- Identity and belonging
- Planning and evaluation
- Interactions
- Play
- Communication
- Health and welfare
- Community involvement
- Transitions
- Legislation and regulation

The Components of Quality have a direct relationship with the Standards, with each Component further unpacking the detail within the Standards. Each Standard has a varying number of Components, incorporating seventy-five Components in total within the Framework. The Components of Quality act as indicators or guidelines for all those engaging with the Framework towards providing quality experiences for our youngest children.

Each Component of Quality is accompanied by a variety of Signposts for Reflection. These are open-ended questions that act as a tool for self-reflection for practitioners to review and consider their current practice within the broad area of the sixteen Standards. They further support the dialogue required for the achievement of the national Standards. While the Principles, Standards and Components are applicable to all settings in which children aged birth to six years are present, the Signposts for Reflection are mediated in two different ways to ensure they are apposite to the needs of all children. First of all,
they are moderated for four distinct settings that were identified by the NQF, specifically: Full and Part-time Daycare, Sessional Services, Infant Classes of Primary Schools, and Childminding. Secondly, where appropriate, they are mediated for three specific age ranges, namely; birth to eighteen months, one to three years and two-and-a-half to six years.

Many of these Signposts for Reflection are further supported by a list of ‘Think Abouts’, which prompt the reflective practitioner to consider various aspects of her/his practice. They can be used by individual practitioners or by groups/teams that are planning for an entire setting. The selection of Signposts for Reflection and ‘Think Abouts’ provided act as examples or prompts to stimulate discussion. They are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive in nature and practitioners are at liberty to add to, edit, or remove those presented to make them more supportive, personalised or relevant to their own unique situation.

Assessment
The White Paper on Early Childhood Education, Ready to Learn, envisages that assessment would form an essential part of the National Quality Framework and would ultimately award a ‘Quality in Education mark’ (QE), where providers reached predetermined quality standards. It also envisaged that assessment associated with the QE mark would take account of the developmental processes that services were engaged in:

Inspectors will also assist providers to attain the QE standards by identifying the areas where improvements are required and by suggesting approaches which providers could take to achieve the improvements. (DES, 1999:121)

Stolte has drawn on both the national and international models of assessment for quality in ECCE. It has also been informed by the national consultation research conducted by the CECDE, which asked for specific opinion about assessment in ECCE in Ireland. The outcomes of this consultation revealed that there was strong agreement that any assessment of quality must be informed by the multiple dimensions of, and perspectives on, quality itself. In addition, great emphasis was placed on the need for both internal and external assessment and on both formative and summative assessment processes. Furthermore, the importance of openness and transparency in assessment processes to ensure validity and reliability and ‘fairness’ of the criteria for quality was emphasised (CECDE, 2004a).
Siolta is designed to facilitate and support all forms of assessment. Multiple assessment methods will be necessary and it is envisaged that an essential aspect of the supports for quality (outlined in the next section) will focus on preparing practitioners and assessors to engage with a wide variety of assessment methods and approaches. This flexibility is only possible because of the strength and solidity of the core elements of the NQF, specifically the national Standards and Components of Quality. These are the benchmark for all assessment and as such will inform and be the focus of developments in practice. An individual practitioner, keen to assess her/his own practice, for example, may draw on a range of assessment data. These could include, keeping a practice journal, inviting peer observation, participating in formal educational examinations or testing. As long as the benchmark for assessment in all of these processes is the core Standards, then the data will provide valuable evidence for the practitioner on her/his level of performance in relation to the NQF. Indeed, it is good practice to draw upon more than one source of assessment data as consistency across all methods means the overall outcome of assessment is more likely to be accurate and reliable.

At this stage of Siolta’s development, assessment processes are not fully finalised and will benefit from discussion and consultation with stakeholders. The system outlined does, however, reflect a synthesis of best practice both nationally and internationally in relation to assessment processes that foster developmental processes of change towards the achievement of quality. It is envisaged that there will be a number of distinct stages that services will engage with in relation to assessment under the NQF; registration, evidence collection and portfolio building, and validation.

During the registration stage, the service provider indicates interest in becoming registered on the NQF quality assurance programme. Details of the service are recorded and introductory information is sent out. This may include an overview of the NQF process, a set of Standards, Components and Signposts for Reflection (appropriate to the type of setting), guidelines for evidence collection, and the relevant application form for registration.

The service provider reads and reflects upon the Standards and if she/he feels that the NQF process is appropriate for the service, then the next step is to invite a visit from an NQF assessor to conduct a baseline assessment visit. During the visit, the assessor will
consult with the practitioner/s in the setting and will discuss in detail the processes involved in participation in the NQF programme. On the basis of this visit, the setting will be given a baseline rating and if it meets the minimum requirements, and if the setting wishes to continue with the NQF process, formal registration is completed.

Once registration is complete, the setting will be allocated a quality support person and, where appropriate, will be assigned to a quality cluster network. As part of the contract, a date for application for assessment for the QE mark will be agreed. Supporting materials, resources and documentation will be sent to the setting and, in the case of larger settings, a quality coordinator will be identified. The time frame between registration and validation will have been determined as part of the registration process. This will usually last for no more than one year. During that time, it is anticipated that the setting would participate in a range of development activities towards the achievement of the quality standards, such as curriculum review, professional development activities and engagement in reflective practice.

When the setting feels that it is ready to progress to the next stage of the NQF process or when the agreed time frame has elapsed, the quality support person would assist the setting in the preparation of a **quality assurance portfolio** to submit for validation. This portfolio should contain fully completed assessment forms for each standard and any relevant documentation to support the application. Upon submission of the portfolio, an appointment for a **validation** visit would be established. The duration of this visit would depend upon the nature and size of the setting and may involve more than one validator. During the visit, the validator would carry out such interviews, observations and review of documentation as is deemed necessary to verify the contents of the portfolio. This visit would culminate in the production of both summative and formative reports. The summative report will be based upon the awarding of merit according to a Likert scale\(^2\). In addition, a narrative report which focuses on areas of strength and target areas for future development would be prepared. If the setting has achieved a satisfactory level of performance to warrant the achievement of an award, they would receive a certificate for display within the setting and a continuing development pack to encourage their continued efforts towards quality practice. The award would be made for a time-limited period. Both national and international practice in this area suggests that this should not exceed two years. If the setting has not achieved the required level of quality practice to
merit the award, the quality support person would engage with the setting to renegotiate a new time frame and identify areas from the validator’s report which need to receive attention and support.

Supporting Quality

The following section presents possibilities for the provision of supports for the implementation of Siolta, drawing on the views of stakeholders, policy analysis, CECDE research and the submissions of members of the CECDE Consultative Committee. It profiles the variety of measures which experience and current practice indicate will be central to the successful implementation of the NQF, and endeavours to bolster the fact that the implementation of quality improvement processes is a project which must include all stakeholders across the ECCE sector, and not just practitioners.

The CECDE has recognised, from the earliest stages of the development of Siolta, that practitioners should receive support in engaging with the framework in pursuit of quality improvement. The provision of such high quality services is not viewed to be the responsibility of practitioners alone, but as a mutual effort, undertaken co-operatively and involving all facets of the system – individual, local, regional and national. The pursuant discussion of possible elements of support takes as its starting point the results of the consultation seminars which the CECDE held in late 2003. Participants were asked to enumerate supports required to enhance quality provision, which were prioritised as follows:

- Funding/financial support
- Professional development
- Staff training and qualifications
- Networking and mentoring
- Standards/guidelines/regulations/curriculum (CECDE, 2004a).

For the purposes of establishing a comprehensive picture of current views from practice, policy and research in ECCE, this initial analysis was augmented with information from a number of other sources. The implications for supporting quality which emerged from the research undertaken for the national review (CECDE, 2004b), the international review (CECDE 2004c) and the review of child learning and development (CECDE,
2005), were considered. A number of other recent and relevant policy documents, for example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report (DES, 2004), the report of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (NESF, 2005) and DEIS (DES, 2005) have also been examined. Finally, as part of the CECDE consultation process on the development of Síolta, submissions were requested from the Consultative Committee on the subject of the supports members viewed as necessary to the implementation of the Framework.

Following analysis of this material, two separate levels of support were identified. The first concerns the macro level of support for quality and highlights issues that need to be addressed at national level, and which were identified as fundamental to the overall development of quality ECCE provision in Ireland. The second relates more specifically to supports which stakeholders have identified as necessary in order for practitioners and services to successfully implement Síolta in practice settings.

At a macro level, a number of issues were identified as being pivotal to supporting Síolta. First and foremost, funding and financial support emerged as the main support required to promote and safeguard the delivery of quality provision. Participants in the consultation seminars acknowledged the critical influence that government policy and practice exerts upon the provision of ECCE services. The OECD (DES, 2004) have, likewise, emphasised the economic and social benefits of investing in ECCE, and have recommended a shift in investment towards services for young children in Ireland. In addition, participants were anxious to see greater coordination between government departments and organisations dealing with ECCE. The OECD proposes, in fact, that one ministry or designated funding and policy agency be the focus for such integration (DES, 2004) and movement in this direction is now evident with the recent establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC). Levels of staff training and qualifications are recognised internationally as a major contributor to, and support for, the quality of service provision (CECDE, 2004c). Issues of concern for the ECCE sector in this area include access to education and training, and flexibility of training pathways. The training and qualifications levels of practitioners will impact on the capacity of services to engage with the quality improvement process, and therefore a related programme of professional development will support the implementation of Síolta.
A clear consensus emerged from consultation on the ecological nature of the relationships between ECCE services, the family and the community. Specific measures will be required during the implementation of Siolta to make sure that services and children can benefit from the contribution of parents and families, and that they can both contribute to their communities and gain from the relationship. The need for a national data strategy to gather and provide accurate, reliable information to support the development of all aspects of ECCE emerged from both Insights on Quality (CECDE, 2004b) and On Target (CECDE, 2004d). Such data is necessary for the co-ordination of policy and provision and, most importantly, will make children in the birth to six years age group visible within society.

A number of possibilities for the provision and dissemination of information to services engaging with the NQF at a practice level were forthcoming. Great emphasis was placed on the availability of on-site support from an advisor with practice experience and expertise, complemented by telephone support, where the advisor would be available to respond to telephone queries from settings and practitioners. Other proposals included a web page on the Siolta website (www.siolta.ie), a dedicated newsletter for participating services, the publication of additional materials to support various aspects of practice and the dissemination of information through seminars at local, regional and national level. The opportunity for networking among practitioners was emphasised in several of the submissions, through possibilities such as quality support networks under the auspices of statutory or voluntary groups or an on-line network with a link from the dedicated web page.

Implementation
Siolta is envisaged as the basis for the development of a national quality assurance scheme for all ECCE settings where children aged from birth to six years are present. As outlined in Ready to Learn (DES, 1999), this would initially be a voluntary scheme with the ultimate objective of developing capacity in service provision to deliver high quality ECCE experiences for young children. In order to realise the ultimate objective of a national quality assurance scheme for early childhood education in Ireland, a period of test implementation and evaluation of Siolta is essential. This phase will need to facilitate a number of key aims and objectives:
- To review, refine and revise the indicators of quality outlined within the NQF
- To model, evaluate and refine the assessment and support functions within the NQF
- To develop the capacity of the ECCE sector to engage with quality improvement processes
- To develop ancillary support materials
- To facilitate aspects of the overall CECDE Research Strategy, such as exploration of parental involvement structures, professional development issues and targeted interventions, such as those suggested in the DEIS strategy (DES, 2005)
- To raise awareness of the critical nature of early education in the lives of young children.

It is envisaged that the pilot will take place throughout 2007 and 2008 and will proceed through a number of distinct but interdependent stages. It is essential to note from the outset that this proposed timeline is dependant upon the achievement of critical milestones along the way. These include; the approval of budgetary and recruitment plans; invitation and recruitment to participate; recruitment of Quality Advisors; development of the final sample profile; settings selection; the commissioning of an external evaluation; quarterly implementation reports; the review and revision of quality improvement plans; the appointment of a validator’s panel; and the implementation of validation processes. Such milestones are inextricably linked. Quality Advisors, for example, must be recruited and inducted before settings can be recruited; assessment structures must be developed and approved before validation processes can commence.

As previously outlined, it is envisaged that the pilot process will be externally evaluated. This evaluation will seek to identify the critical aspects of the NQF materials and processes which contribute to its effectiveness in stimulating and supporting the development of quality ECCE service provision. The evaluation brief will have multiple dimensions, and will seek to represent the broad range of stakeholders’ perspectives including practitioners, parents and children. This evaluation process is essential to establishing reliable and objective data on the efficacy of Siolta. Ultimately, it is envisaged that the findings of this evaluation will combine with a project narrative and recommendations for a revised NQF in a final report in September 2008. The evaluation brief will be put to public tender at an early stage in the pilot process and awarded on the basis of the expertise and capacity of interested institutions and individuals.
It is anticipated that a minimum of one hundred settings will be recruited to participate in the pilot process of the NQF. This number will facilitate representation of the broad diversity which characterises the ECCE settings identified through the national research conducted in support of the development of *Siolta* (CECDE, 2004a; 2004b). The sample will recruit equal numbers of settings from the four categories identified within the NQF – Full and Part-time Daycare, Sessional Services, Infant Classes in the Primary School and Childminding. Within each of these sub samples, effort will be made to ensure representation of settings within the following parameters; rural/urban, disadvantaged/non-disadvantaged, large/small, special needs/diversity, community and voluntary/private, curriculum approach/ethos. It is acknowledged that due to the limited nature of the sample size and also the voluntary nature of participation in the pilot process, it will not be possible to achieve representation of the entire complexity of existing early education provision in Ireland. However, these key categories have emerged from research (CECDE, 2004d) as the most critical elements of this diversity and therefore will form the basis of the selection criteria.

The support provided to all participants at all stages of the pilot process will necessitate the provision of information, mentoring and coaching and will require access to a range of skills including observation, assessment, portfolio building and facilitation skills. A further challenge for the provision of support will be the fact that this is a national pilot programme and will therefore involve participation by settings in geographically dispersed locations. This support will be delivered to settings primarily through the intervention of specialised Quality Advisors working in conjunction with the core staff of the CECDE, and with other organisations and institutions in their region (such as County Childcare Committees and Education Centres).

In light of the specialised skill set necessary for the role of each Quality Advisor and the national spread of participant settings, it will be necessary to recruit appropriately qualified and experienced individuals who can be located regionally. A minimum of five such personnel will facilitate the recruitment and support of one hundred settings nationally. This ratio of quality advisors to settings is important during the pilot process to mediate the establishment of new processes with the diverse range of participants, to integrate with and, where necessary, establish new networks of providers and support structures. Moreover, for the pilot process, these staff must facilitate the close scrutiny of
all aspects of the NQF process. This will, therefore, necessitate the collection of a substantial amount of data in the participant settings. In addition to these specialised staff, the core staff of the CECDE will provide a range of supports to the pilot process. This will include management functions, coordination and supervision of project staff, administration, communication and information services, development of resource materials, training and induction and research and development.

Conclusion

_Siolta_ has been designed to achieve a number of key objectives in relation to the development of early childhood education services in Ireland. As detailed throughout the course of this paper, it seeks:

- To clearly identify a vision of quality which reflects the unique cultural, social and environmental context of Ireland
- To build on existing knowledge and expertise relating to the provision of quality ECCE services
- To promote and support the rich diversity of provision that characterises ECCE service in Ireland
- To develop the capacity of ECCE services to provide quality experiences for children aged from birth to six years and their families
- To promote assessment as an essential element of the developmental processes necessary for the achievement of quality
- To recognise and reinforce quality practice
- To provide a coordinating framework for all aspects of early childhood provision in Ireland
- To support the development of professionalism in all aspects of practice in a dynamic and expanding sector.

_Siolta_ is a significant contribution to the development of ECCE, and education generally, in the Republic of Ireland. Together with the _Framework for Early Learning_ by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2004) it will provide the vision and blue print for a future of ECCE that will meet the needs of our youngest children.
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Bibliography

Notes

1 For detailed information on the contents of *Siolta*, please visit www.siolta.ie.

2 The Likert scale is a four-point scale gauging observed, reported or documented evidence of progress towards the achievement of a particular Component within the setting, with level one indicating no evidence and level four indicating extensive evidence of progress. In order to meet the minimum requirements for registration on the NQF process, a setting must achieve a rating of two on all Components of Quality.
Children’s voices in the Framework for Early Learning – A portraiture study

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Abstract
The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is developing a Framework for Early Learning to support adults in working with children from birth to six years. The Framework is premised on an understanding of children as being active in shaping and creating their own lives. This perspective supports the inclusion of children’s voices in decisions which affect them. The NCCA is using a portraiture study to facilitate children as partners in developing the Framework. The portraits will provide a detailed description of individual children’s experiences and reflections on their time in early childhood settings and will provide an important benchmark for the NCCA in developing a national framework for early learning and development which is grounded in an Irish context. This contextualisation will help to ensure that the Framework is relevant and helpful to adults in working with children in Ireland.

Introduction
The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) advises the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools as set out in Article 41-1[b] of the Education Act (Department of Education and Science, 1998). In fulfilling its remit, the NCCA is developing a national framework referred to as the Framework for Early Learning, to support adults in extending and enriching children’s learning and development from birth to six years. These adults include parents¹, childminders and practitioners² in the range of early childhood settings including the home, childminding environments, nurseries, crèches, playgroups, pre-schools and infant classes in primary school.

The publication of the consultative document Towards a Framework for Early Learning (NCCA, 2004) and the ensuing consultation with the early childhood sector were
important stepping stones in the NCCA’s work in developing the Framework. The portraiture study in early childhood settings around the country represents another important milestone. Portraiture involves recording and interpreting the perspectives and experiences of participants in particular settings. This study explored what children and adults do, say and make in early childhood settings, in order to inform the development of the *Framework for Early Learning*.

The portraiture study outlined in this paper will support the NCCA’s development of the *Framework for Early Learning* in a number of ways. It will help the NCCA to

- represent the voices of children in the Framework
- connect with the everyday experiences of children and practitioners in a range of settings

As children are not a homogenous group the portraiture study will not generalise about children’s experiences across the range of early childhood settings in Ireland. As is often the case in qualitative research the study is focused on understanding not generalising (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1996). Therefore, the portraits will provide rich descriptions of individual children’s experiences and reflections on their time in a small number of settings - what they enjoy doing, whom they enjoy being with, where they enjoy spending time, what they would like to change and so forth. These reflections will help the NCCA to develop a national framework for early learning which is based firmly in an Irish context. This contextualisation of the Framework will help to ensure that it is relevant and helpful to those who care for and educate children under the age of six years in Ireland.

This paper presents the background to the portraiture study and explains why the NCCA used portraiture as a means of understanding more clearly children’s experiences in early childhood settings. It also presents the methods for gathering information from and about the children.

**Background to the portraiture study**
As with all its work, the NCCA is developing the *Framework for Early Learning* in consultation with the NCCA’s various committee structures as well as with the early childhood sector in Ireland. The *Framework for Early Learning* is also informed by policy developments in the area of early childhood care and education such as the ratification by
Ireland in 1992 of the *United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC, 1990) through which Ireland committed to a range of obligations concerning the welfare of children. Another significant policy development is the *National Children’s Strategy: Our Children, Their Lives* (Department of Health and Children, 2000), which emphasises the importance of enabling children to experience a fulfilling childhood to help them realise their full potential.

In 2004, the NCCA launched the consultative document *Towards a Framework for Early Learning*. This document outlined the purpose of the Framework, its vision and aims, its proposed themes, and the model for presenting children’s early learning and development. The consultation process that followed enabled the early childhood sector to influence the ongoing development of the Framework. The findings of the NCCA’s consultation with the early childhood sector were presented in *Towards a Framework for Early Learning: Final Consultation Report* (2005) which is available on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie. The findings revealed strong support for much of the thinking presented in the consultative document. Consultation participants emphasised the importance of strengthening the focus on the child as a contributor and participant in learning, the creative arts, the development of first and second language acquisition and the status of Gaeilge, and the child’s care needs. Participants also re-iterated the importance of representing children’s, parents’ and practitioners’ experiences and voices in the development of the Framework.

In designing the consultation with the early childhood sector in 2004, the NCCA had always planned to consult with children. The NCCA believed that this would be most effectively done during the development of the components of the Framework itself rather than by focusing on the ideas presented in the consultative document. The NCCA identified a portraiture study as an important vehicle for this consultation.

**Why include the child’s voice?**

The NCCA is engaging in a portraiture study at a time when the importance and value of listening to children is increasingly recognised by legislators and policy makers both at home and abroad. Ireland’s ratification of the UNCRC and subsequent legislation and policy initiatives have highlighted the importance of meaningfully listening to children, and have served to promote the importance of taking children’s views
seriously. Consultation with children is also a key principle underpinning the work of the National Children’s Office (NCO) which was established to oversee the implementation of the National Children’s Strategy (Department of Health and Children, 2000). Goal 1 of the Strategy asserts that children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

Changes in the way that legislators and policy makers view the importance of listening to and consulting with children reflect a changing attitude to childhood. Recent years have seen an evolution in traditional understandings of childhood with sociological perspectives generating a new sociology of childhood. This sociology sees children as a distinct group in society; a social group which should be understood and considered independently of adults (Devine, 2004). Understanding children as a group with rights, capacities and needs distinguishable from those of adults should not give rise to a view of children as a homogenous group. The elusiveness of a single concept of childhood is widely accepted in early childhood circles (James and Prout, 1990). Prout (2001) has noted that any one child sees and speaks from multiple, combined and intersecting positions which are created and influenced by gender, ethnicity, class and ability. Resonating loudly through the NCCA’s consultative document *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (2004) is the heterogeneity of children as a social group. Children have different strengths, interests, abilities and needs. Adding to this diversity are children’s different cultures, languages, ethnicities, beliefs and socio-economic backgrounds. In choosing children for the portraiture study, the NCCA is trying to reflect the richness and complexity of the differing childhoods experienced by children in Ireland.

The new sociology of childhood views children as being active in shaping and creating their own lives as opposed to being passive recipients of life’s experiences. Quortrup, Bardy, Sgritta and Wintersberger (1987) call for the promotion of children as *beings rather than becomings*. Similarly, Lancaster (2003) states that children are not simply learning and practising for the future, but instead are already living and accomplishing in the present. This perspective necessitates a fundamental shift in thinking about children and in particular their capacities and competencies as participants in research such as the NCCA’s portraiture study.
Facilitating active participation by children

Traditionally children have often been passive participants in research studies which explore issues related to them and therefore it was particularly important that the NCCA facilitate active participation by children in the portraiture study. Franklin (1995) suggests that due to this relative exclusion of children from participation they need to be supported by adults to achieve the status of active participants. The NCCA used Mayall’s RAMPS framework (1994) to support children in the study in making their voices heard. This framework involves

- Recognising the many visual and verbal languages that children use to express themselves
- Assigning space for documentation and feedback
- Making time to give children information that is relevant, makes sense to them and focuses on what they want and need to know to make informed decisions
- Providing choice
- Subscribing to a reflective practice.

Lancaster (2003) suggests that the RAMPS framework can help to promote the tilting of the balance of power in children’s favour.

What is portraiture?

In their practice of research as portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) describe portraiture as painting with words. They speak of their search for a form of inquiry which would bridge the realms of science and art in order to create narratives that convey the perspective of the subjects and the meaning they attribute to what they do and say and how they behave. Portraiture is therefore a form of qualitative research enquiry which seeks to give voice to the experiences of the various research participants in a particular setting. It does this through a narrative which documents and illuminates the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p.14).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) present four major organising themes of portraiture to guide the portraiture researcher in his/her work. These relate to context, voice, relationships and emergent themes:
Context refers to the setting in which the action and experiences take place. The context enables the researcher to place the participants and their actions in a particular time and space and to understand and interpret what they say and do. The experience of individual children in early childhood settings is thus shaped and framed by the particular family, setting and community in which they learn and develop.

Voice refers to the impression of the researcher on both the process of gathering and interpreting the data and the finished portrait. While other forms of ethnographic research are concerned with dulling the voice of the researcher, the I or we of the researcher(s) is explicit or implicit throughout the final portrait. Voice also relates to the voice of the participants. The researcher listens for the message and meaning from the participants through listening to their verbal contributions and also observing their gestures and body language which often speak louder than words. This is important for all children but is particularly significant for very young and/or pre-verbal children or children who have special educational needs who may continue to use non-verbal forms of communication as their main way of interacting with others.

Relationships are the means by which portraits are constructed, shaped and drawn. It is through the developing relationship and dialogue between the researcher and participant that the portrait is shaped and co-constructed and a balance in participation is achieved between the voice of the researcher and the voice of the participant.

Emergent themes throughout the study lead to the development of more discerning questions and more appropriate means of collecting information.

Why portraiture?
In considering an appropriate methodology the NCCA decided to use portraiture because it allows the researcher/s to describe the rich, complex and diverse experiences of children within the socio-cultural context of their settings. Portraiture also gives the flexibility to use multiple methods and sources of data in creating the final portraits such as observation, photography, interviews and video-recording.

While portraiture has many similarities with other qualitative research methods, it has two distinguishing features. These features were also influential in the NCCA's choice of
potraiture as a methodology. The first feature is that potraiture begins by searching for what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) refer to as *what is good and healthy* about the experiences of the participants in the settings. This *good* forms the context of the research inquiry and a key question the researcher asks then is *what is good here*?

The second defining feature of potraiture is that the researcher *listens for a story* whereas in other areas of ethnographic research the researcher listens *to* the story of the research participants. Welty (1983) makes a crucial distinction between these two forms of listening. In the latter, the researcher adopts a more passive and receptive stance whereas the researcher in potraiture adopts an active, engaged position which involves participating in, identifying and selecting the story and helping to shape the story’s coherence. This active engaged stance means that the *self* of the researcher is critical to the way of listening, selecting, interpreting and composing the portrait.

The Mosaic Approach as a framework for creating the portraits

In designing this potraiture study, the NCCA looked at recent work in the field of listening to young children. In particular, it drew on the work of Clark and Moss (2001) in identifying methods for gathering and analysing information which would be sensitive to the strengths and abilities of children from birth to six years. This approach known as the Mosaic Approach provided the *how* of the NCCA’s portraiture study and emphasised the processes of dialogue, reflection and action as much as the data gathering tools. It is based on a particular framework for listening to children. Clark and Moss (2001) describe six facets of this framework:

- **multi-method** – Goldschmied and Jackson (1994) highlight how children *speak* through their play, their actions and reactions. Recognising that children have different voices and therefore different modes of communication (pre-verbal, non-verbal and verbal), the Mosaic Approach uses a range of imaginative methods to gather and analyse what children are thinking, experiencing and communicating without relying on spoken or written words.

- **participatory** – children play an active role in sharing and interpreting their experiences, reflecting their expertise and agency in their own lives. The Mosaic Approach begins from the premise that children are competent individuals in their
own right. Using a range of methods which combine the visual and the verbal, adults should be able to *view the world through the lens of children and young people* (Johnson, Ivan-Smith, Gordon, Pridmore, Scott, Chamers, Ennew 1999).

- **reflective** – reflection is a critical part of the interpretative process. The Mosaic Approach emphasises the importance of children and adults collectively discussing and sharing their interpretations of the information gathered.

- **adaptable** – both the techniques and the processes may be used in a variety of early childhood settings. Careful consideration is needed when deciding the suitability of different methods for children of different ages, abilities, cultures and languages.

- **focused on children’s lived experiences** – children’s experiences must be viewed in context and the processes through which children learn and develop are as important as what they learn.

- **embedded into practice** – the Mosaic Approach has the potential to be used as a way of listening to and understanding more clearly how children live their lives in early childhood settings, with a view to improving the quality of their experiences.

**Ethical considerations**

Given the young age of the children in the portraiture study (from birth to six years) and the fact that the study involved the use of methodologies such as digital photography and audio- and video-recording, the project raised particular ethical concerns. In light of this the NCCA used the ethical package developed by Lansdown and Lancaster (2001) which provides a guide for respecting three different aspects of children’s contribution:

- respecting children’s right to information
- respecting what children show and tell
- respecting children’s right to active and shared participation in the process right up to the drawing of the final portraits.

In addition to these ethical considerations, the NCCA’s work with children in the early childhood settings was informed by the principles for best practice in child protection as
presented in *Children First*, (Department of Health and Children, 1999), Ireland’s National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children. The NCCA also drew on the work of Hill (2005) in developing protocols for safeguarding the welfare and protection of the children and the researchers. These protocols addressed issues such as where information was gathered from the children and in the presence of whom.

In the process of arranging access and entry to the settings, the researchers provided a statement about themselves from An Garda Síochána. Parents and practitioners were informed about the purpose of the study and the activities involved so that they had the relevant information to assist them in deciding to participate or not. The settings were chosen by the researchers at various locations across three provinces throughout the country. To facilitate optimum and frequent engagement with the children and their practitioners in a variety of early childhood settings, the team selected settings in close proximity to their own homes/workplaces. Merriam (1988 p.48) proposes that ‘One wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most’. The NCCA’s Early Childhood Committee made contact with some of the settings on behalf of the research team or the team used settings where they already had links or connections. Informed consent from parents and practitioners was documented using consent forms. Due to the ages of the children, the issue of informed consent was especially relevant and children’s participation in the study was subject to their parents’ or guardians’ consent. On receiving this consent the NCCA endeavoured to ensure that the children understood that they could stop participating in the study at any time and that they did not have to participate in activities or answer questions that they didn’t want to. In the case of all children but particularly in pre-verbal and non-verbal children the researchers were mindful of non-verbal responses and stopped any activity if the children appeared to be unhappy or uncomfortable in any way.

Gathering and interpreting the information
The Mosaic Approach offers an integrated methodology for listening to children by combining the visual and the verbal. Clark and Moss (2001) note how methods such as photography and drawing which convey children’s meaning in alternative symbolic forms, can in turn provide the springboard for thinking, talking and listening. In selecting methods for listening to children from birth to six years, the NCCA sought a balance between methods which relied solely on written and/or spoken word, and those
which focused on the visual or the visual in combination with the spoken word. These methods reflect how children communicate in different ways as they move through early childhood.

The NCCA collected information during the portraiture study using the following methods:

- Observation (researcher’s own perspective)
- Photography (of and by the children)
- Audio- and video-recording (of and by the children)
- Child conferencing (interview with portrait child and a friend)
- Walking tours and mapmaking (child took researcher on a tour and made a map as a means of exploring the information recorded on the tour)
- Interviews with parents and practitioners (to gain their perspectives and insights into the child’s experiences in the setting).

Each NCCA researcher used a variety of methods which were appropriate given the individual child’s age, strengths, interests and abilities to capture his/her views and experiences. Differences between children for example in physical, intellectual or linguistic ability or in ethnicity or culture as well as the varying constraints of working in the individual settings also influenced the choice of methods used to gather information. Collectively, the information gathered through the different methods provided the pieces of the mosaic which the researcher used to create the portraits of babies, toddlers and young children. The process of gathering and analysing the information was spiral. Information was analysed on an on-going basis with a view to identifying themes, patterns and questions that required further exploration.

What happened during each visit?
The portraiture study involved the researcher making a maximum of six visits to each early childhood setting. An outline schedule of activities for these visits is presented below.
Table 1: Outline schedule of visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visit</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1     | - Observe children in the setting  
       | - Choose a portrait child in partnership with the practitioner  
       |     | (pending agreement from parents)  |
| 2     | - Gather information on the portrait child  
       |     | (as member of a group/class)  
       |     | - Interview the portrait child’s practitioner  |
| 3     | - Gather information on the portrait child  
       |     | (as member of a group/class)  
       |     | - Interview the portrait child’s parent(s)  |
| 4     | - Gather information on the portrait child  
       |     | (as member of a group/class)  
       |     | - Interview the portrait child with a friend/friends  
       |     | - Interview a group of parents  |
| 5     | - Gather information on the portrait child  
       |     | (as member of a group/class)  
       |     | - Interview a group of practitioners and the manager/principal  |
| 6     | - Share outline of the portrait with the child, practitioner,  
       |     | parent and principal/manager  |

The settings and children in the study
The NCCA worked with 12 children in 11 settings in the portraiture study. One portrait focused on two boys in their home. Collectively, these settings reflect a range of different types of early childhood setting in Ireland as well as an urban/rural representation, a range of children from birth to six years, a mix of boys and girls, private, community and statutory provision and cultural and linguistic diversity. Table 2 outlines the children and the settings involved in the portraiture.
Table 2: Profile of settings involved in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting type</th>
<th>Portrait child and area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private Nursery</td>
<td>Portrait child – Cathal aged 9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childminding setting</td>
<td>Portrait child – Jayne aged 19 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home setting</td>
<td>Portrait children – Seán aged 19 months, Patrick aged 4½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Crèche with Naionra</td>
<td>Portrait child - Amy aged 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Crèche</td>
<td>Portrait child – Harry aged 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naionra</td>
<td>Portrait child – Zachary aged 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveller pre-school</td>
<td>Portrait child – Louise aged 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Start pre-school</td>
<td>Portrait child – Caroline aged 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montessori community pre-school</td>
<td>Portrait child – Alan aged 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant class in junior school</td>
<td>Portrait child – Matt aged 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant class in primary school</td>
<td>Portrait child – Andrew aged 5 years 11 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The visits to the settings took place between March and June 2006. Following these, the data gathered was analysed by individual researchers and also collectively by the researcher team, and used to compile the portraits. The portraits (draft and final versions) were shared with the children (as far as is practicable given their ages), their parents and practitioners.
The aim of the *Framework for Early Learning* being developed by the NCCA is to support adults in extending and enriching children’s early learning and development from birth to six years. The NCCA sees the inclusion of the voices and experiences of children in Ireland in the development of such a Framework as being critical. The portraiture study will enable the active and engaged participation of children from as young as nine months through to six years in the *Framework*. The 11 portraits will be compiled and available on the NCCA website at www.ncca.ie in spring 2007 in a publication called *Listening for children’s stories: Children as partners in the Framework for Early Learning*. In addition in this publication, the NCCA researchers will reflect on and document their collective experience in using portraiture as a methodology for listening for the children’s stories and will highlight the lessons learnt through the study as well as outlining how the portraiture study will inform the development of the *Framework for Early Learning*.

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Notes
1 The NCCA uses the term parents to refer to the child’s primary caregivers and educators. These include the child’s father and mother and/or guardian(s).
2 The term practitioners refers to all those working in a specialised manner with children in early childhood settings. Practitioners have a diversity of experience and qualifications ranging from unaccredited through to post-graduate level.
3 The NCCA uses the term verbal children to refer to those children who have the capacity to communicate their feelings, ideas and thoughts through spoken words. Pre-verbal refers to those children who are working towards developing this capacity, and who rely to a greater extent on vocalizations, gestures, expressions and movements in communicating with others.
4 As Garda vetting is currently limited to only a small number of those working in the early years sector the NCCA research team applied under the Data Protection Act (2003) to have themselves checked on the Garda Criminal Records Database and a letter was issued by An Garda Síochána to each of the researchers stating that no personal data had been found on them.
5 Names of all children have been changed.
6 The 19 month old child was chosen as the portrait child but because there were two children in the home at the time of the visits it was decided to include the second child also.
The National Children’s Nurseries Association Centre of Excellence Programme – A Tool for Defining and Assessing Quality in the Irish Childcare System

Aisling Hooper

Abstract
This paper outlines the National Children’s Nurseries Association (NCNA) Centre of Excellence Programme and the learning that has come from using this tool in order to enhance the quality of childcare settings in Ireland. It describes the reasons why the programme was developed and how the Programme defines and describes Quality. It explores the principles that underpin a quality programme while also describing the entire process of the Centre of Excellence. Following on from this it highlights the outcomes through the ongoing evaluation of the programme and how this learning facilitated the review of the Centre of Excellence. The paper also examines the ethical considerations inherent in the programme while identifying that the key issues are those of trust and confidentiality.

Finally the paper discusses the positive outcomes the Centre of Excellence programme is having on the Irish childcare sector. It has proven to be a user-friendly independent assessment tool and a dynamic document that can be amended to reflect changes to the sector. More importantly it identifies key developmental issues for childcare and acknowledges the valuable work of childcare staff.

History of the Centre of Excellence
The National Children’s Nurseries Association (NCNA) was established in 1988 by a number of childcare providers based mainly in Dublin who wished to network and support each other. During this time a quality assurance system was also developed through which members could be awarded the higher status of being a registered member.

With the introduction of Pre-School Regulations, this system was set aside to allow the sector engage with the statutory regulations. In 1997 the NCNA received Department of Health & Children funding to employ a National Advisor whose role was to support and advise members in relation to statutory requirements. In 2001 NCNA secured funding
under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme to develop services for members, including the employment of regional support staff.

It was clear that for many years NCNA members had been striving to provide quality services for the children and families in their care. When the Pre School Regulations were introduced in 1996, it became very clear that there were many childcare providers who were providing services in excess of the requirements of the Pre School Regulations, but no method of acknowledging this existed.

The NCNA launched a project with 40 member services to pilot the Self Assessment Manual, which had been developed in 2000 with funding received from the Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform. The Self Assessment Manual had been developed as a tool for members to evaluate their services. The evaluation of the pilot project indicated a desire from providers to have a more detailed assessment process available.

The outcomes of this pilot project and the awareness of the need to offer recognition to services providing quality, prompted discussions in NCNA about potential mechanisms to address these issues on behalf of the members of NCNA. Following consultation between NCNA staff and Executive Committee, and a number of principles for any scheme were agreed;

- that it would be voluntary,
- it would be non competitive,
- it would involve self assessment as the key methodology,
- that it would be transparent,
- that it should be clearly different from the Pre School Inspection process,
- that it should be a supportive process for anyone who wishes to participate and that
- it should place great importance on Relationships in the Childcare Service and Activities & Programmes in the Childcare Service, as opposed to the more physical environmental issues which are covered in pre school regulations inspections.

**Defining Quality**

Following this, NCNA staff began to research international literature on the assessment of early childhood settings. Their work was guided by a nine-member advisory committee of early childhood professionals from across the country. This research indicated that the
model of self-evaluation had been shown to be successful internationally and it was agreed to maintain this as the key assessment model. There then followed the task of agreeing the areas of the childcare service which the Centre of Excellence would seek to assess. A large amount of secondary research was conducted, including looking at the National Association Education of Young Children (NAEYC) early childhood programme of accreditation model U.S.A. This model was established in 1985 to set professional standards for the early childhood sector. It is a voluntary system by which services measure themselves against national standards. The second model that was researched was ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale). The instrument used is designed to assess process quality in early childhood settings using a rating scale. ECERS has been used in several major studies on early childhood setting through the U.S.A. The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) in Australia was also looked at. This system examines the movement from quality improvement to accreditation. The services undertake a process of self-study and improvement against 35 principles.

Some of the initial categories agreed on by the NCNA were curriculum, food and nutrition, relationships with families, staff management issues, interactions in the nursery, environment, administration, and business management. NCNA staff then examined the headings further, agreed what sub headings would be included in each section, combined certain sections, addressed issues such as overlapping subjects etc, and finally agreed on the following 10 sections (appendix 1)

Activities & Programmes for Children,
Relationships in the Nursery
Partnership with Families
Health, Safety & Hygiene
Staff Conditions & Professional Development
Physical Environment
Food & Nutrition
Management & Administration
Implementation of Policies & Procedures
Evaluation & Review of Nursery
Before work on the document itself began, a number of key decisions were taken including the prioritisation of the sections, process issues in regard to timeframe, who and how a visit would be conducted, defining the process in a brochure for members and questions of administration. A key question at this time was: For how long would the award be valid? It was agreed that the award would be valid for the year of the validation and the following year.

**Defining the Parameters of Quality**

When devising the scoring mechanisms for the programme, a number of key points were noted:

- It was important that all questions would help providers and their staff look at, reflect on and record how well they felt they were performing
- Different types of scoring mechanisms would be necessary for different sections
- Many parameters overlapped two or three sections. It as agreed to repeat subjects where this happened in order to allow for further reflection on the subject
- Yes/No scoring was important for key questions, and a rating system was more appropriate for ‘value-added’ type subjects.

This work concluded with a total of 501 parameters for assessment being agreed. It was also agreed that there were two sections where degrees of compliance could be claimed. These were *Activities & Programmes for Children* and *Food & Nutrition*. A 1-8 mark rating system was used for these sections, 1 being the lowest and 8 being the highest. All other sections have a Yes/No marking system except the Food and Nutrition, which has a combination of both scoring systems. This final draft document became known as the Self Evaluation Profile or SEP.

**Testing & Training**

In March 2002, all NCNA members were invited to participate in the Centre of Excellence Programme. The project had its official launch at a reception at Dublin Castle Conference Centre on March 22, 2002 hosted by the Minister for Children Mary Hanafin, T.D.

Seventy-eight services applied to participate in the project. The applicants received acknowledgment letters on May 15, 2002, with the Self-Evaluation Profile (SEP)
materials sent approximately two weeks later.

The NCNA's Regional Support Workers (RSW) were available to visit childcare services throughout the self-evaluation process. Regional Meetings were also held to answer questions about the Programme.

Initial assessment training for NCNA staff began in May 2001. This training was conducted by two consultants from the National Association for the Education of Young Children in the USA. Following this, in June 2002, the Advisory Team traveled to London for further training in assessing services. This training also involved testing the SEP with London based childcare providers. The feedback from these tests, as well as feedback from participating services indicated the need to develop further explanatory documentation to accompany the SEP. 'Pink pages' were developed and were distributed to all participating services in July, approximately midway through the self-evaluation process. These 'pink pages' clarified certain criteria, and confirmed for participating services, what constituted a score of an 8, a 5 etc. Minimum standards for receiving the award were also clarified at this time. (These 'pink pages' were incorporated into the SEP the following year).

The Validation Process

In the first year of the Programme, a total of 37 centres (47% of the total applicants) completed the self-evaluation process and submitted the SEP for review. The NCNA staff reviewing those submissions determined that two services were ineligible to continue the process: one had missed the submission deadline, the other had submitted incomplete materials. Two other services withdrew from the process voluntarily after changes in management.

All validation visits were conducted over a 6-month period beginning in September 2002 and ending February 2003. The validators selected the visit dates. Services received approximately 10-business day's advance notice of the validation visits. The Advisory Team worked in two-person teams to conduct the validation visits. For consistency the National Advisor conducted all validation visits bar two. In order to help prevent potential conflicts of interest, she excused herself from these services as she had a close affiliation; regional support workers did not validate services in areas where they played a support role. Typically, the visits began with a tour of the building following arrival at 10:00 a.m. and
ended at approximately 5:00 p.m. The profile was then completely reviewed and rated. Most visits lasted one day; there were only three 2-day visits, all necessitated by nursery size.

Members of each validation team divided their responsibilities. One validator conducted room observations while the other reviewed the service’s documentation. Dialogue about the service went on throughout the validation visit. All services provided consent forms signed by parents allowing the validators to speak to their children.

The validation visit ended when observations of all areas of the service and review of the required documents were completed. An exception was the two cases where the validators encountered violations in Pre-School Services Regulations (e.g. if a centre was understaffed or “out of ratio” at the time of the visit). When violations were identified, the validators informed the manager of the infractions and left the centre.

The decision to award the Centre of Excellence was made by the two validators who visited each site. The primary criterion for the award was whether the service was consistently rated 6 or above (out of a possible 8 points) on each relevant area, and scored appropriately in the yes/no sections.

All Centre of Excellence candidates were mailed notification about whether or not they would receive the award on February 27, 2003. Their own completed self-evaluation profiles were mailed separately which were accompanied by the SEPs completed during the validation visit. Soon after, the regional support workers visited each participating site to provide individualized feedback about the validators’ findings.

Sixteen nurseries from seven counties were selected to receive the first-ever awards. This number represents 20.5% of all applicants for the project and 48.5% of all services that went through the validation process.

All participants in the Centre of Excellence project—along with other members of the NCNA and guests—were invited to a Centre of Excellence Award Ceremony at Dublin Castle on May 9, 2003. Colorful display posters prepared by the staff and children of each of the Centres of Excellence and introductions as each group received the award underscored the wide variety of services that had received the special award designation.
Evaluation & Review

External Evaluation, Year 1

The first evaluation of the project was launched concurrent with the award ceremony. Representatives of New Developments Consulting conducted three focus groups of at least one hour each on May 9 and 10, 2003. The three groups included more than a dozen individuals—owners, managers, or childcare staff—who had participated in the Centre of Excellence project. Focus group participants also had an opportunity to submit written comments following each group session. At the completion of the focus groups, the principal investigator also met informally with the NCNA staff to share initial impressions and request their input. 2 separate survey forms were drafted after these focus groups and these were sent to all 78 services that initially applied for the SEP. Some of the results of this evaluation were used to inform changes and improvements in the Centre of Excellence process in 2003. These included

- Services are notified of the result within 30 days of their visit
- Half-hour sessions with written feedback on all sections in document are held at the end of the Validation visit
- An evaluation survey is given to the centre by the validators on conclusion of the visit which they are asked to return to NCNA
- The times spent in each room is recorded with at least one hour being spent in each room
- Longer visits have been introduced, from 8.30am – 5.00pm, which provides an opportunity to meet parents and see children settling in.
- In services with over 100 children, 3 validators conduct the visit, with 2 validators spending their time observing rooms.
- The Policy and procedure section was expanded and providers were given more detail of what was expected in each policy
- Clarification was given about some ratings.
- NCNA members need and are provided with information on an ongoing basis about good practice. Centre of Excellence Bulletins have been developed and articles are written in the NCNA magazine and the NCNA Bulletin.
- The need for in service training on certain issues was identified, e.g. diversity, and this is regularly offered through the NNCA Training Prospectus and Tailor Made Training.
Internal Evaluation – Year Two
An internal review of the Centre of Excellence Programme was completed in Year 2 by participating services. Following this review, 3 key changes were made which have since been incorporated into the SEP. These were:

1. Two new parameters have been added to the section on Activities & Programmes For Children
2. The rating scale has been changed from 1-8, to 1-4
3. A Re-Application Document has been developed (see below)

Re-Application Document
A Re Application SEP was devised in 2004 for services whose Centre of Excellence Award would run out in 2004. There is no compulsion on services to re-apply, but many services have indicated their wish for a re-application process. Following consultation in NCNA, it was agreed that a new document would have to be devised. It was agreed that the standard to be reached by a service reapplying, which has already won the award, would have to be at the same standard as the applicants of that current year. Visits to service re-applying are non-notified. These services are given a 10-day window within which the validation visit will be conducted.

Supporting Quality – the Centre of Excellence experience
The Regional Support Worker team support NCNA members on an ongoing basis, providing support on all aspects of running their childcare service. Specific support is available in regard to the Centre of Excellence as outlined below;

Support to make the decision to apply for the Award: Regional Support Workers are very familiar with the services in their area, and services which the Regional Support Worker feels could achieve the award standard are encouraged to identify their strengths and identify steps to take to address any weaknesses which may exist. This prepares members for deciding to apply for the Award;

Encouraging members to use the Self Evaluation Profile as a working tool: As the methodology used by the Centre of Excellence is Self Evaluation, it is ideal for use by members as a tool to reflect on how well they are doing with their service and to help
identify improvements which can be made;

**Information:** As detailed above, special bulletins on specific issues of good practice have been developed and articles are included on an ongoing basis in other NCNA publications;

**Group meetings:** Question and Answer meetings have been organised which are facilitated by Regional Support Workers. These meetings provide members considering applying for the Award with an opportunity to get clarification on issues of concern;

**Advice from Award Recipients:** Members who have already achieved the Award are now invited to attend these meetings and their advice and experience has proved to be invaluable for potential applicants.

**Site visits before application:** Regional Support Workers are invited by potential applicants to conduct an advisory site visit in advance of application. These visits may include advice on room layout, curriculum, menus, etc;

**External Support:** NCNA have worked to ensure that the Pre School Officers nationwide and all the County Childcare Committees are familiar with the Centre of Excellence Award. This has lead to various Committees and Pre School Officers encouraging providers to apply for the award, and giving whatever advice or support they may have available;

**One to one visits after Award Notification:** Regional Support Workers conduct visits with all members who applied for the award. This visit will involve an examination of the Validators SEP, and advice for the provider on changes that they could make in order to achieve the Award at another time if they have been unsuccessful, or to look at further improvements which can be made, in the case of successful applicants. This encouragement and support is vital for the continuation of a supportive relationship between the provider and the Regional Support Worker.

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical Issues arise when information such as that which is included in an SEP is shared. The key issues are those of confidentiality and trust. NCNA have considered these issues in some detail and a number of guiding points are now in place.
The process of self evaluation is based on the principle of trust, therefore the purpose of the Validation visit is to confirm the service provider’s commitment to and understanding of Excellence in childcare service delivery.

The process is underpinned by the fact that NCNA is a membership based organisation and that services such as the Centre of Excellence are developed on behalf of and with the support of members.

The names of applicant nurseries are confined to the Advisory Team.

Applicant nurseries that are in the validation process are not discussed with their regional support worker.

The Validation Team is made up of Advisory Staff from outside the area.

Details of the Validation process are not discussed outside of the Advisory team.

Regional Support Workers must trust the decision of the Validation team about a service in their area.

The results and feedback of the Validation visit are made known to the service provider and the Regional Support Worker for the area.

Only nurseries who receive the award are publicised.

Ethical Issues are organic in nature and it is assumed that further guiding points may have to be agreed in the future in order to ensure the transparency of the Centre of Excellence Award process.

**Outcomes for the sector**

The Centre of Excellence Award is an independent assessment tool for the childcare sector in Ireland. The independence of the Award is central to its success as it is not dependent on any external agencies or private companies for funding, which means that extraneous influence is not brought to bear.
The SEP provides a user-friendly tool that providers can use to monitor the quality of their service. Because it uses simple methods of assessment, it is transparent and can be easily understood by parents and the external community within which the childcare sector operates. The SEP sets down standards for the sector which are informed by the experience of the NCNA and by our sister organisations in Ireland and abroad and which will serve to lift standards throughout the sector.

The SEP is a dynamic document and as such can be amended to reflect changes in the sector. New developments such as the new National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Framework document, or the revised pre School regulations can therefore easily be incorporated into the SEP.

The Centre of Excellence programme will identify key developmental issues for the sector, i.e. if all services applying for the Award show weaknesses in the same area, this points to significant gaps in the sector in general and therefore may highlight issues for public policy, for training, for legislative changes etc.

The Centre of Excellence Award provides an opportunity for the work of childcare staff to be recognised and gives these, often underpaid and undervalued staff a real sense of pride and success.

The Award is a very tangible, and quantifiable way for the government to assess the value of its investment in childcare and therefore a way of targeting further improvements for the Sector.

Finally the Centre of Excellence Award is available to providers of childcare who are committed to providing quality childcare and to raising the standards of the sector in general. The more this commitment is recognised, the more valuable it will become to achieve an Award such as the Centre of Excellence. The more recognition given, the better-informed parents will be about finding quality childcare for their children. This in turn will give greater confidence to the sector, a sector that has been undervalued for years. This will lead to better childcare for children in Ireland today and into the future. Irish children deserve such aspiration and vision.
Appendix 1
Sample questions used in the evaluation tool (all questions need to score a C or answer yes).

1. Programme / Curriculum for Children
Infants are provided with:
Sufficient space for children to play, sit and talk, listen to each other and for adults to move around / work / observe
a) Limited space
b) Space for small or large group play
c) Space is suitable for adults and for infant small and large group play.

A range of natural materials and objects for exploring e.g. Treasure Basket.
a) Limited availability
b) Freely available with limited variety
c) Freely available with a wide variety.

Activities such as sand, water, play dough, junk art, etc. are provided to encourage infants to learn through their senses.
a) Limited availability e.g. once a week
b) Available but planned times only
c) Freely available for infants to use daily.

2. Relationships in the Nursery
Staff show respect for each other.
• Call each other by name and greet each other in a friendly manner
• Staff show respect by supporting the views of their colleagues
• Staff assist each other as required.
Staff are interested in their colleague's points of view.
• They take on board others suggestions and there is an ongoing discussion regarding the children.
Staff promote independence.
• Staff help children acquire self-help skills. Staff encourage children to share feelings and emotions.
• Through group games, individual work and giving children the language and resources
they need to share their emotions and feelings
- Staff acknowledge children's feelings and respond to them appropriately.
- Staff use a pleasant tone of voice, never shout or use a harsh tone of voice.
- Staff always respect each child.

3. Partnership with Families
Families are encouraged to participate in the nursery's events.
- Activities are planned at times to facilitate families attendance
- There is early notification of events.
Families are involved in regular reviews of the nursery e.g. through meetings, questionnaires etc.
- Yearly, families are consulted in relation to the nursery.

4. Health, Safety and Hygiene
Knives and other sharp objects are kept out of children's reach YES/NO
Outdoor walls, steps, railings and ledges are made safe or inaccessible YES/NO
Ponds and pits are securely fenced YES/NO/NA
Documentation is kept to prove that daily risk assessment for outdoor area is completed YES/NO

5. Staff Conditions and Professional Development
The recruitment and selection procedures are fair and consistent YES/NO
The recruitment and selection policy and procedures comply with equal opportunity legislation and policy YES/NO
Positions are advertised internally / externally YES/NO
The nursery is an equal opportunities employer YES/NO

6. Physical Environment
There are appropriate facilities for evacuation in case of an emergency YES/NO
The fire door access is always kept clear and unlocked YES/NO
There is a designated safe meeting point outside YES/NO
The premises are accessible with ramps and handrails available YES/NO
7. Diet and Nutrition
Food texture is adjusted according to the age of the child. YES/NO
Food texture is the same for all children. YES/NO
Food texture is the same for each individual group. YES/NO
Food texture is adjusted to individual child's needs. YES/NO

The nursery keeps in touch with parents about their children's changing likes and preferences of food.
  a) Occasional verbal feedback is given to parents
  b) Regular feedback is given to parents
  c) There is documented evidence of two-way communication between the nursery and parent.

8. Management and Administration
Details of child’s attendance on a daily basis YES/NO
Details of staff attendance on a daily basis YES/NO
Details of trainees attendance YES/NO/N/A

To qualify for the All Ireland Centre of Excellence Award you will need to have all of the following policies: (It may be appropriate for some policies to be incorporated together)
  Admission Policy YES/NO
  Anti Bullying Policy YES/NO
  Arrival and Departure Policy YES/NO
  Child / Adult Illness Policy YES/NO
  Child and Adult Protection Policy YES/NO

Written evidence of long-term programme / curriculum YES/NO
Written evidence of medium-term programme / curriculum YES/NO
Written evidence of short-term programme / curriculum YES/NO
Evidence of individual child’s needs being met through the programme / curriculum YES/NO
Acronyms
National Children’s Nurseries Association - NCNA
Self Evaluation Profile - SEP
Regional Support Worker - RSW

Bibliography
Early Foreign Language Learning for all in Irish Schools: One Way Forward in Managing and Celebrating Difference in Irish Society?

Brian Murphy, UCC

Abstract
The early years of the twenty first century have seen Ireland experiencing an era of unprecedented growth in immigration into the country and a corresponding rapid ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversification of its population. It would appear that the need for provision for teaching and learning of a variety of languages in Irish primary schools from an early age has never been greater; especially in terms of the accepted potential that foreign language learning has been acknowledged to have in promoting linguistic and cultural acceptance and tolerance.

This paper examines the desirability of early foreign language learning at a policy level, especially in an evolving multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. It outlines the current status of early foreign language learning at policy level and in the primary curriculum, It highlights how the current position of and policy towards language learning in Ireland bucks European policy and trends with respect to desirable practice in this area. It concludes with a call for a reappraisal of current Irish policy and practice and an extension of foreign language teaching to all pupils in light of the fundamental changes occurring in Irish society.

Introduction
Recent rapid changes in the ethnic and linguistic make-up of Ireland’s population have posed a number of complex challenges to Irish society. A large influx of non-English speakers into the country as a result of an exponential growth in immigration has meant that the issue of language teaching and learning has surfaced as a priority issue. The historically enduring Irish tradition of monolingualism and current policy and practice with regard to the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Irish schools are emerging as insufficient in responding to current linguistic circumstances. In this light, this paper is a general call for action and change with respect to language teaching policy for Irish
schools. It outlines current policy along with linguistic and societal realities, which must be embraced as part of any language teaching policy reform. It proposes changes in current language teaching policy and the extension of foreign language learning to all young children in our schools as one core element in the way forward in our efforts to manage, cope with and celebrate cultural and linguistic difference in the new multicultural Ireland. Overall, the paper presents an argument, in principle, regarding the necessity and desirability of the inclusion of early foreign language learning as part of the school curriculum. Some of the larger issues, which arise in conjunction with that call e.g. the model of foreign language learning (immersion, competence, and sensitisation/awareness), the specific foreign languages to be taught and the systemic reorganisation and practice realities required, are not addressed as they are deemed beyond the remit of this particular paper.

Current language ideology and practice in Ireland: a core element to the overall debate on and reform of language teaching and learning policy

In calling for a reappraisal of language teaching policy in Irish schools to reflect the rapidly evolving linguistic profile, needs and reality of the country, it is the contention of this paper that current language ideology and corresponding language practice must be acknowledged, honoured and incorporated into any future policy shift.

According to Spolsky (2004), any language policy needs to acknowledge and embrace three sub elements. The first of these sub elements, which he terms ‘language ideology’, refers to the language beliefs and practices that are acceptable to a particular group based on some value judgements regarding language (Boldizsár 2003 & Cobarrubias 1983). Current European language ideology strongly embraces and advocates the concept of plurilingualism. While developments in Ireland will inevitably be influenced by this distinct European ideology of plurilingualism, it will also be vitally necessary to clarify and incorporate the specific and or unique language ideology, which currently exists and to which we may aspire in Ireland, that of the official aspiration to be a bi-lingual society, incorporating use of both Irish and English languages as the vernacular. This ideology has a distinct bearing on and is closely related to language practices, the second sub element of Spolsky’s model of language policy. Language practices refer to the established rules, practices and behaviours, which govern the regularities of language usage in society. Clearly, in moving towards an overarching and holistic policy for language and language
education, any developments or changes in language teaching policy will have to acknowledge and honour the role and position of both Irish and English as the first and second official languages of the country and as a mainstay and characteristic feature of the language education of its citizens. Cognisance must also however be taken of the current and possible future sociolinguistic ecology of Ireland in the twenty first century in terms of language practice. This will clearly involve recognition of the new, but ever expanding linguistic diversity of the country. Both the language ideology and the language practices dimensions have in turn a critical role to play in determining the third and final sub element of overall language policy that of language management and planning. It is this informed and coherent language management and planning at both societal and school curriculum levels, which is particularly called for in this paper.

The constitutional and ideological position with respect to Irish and English languages in Ireland dictates that current language education for young children in Irish primary schools compulsorily comprises both Irish and English. The perceived and attributed importance of learning both languages in school is clearly stated by the Primary School Curriculum (Ireland & NCCA 1999) in outlining that

... an appropriate experience of both languages has an important contribution to make to the development of the child’s cultural awareness and sense of cultural identity. Psychologically, historically and linguistically, an experience of both languages is the right of every child.” (Ireland & NCCA 1999, p. 43)

In light of this reality, it is imperative that this language ideology and practice be recognised, acknowledged and incorporated into any future language management and planning. Whatever developments will take place in language teaching policy and practice will therefore presuppose that Irish and English will be learned by pupils in Irish schools. However, in light of the very considerable changes in Irish society to be outlined below, it is clear that provision for the learning of further foreign languages by children in Irish schools must also be made.

A growing linguistically diverse society
The past thirty years have seen rapid and radical changes in Irish society, with the
economic, social and cultural fabric of the country transformed to a revolutionary degree. Accession to the then European Economic Community in 1973 coupled with phenomenal economic growth and expansion during the so-called Celtic Tiger years of the 1990s and rapid growth in globalisation have resulted in unprecedented levels of economic development and prosperity in the country. One of the most visible and tangible consequences and results of these phenomena has been the growth in immigration into Ireland. The net influx of people from countries all over the world has transformed a once mono-cultural, mono-lingual and homogenous society into one which is clearly now characterised by plurality of culture, ethnicity and language.

The extent of this rapid change in the ethnic composition of Irish society can be somewhat gauged by comparative data from the two most recent censuses of Irish population. In 2002, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) indicated that the number of non-Irish nationals enumerated as part of the census of that year was 222,000, representing 5.8% of the usually resident population. While the corresponding figure for census 2006 will be confirmed with the publication of the Principle Demographic Results in April 2007, it can be tentatively estimated from the derived flow data on migration (Government of Ireland 2006) that the number of non-Irish nationals is likely to be about 400,000 or 9.5% of the total population. These figures illustrate a 45% increase in the number of non-Irish nationals living in the state between April 2002 and April 2006. In light of this globalised economy and multicultural context, it would appear that the need to acknowledge and to make provision for the teaching and learning of a variety of languages in Irish schools has never been greater.

Within the context of this particular rapid and sudden change in the demographic, ethnic and linguistic profile of the country, a further trend has clearly and recently emerged. The accession of ten new states into the EU in 2004 resulted in immigration into Ireland reaching a record high in the post enlargement year. According to Doyle et al. (2006), over forty percent of the migrants coming into Ireland in 2005 were from the accession states, with the majority of these coming from three particular Eastern European countries Poland (55%) followed for the most part by large numbers of Lithuanians and Latvians. The country now boasts significant Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian speaking communities, whose needs in terms of mother tongue and English as a second language provision will have to be met in some way by the school system. The situation is likely to
become even more diverse with the recent accession in January 2007 into the EU of the two further Eastern European countries of Romania and Bulgaria. It is anticipated that large numbers of migrants from these countries will relocate to Ireland with their children further diversifying the language profile of the country and highlighting the need for official policy and corresponding practice with respect to early foreign language learning in Irish schools to be radically altered.

**Why foreign language learning?**

In a rapidly evolving multicultural Ireland, Europe and the world, language learning has been closely linked to human rights, democracy and social inclusion and in this light has been acknowledged to play a pivotal role in fostering and promoting tolerance and understanding between ethnic groups. This is emphasised clearly by UNESCO (2003) in stating that “learning another language opens up access to other value systems and ways of interpreting the world, encouraging inter-cultural understanding and helping reduce xenophobia” (UNESCO 2003, p. 17). A similar view of the value of learning other languages in helping people to become more open to others cultures and outlooks is expressed by the European Commission 2003, who acknowledge that the enlargement of the Union has meant that it will be more important than ever that European citizens have the skills necessary to understand and communicate with their neighbours. Commission policy on the matter is thus unequivocal; “in short the ability to understand and communicate in other languages is a basic skill for all European citizens” (European Commission 2003, p. 3). In light of this policy and the reality that “Ireland's school-going population will remain multinational, multilingual and multiethnic” (Little 2003, p. 18), it would appear that, in principle, foreign language learning should enjoy a central profile and position both within and outside Irish schools.

It is evident that many specific elements of this envisaged foreign language learning policy principle would have to be explicitly debated and clarified e.g. to which languages other than English and Irish all primary pupils would be exposed (e.g. French, German, Spanish, Polish, Lithuanian, Romanian or to a little of all) and to what end, as well as how the mother tongues of all immigrant children and their need for support in English as a second language would be recognised and supported throughout their schooling. However, in spite of these complex elements of the debate, it remains the principle contention of this paper that the potential role and contribution that foreign language can
make to enhancing intercultural understanding and tolerance cannot be denied. It should therefore occupy a central place in language education policy and practice in Ireland.

**Justifications for early modern foreign language learning**

In light of the above outlined role of foreign language learning in promoting social cohesion and tolerance of difference, it is logical and desirable that such learning should begin as early as possible in a child’s schooling. Furthermore, it is now widely accepted that young children tend to absorb, relatively easily, any language by which they are surrounded and that they appear to learn to speak a new language with greater facility than adults do (DeKeyser & Larson-Hall 2005). This benefit is one of the many cited justifications for the teaching of foreign languages to young children. This and many of the other linguistic, social and cultural arguments put forward are effectively summarised by Sharpe (2001) as follows, into six main aims used a rationale for early teaching of foreign languages to young children:

- To exploit the linguistic and cognitive flexibility of primary-age children (the ‘young learners are better learners’ argument)
- To exploit the attitudinal and motivational flexibility of primary-age children (the ‘young learners are more eager and malleable learners’ argument)
- To raise levels of achievement through learning (possibly more) languages for longer (the ‘higher standards’ argument)
- To exploit the opportunities presented by the particular circumstances of the context of primary schooling for promoting language awareness and second language acquisition (the ‘primary context advantages’ argument)
- To provide children with an important and enriching experience, which will better equip them to understand the realities of life in the third millennium (the ‘European/global citizenship entitlement’ argument)
- To equip the next generation with the requisite knowledge, skills, and understanding, which will enable them to function effectively in international contexts (the ‘social and economic benefits’ argument)

Although the jury is out regarding whether the long-term benefits of early foreign language learning accrue in terms of mastery and proficiency of the target language or exposure to or appreciation of its related culture, it is clear that such language learning can only have a positive impact on the early development of an awareness and appreciation of difference in
the context of a rapidly developing multicultural and multilingual society. This need is
further highlighted by recent statistics on foreign language skills and attitudes to foreign
language learning among the general population in Ireland.

**Current foreign language skills and attitudes in Ireland**
The inadequacies of overall language skills in Ireland were revealed in a recent
Eurobarometer poll. At 41%, this showed Irish people trailing the EU average in the
ability to speak a second language by 10% (European Commission 2005). This figure did
not distinguish between Irish and a foreign language and the true figure for speakers of
second languages other than Irish is likely to be much lower. Hayes (2005) outlines that
our benchmark should be the results obtained from the smaller countries of the EU with
an average 80% of people able to have a conversation in a language other than their
mother tongue. This general lack of public knowledge, awareness and support for the
teaching and learning of languages in Ireland is acknowledged by the European
Commission 2004 in noting “… a lack of motivation for learning languages other than
English … restricted support … a lack of a coherent, integrated policy …” (European
Commission 2004, p. 18). In this light European Commission President José Manuel
Barroso recently highlighted the challenge and necessity for action in Ireland in his
reiteration of official EU policy that every student, especially at secondary level, should
be learning at least two foreign languages on a compulsory basis (Barroso 2006).
Examination of the reality of current language teaching policy and practice in Ireland
however reveals a picture at considerable odds with official EU policy as well as with the
previously discussed radically changed linguistic profile and needs of the country.

**Foreign language learning in the Irish Primary School Curriculum**
Ireland stands apart from the rest of Europe in terms of the position of foreign language
teaching in the school system. According to Eurydice (2005) the teaching of one or more
foreign languages is now compulsory in all European Union countries except Ireland,
with this compulsion beginning more and more frequently at early primary level.
Furthermore, Eurydice (2005) indicates that the curricula of the great majority of
countries give all pupils the possibility of learning two or more foreign languages during
the course of compulsory education. Language learning enjoys no such guarantee or
position at primary or post-primary levels in Ireland. The recent Irish Primary School
Curriculum (Ireland & NCCA 1999) merely allows for the possibility of modern foreign
language learning at some future stage. It speaks of its general objective “to develop a competence in a second and perhaps a third language …” (Ireland & NCCA 1999, p. 36), with this aspiration being dependent on the outcome of the current small scale pilot project on teaching modern foreign languages at primary level, involving a mere 4% of primary pupils. The possibility of realising this objective and of introducing a foreign language system-wide at primary level appears a very distant reality in light of the recently expressed view of the Irish National Teachers Organisation (I.N.T.O.) that “there is a strong view among teachers that the current primary curriculum is sufficiently demanding without the introduction of a separate modern languages programme” (I.N.T.O. 2004, pp. 87/88). It appears that achievement of the European average of 50% of primary pupils learning a foreign language (Eurydice 2005) is deemed neither desirable nor feasible in Ireland in the immediate future. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has also indicated a similar position. In its recent paper (NCCA 2005a), it deferred making a recommendation regarding inclusion of modern foreign languages in the primary school curriculum pending both the full implementation of the existing revised primary curriculum in 2007 as well as awaiting “the results and findings from the interim activities and projects recommended” (NCCA 2005a, p. 89), which included small scale pilot projects in language awareness and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). In spite of the changing linguistic profile of the country and the potential contribution, which early language learning can make not least to celebrating difference and managing diversity, early foreign language learning for all in Irish primary schools would currently appear to be contentious and to remain a distant aspiration.

A need for action on policy change
The aforementioned and previously discussed reality that foreign language teaching and learning is not guaranteed or supported by any official Irish policy or curriculum highlights the inadequacy of the current position of foreign language teaching and learning in Ireland. How long more can current language teaching practices in Ireland endure in the face of the ever advancing and powerful phenomenon of immigration and cultural and linguistic diversity? Clearly, the NCCA call for “… the development and agreement of a policy for languages in education” (NCCA 2005b, p. 9) and the Report of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science on modern languages (2004, p. 26) for “an overarching language policy …” to inform decisions made about language teaching and to guarantee the position of language teaching on school curricula.
is both an urgent and immediate priority and action. Such an explicit policy on languages in education would clearly need to take account of the wider picture, of “the interaction between languages in education and language in society” (NCCA 2005b, p. 13). In this light it would need to identify the criteria for including, modifying, diversifying and discontinuing the teaching of any languages in the country. This would be especially pertinent in light of maintaining the essence of our current ideology with respect to the position of the English and Irish languages in schools, but also in terms of responding to the rapidly evolving and diverse linguistic profile of Irish society and school children. Furthermore, the policy “should offer some insights, at a general level, as to how integrated a language curriculum should be … and how achievement and proficiency in the area of languages is to be monitored” (NCCA 2005b, p. 12). Although the rationale and immediate need for this policy reform has been established, the process and course of actions required to bring the policy to fruition are clearly contentious and complex. This is highlighted by the contrasting perspectives from various international commitments as well as the national context and the variety of interest group and practitioner ‘on the ground’ issues and concerns, which must be taken on board in moving the process forward in any way. Despite this complexity, it is a process which must be immediately engaged.

**International agreements and commitments**

Developments in language policy and practice in Ireland cannot and do not exist in a vacuum. Progression and developments in the language in society and language in education policy areas are inextricably linked to and bound by a plethora of agreements and commitments made by the country at both international and European levels. In the context of a rapidly changing, diverse and linguistically plural world context, the UNESCO position paper of 2003 *Education in a multilingual world* outlines three basic guidelines and principles common to its documents, agreements and recommendations, which it feels should inform the international community’s approach to language and education in the twentieth first century. The three principles have much to contribute to the development of a ‘languages in education’ policy in a multicultural Ireland and are worth outlining here:

- UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers
- UNESCO supports bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education
as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies

UNESCO supports language as an essential component of inter-cultural education in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights (UNESCO 2003, p. 30)

The three principles have much to say in the context of how the country needs to respond to the language issue in terms of dealing with the mother tongue issue of all Irish including the ‘new’ Irish. The principles are underpinned by the understanding that all pupils at all levels should generally be learning three languages (mother tongue, the official or national language (if different), as well as one or more foreign/global languages) with a view to having a working knowledge of all three when they leave school. This, UNESCO feels, represents “the normal range of practical linguistic skills in the twenty-first century” (UNESCO 2003, p. 32). For pupils in Irish primary schools, this would appear to translate into a situation where all pupils should be learning English, Irish and a foreign language, with provision for the immigrant children to learn their mother tongue and English and Irish as the required foreign and official languages.

A similar vision for each school pupil to learn at least three languages is articulated policy at a European level. European Heads of States and Government meeting in Barcelona in March 2002 declared that “every European citizen should have meaningful communicative competence in at least two other languages in addition to his or her mother tongue” (cited in European Commission 2003, p. 4). This consistent desire for the promotion of language learning and overall diversity is clearly and continuously evident across most European policy directives. The European Commission (2003) clearly outlines the reality that “linguistic diversity is one of the European Union’s defining features” (European Commission 2003, p. 12). European policy and consequent Irish responsibility is that foreign languages are a key competence for every citizen and “the ability of all citizens to understand and use a wide variety of foreign languages is central...” (European Commission 2004, p. 3). Promotion of such linguistic diversity essentially involves actively encouraging the teaching and learning of the widest possible range of language in our schools from the smaller to the larger languages, from regional, minority and migrant languages to the languages of trading partners throughout the world from the earliest stage. This linguistic diversity is captured in the Council of
Europe’s overall policy objective of plurilingualism, the lifelong enrichment of the individual’s plurilingual repertoire. This repertoire marks a fundamental reappraisal of our understanding of language learning and language competence being made up of “different languages and language varieties at different levels of proficiency and includes different types of competences. It is dynamic and changes in composition throughout an individual’s life” (Council of Europe 2005, p. 7). These policy requirements further highlight the inadequacy of the current status quo with respect to language teaching in Ireland. Whatever language policy is devised it will have to take cognisance of previously discussed directives and responsibilities, as well as a large range of on the ground concerns not addressed in this paper. What has emerged is a clear need for change in current language teaching policy practice, with the impetus for this change coming from within and outside the country.

The current and future states of play
Ireland is not alone in being obliged to face this fundamental reappraisal of language teaching and learning policy and practice. Change is rife across Europe and the world in a rapidly expanding and developing globalised context. The Council of Europe acknowledges that the development of language education policies for linguistic diversity and plurilingualism needs to occur across Europe. The process first “needs to be preceded by analysis of existing conditions in society ...” (Council of Europe 2003, p. 22). This is essential groundwork to the development of a coherent and holistic policy. Such audits of the language teaching situation describing current contexts and practices as well as prescribing options for future developments are currently work-in-progress in a number of countries including Ireland. The Department of Education and Science, in collaboration with the Council of Europe and the European Centre for Modern Languages are currently engaged in this process of developing a Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland. This development marks a very positive, though only first step forward, in terms of advancing the call for action and change with respect to language teaching generally and in the early years, which has been made throughout this paper. This profile marks a real opportunity for change and renewal with respect to language teaching in Ireland as it “will form the basis for the development of a policy on languages in education” (NCCA 2005b, p. 9). The profile, in conjunction with the plethora of arising and required actions, will be vitally necessary in the globalised context of Ireland in the twenty-first century if we are to protect and enhance the vital contribution, which
language learning can make to the development of acceptance and tolerance in our multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual society. In the vast amount of work in moving the policy formulation and implementation process forward in a coherent but realistic way, it would be worthwhile to bear the Council of Europe perspective in mind that “the management of innovation requires development from existing situations rather than the implementation to radical change, which frequently leads to rejection by all stakeholders …” (Council of Europe 2003, p. 50). We must be particularly cognisant of this reality in moving forward the current language teaching policy situation in Ireland.
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Integrating Children of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Early Childhood Settings

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**Abstract**

During the past decade, Irish society has experienced rapid change in becoming a multi-ethnic and multi-racial population. The advent of people from such diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds has presented many challenges for the Irish state, particularly in the provision of appropriate healthcare and education. This paper presents a review of selected literature from the United States, where such challenges have long been a matter of concern. The focus of this paper is on identifying best practice which might inform the provision of effective care and education for the early years of children of cultural and linguistic diversity in Ireland. The findings from research in the U.S. is summarised under three broad headings: attitudes and beliefs towards diversity, effective approaches for early years carers and educators and finally, home-school collaboration initiatives deemed effective in the successful integration of linguistically and culturally diverse children in the early years.

**Introduction**

The literature review which follows, attempts to outline the various dimensions underpinning early childhood teacher preparation in the future- the need to help early childhood teachers and caregivers acquire the attitudes, knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to work effectively with a culturally and linguistically diverse population. As Ireland is in its relative infancy in relation to preparing early childhood teachers and caregivers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students, the focus of this review is on literature from the U.S.A. where such challenges have long been a matter of concern. By examining this research, it is hoped to identify best practice amongst successful early childhood teachers and caregivers for ensuring success for culturally diverse children (Garcia, 1991), and to suggest initiatives which may be taken on board in the Irish context, as carers and early childhood educators endeavour to prepare professionals to effectively meet the care and learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children in the twenty first century.
The question of what is best practice in this area generates much debate. These efforts have focused on three major theoretical approaches, namely “culturally specific”, “effective principles” and “socially critical”(García, 1993). The “cultural specific” approach suggests that differences between home and school language and culture is the primary cause of failure in minority culture children. Such views are supported by research undertaken by Delgado-Gaitan, (1992), García, (1988) and Ogbi, (1988), and suggest that to ensure success for the latter, educators and caregivers must use information about critical differences between home and school before planning an effective curriculum.

Advocates of the “effective principles” approach suggest that if instruction is based on principles of effective teaching and learning, then minority language children will experience greater success. In early childhood settings, such approaches include structured contexts where children have opportunities to interact informally during play sessions, and use songs and nursery rhymes to develop language (Cazden, 1986). Promoters of the “social critical” approach highlight oppression of minority groups as the cause of school failure (Ogbi, 1988; Cummins, 1986). Low expectations of education providers towards language majority children further undermine school success for these children (Winfield, 1986).

To facilitate this discussion, the review will focus on three major areas: attitudes to diversity, best educational practice for culturally and linguistically diverse students, and home-school collaboration. An overall conclusion from research in these areas is that teachers, caregivers and administrators of educational and childcare settings have responsibility for the success or failure of minority students. Their beliefs, attitudes and practices play a significant role in the success or failure of minority language students.

Classification of the term ‘cultural and linguistic diversity’:
The population identifier “culturally/linguistically diverse” is a relatively new educationally related term, which underlines the marginal appreciation for diversity among the United States populations (García, 1993). Diversity, for the purpose of this discussion will be defined as “Differences [between the teachers and the students] related to social class, ethnicity, culture, and language” (Zeichner, 1993, p.1).

Attitudes and beliefs towards diversity
Beliefs significantly influence how prospective teachers may teach. Research by
Harrington and Hathaway (1995) and Garmon (2004) focuses on preparing teachers for multicultural environments, provides insight into prospective teachers’ multicultural awareness and on how their beliefs influence the type of multicultural education implemented. Studies undertaken by Falconer and Byrnes (2003) highlight how practising teachers are addressing multicultural issues. Much of the research on teacher beliefs focuses on the content, skills and methods teachers use in their professional lives. Less is known about the deeply held belief structures providing for their development as teachers. The research sensitizes us to the relevance of beliefs and the difficulties in changing them (Harrington & Hathaway, 1995). Tajfel (1982) found that frequent positive contacts are associated with positive attitudes. Tajfel (1982) suggests that if the educational experiences and opportunities for language minority students are to be improved, an understanding of the factors that influence teachers’ language attitudes needs to be achieved.

Grottkaú & Nickolai-Mays (1989) suggest that prolonged exposure to cultural diversity, which results from a comprehensive curricular and experiential programme format, is capable of producing attitude change in teacher education students. However, Garcia (1993) advises that limited contact with cultural diversity may be of little advantage in reducing bias towards minority groups. In fact, limited exposure may serve to increase racist attitudes. Our increasingly linguistically diverse society necessitates a greater understanding of teachers’ attitudes towards language diversity.

Byrnes, Kiger & Manning (1997), found four categorical variables associated with positive language attitudes among teachers in their study. These included exposure to language diversity, experience, formal training and level of certification. Language attitudes differ significantly with experience. Teachers who are familiar with language diversity have at their disposal resources to address language deficiencies among their students. Formal training was also associated with positive language attitudes, in that the latter provides teachers with skills and knowledge necessary to work with children who are not proficient in English (Byrnes, Kiger and Manning, 1997).

Educating early childhood teachers and care providers at all levels to be culturally sensitive is a challenge. All teachers and carers need to understand their own cultural experience and learn about the values and attitudes they hold towards other ethnic groups and
confront them (Garmon, 2004; Zeichner, 1993). An unfortunate social circumstance, often reported with bilingual and non-English speaking children, is the tendency to perceive these children and their families as foreigners. This uncomfortable social situation often leads to the desire to change the difference between cultures and language by ridding the children and their families of those attributes which make them feel different. Such attempts often serve to alienate infants and their families further (Garcia, 1991). Rather than attempting to minimize diversity, appreciating and respecting diversity can enrich the lives of everyone concerned in the education and care of young children (Garcia, 1991). In short, the desire and ability of teachers to learn about the special circumstances of students and their communities, and the ability to take this knowledge into account is important when working with young children of cultural diversity (Yang and McMullen, 2003; Jimenez et al, 1996).

**Best educational practice for linguistic and culturally diverse students**
Areas of educational practice of significance to linguistic and culturally diverse students have been outlined by Garcia (1993). These include issues such as understanding students’ home language and culture and how this impacts on school success, special linguistic circumstances relevant to culturally and linguistically diverse students such as bilingualism and second language acquisition, and effective teaching approaches used by teachers in the classrooms. Theoretical and empirical studies of multicultural education consistently show that to implement a successful multicultural education programme, changes must be made to the curriculum, teaching materials in use, teaching styles and approaches, attitudes and practices of teachers and administrators and, finally the culture and goals of the school (Banks, 1992).

**The influence of children’s native language and culture**
Studies by Tharp (1989) and Yang and McMullen, (2003), have suggested that without attending to the distinction between home and school language and culture, educational efforts are likely to fail. Culture and context must be taken into account to promote the success of ethnic minority students (Zeichner, 1993). Garcia, (1991) argues that infants, toddlers and young children need a rich linguistic environment in order to thrive and develop their language and communication competence. When a young child is first learning language, it is best to provide a rich linguistic environment both at home and in the childcare setting which is the same as and supports the native language and culture of
the infant’s family. For young children, cultural and linguistic identity provides a strong sense of self and family belonging, which in turn supports a wide range of learning capabilities, not the least of which is learning a second language (Cummins, 1979).

A further consideration is the relationship of language development and learning about one’s culture. Language learning for the young child is closely linked to cultural learning (Garcia, 1991). To address this challenge, well trained, sensitive caregivers who speak the same language as the child and who represent the child’s cultural group are required. Secondly, all caregivers need to be educated about and sensitive to the issues of language and culture, regardless of their own language background and cultural heritage. Furthermore, Garcia (1991) suggests that for infants and toddlers whose childcare arrangements expose them to a bilingual or to a language environment different from their normal home environment, care giving will present some challenges. In order to maximize the effectiveness of care provided to children in non-native language environments, Garcia (1991) makes three recommendations. Firstly, the dismissing of existing myths regarding the negative effects of bilingualism (Hakuta and Garcia, 1989). Secondly, understanding what caregivers need to do in order to ensure a positive and responsive environment to enhance communication experience. Thirdly, communicating with the young child’s family and understanding its general social circumstances. This desire by teachers and carers to learn about the special circumstances of their children and their communities is important for children’s success (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

The transition to school and young children’s acquisition of academic language skills does not depend on which language is used in the home. Rather, a successful experience in a school setting is achieved through the quality of language experiences that the children have at home and how these are extended in school (Heath, 1986). Cummins (1994) highlights the rapidity at which minority children lose their native language when children are educated in contexts where support is not made available for their first language and argues that strong institutional support is necessary in order to resist this process. He further makes the argument in support of native language maintenance in highlighting the fact that native language support for minority language students at preschool and elementary levels, does not seem to impede the acquisition of conversational or academic skills in the majority language. Where support for native language has been secured, through institutional, peer and parental support, success in
academic and social adaptation for culturally and linguistically diverse students has been achieved (Tse, 2001; Nieto, 2004).

**Bilingualism: Present perspectives**
Cummins (1986) argues that all other things being equal, higher degrees of bilingualism are associated with higher levels of cognitive attainment. Measures include cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, concept formation, and creativity. Research has also highlighted that children who had acquired literacy in two languages performed significantly better in the acquisition of a third language than did children from monolingual backgrounds or those from bilingual backgrounds who had not acquired literacy in their home language (Cummins and Swain, 1986). These findings are consistent with children in additive bilingual settings (settings where second language is added as enrichment to the child’s first language and not at the expense of the child’s native language as in subtractive bilingual approaches (Cummins, 1986).

**Effective early years teaching strategies for students of cultural and linguistic diversity**
Caunden (1986) promotes successful learning in early years education by including children’s own words at the beginning of reading texts instead of imported readers, creating new texts which reflect young children’s personal lives, allowing for voluntary participation as opposed to teacher-led reading lessons and encouraging peer collaboration in the practising of academic skills. The use of large-group instructional activities (as in field trips, reading big books, song singing) enabled children to share a wealth of rich experiences with other children. Large group activities also served an important social function in that they helped students feel that they were part of a group rather than isolated or stigmatised (Johnson, 1994). Students also need opportunities for communicative interaction (both written and spoken) in pairs and small groups that are fully meaningful for them and useful as linguistic input for learning (Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

Both Garcia (1991) and Au (1998) argue that it is important to find someone who can speak the infant’s language. Bilingual personnel – teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents can be especially helpful in supporting young minority language children. The infant must feel at home in the non-home environment, the presence of his/her home language assisting in this process. By helping children understand what is expected of them, bilingual adults further promote young children’s access to the curriculum. They increase

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children’s opportunities to engage in more complex language and thinking by enabling them to use their primary language in the early learning setting at the same time as they are learning English. Bilingual adults can also serve to ensure that assessment of young children is accurate and reflects children’s actual competence levels (Au, 1998).

**Home school collaboration**

Yang and McMullen (2003) suggest that it is critical for teachers to respond to changes in the composition of the school population by finding better ways to understand minority students and by developing more effective ways to work with culturally and linguistically diverse parents. Eccles & Harold (1996) further indicate that schools have an important part to play in encouraging and facilitating parents’ roles in their children’s academic achievements. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1996), state:

Parents and families should be actively involved in the learning and development of their children. Teachers should actively seek parental involvement and pursue establishing a partnership with children’s families (NAEYC, 1996, p.8).

In her study of Mexican-American families, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) concluded that parents provided their children with the appropriate emotional support and a placed a high cultural value on education, and suggests that it is necessary to continue to examine the family learning environments of children from ethnically different groups to help educators to better understand and interpret the discrete circumstances of children’s home life. García (1991) emphasises the importance of having professionals who speak the language of the parents when communication between caregivers and families occurs. Using parents’ language by caregivers for greetings was further recommended. All forms of written communication between caregivers and families must be in the family’s native language. Banks (1991) argued that to become effective multicultural teachers, the latter need to have pedagogical knowledge of the characteristics of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. In establishing this knowledge, parents become key informants in helping teachers to develop the understanding about the child’s home culture, building understanding and helping teachers determine what would be most culturally and linguistically appropriate for their children (Gay, 2002). This view is supported by Yang &
McMullen (2003), who recommend that teachers of culturally diverse students define and research the cultural and ethnic groups represented by their students. They also stress the importance for teachers to identify how families transmit their cultures to their children.

Wolfe (1992) outlines the valuable resource parents and community members can offer to their young children’s literacy development, in particular how they can support their children’s bilingual education and development. For example, parents, or other community members who are literate in their primary language may read stories aloud to the children in the early childhood setting or at home, or make audiotapes for children to read at home or in the school. Parents and older family members may be encouraged to visit the school or care setting and tell stories, folktales, and share other oral traditions from their culture with the children. Parents may share their knowledge of traditional celebrations, music, poetry, and dance with the schools. Parents are also seen as a valuable resource in setting up multicultural activities. Wolfe (1992) argues that parent and community involvement is key to ensuring cultural continuity for young children. Including a child’s language and culture into the school environment gives the child positive affirmation about the importance of his or her language and culture, referred to as “scaffolding” by Gay (2002), and in developing a sense of “empowerment” (Cummins, 1986). Involving culturally and linguistically diverse families at this level ensures that families are reaffirmed about the importance of the status of their language and culture (Garcia, 1991). Early childhood teachers, carers and parents together, by opening themselves up to new conceptions and definitions of parent involvement “can create an environment that can be powerful and transformative for language-minority students’ healthy development and well-being” (Yang & McMullen, 2003, p.3).

Conclusion
Drawing on research from the U.S., this paper has endeavoured to identify best practice to effectively include students of cultural and linguistic diversity in early childhood educational settings. The research clearly indicates that in order to effectively integrate children of cultural and linguistic diversity in early educational settings, teachers and caregivers need to become aware of the effect of their own attitudes and beliefs towards young children of cultural and linguistic diversity, use effective teaching approaches which address the learning needs of culturally diverse children and finally, develop home-school collaboration initiatives which are sensitive to culturally diverse norms and practices.
Bibliography


Strategies in Working with Children Learning English as a Second Language

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Abstract
This paper discusses the findings of a small-scale research project on strategies used by early years practitioners working with children learning English as an additional language. A list of themes and strategies relating to second language acquisition was identified from the literature, including practice-based research in the United States and in Britain and the experiences of the Naíonraí (Irish-language immersion pre-schools) in Ireland. Experienced practitioners in four early years centres were interviewed on the usefulness of the language support strategies outlined and on their own experiences of working with children and families new to this country. They were also asked to identify the current issues for practitioners and how they thought these might be addressed.

Introduction
Recent changes in Irish society and the growth in the economy have impacted on aspects of Irish life and these changes can be seen in the early years settings which work with non-English speaking immigrant or newcomer children and their families. Working with the early years sector in Dublin, we have been aware of how settings have adapted to a new role of assisting the children and their families to adjust to their new lives in Ireland and to learn English as an additional language.

A great deal of practice and research on children learning English as a second language in early years settings has taken place in North America and to a lesser extent in the U.K. (Tabors 1997, Tabors and Snow 1994, Siraj-Blatchford, 2000). This article describes an exploratory research project which drew on this practice-based research and on the Irish experience of second language early education in the naíonraí or Irish-language immersion preschools (Hickey 1997, Mhic Mhathúna 1999, 2004), in order to investigate the experience of Irish practitioners who are supporting children learning English as a second language. The aim of this research project was to listen to the voices
of experienced practitioners as they related their experiences of working with children and families new to this country. We wanted to identify the strategies used by practitioners to assist the process of second language learning and to draw on their experiences in order to assist other settings which may be just starting on this process.

Methodology
This study was undertaken in four early years settings which provide practice placements for Early Childhood Education students in the Dublin Institute of Technology and which had experience of supporting second language learning. Three centres were based in similar areas of socio-economic disadvantage in Dublin and one centre was attached to a service offering English language classes for adults.

A list of themes and strategies used by adults in supporting young children learning a second language was collated from the literature (Tabors 1997, Weizmann and Greenberg 2002, Wesche, 1994, Browne, 2001). This was sent to each centre and arrangements were made in April 2006 to interview the staff to discuss their views and experiences. A semi-structured interview schedule was devised as it was hoped to “approximate the feeling of the unforced conversations of everyday life” (Wilson 1998, p. 95). This allowed participants to follow the natural flow of the discussion and to outline areas of particular significance to them. The staff teams and the researchers knew each other well, having worked in partnership on student placements for many years and the aims and possible outcomes of the research were explained clearly to them at the outset. Based on the high level of personal and professional cooperation, very interesting and insightful discussions took place and rich descriptions of the respondents’ experiences in relation to working with children learning English as a second language emerged.

Three of the interviews were audio-taped and one was videoed. The interviews lasted for about one hour. The total number of staff interviewed was 25, with 11 practitioners having studied a module on bilingualism during the BA in Early Childhood Care and Education in the Dublin Institute of Technology. The total number of children in the nurseries was 206 and of these, 45 children or approximately 20%, were learning English as a second language.

Each interview was transcribed and the analysis of the data focused on the responses of each centre to questions on the following areas of interest:
Social and linguistic factors affecting the children
Process of learning a second language
Language support strategies of early years practitioners
Classroom organisation
Ongoing contact with parents
Challenges and issues

We asked the staff for their views on the usefulness of the language support strategies outlined and for examples from their own practice. In addition, we asked them to identify the current issues for practitioners and how they thought they might be addressed. Full confidentiality and anonymity were assured. It will be seen that there was a great deal of variety in the answers, reflecting the diversity of the practitioners’ experiences in working with newcomer children and their families.

Children’s social and linguistic backgrounds
Best practice in Early Childhood Care and Education and in Second Language Acquisition practice (Siraj-Blatchford 2000) holds that practitioners should start with understanding the child and his/her family. This means collecting basic demographic information such as the country of origin, religious beliefs and practices, the languages that the child understands and speaks as well as the parents’ expectations of preschool and any additional information that would help the staff to get to know the child and the family. In two of the nurseries in this study, the parents were happy to provide basic information about their country of origin, languages and medical/health information.

The other two nurseries encountered some difficulty in accessing background information, with some parents reluctant to say which country they came from or the languages that the child could speak. The staff felt that this reluctance stemmed from the wider socio-political context and in particular the rules and regulations regarding refugees and asylum seekers. The parents in these two nurseries also asserted that the children were fluent speakers of English and that they did not speak any other language. It subsequently emerged that this was not the case and the staff thought that the parents might be afraid that a place in the nursery would not be offered if the child was perceived as being more “trouble” than other children. They also said that there is strong expectation of fluency in English in the labour market in Ireland and this might
have influenced the parents’ expectations of what was required to gain a place in a childcare setting.

All the nurseries had devised a number of approaches for explaining the policies and procedures of their services to all new parents. One nursery provided a Parents’ Handbook in English and read out the most important sections at a general meeting for all new parents. They had originally devised the strategy to help parents with literacy difficulties but found that it was also helpful to newcomer families with limited experience of childcare in Ireland and/or of English. Another nursery provided a Russian translation of the enrolment form and many of the parents found this very helpful. They based their form on the templates provided by Fingal County Childcare Committee (www.fingalcountychildcare.ie) and Galway County Childcare Committee (www.galwaychildcare.com) in 10 different languages and added additional sections to suit their own requirements. They felt that in many cases a great deal of time was required to assist newcomer parents understand what was involved and that this affected the amount of time available for other parents.

**Process of learning a second language**

The literature describes a series of stages that children go through when they are learning a second language. The staff clearly recognised the main stages of second language acquisition outlined in the literature (Ellis 1994, Tabors 1997) and gave examples of their children progressing through these stages.

**a) Non-verbal period:** All recognised this beginning stage and said that the children used physical means of communication such as pointing, crying, using gestures, taking toys and objects sometimes without the consent of other children. This was true in relation to their interaction with other children and with adults. Some cultural aspects of behaviour may also be involved as some African children were also more tactile or needed less personal space than other children.

**b) Telegraphic Speech:** Staff said that when the newcomer children started speaking English, they sounded like younger Irish children beginning to talk, for example, “Me want” or “Me play.” They used “chopped sentences” with the names of toys and other objects or said one word utterances such as “yes,” “no,” or “stop.”

**c) Formulaic speech / short useful phrases:** The children acquired rote phrases for their basic
needs such as telling staff that they needed to go to the toilet, that they were hungry or thirsty or that they wanted a turn in a game or activity. Several children knew quite a lot of advertisements from television in relation to toys or food and some knew many songs and nursery rhymes. All the children spoke with the local Dublin accent and some had picked up a number of colloquial sayings such as “Janey mack.”

d) Creative Speech. Not all of the children reached this stage but some were very proficient speakers and could speak English in an age-appropriate way. During planning time in the High/Scope approach (Hohmann and Weikart 1995), some children could describe exactly what they would like to play with and in what order. Staff felt that many of the children would take another year to reach this stage. In the case of children with language difficulties in their mother tongue, it would take a good deal more time for them to make progress.

**Language strategies of early years practitioners**

Most of the children began attending the setting together at the beginning of the year and the newcomer children were part of the new group learning how to adjust to preschool. Staff felt that the way they modified their language for newcomer children was more an extension of how they related to other children rather than something new in itself. The practitioners emphasised that there was no one right way to facilitate second language learning because each child is unique. They tried to respect the personality and individuality of each child and work accordingly.

One staff team had participated in a Marte Meo training programme (www.martemeo.com) and found the method’s observation and communication strategies particularly useful. Marte Meo is a video-based interaction programme that provides practical support to adults on supporting the social, emotional and communication development of children during daily interactions. The practitioners adapted the strategies to suit second language children’s interactions, e.g. naming what the target child was doing and describing the ongoing action. They also directed the child’s attention to other children nearby and talked about what they were doing. This meant that the child got a lot of verbal description about concrete experiences that he/she was involved in and was encouraged to observe/interact with other children.

The staff in the nursery that had a lot of Russian-speaking children had learned some
basic words of Russian themselves and found that this was very useful when children were settling into the nursery. They sometimes used the Russian word sandwiched between two English versions of the word when talking to new children and found that this helped build communication quickly. They had devised a set of Russian flashcards for themselves, written phonetically according to the English language system and this caused a great deal of amusement among the Russian-speaking parents, who complimented them on their oral language but not on the written form!

However, one of the most useful strategies for communicating with children and parents was photography. In one of the nurseries run on High/Scope principles, the staff made extensive use of photographs to label storage boxes for toys and equipment, make a poster of the options for free-play and as a communication tool in the Plan-do-Review cycle. This form of visual communication was available to all the children and facilitated independent choice and play. The staff used the camera to document many forms of play and learning and could then use the photographs with the children for discussion and elaboration. They could also show the photographs to the parents to explain what the children had been engaged with during the session.

**Classroom organisation**

The staff felt that a stable and predictable routine helped all the children, particularly newcomer children, to know what was going to happen next and what was expected of them. They said that the newcomer children often reminded them if they passed over part of the Circle Time routine or missed a verse of a nursery rhyme or song. One nursery incorporated a counting routine into the preparation for lunch and counted up to ten in English and Irish. They had a French-speaking student on placement for some weeks and expanded the counting languages to include French. Long after the student had returned to college, one of the newcomer children continued to count in French. The staff did not know if the child spoke French at home, but it had become part of the routine and could not be skipped.

Stability and regularity was also an important factor for a newcomer child who asked a practitioner to read the same book to her every day for a week, in exactly the same way. The book was a simple picture book about food and colours and the child mimed the same actions of eating the food each time the book was read and did not want any pages skipped. She could name the colours, in one-word utterances and thoroughly enjoyed the
predictable activity of reading the book in this manner with the practitioner. This echoes the strategy of rereading certain books for language acquisition purposes outlined by Dickinson (2000) and Mhic Mhathúna (2003).

The “Russian” nursery promoted literacy through wordless picture books, simple books in English and dual language books in English and Russian. They also made their own books, using photographs of activities in the nursery and some of the parents provided copies of children’s books in Russian. The staff photocopied the pictures and translated the text into English in an effort to provide culturally appropriate material. This succeeded up to a point, but they felt that some of the essence and richness of the original language was lost in the process. This was particularly true in relation to the attempts to translate songs and rhymes from Russian to English and from English to Russian.

**Ongoing Contact with Parents**

The staff in the four nurseries felt that they had very good relationships with all their parents, including the parents of children who were learning English as a second language. When communication difficulties arose, other parents were sometimes asked to act as translators, or older children were asked to explain. The staff recognised that this practice might give rise to problems if sensitive issues were involved and several nurseries said that they felt very isolated in relation to language help and support. They cited the limited facilities available to colleagues in the health and school systems, but said that no assistance regarding translation existed for practitioners in early years settings, who were often the first point of contact for children and their families with the Irish system.

The nurseries sent home written notes with important information or events and parents could then get help if they needed someone to read/translate it for them. However, occasionally last minute changes occurred and this sometimes posed problems of understanding exactly what was involved as some beginner learners of English could understand the gist of what was being said but not the precise point. When all else failed, the staff said that they resorted to gesture and mime, leading sometimes to feelings of inadequacy and a loss of dignity for all concerned.

Photography was also a very useful tool in relation to ongoing contact with parents. One particular baby took a long time to settle in and her mother, who was just
beginning to learn English, was upset at leaving her distressed child every morning and worried about how she was getting on during the day. The staff took many photographs of the baby during the day and her mother could see exactly how happy she was after a certain length of time.

The challenge of understanding World Englishes was cited by two of the nurseries. They said that this was a particular challenge in relation to the variety of English spoken in Nigeria (Mann 1996) as these parents had very fluent English, but the different stress and intonation made it difficult for Irish people to understand. They thought that the Irish dialect might also pose challenges for speakers of other dialects!

**Challenges and issues**

One of the major challenges faced by practitioners was accessing help for children with developmental problems or language delay. This can be difficult for Irish children and their parents, but when languages other than English are involved, it can be particularly challenging to find a specialist who can understand the child or have access to a suitable translator. Parents sometimes act as translators but this is not ideal as they have a different role to play in what can be a demanding and emotional situation for themselves.

Cultural information was also difficult to find. Staff said that they were learning through experience about different cultural norms regarding eating, politeness and discipline, for example. They had found that in some cultures the accepted polite way to eat is with the hands in a certain way, but as is the Irish norm, the practitioners had insisted on even the youngest children learning to eat with a spoon. Showing respect to an adult was another area of cultural difference. Some cultures frown upon children looking directly at adults in certain situations, but staff said that they insisted on children looking them in the eye when they had to speak to them about unacceptable behaviour. They were concerned about the mixed messages that the children were receiving and felt that had they known about these types of cultural difference, they might have approached the issues in a different way.

Other differences arose in relation to discipline. Some cultures find it acceptable to chastise children physically and this was not acceptable to the staff in the nurseries. This led to serious disagreement between staff and several parents and staff were very

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concerned about the consequences of bringing children’s misbehaviour to the attention of some parents. On the other hand, some of the newcomer parents felt that the issue of discipline was overstated as language was sometimes used metaphorically. The staff said that they were shocked when they heard some newcomer parents saying “I’ll beat you” to their children but were somehow less concerned when some Irish parents said “I’ll kill you” to their offspring!

Procedures for collecting children at the end of sessions could sometimes be problematic. According to national child protection guidelines (Department of Health and Children 1999), parents are responsible for collecting their child or must nominate another person and inform the centre. Parents from cultures who adopt a wider view of childcare in the extended family/community sense, found it difficult to accept that their relations and friends were not allowed to take the child home. This created considerable difficulties in some cases.

Some parents had different expectations of preschool to the staff. In one nursery, a parent insisted that her child sat down and did her “school work” and invigilated closely from outside the window. Another nursery had the same problem but explained their emphasis on social development to parents who were then happy to accept this.

Occasionally difficulties arose in relation to equality of opportunity with the local communities. In some areas of Dublin, there is a long waiting list for housing and some families were aggrieved that newcomer families were being housed in preference to local people. Some complaints were also received about newcomer children getting places in the nurseries, again in preference to local families. In general, the practitioners felt that relations between the local parents and the newcomer parents were good, with all parents being accepted according to their personality and their efforts to be friendly. Some newcomer families knew other families from their own country in the neighbourhood and could share their experiences and language skills if required.

Conclusion
The above account of the strategies employed by practitioners shows that they were drawing on their existing knowledge of Early Childhood Care and Education in their work with children learning English as a second language. Several practitioners said that
the knowledge and understanding of second language acquisition gained in their degree level training was invaluable to them when they first started working with children learning English as an additional language. The discussion showed that they were aware of the importance of responding to the children’s initiatives in communicating through a range of verbal and non-verbal means, that they were sensitive to the cultural differences that emerged and that in many cases, they had formed close bonds with the newcomer families. The major difficulties that they saw were in relation to finding out about cultural practices and in accessing help for second language children with developmental or language problems. Access to translators for communication with parents was also a problem.

This paper has focused on one particular context, that of children learning English as an additional language in areas of socio-economic disadvantage in Dublin. In order to gain a greater understanding of the issues and practices involved in this growing area of early childhood education, it will be necessary to extend the scope of the study to include a range of social backgrounds and contexts. It is anticipated that a range of issues, some similar and some different, will emerge from a wider study and that a greater understanding of the issues facing practitioners across a wide range of contexts will assist both practice and training. Underlying issues such as the tension between valuing the host community while resisting the trend towards assimilation of the newcomer cultures, the visibility of newcomer languages and cultures and the perspectives of the children and their parents need to be investigated and discussed. The experiences of early childhood practitioners from other cultures working in Ireland also need to be explored.

In spite of some difficulties, the practitioners in this study were extremely positive about their experience of working with second language children and their families and regarded their inclusion as an opportunity to learn about other cultures and languages. They felt that they were coping well in that they were learning how to extend their practice to take account of the new issues involved. In one sense, they had learned how to facilitate children learning English as a second language because of and not in spite of the language and cultural differences. We would like to thank them for participating in this project and for sharing their experiences of working with newcomer children and their families. They have extended our knowledge on strategies in working with second language children,
given vivid descriptions of inclusive and innovative practice and have identified some of
the underlying issues that need to be addressed if the young children who are learning
English as an additional language are to be facilitated in reaching their potential in a
culturally diverse Ireland.

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The Transition from Preschool to School for Children in Ireland: Teachers Views

Mary O’Kane & Nóirín Hayes

Abstract

There is a wealth of international research on the transition from preschool to school from a range of perspectives. Following on from such research, the issue of transition is emerging as an important new construct in early childhood care and education (ECCE), with a transition-to-school framework replacing the construct of school readiness as a focus of research interest. There has been limited research into transition practices in Ireland and this study is the first comprehensive research looking at this area from an Irish perspective.

Phase I of this study involved conducting a questionnaire on the transition from preschool to formal schooling in Ireland. This was completed by a nationwide sample of preschool teachers and primary school teachers. This paper presents some initial findings on data collected during this phase of the study.

What is Transition?

In educational terms, transition means, in the main, the process of movement from one educational setting to another. These transitions can often mean a change in location, teacher, curriculum, and philosophy (Margetts, 1999). A number of transitions occur through the early education years. Some occur across the years, for example, home to preschool, home to formal schooling, while others occur during the child’s day or week, such as early morning childcare to school, or school to after-school care. This study investigates the transition from preschool to formal schooling, which has been identified internationally as being of great importance in the lives of young children (Pianta & Cox, 1999; EECERJ, 2003; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Ackerman & Barnett, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2005).

The period of transition begins while children are still at preschool, through preparation that takes place in the home during the summer months, and continues on until the child...
is settled in the new setting. The actual time scale until the child feels fully settled is
dependent on each individual, and the National Foundation for Educational Research
(NFER) proposes that transition should be viewed as “a process rather than an event”
(2005, p2). So rather than concentrate on the ‘First Day of School’ transition needs to be
viewed from an ecological perspective, and considered in terms of the influence of
contexts (e.g. family, preschool, school) and the connections between these contexts (e.g.
family-school relationships, preschool-school relationships) across time. In international
research the issue of transition is emerging as an important new construct in ECCE,
replacing the construct of school readiness (Ramey & Ramey, 1999). They cite evidence
suggesting that the concept of readiness is flawed in that it focuses on the competence
of the child as compared to the role of the family, school, and community. They suggest that
this traditional view of readiness needs to be replaced with a transition-to-school
framework, which views the first few years of a child’s school life as a time of adaptation
for children, their families and schools.

Fabian and Dunlop (2002) remind us that this is a period of accelerated developmental
demands. Although some children will adapt easily to a new educational environment, for
others moving from an environment in which they are familiar and secure to a new
classroom environment can be a daunting task (Brostrom, 2000). For this reason, it is
suggested that attention should be given to transition procedures and practices to ensure
a smooth transfer for the child from one setting to another. Continuity from one setting
to the next is important so that the child is enabled to predict events and have some sense
of control over her environment. Fabian and Dunlop (2002) suggest that it is essential
that children are given the knowledge they need about the timings involved in the change,
people involved, and the expectations of the new setting. With this in mind, practices
which facilitate the transition to formal schooling by involving all the parties playing a
role in the process are encouraged.

Why are Transition Practices Needed?
Bailey, (1999) in explaining why the National Centre for Early Development and
Learning (NCEDL) in the United States chose the topic of transition for one of their first
synthesis conferences, explained that this was because the group considered success at the
first year of schooling to be critical:
Kindergarten is a context in which children make important conclusions about school as a place where they want to be and themselves as learners vis-à-vis schools. If no other objectives are accomplished, it is essential that the transition to school occur in such a way that children and families have a positive view of the school and that children have a feeling of perceived competence as learners: “School is OK, and I think that I can make it here”. Unfortunately, many children and families reach alternative conclusions about school and about their fit with the school environment during this very first year. (p.xv)

Recognition is growing internationally that a successful transition to school is significant to the social and emotional welfare of the child, as well as their later cognitive achievements (Kagan & Neuman, 1999; Margetts, 2002; Datar, 2003; Dunlop and Fabian, 2003; Wylie & Thompson, 2003). The period of transition provides opportunities for growth for children and their families, however it also creates challenges for them to face. Research on children’s adjustment at this critical time suggests that social and emotional difficulties in the first years of formal schooling can predict risks of educational and social problems for up to ten to twelve years hence (Margetts, 2002). Entwistle and Alexander (1999) would support this assertion, and propose that on commencing formal schooling children assume a new role, that of student. This is a role that they will occupy for many years, and how they develop into this role largely determines their future educational direction.

Rationale for this Study
Internationally the focus on transition to formal schooling has increased (Brostrom, 2002; Brooker, 2002; EECERJ, 2003; Peters, 2004; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Sharp & White, 2005). However, Pianta and Cox (1999a), referring to research on the transition to formal schooling in the United States, advise that our understanding of this period in children’s lives is still very limited. We have no clear understanding of this transition in the Irish context.

The study investigates the experiences of children who have attended preschool in the transition to formal schooling, as compared to those who enter school directly from the home environment. Although some children enter school without any experience in
group settings, schools in Ireland have a long history of dealing with that situation. Children attending school straight from the home environment are now in the minority in Ireland. Hayes and Kernan (2001) found that 90% of children studied in the Irish element of the IEA Preprimary Project had attended some form of ECCE service before beginning primary school. This study addresses the now predominant situation of children making the transition from a preschool environment to the school environment. The audit of research in the area of ECCE in Ireland conducted by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (Walsh, 2003) identified a gap in the area of research on the transition from preschool to formal schooling in Ireland. Hayes (2004) making concluding observations at the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) “Questions of Quality” conference in Dublin Castle, also spoke of how “the matching of quality at points of transition in the lives of children warrants consideration” (p.413). The results of this study will provide the first data on the policies and procedures in use in Irish preschools and schools with regard to this transition.

Methodology
This paper reports on Phase I of the study, in which a questionnaire was used to investigate the views of a total sample of 500 preschool teachers and teachers of Junior Infants classes on the impact of the transition for children.

The preschool sample was identified using lists of preschools held by Health Boards. The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations (Department of Health and Children, 1996) propose that every preschool in operation in Ireland must notify their local Health Board. Stratified random sampling was used to identify the final proportional sample of 249 preschools. The Primary School sample was identified using the Department of Education’s school listing for academic year 2003-2004 which was the most up-to-date school listing available in February 2005. As with the preschool sample, stratified random sampling was used, and again proportional allocation ensured that each county was included in the final sample of 250 schools in direct proportion to its percentage of the total national sample.

Two questionnaires were developed, one for preschool teachers and one for teachers of junior infants classes, containing related questions. The questionnaires were based on an extensive review of literature on transition to school5. They covered sections on the
service/school itself, general beliefs about the transition process, skills that teachers believe are important for children to possess on arrival at school, and transition practices in place at preschools and schools. The questionnaire included sections with open-ended questions to allow respondents to reply in greater detail on various issues. While finalising the questionnaires it was decided to have the instruments evaluated by an ‘expert panel’, a technique which has been used in previous studies of this kind (Daly, 2002). The group were asked to review both questionnaires, highlight any deficiencies, identify questions that they felt were most relevant, and comment on any areas they felt were of particular interest. The questionnaire was also piloted both before and after review by the expert panel.

It was decided to send out the questionnaires at the time of year when the transition to formal schooling would be in the forefront of each group’s mind. Therefore the preschool questionnaire was sent out in April/May 2005, as this is the time of year when preschool children in Ireland are being prepared for school start in September¹. The Junior Infants questionnaire was sent out in October/November 2005, when the teachers would have just experienced the influx of a new group of students.

The final response rate for the preschool questionnaires was 77%, and for the teachers of junior infants classes was 82%. These high response rates are mainly attributed to the use of both follow-up phone calls, and follow-up mailings to secure a high rate of responses, however it might also reflect a keen interest in the topic.

Some initial findings from the questionnaire data are now considered, although formal analysis of data is ongoing.

Initial Findings from the Questionnaire Data
Both preschool teachers and teachers of junior infants classes were asked, based on their own experiences, to estimate the percentage of children that they felt may have some difficulties making the transition to formal schooling. Sixty-one percent of preschool teachers felt that less than 20% of children are at risk of experiencing some difficulties making the transition, with an additional 23% estimating the figure as higher at between 20%-40%. Seventy percent of the teachers of junior infants classes felt that less than 20% of children are at risk of experiencing some difficulties making the transition, with an additional 24% estimating the figure as being between 20%-40%.
The two groups of teachers were then asked to rank their level of agreement that various
different groups of children could be at risk in general terms of experiencing a difficult
transition to formal schooling. Interestingly both sets of teachers identified three
particular groups of children as being most at risk of experiencing some difficulties. These
were children with low self esteem, children who have difficulty sitting still and listening,
and children with behavioural problems. These three types of children were considered to
be more at risk than groups such as children who had not been to preschool, children
from disadvantaged backgrounds, children from minority groups, and children with
special needs. The two sets of teachers were also in general agreement about types of
children that they would not consider to be at risk of experiencing a difficult transition.
These were children in urban areas, firstborn children, and boys.

When asked which skills were necessary for children to succeed in formal schooling, again
the two groups were in general agreement. The four general areas of social skills,
independence, language and communication skills, and the ability to sit, listen and
concentrate, were highlighted as being of particular importance by the two groups.
Academic skills were not rated highly by either group.

Independence also featured highly in beliefs about how preschools should prepare
children for primary school. Preschool teachers widely reported an emphasis on
encouraging independence in children, including responsibility for both themselves and
their belongings (reported in 99% of preschools in the study), and the use of classroom-
type rules such as standing in line and waiting their turn (again reported in 99% of
preschools in the study). The number of junior infants teachers who suggested that these
practices were of particular importance at preschool level was also very high. However
some concerns were expressed by teachers of junior infants classes that children were not
actually arriving at school adequately prepared in terms of independence. Whether this is
in itself a transition difficulty, or whether definitions of, or expectations of, independent
behaviour among the two groups of teachers are different, will be examined.

Only 23% of preschool teachers reported that they had any form of communication with
primary teachers in relation to transition, however 74% reported that they felt such
communication should take place. Similarly only 29% of preschool teachers reported that
they undertook evaluations of children which could be passed to the primary school
teachers; however 81% of preschool teachers felt that it would be a good idea to undertake such evaluations and pass them on to the primary school. Preliminary finding suggest that quite a high number of teachers of junior infants classes would welcome greater communication with preschool teachers, and would welcome evaluations (eg, strengths or support needs of individual children) from preschool teachers. However, some primary teachers reported concerns about whether preschool teachers were adequately qualified to assess a child’s readiness for school.

Discussion

Figures estimating the number of children who are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition are in line with international findings (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Hausken & Rathbun, 2002). Although the teachers in the current study reported transition problems in a minority of students, it is clear that as Stephen & Cope suggest, during the transition to school “some children are at risk of becoming disengaged from education at the beginning of their school career” (2003, p.262). They suggest that in the interests of inclusion no child should be left out of school, or put in a position where their success is less likely.

The two groups of teachers identified children with low self esteem, children who have difficulty sitting still and listening, and children with behavioural problems, as being most at risk of experiencing a difficult transition. A sense of self-worth, and a confidence that you can cope in the new school environment are important at the time of transition, and those children with low self-esteem are less likely to exhibit such confidence (Fabian, 2002; Bulkeley & Fabian, 2006). As Fabian notes “personal, rather than intellectual, ability is the key to giving children the best start to school. Social confidence and a sense of success play an important part in giving children self-esteem which will, in turn, help children to approach the start of school in a positive way” (2002, p.63). The issue of concentrating, sitting still and listening is a very complex one. Whether sitting still and listening is really the best way for children of this age to learn is open to question. The Revised Primary Curriculum (Department of Education and Science, 1999) proposes that children are active learners, and should play an active part in the learning process; at no point does it advocate sitting still as being useful in terms of children’s learning. Fabian (2002) notes that the ability to sit still is suggested to be the most advanced stage of movement, but she also found that the ability to sit still was identified as being of
importance when starting formal schooling. It is, perhaps understandable that teachers of large classes would find the ability of students to sit still useful in terms of classroom management, and the ability to listen and concentrate as being useful in practical terms. However, whether this is in the best interests of the children is questionable.

When asked which skills were necessary for children to succeed in formal schooling, it became clear that both preschool and primary school teachers value the skill of independence, which they defined in general terms as the ability to be self-sufficient in taking care of oneself and one’s property within the classroom situation. A higher percentage of teachers of junior infant classes placed a greater emphasis on independence/self-help skills than their preschool colleagues. Dockett & Perry (2004) also noted that teachers in their study valued the skills of independence (toileting, dressing themselves, and taking care of their own things) as being of importance when starting school. It is easy to see how such skills, in essence the ability to negotiate classroom life without the constant attention of the teacher, would be valued by a teacher working with a class of up to 36 four and five year olds. Socially, the ability to wait turns, share, anticipate change, and ‘read’ the teacher will increase positive experiences within the classroom (Fabian, 2002; Haas-Foretta & Ottolini-Geno, 2006). Such skills would indeed support students dealing with the new rules and levels of negotiation which international researchers suggest children have to adhere to at school, compared to the relative flexibility and freedom of preschool (Myers, 1997; Wolery, 1999). In essence, the teachers in this study have suggested that children with the ability to negotiate classroom life independently, equipped with good social skills and the ability to concentrate and listen for short periods of time, are more likely to be successful at primary level.

The emphasis on communication and language skills is not surprising. This emphasis on communication has been noted in other studies. Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell (2003) found that 75% of the 3,305 teachers they questioned felt that ability to follow direction and to communicate needs were very important readiness skills, as compared to academic skills which they found to be less important. Communication and language skills are closely linked with literacy skills (DES, 1999). The primary school curriculum notes the importance of oral language, and an emphasis on oral language (both English and Irish) at infant stage is encouraged in the curriculum.
Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta & Cox (2000) question whether transition problems reported by teachers might reflect disparities between teacher expectations and children’s actual competencies. This would support the views of the teachers of junior infants classes that children are not necessarily arriving in their classrooms with the preparation necessary for success, leading the researcher to question if there is in fact a mis-match of beliefs between preschool and primary school teachers about how children should be prepared for school, reflecting a finding reported by Kernan and Hayes (1999). However, this must be considered in tandem with the understanding that the responsibility should not be on the child to enter school ‘ready’ for the demands of the infants class, but more that the responsibility should be on all professionals involved to work towards an approach that supports children during this time. Such an approach would require greater attention to continuity of services and more emphasis on seamless and continuous services for children across the preschool and primary school years of their education.

Levels of communication between preschools and schools were reported to be low, however both groups were in agreement that such communication should take place. It is recommended that bonds between the preschool and primary school sectors should be strengthened. The OECD (2002) has noted that strong links between the two sectors can have a number of advantages in terms of developing shared goals and educational methods, and also to create coherency in staff training and development. Although fears have been articulated about the push-down of teacher-led academic work rather than child-centred play-based learning (Carr, 2000; Peters 2002), if the two cultures can come together while respecting the traditions of both groups, the resulting continuity of approach could benefit children making the transition between the two educational settings. Policies are needed that would foster communication in this area.

Following on from this, possible different uses of language within the two educational spheres were noted in the findings. Differences were found in the language used in teacher responses to the skills children need for a successful transition to school. As Donnelly notes, “Language matters and the language we use to describe our work with children indicates our understanding of childhood” (Donnelly, 2005, p56). Differences in cultural expectations, and distinctions in meaning the two groups of teachers take from the same language have been identified in previous Irish research (Hayes, O’Flaherty & Kernan, 1997) and may well be the case here. As Dunlop and Fabian advise “a shared language to
describe transitions may not be a mutual one” (2002, p146). Considering the historical and cultural divergence between preschool and primary education in Ireland which covers nearly every aspect of both types of settings, it is possible that this is the case. Difference found in response rates in relation to the importance of problem solving skills, academic skills, and task completion, could have cultural or linguistic connotations. This possible gap in understanding requires further investigation, particularly if greater levels of communication between the two groups are to be encouraged. An investigation into the professional language used in the preschool and primary school sectors in Ireland could be a first step in this process.

**Conclusion**

As this was the first research into this area in Ireland, one of the primary considerations in the rationale in the design of the study was to provide much needed information on the beliefs of teachers at both preschool and primary school level on various issues surrounding the area of transition to school. Although there were many areas in which the two groups were in agreement, further investigation is needed into possible differences in the expectations of the two groups, and possible different uses of language.

Certainly, we cannot assume that all participants in a child’s mesosystem have the same ideas about what is important on transition to school. Preschool teachers and the teachers of junior infants classes fill two very powerful and influencing roles in the period of transition, so it is important to compare and contrast their views. Indeed, differences between the opinions of preschool and primary school teachers with regard to adjustment to school have been identified in other international research (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Perhaps due to these differences, the OECD have noted that in Early Start’ units in Ireland where primary school teachers and preschool teachers work together, both groups reported that this was a “partnership challenge” (2004, p.60) partly because of the differences in professional perspectives.

Nationally and across a variety of settings, these two groups of teachers create the environments to and from which children are making transitions, and their views on transitions and readiness will be translated into practice in their classrooms. The emphasis of the teachers in this study on independence, social skills, and language and communication skills reveals that their primary concern is with children’s social
behaviours on entering school, rather than academics. This is in line with much international research into the concerns of primary level teachers’ concerns about children’s readiness (Piotrkowski, 2001; Lin et al, 2003; Wesley & Buysee, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2004).

Findings reported in this paper represent preliminary data analysis of a wider data set. Full analysis will be complete by mid-2007, and will include additional data from parents and children themselves.

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**Bibliography**


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Appendix

Questionnaire for Preschools on Transition for Children to Formal Schooling

SECTION A: INDIVIDUAL SETTING

A1: Service Type. What type of preschool is your service?

☐ Private Playgroup  ☐ Early Start Preschool
☐ Community Playgroup  ☐ Traveller Preschool
☐ Naíonraí  ☐ Montessori Preschool

☐ Other, please clarify: ________________________________

A2. How many years have you been working with preschool children?

☐ This is my first year working with preschoolers
☐ 1-5 years
☐ 5-10 years
☐ 10+ years

A3: Do you hold a qualification in childcare?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, please indicate (referring to your highest qualification):

__________________________________ Qualification
__________________________________ Length of Training
__________________________________ Full or Part Time
__________________________________ Awarding Body

A4: At your preschool, who makes the decision about when a child is ready to start formal schooling?

☐ parents
☐ parents in conjunction with preschool teacher
☐ preschool teacher
☐ other, please explain ________________________________
A5: Can you please estimate the percentage of parents who ask your opinion as preschool teacher as to whether you feel their child is ready for school?
☐ 0-20% ☐ 20-40% ☐ 40-60% ☐ 60-80% ☐ 80-100%

A6. Please categorise your preschool as being located in either an “Urban” or a “Rural” area?
☐ Urban ☐ Rural

A7. Please categorise your preschool as being located in either “Disadvantaged” or “Non-Disadvantaged” area?
☐ Disadvantaged ☐ Non-Disadvantaged

SECTION B: GENERAL BELIEFS ON TRANSITION PROCESS

B1: From your personal experience, could you estimate the percentage of children you feel may have some difficulties making the transition to formal schooling?
☐ 0-20% ☐ 20-40% ☐ 40-60% ☐ 60-80% ☐ 80-100%

B2: Please circle the number which best indicates your level of agreement that each of the following groups of children are at risk in general terms of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children who have not been to preschool are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children from minority groups are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in urban areas are at greater risk of experiencing a difficult transition to school than those in rural areas</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with special needs are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with low self esteem are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children entering school without a “friend” in their class are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal school schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children with behaviour problems are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children who find it difficult to listen and sit still are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firstborn children are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys, rather than girls are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The youngest children entering school are at risk of experiencing a difficult transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B3: Do you feel that entrance to Junior Infants class should be decided on age or whether the child is has developed the necessary personal, social, and intellectual skills to succeed in formal schooling?

- [ ] Age
- [ ] Socially, emotionally and intellectually ready
- [ ] Both

How would you judge if a child has developed the necessary social, emotional
and intellectual skills to succeed in formal schooling?

B4: Are there any other factors (apart from age and the personal skills of the child) that you feel influence parents on when to send their child to formal schooling?

B5: Please circle the number which best indicates your level of agreement that the skills listed below are important for children to possess on arrival at school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence and self help skills are important for children to possess on arrival at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to listen, sit still, and take turns, are important skills for children to possess on arrival at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preacademic skills, such as letter recognition, are important for children to possess on arrival at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social skills are important for children to possess on arrival at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving skills are important for children to possess on arrival at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and language skills are important skills for children to possess on arrival at school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B6: In your opinion, what are the three most important skills for a child to possess on arrival at school?


SECTION C: TRANSITION PRACTICES ALREADY IN PLACE IN YOUR PRESCHOOL, AND THAT YOU BELIEVE SHOULD BE PUT IN PLACE IN PRESCHOOLS

C1: From the list below please tick the practices that your preschool has in place, and that you believe should be put in place generally, to facilitate transition to formal schooling. *(Please tick A or B for all that apply)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A = Practices already in place in my preschool</th>
<th>B = Practices I think should be in place in preschools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion about what to expect at primary school</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange class visit(s) to a primary school</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporate academic skills into preschool curriculum</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage independence in children, responsibility for self and belongings</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of classroom-type rules (eg, stand in line/wait your turn)</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertake evaluations (eg, strengths/support needs) of children to pass to teachers of junior infants classes</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish ongoing communication with receiving teachers of junior infants classes</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold discussion with parents on readiness of children who plan to start formal schooling</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devise a written “transition plan” outlining practices put in place to smooth the transition process</td>
<td>☐ ☑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION D: WAYS IN WHICH PRIMARY SCHOOLS COULD ASSIST THE TRANSITION PROCESS

D1: Do you think PRIMARY SCHOOLS should undertake the following activities to help with the smooth transition of children from preschool to school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send letters to parents prior to school term start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send letters to children prior to school term start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange parent meeting prior to school term start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange home visits prior to term start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange one child visit to school prior to term start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange a series of child visits to school prior to term start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange preschool group visits to school prior to term start</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish communication with preschool teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit preschools and observe children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review preschool evaluations of children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage new friendships for children starting school without a friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION F: SUGGESTIONS TAKEN FROM THE LITERATURE ON THE TRANSITION TO FORMAL SCHOOLING

F1: Below are some suggestions aimed at smoothing the transition process. Please circle the number which best indicates your level of agreement that each statement is important for children's transition to formal schooling.

Agree 1 2 3 4 5 Disagree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents should promote the skills of social competence and resiliency, prior to transition to formal schooling</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teachers should promote the skills of social competence and resilience prior to transition</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers of junior infants classes should promote the skills of social competence and resiliency, on arrival at school</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and evaluations on individual children should be transferred from preschool to school</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschools should be located within schools where possible</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be greater communication between preschool and primary school teachers</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be greater communication between preschool teachers and parents</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There should be greater communication between primary school teachers and parents</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School entry age should be raised from four years so children are more mature when making the transition to formal school</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The curriculum in the infants classes should have a greater focus on learning through play</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class sizes in the early years of school should be reduced</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
F2: Below are some barriers, identified by researchers, to ensuring a successful transition to formal schooling. Please circle the number which best indicates your level of agreement with each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences between preschools and primary school are a barrier to a successful transition for children. Differences in curricula of preschools and primary school are a barrier to a successful transition for children.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Differences in training/professional preparation of preschool and primary school teachers cause barriers to transition.</td>
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<td>Preschool teachers not having direct experience of junior infants classrooms causes barriers to successful transitions.</td>
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<td>Children arriving at formal schooling with a variety of preschool (or not) experiences causes barriers …</td>
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If you have any other comments to make on the process of transition from preschool to school, I would be very interested to hear them (please continue on the back of this sheet):

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

Notes

1 This research is funded by a scholarship through the CECDE (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education), and is being undertaken as a PhD by Mary O’Kane, through Dublin Institute of Technology, supervised by Dr Noirin Hayes.

2 The term ‘Teacher’ is used throughout this report for consistency, when referring to teachers at preschool level, although it is acknowledged that in practice a variation of titles are used.

3 A copy of the Preschool Version of the Questionnaire is attached to this paper as an Appendix. Copies of the two questionnaires are available from the corresponding author. [Mary O’Kane, Postgraduate Office, Room 323, Dublin Institute of Technology, 41-45 Mountjoy Square, Dublin 1. Email Address: Maryok.oakleigh@gmail.com]

4 In Ireland there is no rolling school start for children; all children in the new entrants Junior Infants class commence on the same date, usually around 30th August-1st September.

5 See attached questionnaire for full list of the groups of children ranked by teachers.
A wide range of class sizes was reported in this study, ranging from a minimum of four to a maximum class size of 36 children.

Early Start is a pilot pre-school intervention project for pupils aged 3 to 4 years who are most at risk in areas of social disadvantage. It aims to expose young children to an educational programme, which would enhance their overall development and prevent school failure and offset the effects of social disadvantage (Department of Education & Science, 2006)
‘Give her a bottle … Tell her everything will be alright …’
– How Children Manage Adults/Teachers to Get What They Want

*Carmel Brennan* & *Dr. Nóirín Hayes*

**Abstract**

This paper emerges from a research project entitled ‘Partners in Play: How children organise their participation in social pretend play’. It is an ethnographic, interpretive study designed to explicate how children organise shared activity and shared meaning in play. The data was collected in a preschool playgroup over a nine month period and consists of over 200 documented (with video) play episodes.

With the words quoted above, Alice gives Ann (teacher, playing babysitter) instructions about minding her ‘baby’ and in the process reverses the usual power relationship between teacher and child. It introduces the question: What is the role of the adult/teacher in children’s play? The paper addresses the questions from the perspective of the children, looking at how and for what purposes children use adults in their play and suggests that to understand children’s skills and interactions, we must study them in terms of their function in achieving goals that are meaningful and valued among the children (Rogoff 1990). This approach demonstrates the opportunities offered by social pretend play to recentralise interpersonal transactions in the learning process, with implications for the role of adults in supporting children’s skills and knowledge construction. The paper calls for a shift from the individual basis of the traditional pedagogical approach towards a pedagogy of connection.

**Theoretical background**

The research is located within a sociocultural perspective that suggests that learning is a process of shared meaning making, framed by the goals of social activity rather than the transmission of meaning from teacher to learner. The research works from the principle that children are social actors with an innate drive to learn a culture and to share thinking with others (Stern, 1977, Vygotsky, 1978, Trevarthen, 1998).

Bennett, Wood and Rogers (1997/98) found that teachers, working from *Bagetian*
theory, described their role as general manager, organiser of environment, observer for assessment and play participant. This is the traditional role of the pedagogue when the focus is on innate, individual cognitive processes. The sociocultural view of learning, however, foregrounds the intermental plane and the collective construction of knowledge. Here, learning is a process of appropriation that takes place as children participate in cultural ways of interacting, of working together, of sharing and representing knowledge in cultural activity towards cultural goals. The process not only communicates meaning but provides the tools for the on-going reconstruction of meaning and function to meet the needs of changing groups and goals. With this perspective, the research focuses on children as they engage in the process of appropriating from the adult world (1) the system of social relationships and interactions within their society and (2) the cultural conceptual and symbolic system (Nicolopoulou, 1993).

In this paper, this lens is used to analyse the data and consider the role of the adult in children’s play. We focus on the staff of the playgroup and their role in ‘bridging and structuring’ (Rogoff, 1990) children’s interpretation and reconstruction of the cultural systems, particularly from the perspective of the child. Within the childcare setting, staff, for example, ‘structure’ the environment and the daily routine in ways that convey what they consider important learning and they offer supports that ‘bridge’ the gap between what children can do and know and what they need to do and know in order to manage their new context and activities. At the same time, children are managing and manipulating adults as a resource to meet their own individual and group needs. Among these is the need for a peer culture that frames group membership and establishes difference between the adult and peer world. Where adults and children’s goals are at odds with one another, children have to find ways of wrestling power and forcing change.

Social pretend play is a context for appropriation. Children reconstruct concepts, practices and relationships in pretend contexts and thereby create another window on the world. The combination of pretence and exaggeration in social pretend play serves to make children’s interpretations and reconstructions more explicit both for themselves and for the observer. “What passes unnoticed by the child in real life becomes the rules of behaviour in play” (Vygotsky, 1967/1976). In reconstructing cultural practices in new and varied roles and contexts, children are engaging in a process of reflection in situated action that supports learning.
Rules
The play episodes have been analysed using Rogoff’s (1995) three planes of analysis. The second plane focuses on interpersonal negotiation where the data is explored to analyse children’s appropriation of the cultural discourses of rules, gender and power, in particular. In children’s reconstruction of rules, for example, one finds complex understanding and complex reconstruction towards complex goals. According to Corsaro (1985) children’s reconstruction of rules demonstrates an understanding of a need for order in their interactions. Children also demonstrate many other properties of rules. Rules, for example, must be recognised as such, at least by some members of the group. The power of rules depends on the power and persuasion of the proponents or on their acceptability to the majority. Rachel, in this episode, tells us that rules often come in threes and usually indicate what one cannot do.

Rachel is playing ‘house’ with others in the home corner. She is trying to amuse Susan.
Rachel    First rule is ... don’t get my clothes dirty. Number two rule... no fighting and no kicking and number three is... no pooping on the ground

Rules, when broken, carry consequences and the constructing of consequences seems to be of particular interest to the children. Here, Conal and Tiernan are playing with a group. Tiernan is often disruptive and Conal reconstructs the rules for dealing with him here.

Conal (authoritatively)    Tiernan... if you stick out your tongue I’ll take that off you –
Donal to Tiernan    Put it out again
Tiernan sticks out his tongue a few times
Donal    He stuck out his tongue
Conal    I’m gonna take it off ye – gimme it …
He forces it from his hand

Donal encourages the conflict for his own purposes. Rules themselves are often a source of conflict. They can be interpreted or misinterpreted and used for unintended purposes. Not everyone has an equal voice in making the rules. Rule makers are powerful but so is deviance. Rules have a bonding effect among members of ‘the club’ – a way of creating ‘us’ and ‘them’. In the following episode excerpt, many of these properties are demonstrated. Rachel proposes that eating uncooked flour is bad for your ‘tummy’. Susan, her best
friend, goes a step further and rules that if you eat flour, you’ll die. Rachel supports this proposition. Lilly, wishing to belong to the group, reaffirms. Collective construction is in process. Shane refutes the rule and the girls restate it with absolute conviction.

Shane  
Rachel  
Yummy sugar, yummy sugar
That’s not sugar…it’s flour
Lilly  
It’s flour (a newcomer who is keen to be agreeable and befriend the girls)
Rachel  
Yeah…and it’s not nice for your tummy
Susan  
No- it’ll make you die…it’ll make you die (with more emphasis)
Rachel  
It will make you die, yeah
Shane  
It won’t make you die, it’s sugar
Lilly  
No, it will make you die (with increasing conviction)
Rachel  
Yeah, it’ll make you die if you eat it
Susan  
Yeah
Lilly  
Yeah

There is a sense that the rule is tested and strengthened by opposition. ‘If you eat flour, you’ll die’ becomes an undeniable, objective truth.

These are concepts and practices that children have appropriated from the adult world and reconstruct to meet the needs of the peer group towards building a sense of togetherness (De Haan and Singer, 2001) and shared control (Corsaro, 2003). This understanding of learning offers another lens with which to view the role of the adult/teacher. Adults guide children’s interpretation of the world and children, in turn, are eagerly observing, playing out and appropriating how the world works, ‘... what every look means, every tone of voice, who their family is, where they come from, what makes them happy or sad, what place they occupy in the world’ (Gussin Paley, 1997)

**Teacher as Helper**

Although children derive satisfaction from doing things together without the help of adults, they are quick to use adults as functional and technical aids to progress their own activities. The data records continuous requests for help to don dress-up clothes, find things they need, read stories, sort out problems efficiently and of course, to publicise their achievements. ‘Teacher, look what I did’ inevitably accompanies achievement rather
than failure. The children loved when teacher made them the centre of attention by naming them and their activities. When teacher wondered ‘What is Tiernan making?’ and Rose replied ‘He’s making rice’, Tiernan beamed. When Kris wanted a seat at the ‘clay’ table beside Susan, she asked teacher to procure it for her. Children recognised the skills and power zones of the adult and used both to their own ends. They also recognised that some adults make pliable and biddable play partners.

**Teacher as play partner**

Alice likes to engage Ann in play. She finds it difficult to engage play partners from among her peers. Ann (teacher) reads her intentions and knows how to respond contingently. She follows Alice’s lead and in contrast to the power relationship they experience in real life, she doesn’t threaten her power position in play. Playing with peers can be much more difficult than playing with a facilitative adult. The accomplishment of joint play requires children to work responsively to achieve and maintain intersubjectivity (Trevorthen, 1980). With peers, one must be prepared to take initiative but also to follow the initiatives of others in order to achieve interpersonal focus, interpersonal cooperation and agency (Marwick, 2001). For Alice, this is difficult. Her initiatives have a private rather than a shared quality. She tends not to name them and others tend not to see them just as she sometimes doesn’t seem to see and attune to their initiatives.

In this episode, Alice takes Ann (teacher) by the hand and leads her to the empty home corner. She indicates that Ann should sit on the bench and brings her a doll to nurse. Immediately others join them and the home corner becomes a hive of activity. Ann is given three mothers’ babies to nurse. Alice gets dressed up and performs her domestic chores and then positions Ann as babysitter while she goes shopping. She calls on her mobile phone.

Alice  
*Hello, what’s the baby doing?*

Ann  
*Baby’s crying, what will I do?*

Alice  
*Give her a bottle*

Ann  
*And if she still cries – what will I do?*

Alice  
*Tell her everything will be alright and put her to bed.\nI’ll be home in an hour.*
Ann checks out Alice's intentions and is able to follow with appropriate and extending suggestions. Alice finds the play very satisfying. She reaches a level of intersubjectivity with Ann that escapes her when interacting with peers. The role of adults as play partners is particularly prevalent at the beginning of the playgroup year, when new children in the service struggle to find common ground and use the adult as interpreter and connector. When children have the skills, strategies and opportunities for peer intersubjectivity and cooperation, the adult becomes somewhat redundant in this play role but children, who experience difficulty developing cooperation with other children, continue to seek adult company. In such cases adults are often used to compensate for inability to engage peer play partners.

**Managing the teacher**

Deviance from adult rule is an integral part of developing the peer culture (Corsaro 1985). Adult plans often get in the way of children's peer group plans and children need to orchestrate both. The children are very rarely openly defiant, rather they try to manage the adults and still pursue their own goals. They seem to be concerned that teacher will be angry or think badly of them but at the same time the deviant activity is worth the risk. Adults, as the following examples show, often make adjustments to rule implementation in response. Lydia sneaks water from the bathroom in the play kettle and surreptitiously skirks the adults on her return journey to share it with her friends. Ann, on discovery, returns the water but accepts the cup of tea (water) that Lydia offers. Again, Susan throws a hoolahoop in the air. Teacher approaches. She knows she is not allowed to throw things. She adopts a friendly tone:

Susan  *Teacher, do you know how to catch a hoolahoop?*
Teacher  *No – show me*

In both episodes and many others, the teachers know that the rule has been broken but are persuaded or, some would say, manipulated by the children into a level of compliance with the deviance. Children show a remarkable ability to predict the reaction of adults. The following episode further demonstrates. Grainne, not yet three years old, is the youngest child in the playgroup while Susan and Kris are among the oldest. Grainne is playing with her doll and buggy by the bed in the home corner. Susan and Kris move in and commandeer the bed.
Grainne  
That's my baby's bed
Susan  
No
Grainne continues to stare at them. Susan and Kris stare back for several seconds and then join together in laughing at Grainne.
Grainne  
... I'm going to tell my teacher
Susan (teasing)  
She's not your teacher
Grainne moves. Susan jumps up and followed by Kris, overtakes Grainne and approaches Ann (staff)
Susan  
Grainne won't let us play with the bed
Ann  
Oh, I'm sure she will ... You three girls can play together
Susan and Kris return to the bed.

This episode offers an interesting insight into the children's perspective on using teacher to resolve conflict. They are aware that being the first to recruit help and to lay the blame improves one's chances of being heard and believed. The victim is usually the one to complain and seek justice. The ploy is effective. The children have demonstrated an ability to read the situation and to predict the adult interpretation and reaction. Piaget considered that children were incapable of this level of 'decentering' or understanding another's perspective until around seven years. In this research project, observations in settings found it in abundance among preschoolers.

Bending the Rules
No weapons of any kind, particularly guns and knives are allowed in the playgroup, even for play purposes. The children are aware of this rule. Ann responds to a commotion in the home corner and finds both Conal and Donal with knives. Conal is visibly playing at stabbing people.

Ann  
What did D say the other day about knives? She said knives are not allowed in playschool ... Now what are they?
Conal  
Knives
Ann  
And what are you going to use them for?
Conal  
Em ... eh ... chop
Ann  
No, you're not allowed to chop anyone
Donal  
No, ... chop ... eh ... these
He moves to the cooking area and indicates that he will chop food

Ann  
"Oh, that's a good idea ... to do the food preparation?"

Ann turns her back

Donal to Stephen  
"I'll chop your head off"

(in bed)

Again, we can see how the children devise an explanation to satisfy the adult. Donal picks up the explanation and bonds with Conal in deceit. Both playing with weapons and the evasion strategies used are valued in the peer culture. The children know that they are breaking the rule but present themselves as innocent. The adult knows they are breaking the rule but accepts their explanation. Two weeks later, Conal again is playing knives and agrees with Susan that he will be the attacker. Kris is protesting that she doesn't want knives in the game

Conal  
"Susan, pretend we were ..."

Ann  
"Conal!"

Conal  
"We're not ..."

Ann  
"Conal, Conal, listen to Kris - what did you say?"

Kris  
"I don't like games with knives"

Ann  
"See, she's scared of knives"

Conal  
"Nooo ..., not real knives"

Ann  
"I know it's not real knives -- but I don't even like talking about knives and cutting people"

Conal  
"I'm not talking about that ..."

Ann  
"Well then, what are you talking about?"

Conal  
"I'm talking about peels ... knives for cuttin' peels..."

Kris  
"I don't want him to have ..."

Ann  
"oh peels -- it's a vegetable knife ... well, Kris you tell him what you don't want"

Conal  
"She didn't hear it -- knives for cutting peels is not scary"

Ann  
"I know but can you understand why ..."

Conal  
"It means you're hungry"

Ann  
"Right, but do you know why I think she's nervous? -- she didn't know ... I don't think you knew... did you know what he was talking about?"
Kris  

*I don’t want him to have …*

Kris notices that Lilly has a knife in her hand. She finds one and they both approach Conal surreptitiously. Ann realises that the girls have changed tack:

Ann  

*They’re the things you don’t want him to use, right?*

The girls begin to innocently chew on the knives.

Conal tries to persuade Ann that she has misread his intentions and that he is innocent of any rule breaking. This is what Corsaro (1985:138) calls ‘secondary adjustments to adult rules’. Here, we can see the complexity of the activity. The children are intent on breaking the rules but they also wish to fool Ann. While on this occasion, Conal may have initiated the activity, the complainants also join in both breaking the rule and fooling teacher. This type of behaviour may be seen as contributing to their identity building as preschool students, when children conspire to take control through resistance to the rules and through a display of clever deceit. Breaking rules and getting away with it is often valued in the peer culture.

**Resistance and identity**

Children’s resistance, at times, seems to run like a current through the group and to gain momentum when it succeeds in disrupting adult authority. This was particularly obvious at transition times when children were waiting to go outside or preparing for lunch. Sometimes they collectively began to bang the tables or make noises that thwarted the adults’ efforts to organise them and get things done. This group resistance created a sense of group bonding and power among the children and established them in opposition to the adult group. In testing adult rules, they gain insight into adult organisation and goals and in turn use this insight to develop their own group culture. On several occasions children were observed taking school rules and using them for unintended purposes in a way that somewhat confounded the adults authority and gave a sense that the children were accomplices in subversion. In this episode, by way of demonstration, Conal and Donal are arguing over roles and in bad humour when Sam tries to joins them, against their wishes. Sam draws the teacher’s attention to his plight.

Teacher  

*Well what can Sam be in the game?*

Conal  

*Nothing – he’s bold*

Teacher  

*No he’s not. Are you bold Sam?*
Sam  No
Teacher  You tell them – you tell them you’re not bold
Conal   We’re not ready to share
Donal   We’re not ready to share
Teacher But Sam has already been in here playing with you
        – you can’t just say you’re not ready to share now
Conal   We’re not ready to share
Donal   Yeah we’re not ready to share
Teacher You can’t say …
Conal   We’re not ready to share

Tiernan comes and suggest they play Power Rangers and Conal and Donal grab the
opportunity to escape. Before departure, they agree to tidy up in order to placate teacher
and to undo any suggestion that they may be defiant children.

If you don’t wish to play or share your equipment with another, the school rule dictates
that you say ‘I/we’re not ready to share’. Here the children work the system to their own
ends, to exclude Sam. They also forget their own conflict and bond in opposition. They
immediately suspect teacher’s purpose when she enquires about their game and they stick
to their own strategy even when teacher insists that the rule is being misused. In the
process they are refining their skills of resistance and learning the adult skills of
negotiating. Both Piaget (1959/2001) and Vygotsky (1978) propose that conflict or
perturbations have the effect of making the child aware of his/her thinking and thereby
pre-empt significant shifts in learning. Resistance also gives them an experience of power.
In the above episode, the children seemed somewhat concerned about the powerful stance
they had taken and wanted to give teacher back some power. They readily complied with
instructions to tidy up and were more receptive to Sam.

There is a sense in these play episodes that confrontation with adults prompts children to
think consciously and strategically and to develop their group membership skills, skills
that the children reconstruct and adapt in developing their own peer, and in time, adult
world. The reconstruction process accounts for both change and continuity in culture.
Implications for research and practice

Primarily the data prompts questions rather than answers and highlights the need to be reflexive in our approach to education in the early years. The data and literature, for example, suggest that deviance is important in the construction of peer culture. How then should adults deal with deviance? Is it sufficient that adults give control to children or do children need the experience of taking control from adults? Is the process as important as the outcome? These are the kind of research questions that arise when we consider learning from the perspective of the learner.

The first implication for pedagogy is the requirement to understand the process of appropriation in early childhood and the goals of children’s activities and collaborations. Children not only appropriate, interpret and reconstruct their understanding of the adult world but they also appropriate their cognitive, interactional and psychological tools and use them to create a group culture that differentiates them from adults. In the above episodes we can see children challenge adults with these adult-derived tools. They read adult intentions and they conspire to undermine them by, for example, changing the meaning of one’s actions with a knife, registering one’s grievance first, using convincing tones and expressions and indeed quoting adult rules for other purposes. This circumvention of ‘teacher’ control illustrates the cleverness and agency of society’s youngest members in pursuing their task of cultural reproduction and change and should encourage us to stop and wonder at, and to work with that cleverness and agency.

Adults working with children have the possibility both to support children’s interpretations of the adult world and to support their reconstructions. Their job is primarily to help children to connect to one another so that they have a voice in cultural reconstruction. Corsaro (1985) calls this ‘boundary’ work. The adult stands on the boundary between the adult and peer culture. Her/ his job is to equip children with the ways of knowing and ways of constructing knowledge that are valued in the adult world and support them as they collectively reconstruct these ways. Central to this process is understanding the power, access and control issues involved in our valued knowledge (Bruner, 1996) and demonstrated in children’s reconstructions, which as adults we may want to reconsider before sharing them with the next generation. In looking at how children reconstruct rules, for example, we may want to renegotiate our adult implementation of rules as well as supporting a fairer reconstruction among children.
The research shows the potential of social pretend play as a particularly powerful meaning making mechanism. It offers children opportunity to reconstruct ways of being in varied roles, relationships and contexts and provides a tool for checking and validating the meaning and function of cultural concepts and practices. In play, children make explicit the concepts and values appropriated from the adult world, thus also offering the adult/teacher opportunities to represent them for discussion and argumentation. Adult observation and assessment is reconceptualised by this perspective and the role of play in the curriculum is centralised and revitalised. However, there is a recognition that the value of play is linked to what children learn in play.

Conclusion
Children collaborate with peers and adults in the process of appropriation. Together, in interaction, they construct their individual and group identity and create a framework for belonging among their peers and wider culture. This paper demonstrates that not only forbidden activities, such as use of weapons or real water, but also the strategies used to evade teacher sanction are valued in the peer culture and are part of the bonding process.

The research offers an understanding of children’s reconstruction of cultural concepts and practices from the perspective of children’s motivations and purposes and foregrounds children’s competence and agency in achieving goals that are meaningful and important to the peer group. It calls for a revision of our pedagogical approach, with its focus on the individual, to include a focus on connection with others. The adult’s role, particularly in play, is to help children negotiate interpersonal collaboration which is critical to the development of identity, belonging, communication and their knowledge of the world.

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Bibliography


**Notes**

1 Carmel Brennan has received a scholarship from the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE]. This article draws on the results of her fieldwork.
Reflections on the Reggio Emilia Experience

Anna Ridgway, UCC

Abstract
This paper contains reflections on two visits to the Infant-Toddler Centres and Pre-Schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy. It looks at the core beliefs and principles underpinning the work in the schools and the ways in which the Reggio Teacher/Pedagogista/Atelierista understands the constructivist approach to working with young children. The relationship between children, parents, teachers, the wider community and the outdoor environment, is seen as fundamental to the children's welfare. Extensive documentation of the children's work is a core part of the practice; it is a continuous and integral part of the assessment and evaluation of the child's experience in these Municipal schools.

Key Words: Reggio Emilia, Teacher/Pedagogista/Atelierista, relationships, environment, documentation of learning, assessment, evaluation

Introduction
I have indeed been fortunate to visit Reggio Emilia in 2005 and 2006. Each visit has been part of an international study group organised by SightLines Initiative UK, under the directorship of Robin Duckett. The study week consists of lectures, workshops and, very importantly, visits to the Infant-Toddler Centres and Pre-Schools. School staff members host these visits both during, and after, school hours. They give of their time very generously to explain what they do and to answer questions. Questions are very welcome indeed, as part of their continuing staff development and their understanding of their role as lifelong learners. The influence of Professor Loris Malaguzzi, one of the founders of the pre-school movement, is very visible throughout the schools.

This paper will reflect on some of the essential components of the Reggio Emilia experience and is based on my own observations, reading and the presentations made by Reggio personnel during the study weeks. The quotations made from presentations by Reggio staff are shown in italics. The paper will focus on the following:
Historical context

The Reggio Emilia experience offers much food for thought to anyone involved with early years care and education. While it would be interesting to see how this could be incorporated into an Irish early years setting with its very different social and cultural context, this is outside the scope of the present paper. It is hoped however that the reader will be inspired by some of the ideas presented here.

Historical context
Reggio Emilia is in the Emilia Romagna region of Northern Italy which borders Tuscany. It takes pride in being the place where the Italian tricolour was born in the 19th century and where the co-operative movement was started. After World War II, the area suffered severe deprivation and the women set about to improve their lives and the lives of their children. They realised that the lives of the children could only be improved through education. Loris Malaguzzi, a native of Reggio Emilia, who worked as a pedagogue and psychologist, founded the schools. He spent his life working to improve the environment for the children both nationally and internationally. His vision for early years provision is fundamental to the success that is Reggio today.

Fundamental principles underpinning the work
Carla Rinaldi of Reggio Emilia (2005) stresses the reciprocity of the relationship between the schools and the wider community: *the community generates a school and is in turn regenerated by the school, receiving vital sap, meaning and future.* This is a fundamental guiding principal of Reggio work and everyone, staff, parents and children, works very hard at building reciprocal relationships. There are two key values to which they adhere:

Value 1. Trust in mankind being educable
This means that education is viewed as a shared process, a construction not only of a private nature with the child’s family but also of community and society. Education involves a process of participation in the construction of knowledge. One of the concepts
I found most thought provoking here is the understanding that a ‘problem’ provides a
means of opening dialogue towards a shared understanding and a shared resolution, while
a quick ‘solution’ often closes dialogue. Therefore, emphasis is placed on the process of
working through a problem rather than arriving at a speedy solution. This is important to
us as educators in the west where speedy answers are often seen as a sign of intelligence.

Value 2. Declaration of the child as a subject of rights
This child is the bearer of rights, a social subject. Hence, each child, as a citizen, has a
right to pre-school services. In the past two years the Municipality has been able to
guarantee a place to any child who wishes to attend an infant-toddler centre or pre-
school. The Reggio child is a citizen, not a child being prepared to be a citizen; being a
citizen cannot be taught, it must be lived. In fact, Reggio practitioners live by the belief
that there is too much preparation for the future in school; we should concentrate on the
present, which holds the seeds of the future in it.

Childhood is a social construction; it is constructed within each culture,
which makes it visible and recognises it through rights, first and foremost the
right to participate in the construction of the culture and community it
belongs to. (Rinaldi, 2005)

This ties the schools to the social and cultural contexts in which they are located and
shows us that, although we have a lot to learn from Reggio Emilia, we must ensure that
our school system is culturally embedded in our own culture rather than seeking to
import or impose another approach. Rinaldi (2005) reminds us that every community
must answer questions about the role of the school in that society for themselves. Schools
are places where values and culture are built, not just transmitted; families must be
involved in building the educational programme and everyone must live it, together.
Part of the work of school and society should be to transform differences into something
or some value you can share. This has become very important in Reggio Emilia now as
this city has the highest rate of immigration in all of Italy. Italy, like Ireland, has had a
history of emigration and is now in the process of welcoming immigrants to its shores.
Malaguzzi invited practitioners to leap over the wall of the obvious, of the banal and of the
irremovable and to go beyond the boundaries that separate places, ideas, subject matters that
break with conformity. He asks that educators of young children open themselves up to
new and passionate scenarios. Reggio practitioners agree that this is inspirational and aspirational but, they suggest that we must keep aspiring to the inspirational. This is the key to the Reggio experience for me. There is an emphasis on constantly reaching for the stars, of not accepting the everyday or the banal. This was summarised by a response to a question from a participant who asked 'What is the magical ingredient of Reggio?' The response was 'We replace we can't with what if ...' The emphasis is on problem-solving, persistence, openness, questioning and experimentation. They observe what the children are interested in and intrigued by and, they look to see how they can prolong this interest. As one teacher said, We see how children face things and use the material and we ask how we can offer this back to them in a new way. Reggio practitioners do not follow any one educational theorist as they feel that this would limit the possibilities open to them and to the children. They refer to the need for constant dialogue between theory and practice. They familiarise themselves with the work of a wide range of theorists both past and present and see if their practice, a holistic anthropological approach derived from observing the child, fits with a theory. In fact, they state quite clearly that they believe that if you get to a 'method' you have missed the point.

The roles of the Teacher/Pedagogista/Atelierista in Reggio schools
Throughout the study week in Reggio many questions are asked by participants in an effort to understand more fully how the schools work. The question asked most frequently relates to the difference in the roles of the classroom teacher, the pedagogista and the atelierista. The inter-relationship between these three key roles is a fundamental part of the way the schools are organised. Each class has two teachers with equal responsibility for the class. This ensures that in the morning one teacher is there early to welcome children to the school, which gives the second teacher an opportunity to talk to parents, staff and children as part of the important work of building up relationships. In Reggio teachers have many responsibilities which may be summarised as:

1. making visible the way in which she/he is a teacher
2. making visible the languages, intelligences and traits of the children
3. making visible the relationships in school.

The emphasis is on making all work, all learning visible to children, parents, staff, visitors and the wider community. This involves being constantly open to listening to children,
to inviting children to question, to sharing thoughts, ideas, plans with children, parents and colleagues. This involves an openness we are not familiar with in our culture. Reggio teachers do not consider just ‘my class’, but rather how all the work of the school interrelates in helping children to achieve their potential. Reggio teachers do not speak of a Reggio Methodology or Reggio Approach, but rather of the Reggio Experience. The children, staff and parents all experience the child as a researcher who asks fundamental questions about life and the environment he/she lives in; teachers and children are co-researchers in the community of learners.

Reggio philosophy is grounded in Kantian thinking: we do not learn about the world because we observe it, but rather because we ask questions of it. Teachers meet every week to update each other and to learn from each other. The children filter into school from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. each morning and this flexibility gives teachers the opportunity to catch up on documentation and to discuss plans with each other. This visible collaboration serves as a model for the children. The role of the teacher, who is respectful of the child, is founded on a pedagogy of listening. This pedagogy is put into practice by careful and detailed documentation of the children’s learning.

Each of the pre-schools has an Atelierista (artist) who has a completely different educational background having attending an Academy or Institute of Art. He/she brings richness to the school by having a different perspective. The Atelierista must, however, be aware of the needs of children in the different developmental stages. This is a full time position, 36 hours per week, in which the Atelierista shares in the entire process of the children’s day. Therefore, the work of the school is enriched by constant dialogue between the teacher, atelierista, pedagogista, parents and children. The influence of the atelierista is very evident in the work of the children and in the way in which the materials and the environment are presented to the children. The school must be very organised if it is to be a good learning environment for its learning community. The Atelier is always very well resourced with a multiplicity of inviting materials. These are carefully chosen materials which do not dominate the environment; they have multiple or unlimited possibilities and await the child’s imagination. One of the study week participants, an artist, referred to the ‘restraint’ in the materials. She highlighted the difference between what she saw in Reggio and the schools where she works. She referred to the lack of pre-cut materials available to be coloured in/glued/folded etc, in the schools as the Reggio
practice is to allow the children to interact with the materials as they wish. Strozzi (2006) refers to the need to *value the children’s desire to experiment by providing materials that pose questions and elicit answers, not materials that impose.*

The materials are usually light, bright, clear and often transparent. Children often work on projects which allow them to explore the properties of light on the different materials. Gualandri (2005) states that

> Materials brought into the school are re-readable and re-interpretable. When they are placed on a light table they take on a whole new life, especially when projected on to a wall; light changes the quality and gives unexpected results.

Reggio teachers believe that the child learns best when he/she gets close to reality. One must always build on prior learning and be open to all possibilities by being able to see with new eyes every time one approaches a subject.

Loris Malaguzzi’s vision and commitment to setting up the pre-schools is evident everywhere. The new International Centre, which opened in February 2006, has been named in his honour. He felt that children have the right to come out of anonymity, therefore, documentation of children’s work is paramount. All work must be reflected upon, and the interrogation of this work leads to the formulation of theories and to further research. His poem, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, shows his vision for children and the Reggio environment endeavours to provide opportunities for children to use their multiplicity of expressive languages at all times.

The pedagogista or curriculum expert may be drawn from any background. Several of those who addressed us during the study weeks were psychologists. Each pedagogista works with several schools in a district; therefore he/she is uniquely placed to gain an overall perspective on the work of groups of schools. This collaboration between teacher/atelierista/pedagogista is in essence what makes Reggio so unique. The collaboration between different schools is also very important and at this time, several pre-schools and primary schools in the area are collaborating on a project on *Light in the City*, in the new Ray of Light Atelier, which is based in the International Centre Malaguzzi. In fact, Malaguzzi insisted on having an atelier and an atelierista in each school and he described the atelier as ‘*a subversive eruption*’ in the
school. In the Ray of Light Atelier, where all the materials were made by the fathers of children in the schools, I was able to work with a group exploring how rainbows are made. We conducted our experiments in the same way the children do, by trial and error, discussion, generation of hypotheses and asking myriad questions. The focus was not on how the end product, the rainbow, looked, but rather on the lengthy discussion of the process of our learning that took place after the period of experimentation. This Atelier is very different from other children’s museums in that there is no information available on how to do things; rather the resources and equipment are made available for exploration in a most inviting manner. It mirrors the atelier found in all schools as a place of discovery.

The central role of the adult was defined by one pedagogista as to activate, especially indirectly, the meaning making competencies of all children as a basis of all learning. The provision of a well resourced environment is key to this learning.

Children’s working environment
All early years practitioners endeavour to provide an environment for the children that is welcoming, rich, aesthetically pleasing and open to multiple learning possibilities. However, in Reggio Emilia this is done to an exceptionally high standard. There are many common elements in all the schools but each school is individual and different. Some schools have been custom built while others have been re-designed from existing buildings. The buildings range from single level to multiple level buildings so that one could not say there is a ‘typical’ Reggio pre-school building in terms of its construction. However, there is much more uniformity in the interiors of the buildings. Each school makes its own statement by ensuring that there is personal information about the school displayed at the entrance foyer or piazza. This was part of a project done some time ago when the schools wished to preserve their history and to make it visible.

Many of the schools are named after people who influenced the thinking of the community. One of the infant-toddler centres I visited, the Cervi School, is named after Genoeffa Cervi, a mother of sixteen whose seven sons were killed by fascists in 1943. Genoeffa, who had no formal education, was described as a shy, reserved person with a quiet inner strength. She was very widely read and, throughout the remaining war years, she was mother to her own daughters and her daughters-in-law. She founded a peace movement and was passionately interested in education. Other schools are named 25th April (Squole 25 Aprille) after the
liberation of Italy after World War II, or 8th March (Squole 8 Marco) in honour of International
Women’s Day, because the schools were developed as a result of the insistence of the women
of the area. Others are named after well known people like Picasso or characters like Gulliver.
Reggio schools are very proud of their history, the history of their city and that of their country.
It is considered very important to remember and celebrate this history. In some schools
descendants of the person the school has been named after are invited to the school to talk to
children, staff and parents to ensure they the memories are kept alive.

In the entrance area of each school one finds lots of documentation pertaining to the
identity of the school. The documentation is usually at two levels, one for adults and one
for children. The material is always very artistically and attractively arranged in order to be
appealing and inviting. The schools are full of light and have very attractive open places and
spaces. There is a distinct lack of clutter everywhere. Each school has a cook who prepares
food for staff and children. The dining area usually has tables spread with attractive
tablecloths and real delph. Children help to set up the dining area and serve the food. The
attention to detail is very impressive. The dining area often has pictures of food or, of
children preparing food. In one school I visited, a shelf in the dining area contained some
lovely green plants and an apple, cut in sections, attractively arranged. Other shelves contain
jars of pasta or wheat. The ambience, attention to detail, lack of haste and provision of soft
mood music makes eating an enjoyable social occasion. I have visited schools in Cork where
the children often eat quickly while standing up, with their coats on, just before going out
to play in the yard. Eating is more of a fuel or pit-stop rather than an integral part of the
school experience.

The classroom areas are very thoughtfully laid out. I visited a school after school hours,
where the classroom had been prepared for the following day. The colouring pens and
other materials had been placed very carefully and invitingly on the tables and unfinished
work awaited the children’s return. On reading my notes made during this visit I had
written, ‘it is hard to believe the children have just gone home; everything is
extraordinarily clean, tidy and so very inviting’.

Yet, there was ample evidence of children’s unfinished work artistically displayed in a most
aesthetically pleasing manner. The attention to detail is remarkable. Work tables are often
adorned with greenery to help integrate the indoor/outdoor environment. In one
infant/toddler school that I visited the baby area was separated from the outdoors by a floor to ceiling glass window. Outside the window a large mature tree grew and some very inviting mobiles were suspended from the tree to attract the attention of the babies. Some were made of coloured materials while one was made of CDs which caught the sunlight beautifully. In fact, the participant group were asked to describe the schools after a day of visitations and the words commonly used were Light, Space, Cleanliness, Peace, Order, Nature, Commitment, Freedom and Time. Reggio staff state that the way in which a workspace is presented to the children is a statement of how we think of education, stating that the way we propose how a school should be is an ethical/political/social and economic responsibility for the entire community.

The work areas all have an overhead projector where children explore the concepts of light, reflection, transparency and opaqueness. Sometimes one finds dinosaurs or other animals on the overhead projector magnified on to a wall or screen. Children often use the projected figures as models to draw. Large sheets of drawing paper cover the wall and the figures are projected on to this. One may also find videos of children at work being shown in the classrooms. Reggio children become very accustomed to having their work videotaped or audiotaped. They regularly see themselves on videos in their classroom and are actively encouraged to step back and think about the work they have done, to re-consider knowledge that has been encountered during the day. This focus on reflection or on re-cognition based on dialogue is a core part of the way in which teachers work with children. Dialogue is not just considered as ‘talk’ in Reggio but has been described by Rinaldi (2005) as having the courage to change the Logos – way of thinking; this negotiation of points of view offers to the children a person who is searching – not someone who knows everything. Dialogue between partners involves listening and being open to change. One must embrace another person’s point of view and not tolerate silence, dogma or absolute truth. The core belief here is that of the child as researcher, who is competent at learning; in fact, the Reggio classroom encourages children and adults to learn how to learn, thereby becoming flexible and adaptable in their thinking. This ongoing classroom research is continuously documented in detail.

Documentation of learning
All aspects of children’s learning in Reggio schools is documented, in an effort to share that learning between all the partners in the education system. It involves active listening and the development of a relationship between the child and the environment.
Documentation in Reggio is part of the process of giving the child a sense of place in his/her own community; a visible acknowledgement of the child’s voice. Margini (2005) attests to the curiosity of Reggio teachers concerning ‘(through) what processes does a child manifest his/her intelligence and how is this different to the adult’. Knowledge is constructed in so many different ways and stages through the process of social interaction. Margini (2005) emphasises the belief that

We need other people to construct our knowledge. This process and these interactions generate and re-generate knowledge of ourselves and, what has been activated in our cognitive and personal learning, to arrive at this knowledge.

The Reggio teacher needs to hold together the ideas of individuals and the group. The role of the teacher is also that of a learner who is respectful of the child, which is founded on a pedagogy of listening. Reggio teachers state that a good investment in documentation is how this pedagogy is put into place. The three strands of good documentation of the child’s learning are observation, interpretation and documentation. ‘To observe is to interpret. To observe it is necessary to predispose the environment for it’ (Margini, 2005). This observation cannot be separated out from the work of the child, there is a reciprocal demographic involved; the observation is not just done by the teacher and the work done by the child. Each teacher feels that learning occurs for the teacher as he/she observes. The question Reggio teachers keep to the forefront of their work is ‘On the basis of what elements can I say that the child has had a good experience? During the observation of children at work teachers must remain open to ‘welcome theories/hypotheses/idea of children that come from experiences they have had’(Margini 2005).

Observation in Reggio schools is a creative act which requires interpretation. On the basis of the work and observations teachers compile extensive and detailed documentation. The children also document their own work. This documentation is described by Reggio teachers as the gathering of materials to allow for the collegial experience of sharing with colleagues. This is a very new concept for many of us. Documentation is not just about making short notes about a child’s progress but is an integral part of the learning experience. It is open and visible to all. It makes it possible to plan further work and to re-experience past work; it provides ‘archive of experience’. Each school seeks to cultivate its own identity through documentation; it serves to make its own cultural identity readable.
Teachers make notes every day on the experiences of the day. These notes are often accompanied by video or audio recordings. They are made available to parents as they collect their children from school. As the notes help to generate collegial discussion, the plans for project work take place. Gualandri (2005) states that as children work in groups on projects they learn to look at what they are working on through each others’ eyes. Barchi (2005) elaborates on this idea when she says that as children work together they build up relationships with each other and with the materials with which they work. It ‘makes it possible for children to be the protagonists of their own learning, through sharing ideas, imitation, listening and giving value’. Documentation of the work makes visible the values of the group and ‘makes permanent the assessment carried out by children and adults’ (Barchi 2005).

Guidici (2005) identifies some of the questions Reggio educators consider with regard to group project work. They ponder the questions of how much individual learning can be reinforced or dampened in a group situation, is there such a thing as group learning and, is it possible for a group to construct its own style of learning? These questions are of interest because although there is a vast literature on individual and/or group learning there is little available on individual learning in a group, particularly in relation to how young children learn. Filippini (2006) refers to their documentation as a second skin stating, documentation helps give us the conceptual tools to consider, What is a child?

Rinaldi (2005) summarises the Reggio understanding of the importance of constant rich documentation by saying,

Documentation alters the dynamic within group learning from individual learning in a group to group learning. A group characterised by an increased awareness of the interdependence of learning, a greater sensitivity to the learning experience of the other and, richer possibilities for choosing ideas. A model from which to draw inspiration and differentiate energy.

*School is not a place for anonymous users, everyone is part of a relationship.*

(Stroazzi 2006)
Recommended Reading List
Law Without Limit: Discipline and Young Children

*Francis Douglas, UCC*

**Abstract**

“Hey, careful Joey! God sees everything we do, then he goes and tells Santa Claus.”

(Dennis the Menace).

**Introduction**

Aquinas (1225-1274), like Aristotle (384-322 BC), identified the ultimate goal of human life as happiness, and they both thought that happiness could not be equated with pleasure, riches, honour, or any bodily good, but must consist in activity in accordance with virtue. Aristotle, in his ethics, introduced the concept of Voluntariness: something was voluntary if it was originated by an agent free from compulsion or error. In his moral system an important role was also played by the concept of *prohairesis* or purposive choice: this was the choice of an action as part of an overall plan of life. Aristotle's concept of the voluntary was too clumsily defined, and his concept of *prohairesis* too narrowly defined to demarcate the everyday moral choices which make up our life. While retaining Aristotle's concepts, Aquinas introduced a new one of 'intention', which filled the gap left between the two of them, and greatly facilitated moral thinking. It is worth noting that young children become aware of intentions at about the age of three (Nelson, 1980; Siegal and Peterson, 1998).

In Aquinas' system there are three types of action. There are those things which we do for their own sake, wanted as ends in themselves: for example, the pursuit of play. There are those things which we do because they are a means to an end: taking medicine in order to get better for instance. It is in these actions that we exhibit intention: we intend to achieve the end by the means. Finally, there are (perhaps unwanted) consequences and side-effects which our intentional actions bring about. These are not intentional, but merely voluntary. Voluntariness, then, is the broadest category; whatever is intentional is voluntary, but not vice-versa. Intention itself, while covering a narrower area than voluntariness, is a broader concept than Aristotle's *prohairesis*. The disciplining of young children cannot be understood without at the same time considering the moral
development and the growth of that child’s conscience. Methods of discipline cannot be isolated from their consequences.

This paper proposes firstly, to look at a number of methods that have been shown to be effective in the control of young children. From there it is a small step to look at the different types of child-rearing practices and their implications for discipline, and from there, to how young children themselves view adult practices in this regard. Secondly, as it is obvious that the only real discipline must come from ‘within’, the remainder of this paper is devoted to the development of the child’s conscience within the context of the family, society and the spirit.

Methods of Control
It is in the nature of young children to attempt to do things that their adult carers do not want them to do, ask for things they cannot have, or refuse to obey their carers requests or demands. Adults are inevitably faced with the task of controlling the child’s behaviour and training the child to follow some basic precepts. The methods of controlling young children can broadly be divided into four categories: Rules, Expectations, Punishment and Communication.

Rules
One element of control is the consistency of rules. This requires making clear to the child what the rules are, what the consequences are of disobeying them are, and then enforcing them consistently. Some adult carers are very clear and consistent; others waver or are fuzzy about what they expect or will tolerate. Studies of families show that parents who are clear and consistent have children who are much less likely to be defiant or non-compliant and the same pattern can be observed in day-care centres and pre-schools. Children whose teachers are lax and inconsistent in their response to misbehaviour are more likely to misbehave (Arnold, McWilliams and Arnold, 1998). Consistency of rules does not produce ‘little robots’. Children from families with consistent rules are more competent and sure of themselves and are less likely to become delinquent or show significant behaviour problems than are children from families with less consistent rules.

Expectations
A related element of adult control is the level of their expectations with respect to the
child’s behaviour. Is the child expected to show relatively mature behaviour, or does the adult carer feel that it is important not to expect too much, too soon? Studies of such variations show that, within limits, higher expectations are associated with better outcomes. Children whose parents make high demands on them – expecting them to help around the house or show relatively mature behaviour for their age – have higher self-esteem, show more generosity and altruism towards others, and have lower levels of aggression. Obviously, high expectations can be carried too far. It is unrealistic and counterproductive to expect a two year old to set the table for dinner or to tie his or her own shoelaces. Nevertheless, when a child is expected to be as independent and helpful as possible they gain a sense of competence that carries over into the rest of their life.

Punishment
In order to understand the process of control you must also understand the nature of punishment. Punishment is one form of discipline, one method of training and controlling, but not the only one. It is most often aimed at stopping a child doing something which is prohibited, such as writing on the wall or hitting his brother, but it may be used to ‘persuade’ a child to do something that he or she is resisting, such as sweeping the garden. Punishment nearly always involves something with negative consequences for the child, such as cancelling ‘treats’, sending the child to his or her room, to a violent verbal exchange or even spanking. Two important points emerge from the literature. Firstly, “Punishment ‘works!’ If you use it properly it will produce rapid changes in the behaviour of other people” (Patterson, 1975, p.19). The most important word here is ‘properly’. The most effective punishments – those that produce long term changes in a child’s behaviour without unwanted or negative side-effects – are those that are used early in some sequence of misbehaviour, with the lowest level of emotion possible and the mildest level of punishment possible. Taking a desired toy away when the child first hits a sibling with it, or consistently removing small privileges will often produce the desired results, especially if the adult is also warm, clear about the rules, and consistent. It is far less effective to wait until the sibling’s screams have reached a piercing level or that the situation has been allowed to develop in such a way that the adult weighs in with yelling, critical sarcastic comments and strong punishment. Secondly, to a considerable degree, adult carers ‘get back what they put in’ with respect to punishment. Young children learn by observation as well as by doing, so they learn the adults’ ways
of coping with stress and their forms of punishment. Yelling at children to try and make
them stop doing something, for example, may bring a brief change in behaviour (which
reinforces the adult for yelling!) but the child will, by copying, be much more likely to
evil at others in the future.

Communication
A fourth important dimension of the family system is the quality of the communication
between the adult carer and the child. Two things about such communication make a
difference for the child. Firstly, the amount and richness of the language used and
secondly, the amount of conversation and suggestions from the child that the adult
encourages. In other words, listening is as important as talking! Listening means
something more than merely saying “yes, yes” periodically when the child talks. It also
means conveying to the child the sense that what he says is worth listening to, that he has
ideas, that his ideas are important and should be considered in family decisions. In
general, children from families with open communication are seen as more emotionally
or socially mature (Baumrind, 1971; Bell & Bell, 1982). Open communication may also
be important for the functioning of the family as a unit. The type of family interaction is
also important for discipline.

Family Types – Implications For Discipline.
Baumrind (1973) looked at combinations of the various dimensions of parenting which
mostly repeat the points raised above: firstly, warmth, or nurturance, secondly, the level
of expectations, which she called “maturity demands”, thirdly, the clarity and consistency
of rules, which she referred to as “controls” and fourthly, the communication between the
adult carer and the child. Baumrind says that there are three specific combinations of
these four characteristics which give rise to three types of family organisation. Firstly, the
Permissive Style is high in nurturance but low in maturity demands, control and
communication. Secondly, the Authoritarian Style is high in control and maturity
demands but low in nurturance and communication. And thirdly, the Authoritative Style
is high in all four.

Macoby and Martin (1983) extended Baumrind’s category system proposing a model
that has been hugely influential. They emphasised two dimensions: firstly, the degree of
Control or Demand, and secondly, the level of Acceptance or Responsiveness. The
The intersection of these two creates four parenting types, three of which are very similar to Baumrind's, the fourth being a **Neglecting Style**.

### FOUR TYPES OF PARENTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Control or Demand</th>
<th>Level of Acceptance/Responsiveness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
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After: Macoby and Martin (1983)

**The Authoritarian Type**
These parents feel that they have “standards”. They believe in controlling their children. They place a high emphasis on obedience, respect for authority and order. They are difficult to please. Children growing up in such families do less well at school, are typically less skilled with peers, and have lower self-esteem than children from other types of families (Baumrind, 1991; Macoby and Martin, 1983). Some of these children appear subdued; others may show high levels of aggressiveness or other indications of being out of control. Which of these two outcomes occurs may depend in part on how skilfully the parents use various disciplinary techniques. Patterson (1996) finds that the “out of control” child is most likely to come from a family in which the parents are authoritarian by inclination but lack the skills to enforce the limits or rules they set.

**The Permissive Type**
Children growing up with indulgent or permissive parents, who are tolerant and warm but exercise little authority, also show some negative outcomes. They do slightly less well in school in adolescence, and they are likely to be aggressive - particularly if the parents are specifically permissive towards aggressiveness - and to be somewhat immature in their behaviour with peers and in school. They are less likely to take responsibility and are less independent (Macoby and Martin, 1983).
The Authoritative Type
The most consistently positive outcomes have been associated with the authoritative parenting pattern, in which the parents are high in both control and warmth, setting clear limits, expecting and reinforcing socially mature behaviour, and at the same time responding to the child’s individual needs. [Note that parents who use this style of parenting do not let the child rule the roost]. Authoritative parents are quite willing to discipline the child appropriately if the child misbehaves. They are less likely to use physical punishment than are authoritarian parents, preferring instead to use time out or other mild punishments, but it is important to understand that such parents are not “wishy-washy”. Children reared in such families typically show higher self esteem. They are more independent but at the same time are more likely to comply with parental requests, and they may show more altruistic behaviour as well. They are self confident and achievement orientated in school and get better grades in elementary school, high school, and college (eg: Crockenberg and Litman, 1990; Dornbusch, Ritter, Liederman, Roberts and Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Elmaen and Mounts, 1989; Weiss and Schwarz, 1996). In late adolescence, they are more likely to use postconventional (principled) moral reasoning (Boyes and Allen, 1993).

The Neglecting Type
The most consistently negative outcomes are associated with the fourth parenting pattern, the neglecting or uninvolved type. Insecurely attached children often suffer from the “psychological unavailability” of the mother. The mother may be depressed or may be overwhelmed by problems in her life, or she simply may not have made any deep emotional connection with the child. Whatever the reason, such children continue to show disturbances in their relationships with peers and with adults for many years. At adolescence for example, youngsters from neglecting families are more impulsive and antisocial and much less achievement orientated in school (Block, 1971, Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg and Dornbush, 1991; Pulkkinen, 1982). Lack of parental monitoring appears to be critical; children and teens whose neglecting parents show poor monitoring are far more likely to become delinquent and to engage in sexual activity in early adolescence (Patterson, Read, and Dishion, 1992; Pittman and Chase-Lansdale, 2001).

Disciplinary Techniques and Moral Development.
Hoffman (1970) reviewed the child-rearing literature to see whether the disciplinary
techniques that parents actually use have any effect on the moral development of their children. Three major approaches were found. The first, *Love Withdrawal*, was defined as withholding attention, affection, or approval after a child misbehaves or, in other words, creating an anxiety over a loss of love. The second is *Power Assertion* where an adults’ superior power to control the child’s behaviour is made use of (includes techniques such as forceful commands, physical restraint, spankings and withdrawal of privileges and other techniques that may generate fear, anger or resentment). Thirdly, *Induction* is a technique whereby explanations are given to the child as to why a behaviour is wrong and should be changed. This is done by emphasising how it affects other people and it often involves suggestions as to how the child might undo any harm done.

Although only a limited number of child rearing studies had been conducted by 1970, their results suggested that neither *Love Withdrawal* nor *Power Assertion* were particularly effective and that *Induction* seemed to foster the development of all three aspects of morality - moral emotions, moral reasoning and moral behaviour (Hoffman, 1970). The following table gives the number of child-rearing studies which Hoffman found in each category.

### Child Rearing Studies And Disciplinary Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction of relationship between parent’s use of a disciplinary strategy and children’s moral maturity</th>
<th>Power Assertion</th>
<th>Love Withdrawal</th>
<th>Induction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+7</td>
<td>-32</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-11</td>
<td>+38</td>
<td>-6</td>
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After Hoffman, 1970.

Recent research indicates that *Induction* can be highly effective with two to five year olds, reliably promoting sympathy and compassion for others as well as a willingness to comply with parental requests. In contrast, the use of such high-intensity power-assertive tactics as becoming angry and physically restraining or spanking the child is associated with and seems to promote non-compliance, defiance, and a lack of concern for others (Crockenberg and Litman, 1990; Kuchanska et al, 2002; Kuchanska and Murray, 2000,

Why is inductive discipline so effective? Hoffman (1970) cites several reasons. Firstly, it provides children with cognitive standards (or rationales) that they can use to evaluate their conduct. Secondly, this form of discipline helps children to sympathise with others (Krevens and Gibbs, 1996) and allows parents to talk about such moral affects as pride, guilt, and shame, which are not easily discussed with a child who is made emotionally insecure by love withdrawal or angry and resentful by power assertive techniques. And thirdly, parents who use inductive discipline are likely to explain to the child (a) what he or she should have done when tempted to violate a prohibition, and (b) what he or she can now do to make up for the transgression. So induction may be an effective method of moral socialisation because it calls attention to the cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of morality and may help the child integrate them.

Finally, it is important to note that few, if any, parents are totally inductive, love orientated, or power assertive in their approach to discipline; most make at least some use of all three disciplinary techniques. In fact, Hoffman (2000) stresses that a little bit of power assertion is useful now and then, as long as it does not arouse too much fear, because it can motivate a child to pay close attention to the inductive component of discipline. As Hoffman (2000) puts it, the winning formula for effective discipline is “a blend of frequent inductions, occasional power assertions, and a lot of affection” (This prescription is very similar to the “rationale and mild punishment from a warm disciplinarian” treatment that Parke (1977) found most effective in laboratory studies of resistance to temptation undertaken with young children)

In yet another twist, Kochanska (1993, 1997) proposes that the kind of parenting most likely to foster moral internalisation depends on a child's temperament. Some children are fearful while others are not. Kochanska says that fearful children respond most favourably to gentle forms of discipline that de-emphasise power assertion. While with fearless children she proposes that parents should adopt a warm, sensitive approach which encourages a strong attachment between parent and child. Her view is that a secure and mutually positive relationship makes the cost of bad behaviour too high for the child. In other words, this mutually beneficial relationship fosters committed compliance from the child, who wants to co-operate with and please his parents.
The “Direction Of Effects Issue” – A Young Child's Concern For Others
Does induction promote moral maturity? Or do morally more mature children elicit more inductive forms of discipline?

Hoffman (1975) says that parents exert far more control over their children's behaviour than children exert over parents. He believes that parental use of inductive discipline promotes moral maturity rather than the other way round. However, children can influence the discipline they receive. A child who has already developed a sense of committed compliance as a toddler may have come to view himself as a 'good' or 'moral' person and will respond well to induction and be treated that way (Kochanska, 2002). Another child who frequently ‘acts up’ and defies his parents will often elicit more coercive (and less effective!) forms of discipline over time (Stoolmiller, 2001).

Although most youngsters respond favourably to inductive discipline, it is becoming quite clear that no one disciplinary style works best for all children and that the most effective approaches are those that are carefully tailored to the child's attributes and the situation at hand (Grusec, Goodnow and Kuczynski, 2000). So moral socialisation at home is double sided. Although inductive discipline often does promote moral maturity, children who respond more favourably to this rational, relatively non-punitive approach are the ones who are most likely to be treated this way by their parents. Other investigators have wondered whether Hoffman's conclusions about the effectiveness of inductive discipline might not be overstated. For example, inductive discipline used by white middle-class mothers is consistently associated with measures of children's moral maturity; however, the same findings don't always hold for fathers or for parents from other socio-economic backgrounds (Brody and Schaffer, 1982; Grusec and Goodnow, 1994).

A young child's concern for others is measured directly by the amount of altruism that that child has and the following table gives the correlation for various types of altruistic behaviour experienced with toddlers.

Mothers’ reports of the proportion of times their toddlers displayed sympathy, prosocial behaviour, aggression or personal distress to others’ distress that they did not cause.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toddler Reaction</th>
<th>13 - 15 mths</th>
<th>18- 20 mths</th>
<th>23-25 mths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sympathy</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-social Behaviour</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive Behaviour</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Distress</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Altruistic parents tend to raise altruistic children (London, 1970; Oliner and Oliner, 1988) while partially committed altruistic parents do not (Rosenhan, 1970; Clary and Snyder, 1991). Parents teach by example and parental reactions to their child’s harm-doing to others also plays an important part. Mothers of less compassionate toddlers react to harm-doing in punitive or forceful ways, whereas mothers of compassionate toddlers rely more heavily on non-punitive, affective explanations in which they display their sympathy for the victim, persuade the child to accept responsibility for his or her harm-doing, and often urge him or her to direct some sort of comforting or helpful response towards the victim (Zahn-Waxter, Radke-Yarrow, and King, 1979; Zahn-Waxler et al, 1992).

There are probably several reasons why rational affectively orientated discipline that is heavy on reasoning might inspire children to become more altruistic. First, it encourages the child to assume another person’s perspective (role playing) and to experience that person’s distress (empathy training). It also teaches the child to perform helpful or comforting acts that make both the self and the other person feel better. And last but not least, these altruistic responses might convince children that they can be ‘caring’ or ‘helpful’ people. This in turn fosters a pro-social self concept that they may try to live up to by performing other acts of kindness in the future. Parents who continue to rely on rational, non-punitive disciplinary techniques in which they regularly display sympathy and concern for others tend to raise children who are sympathetic and self-sacrificing, whereas frequent use of forceful and punitive discipline appears to inhibit altruism and leads to the development of self-centred values (Brody and Shaffer, 1982; Eisenberg and Fabes, 1998; Hastings et al, 2000; Krevans and Gibbs, 1996).
A Child’s View of Discipline
What do children think about various disciplinary strategies? Do they feel that physical punishment and love withdrawal are ineffective methods of promoting moral restraint? Would they favour inductive techniques, or perhaps prefer that their parents adopt more permissive attitudes towards transgression?

Siegal and Cowen (1984) addressed these issues by asking children and adolescents between the ages of four to eighteen to listen to stories describing different kinds of misdeeds and to evaluate strategies that mothers had used to discipline these antics. Five kinds of transgressions were described. Firstly, simple disobedience (the child refused to clean his room). Secondly, causing physical harm to others (the child punched a playmate). Thirdly, causing physical harm to oneself (ignoring an order not to touch a hot stove). Fourthly, causing psychological harm to others (making fun of a physically disabled person). And fifthly, causing physical damage (breaking a lamp while messing around).

The four disciplinary techniques on which mothers were said to have relied were: (a) Induction (reasoning with the culprit by pointing out the harmful consequences of his or her actions). (b) Physical Punishment (striking the child). (c) Withdrawal of love (wanting nothing more to do with the child). (d) Permissive non-intervention (ignoring the incident and assuming that the child would learn from mistakes).

Each participant heard 20 stories that resulted from pairing each of the four maternal disciplinary strategies with each of the five kinds of transgressions. After listening to or reading each story, the participant indicated whether the mother’s approach to the problem was “very wrong”, “wrong”, “half right/half wrong”, “right” or “very right”.

Although the perceived appropriateness of each disciplinary technique varied somewhat across transgressions, the most interesting findings overall were that firstly, Induction was the most preferred discipline strategy for participants of all ages (even preschoolers). Secondly, Physical Punishment was the next most favourably evaluated technique. Love Withdrawal and Permissiveness were favourably evaluated by no group. Most interesting of all was that the four to nine year olds in the sample favoured any form of discipline, even Love Withdrawal, over a Permissive attitude on the mother’s part (which they viewed as “wrong” or “very wrong”). These young children were disturbed
by stories in which youngsters were generally free to do their own thing, largely unencumbered by adult constraints. What these children wanted was what Montessori calls “Freedom within limits”.

The Development of the Child’s Conscience

Freud’s psychosexual theory specifies that three components of personality - the “id”, “ego”, and “superego” - develop and gradually become integrated in a series of stages.

The “id” is all that is present at birth. Its sole function is to satisfy inborn biological instincts, and it will try to do so immediately. If you think about it, young infants do seem to be all “id”. When hungry or wet, they simply fuss and cry until their needs are met, and they are not known for their patience! The “ego” is the conscious, rational component of the personality that reflects the child’s emerging abilities to perceive, learn, remember, and reason. Its function is to find realistic means of gratifying the instincts, as when a hungry toddler, remembering how he gets food, seeks out his mother and says “biscuit”. As their egos mature, children become better at controlling their irrational “ids” and finding realistic ways to gratify needs on their own. However, realistic solutions to needs are not always acceptable, as a hungry three year old who is caught stealing biscuits between meals may soon find out! The final component of personality, or “superego”, is the seat of conscience. It develops between the ages of three and six as children internalise (take on as their own) the moral values and standards of their parents (Freud, 1933). Once the superego emerges, children do not need an adult to tell them they have been good or bad; they are now aware of their own transgressions and will feel guilty or ashamed of their unethical conduct. So the superego is truly an internal censor. It insists that the ego find socially acceptable outlets for the id’s undesirable impulses.

Cognitive-developmentalists, on the other hand, study morality by charting the development of moral reasoning - the thinking children display when deciding whether various acts are right or wrong. According to cognitive theorists, both cognitive growth and social experiences help children to develop progressively richer understandings of the meanings of rules, laws, and interpersonal obligations. As children acquire these new understandings, they are said to progress through an invariant sequence of moral stages, each of which evolves from and replaces its predecessor and represents a more advanced or “mature” perspective on moral issues.
Piaget’s early work in Switzerland on children’s moral judgements focused on two aspects of moral reasoning. Firstly, he studied children’s developing respect for rules by playing marbles with children aged five to thirteen. He asked such questions as “Must everyone obey this rule?” or “Can these rules be changed?” Secondly he studied children’s conceptions of justice and in so doing he gave them moral decision stories to ponder. For example after the story he would ask: “Which child is naughtier? Why?” “How should the naughtier child be punished?” He thus formulated his stage theory of moral development. In the first stage, the pre-moral period, Piaget said that pre-school children showed little concern or awareness of rules. In a game of marbles, these pre-moral children do not play systematically with the intent of winning. Instead, they seem to make up their own rules, and they think the point of the game is to take turns and have fun. In the next stage, that of moral realism, Piaget said that between the ages of five and ten children develop a strong respect for rules. And finally, in the stage of moral relativism, Piaget said that by the age of ten or eleven most children consider that social rules are arbitrary agreements that can be challenged and even changed with the consent of the people they govern.

It is true that younger children around the world are more likely than older ones to display such aspects of morality as a belief in immanent justice or a tendency to emphasise consequences more than intentions when judging how wrong an act is (Jose, 1990; Lapsley, 1996). In addition, the maturity of children’s moral judgements is related to such indications of cognitive development as IQ and role-taking skills (Ambron and Irwin, 1975; Lapsley, 1996). There is even some support for Piaget’s “peer participation” hypothesis; popular children who often take part in peer-group activities and who assume positions of leadership tend to make mature moral judgements (Bear and Rys, 1994; Keasey, 1971). Nevertheless, there is ample reason to believe that Piaget’s theory clearly underestimates the moral capacities of pre-school children. This was to some extent due to a flaw in his research design. He confounded intentions and consequences by asking whether a person who caused little harm with a bad intent was naughtier than one who caused a larger amount of harm while having good intentions. He also made information about the consequences of an act much clearer than information about the actor’s intentions. This tended to confuse his young subjects and they thus gave the answers he was expecting.

Kohlberg (1963, 1984; Colby and Kohlberg, 1987) has refined and extended Piaget’s theory of moral development. Each stage of his concept represents a particular
perspective, or method of thinking, about moral dilemmas, rather than a particular type of moral decision.

**Level One: Pre-conventional Morality** views rules as truly external rather than internal. The child conforms to rules imposed by authority figures to avoid punishment or obtain personal rewards. Morality is self-serving. What is right is what one can get away with or what is personally satisfying. Level one is divided into two sub-stages: ‘Punishment and Obedience Orientation’ and ‘Naïve Hedonism’.

(Stage 1) *Punishment and obedience orientation.* Here the goodness or badness of an act depends on its consequences. The child will obey authorities to avoid punishment, but may not consider an act wrong if it will not be detected and punished. The greater the harm done or the more severe the punishment is, the greater the ‘badness’ of the act.

(Stage 2) *Naïve Hedonism.* Here the person conforms to the rules in order to gain rewards or satisfy personal objectives. There is some concern for the perspective of others, but other-orientated behaviours are ultimately motivated by the hope of benefiting in return. “You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” is the guiding philosophy.

**Level Two: Conventional Morality** views the individual as striving to obey rules and social norms in order to win others’ approval or to maintain social order. Social praise and the avoidance of blame have now replaced tangible rewards and punishments as motivators of ethical conduct. The perspectives of other people are clearly recognised and given careful consideration. Level two is also divided into two sub-stages: ‘Good Boy/Girl Orientation’ and ‘Social Order Morality.’

(Stage 3) “Good Boy” or “Good Girl” orientation views moral behaviour as that which pleases, helps, or is approved of by others. Actions are evaluated on the basis of the actor’s intent. “He means well” is a common expression of moral approval at this stage. The primary objective is to be thought of as a “good” person.

(Stage 4) Social order morality is where the individual considers the perspectives of the generalised other - that is, the will of society as reflected in law. Now what is right is what conforms to the rules of legal authority. The reason for conforming is not a
fear of punishment, but a belief that rules and laws maintain a social order that is worth preserving.

**Level Three - Post-conventional Morality** is Kohlberg's term for the fifth and sixth stages of moral reasoning, in which moral judgements are based on social contracts and democratic law (Stage 5) or on universal principles of ethics and justice (Stage 6).

It must be realised that most adults never reach stages five or six and that cognitive growth, by itself, is not sufficient to guarantee moral development. In order to move beyond the pre-conventional level of moral reasoning, children must be exposed to persons or situations that introduce cognitive disequilibrium - that is, conflicts between existing moral concepts and new ideas that will force them to re-evaluate their viewpoints. So, like Piaget, Kohlberg believed that both cognitive development and relevant social experiences underlie the growth of moral reasoning.

Many of the criticisms of Kohlberg's theory have centred on the possibilities that it is biased against certain groups of people; that it underestimates the moral sophistication of young children, and that it says much about moral reasoning but little about moral affect and moral behaviour. Even six year olds are quite capable of evaluating laws as just or unjust based on their potential for infringing on individual rights and freedoms and show little evidence of the strict “punishment and obedience” or “naive hedonism” orientations that Kohlberg sees as characteristic of young children (Helwig and Jasiobedzka, 2001)

In recent years, a number of investigators have taken a new look at the early development of “conscience” from a social learning or socialisation perspective (eg Kochanska, Coy and Murray, 2001; Kochanska and Murray, 2000; Labile and Thompson, 2000, 2002) and their findings are quite revealing.

It seems that children may begin to form a conscience as toddlers if they are securely attached to warm and responsive parents who have shared many positive experiences with them, have often co-operated with their wishes during joint play, and who may resolve the many conflicts that all parents have with a wilful toddler by remaining firm but calm as they openly express their feelings, evaluating the toddlers behaviour as wrong and explaining why he or she should feel uneasy about his conduct. By establishing rules in
rational, non-threatening ways, clearly evaluating the child's transgressions and working
to establish mutual understandings about what is acceptable and what is not, parents give
children a rule system to internalise.

And within the context of such a warm, secure mutually responsive relationship (rather
than a fear provoking one), toddlers are likely to display committed compliance - an
orientation in which they are, firstly, highly motivated to embrace the parent’s agenda and
to comply with her rules and requests, secondly, sensitive to a parent’s emotional signals
indicating whether they have done right or wrong, and thirdly, beginning to internalise
these parental reactions to their triumphs and transgressions while coming to experience
the pride, shame, and guilt that will help them to evaluate and regulate their own conduct
(Kochanska, Coy and Murray, 2001; Kochanska et al, 2002; Labile and Thompson, 2000).

By contrast, aloof and impatient parents who rely more on power assertion to resolve
conflicts and who have shared fewer mutually positive experiences with a toddler are
likely to promote situational compliance - generally non-oppositional behaviour that
stems more from parents’ power to control the child’s conduct than from the child’s
eagerness to co-operate or comply.

Evidence is rapidly emerging to support these newer ideas about early development of
conscience. Consider, for example, that two to two and a half year old toddlers who have
mutually responsive relationships with mothers who resolve conflicts with them calmly and
rationally are more likely to resist temptations to touch prohibited toys at age three (Labile
and Thompson, 2002) and continue to show more signs of having a strong internalised
conscience (e.g. a willingness to comply with rules when adults are not present; clear signs
of guilt when they think they have transgressed) at ages four and a half to six than do age-
mates whose earlier mother-toddler relationships had been less warm and mutually
responsive (Kochanska and Murray, 2000). What’s more, boys who show committed
compliance to their mothers at 33 months soon come to view themselves as “good” or
“moral” individuals (Kochanska, 2002) - a finding which may help explain why such
children are more inclined to co-operate with other adult authority figures (e.g. fathers, day-
care providers, experimenters) compared to those whose compliance with their mother is
less consistent and more situational in nature (Feldman and Klein, 2003; Kochanska, Coy
and Murray, 2001).
Law Without Limit
The child’s pursuits for their own sake and as a means to an end often give rise to unwanted side effects. These side-effects have to be controlled through discipline. Inner discipline is the result of the moral development of the child. There are four main methods of enforcing discipline - rules, expectations, punishment and communication. These methods are exhibited in varying combinations and strengths in four different family settings - authoritarian, permissive, authoritative and neglecting. These organisational strategies can equally well be applied to other pre-school situations. The moral development of the child is enhanced by “a blend of frequent inductions, occasional power assertions, and a lot of affection” (Hoffman, 2000) and the temperament of the child also has to be taken into account (Kochaska, 1993, 1997).

Young children’s concern for others is largely the result of the example set by the adults around them and the way in which they are brought up. Rational, affectively orientated discipline that is heavy on reasoning is the way to go (Zahn-Waxler et al, 1992). Young children do not like adult carers who fail to correct their mistakes and misdemeanours. They view such adults as abdicating their responsibilities (Siegal and Cowen, 1984).

The development of the child’s conscience can be viewed in many ways. However, Freud’s psychoanalytic approach provides a sharp contrast to the developmental theories of Piaget and Kohlberg and the social learning perspective adds yet another lens. However, it is now evident that young children develop a sense of “right” and “wrong” at a much younger age than had been previously thought.

Our conscience comes from relationships and all our relationships of affection, authority and dependence are permeated by weakness, tyranny and distrust, from our earliest days. Authority, like every other human value, is in constant need of discipline. To have power and authority, no matter how worthy of reverence through experience or by virtue of mission, and no matter how fascinating (through press, radio, television, eloquence, daring or talent) is something that needs to be watched. Power is only redeemed by service to others. It cannot be a pretence of service, which makes use of kindness to hold others in its power psychologically - it has to be genuine where the leader becomes the one who serves. In this sense adult carers are there to serve children and not the other way round. However, in order that these children learn to serve others themselves they have to know
that there is a force greater than themselves. They have to know that there is an “other” and of course the first “other” that a person knows is his or her own mother. Nothing has a deeper influence in life than the relationship between parent and child. It can never be undone. We are always the children of our parents. And it is in the family that the way to the “other” begins.

The world’s religions have long recognised this. They have all portrayed salvation through discipline. However, they do not all portray morality as being driven by conscience. For example, the Hindus and the Buddhists base their beliefs on being re-born after death on a higher or lower plane according to the law of Karma which depends on the actions of a person’s life. This doctrine implies that mankind can take the wrong way, but not that this is ingratitude or an offence against love.

The doctrine of Karma states that good conduct brings a pleasant and happy result and creates a tendency towards similar good acts, while bad conduct brings an evil context for the moral life of the individual. Within physical reality, the dynamic of Karma is reflected in “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction”. A personalised statement of Karma would be “You receive from the world what you give to the world”. For example, a personality that takes advantage of others creates an imbalance of energy that must be righted by the experience of being taken advantage of by others. If that cannot be accomplished within the lifetime of this personality, another of its soul’s personalities in a future life will experience being taken advantage of by other people. If that personality does not understand that the experience of being taken advantage of by others is the effect of a previous cause, and that this experience is bringing to completion an impersonal process, it will react from a personal point of view rather than from the point of view of its soul. It may become angry, for example, or vengeful or depressed. It may lash out, or grow cynical or withdraw into sorrow. Each of these responses creates Karma, another imbalance of energy which, in turn, must be balanced. In this way, one Karmic debt has been paid, so to speak, but another, or others, has been created. This of course puts a completely different slant on our children’s behaviour and our own. Thus from an Eastern perspective the concept of conscience, in the Western sense, is alien for Karma is not viewed as a moral dynamic. Rather morality is seen as the construct of human beings. The Universe is not a judge!

An Leanbh Óg 193
Many view the commandments of religion, whichever one it may be, as a burden imposed from outside. Such attitudes are often the result of an education where the good is too strongly emphasised as a system of well defined precepts; of a general atmosphere where too much stress is laid on the extrinsic “must” (possibly the result of Authoritarian Parenting) and too little confidence placed in the intrinsic and spontaneous sense of values in both pupils and educators. Anchored in the nature of mankind are the most profound and vital values for his or her very survival. Honesty, reverence for life, material fidelity, respect for others are all precepts that flow from men and women acting in a social world. Human beings who are arrogant and selfish act against the social code which is for the benefit of all.

We must always remember that every effort at adaptation bears the stamp of a certain type of society at a given epoch. Elements which are conditioned by their times and elements which are perpetually valid are always interwoven. There is always a growth and insight into good and evil, into the actual adaptation of eternally valid rules. This is not to deny that there is a really authoritative rule and government in a real society. This interpretation is not isolated from our own sense of values, from that organ of perception for the good by which each one is personally led - conscience. Men and women have within them a living sense of what they ought to do.

Commandments and conscience interpret the same values. We should be very much mistaken if we tried to make our conscience a purely private matter, our own special secret, without any links with the community. This would estrange human beings from each other. It would be inhuman. It is therefore obviously a mistake to affirm, as one sometimes hears, that in the “old days” men and women lived by the commandments (they did what they did because they had to) while now they live by their conscience (they now do good freely). Even in the past men and women did not act without reference to their conscience, and even at present they do not act without reference to the commands of the community. The two go together.

The whole source and purpose of Christian law is love. The ten commandments, the first three as well as the last seven, are comprised in this. Here they are given their profoundest meaning: Love of God, Love of Man. We are left therefore with one commandment - LOVE. Love itself is full of divine commands. The commandment of
love is beyond human force. Self preservation and self interest often remain our profoundest motives, deeper than our love. Nonetheless, we must love our neighbour “as ourselves”, that is, with the same energy that we put into self preservation. Hence the law of love knows no limits.

“Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3: 18)

No one can define exactly what it means to be good to other human beings, so that one can say contentedly, yes, I have done it. Yes, I have given it to others and imbeded my children with it. This is a task with which one is never done. It is a gift for which we must always long for more. There is never enough.

Love is the law without limit.

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Childhood Bereavement – The Experience of Losing a Parent in the Early Years

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Abstract
Experiencing bereavement during childhood can have a profound impact on children’s lives. While children can be bereaved in a number of ways this article concentrates on children who have lost a parent through death. It looks at the issue of children and death and the reluctance of adults to discuss the issue with children. It outlines how children of different ages react to death and the stages of grief that children may go through before resolving their grief. The article also looks at how adults can support children on their journey of bereavement as well as outlining some bereavement services that are available in Ireland.

Introduction

I was born into a family where the three boys who we reborn before me had died (two at ten months and one at five years old). … During my first term in primary school my worst nightmare came true, as my father died, so then that just left my mother and me. He was buried before anyone decided to tell me he was dead. I was sent to my aunt’s for three days and when I came home he was gone from my life forever without ever having the chance to say goodbye (Daly, 2004, p. 1).

My personal experience of bereavement as outlined above has made me very aware of the importance of helping children to cope with the loss of a parent. Death and the experience of bereavement have a huge impact on young children’s lives and in order to cope with the loss children need lots of support. While acknowledging that children can be bereaved in a number of ways this paper concentrates on children who have lost a parent through death but what is outlined can be related to other types of bereavement. Professor Grace Christ (2000), a childhood bereavement expert, whose research has been expanded into a book called, ‘Healing Children’s Grief’, states that contrary to common views, children are
neither irrevocably damaged, nor on the other hand are they resilient and able to bounce
back on their own from the death of a parent without the aid of informed and supportive
adults. This paper looks at the issue of childhood bereavement. It identifies how children of
different ages may react to death as well as outlining the stages of grief that children may go
through before going on to look at some ways to help children who are grieving.

Death
We try to protect children from the reality of death and it is not an issue we feel
comfortable discussing with them.

Our own fears of death and the denial of death, so prevalent in our society,
make it excruciatingly difficult to face death honestly and directly with
children. Hence, out of our own inhibitions we often deprive children of the
chance to begin to grapple with their loss and ideas about death (Tatelbaum,
1997, p.61).

However, young children do experience death and bereavement – sometimes a
grandparent or elderly relative or sometimes a parent or sibling. Shielding children from
death can have serious negative repercussions. Children need to be told about death and
to be supported to grieve in their own unique way. A child’s understanding of death is
determined by their age and developmental stage and these determine the level of
information they can integrate and absorb (Alilovic 2004). When someone close dies, key
issues need to be clarified for the young child such as

- The body stops working when a person dies – the person can’t move, think or feel
  anymore.
- Death is irreversible, the parent will never come back.
- Death is different from what happens on the television; children may see an actor die
  in one programme and then see him again in a re-run or on another programme.
- Death has an emotional context. The people who loved the dead person may feel sad
  and upset and can also feel angry or afraid (Christ 2000).

In clarifying such things adults need to be mindful of the language they use. For example
to describe death as ‘Daddy’s gone to sleep forever’ can terrify a child and make them
afraid to go to bed. It is important to tell the truth as far as possible – if someone has committed suicide, then telling them that the person died in a car crash makes it difficult to tell the truth later on. However it is also important to tell children the truth at an appropriate developmental level without overwhelming them with information. Discussing mourning customs and funeral rites is vital. Tell the child what is going to happen, for example that the body will be in a funeral home, will then be taken to a church and then buried in the ground. ‘Children of all ages should be encouraged to participate in whatever rituals, customs, or forms of grieving there are in the family, if the children wish to be involved’ (Tatelbaum 1997 p.70). Facilitating this can help the child to begin to say goodbye, to begin to understand what has happened and to accept the reality and finality of the death. It is also useful as soon as possible to inform the child’s social support systems such as crèche/preschool/school, and to explain to them what the child has been told so that they can also support and comfort the child (Adams 1995, and see also Edel Daly’s article in this volume).

How do children of different ages respond to death?
Children at different ages/stages/developmental levels view and deal with death differently, and each child will react to death in his or her own unique way. However in general young children respond in particular ways.

Children birth to two years old:
- Will sense a loss. Infants have no understanding of death but react to separation. The physical and emotional absence of the dead parent activates their sense of separation.
- Will pick up on the grief of the surviving parent or caretaker. Infants are very sensitive to adults’ anxieties and pick up messages and distress signals from them.
- May change eating, toileting or sleeping habits.

Children aged two to six years old:
- Don’t have a real understanding of time or death.
- Will search for the missing parent and repeatedly ask the same questions – where is daddy/mammy? May become confused by explanations and need to be told repeatedly about the death.
- Will pick up on non-verbal communication so it is important to be honest with them.
- Think dead people continue to function (eat, drink, go to the toilet).
See death as reversible and temporary like in fairy stories such as ‘Sleeping Beauty’.

May experience magical thinking (they think they can bring the person back to life by magic, or if the child was angry or wished someone dead they may feel responsible and guilty about the death).

May associate sleeping with death so the difference needs to be explained.

Fears that death is something contagious.

Personifies death, sees death as a monster or bad person who took the parent away.

May become very anxious about leaving the surviving parent, may refuse to go to school, pre-school, other carers.

May be verbally or physically aggressive.

May return to earlier behaviour patterns such as clinginess, temper tantrums, bedwetting.

**Children aged six to nine years old:**

Develop an interest in the causes of death – illness, accidents, old age, violence.

Reactions will vary, ranging from denial when the pain of loss is too difficult to an understanding that death is real, universal and final as time goes on.

Have definite views on what death is and may become pre-occupied with dying, death and practical details – How does the dead person get to heaven? What is it like being in a coffin? They may have concerns about the parent being buried or being cremated.

Are aware of other people’s reactions and may feel responsible for minding the surviving family members.

May see death as punishment for poor behaviour.

May need reassurance that wishing someone dead does not work.

Peers are important to the child and the child may worry about the responses of friends. They may feel like the odd one out because of their loss and peers may feel unsure how to respond.

May return to earlier behaviour patterns such as clingingness, thumb sucking, bedwetting.

(DeTurris Poust 2002/ Worden 1996)

The experience of grief is very personal and unpredictable. Children who have experienced the loss of a parent typically experience intense grief and sadness, social withdrawal, attention seeking, declines in academic performance, rebellion, anger, guilt and preoccupation with thoughts about the dead parent (Raveis, Seigel and Karus 1999).
The death of a parent

For a young child the death of a parent is not just a single event or stress. It is more like a family tragedy that changes much that existed before and shakes a child’s basic trust and sense of psychological predictability. Their whole life changes, one of their key attachment figures disappears, their daily routine may disintegrate and they may be looked after by people and in places they hardly know. Such a tragedy requires that the child undergo a major psychological reconstitution after the death. This reconstitution reflects not only the family tragedy but also the child’s stage of development when the tragedy happens and the quality of supports provided by the surviving parent and the other support systems the child is exposed to. Some changes that occur as a consequence of the death can remain for life (DeTurris Poust 2002).

The death of a parent deprives the child of the right to the comfort and security provided by a loving parent. Experience of death at this age can undermine self-confidence and the child’s world may become insecure and unreliable. Added to this is the fact that a young child’s ability to process and understand an event such as death is limited. Quality support services including pre and primary schools and the surviving parent’s preparation, love, support and ability to understand and respond to the child’s despair are buffers that mitigate some of the ravages of losing the parent and provide anchors that the child can use to develop a new view of that world that incorporates the reality of the loss. Children who experience early loss may overreact to future losses but the reaction response is influenced by the child’s temperament, previous life experiences, the quality of the surviving parent’s support and in some cases the bereavement supports and services the child is exposed to (Christ 2000). The child’s ability to cope and the level of supports experienced play a key role in minimising the risk of later psychopathologies and emotional problems. Thus the area of childhood bereavement is complex and has very serious implications for the child and family involved.

Grieving and Bereavement

Grieving, mourning and bereavement are necessary for health and adaptation and are associated with reactions and feelings that are essential for resolution to the loss of a parent. Bereavement describes the experience of loss or the feeling of being deprived (Webster 1997) while the term bereaved is usually used to describe the person who has been deprived. The term is usually used in relation to death but can be used to describe
other losses such as parental separation (Donnelly 2001). When children or adults are bereaved the feelings of loss and sorrow they experience is called grief. Grief is the emotional stress caused by loss and common feelings include:

- A sense of being overwhelmed
- Acute physical feelings – emptiness, lack of energy, nightmares, loss of appetite, palpitations, headaches, physical pains and aches
- Acute emotional feelings – bewilderment, numbness, anger, horror, disbelief, intense fear, sadness, hurt, confusion, rejection, helplessness, guilt, anxiety, despair
- Loss of shared hopes and dreams
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Feelings of not being able to cope
- Feelings of not being able or not wanting to survive (DeTurris Poust 2002).

The experience of loss is related to the level of attachment (Bowlby 1982) and thus the death of a parent has a profound impact on a child. Some experts believe that a child may need as long as seven years to grieve and what is vital is that children are allowed and supported to grieve their losses during their formative years (Mallon 1998). Grief is normal and necessary and needs to be expressed. Children experience grief differently from adults. Initially children may be too shocked to show any type of emotion. This is at times misunderstood to mean that they are fine when they are not. In fact most children are unable to handle the intense emotions that accompany the death of a parent for a long time. Their grief may appear suppressed or periodic. For adults, it is often like wading through rivers of grief and feeling like you are stuck in the middle of a wide sea of grieving. For children, grieving maybe like leaping in and out of puddles. First reactions may range from great distress and upset to seeming to not be interested. One minute children can be sobbing their hearts out and the next they can by asking “What’s for dinner?” This doesn’t mean that they care less about what has happened it is just the way children are (Winston’s Wish 2007).

‘Although the signs of grief in children may be less obvious than in adults, children do grieve’ (Tatelbaum, 1997 p.63). It is very important that the surviving parent or other adults realise this, otherwise the result for the child and family can be heightened fear, confusion and helplessness. Children need adults who respect, understand and respond
to their grief if they are to return to normal functioning after a parent’s death. Grieving is a natural process that can evolve from an emotional loss such as the death of a parent. Grief and the experience of bereavement can have a huge impact on emotional well-being. While the experience of grief is a vital part of the bereavement process it is imperative to have supports and services in place to allow children to express their feelings in a constructive manner (Christ, 2000).

Death is a natural part of life and we cannot protect children from the reality of it happening in their lives ... Despite the pain and sadness of bereavement, most children can manage to cope with their loss and continue to grow and develop creatively, but it is vital that children are given the help and support they need. If left to cope alone, they may never fully recover from the trauma (Daly, 2004 p. 129).

Parents and carers of children are the most important source of support and education about death. Early years settings also have a vital role to play to ensure that children understand the issues surrounding death as well as making sure that any child who is bereaved is facilitated with the maximum support available. If a child in the group is bereaved, early years setting must accompany them on their journey through grief with informed support, information and encouragement. Every setting should have a bereavement policy which outlines the procedures to be undertaken when a child is bereaved. Early years workers need to be informed about bereavement issues. They also need to be able to respond effectively and confidently to ensure that children have access to the support they need to deal with the issue of death. These issues need to be dealt with both proactively and reactively by the early years setting (Alilovic 2004). It is more than likely that children will have experienced things dying – a plant, a goldfish - and for some children their loss will be far more significant – a parent, sibling or grandparent. For the children in the former group these experiences can be embedded into the teaching of more factual information on the life cycle. This can open up discussions about people dying. For children in the latter group greater sensitivity is needed (Worden 1996). A vital point is that information needs to be age/stage appropriate and it is important for the setting to have some general information on the family – there is no point in telling children that the person’s soul goes to heaven if the family doesn’t believe in heaven.
Bereaved Children’s Charter

Winston’s Wish, an organization in the United Kingdom that helps grieving children and their families, has developed a charter for bereaved children.

B Bereavement Support – Bereaved children are entitled to receive the support they need.

E Express feelings and thoughts – Bereaved children should feel comfortable about expressing all feelings and thoughts such as anger, sadness, guilt and anxiety and to be helped to find ways to do this constructively.

R Remember the person who has died – Bereaved children have a right to remember the person who has died for all their lives if they wish to do so. This may involve re-living both sad and happy memories.

E Education and information – Bereaved children are entitled to receive answers to their questions and to get information which clearly explains what has happened, why it has happened and what will happen (i.e. the funeral etc.)

A Appropriate and positive response form pre-schools/schools - Bereaved children need the benefit of help and support from friends, other adults, teachers and so on.

V Voice in important decisions – Bereaved children should be asked if they wish to be involved in important decisions which have an impact on their lives (such as planning the funeral or how anniversaries are celebrated).

E Everyone involved – Bereaved children should receive support which includes their parent, siblings and which respects their confidentiality.

M Meeting others – Bereaved children can benefit from the opportunity to meet other children who have lost a close relative through death.

E Established routines – Bereaved children should be able to choose to continue previously enjoyed interests, routines and activities.

N Not to blame – Bereaved children should be helped to understand they are not responsible in any way for the death.

T Tell their story – Bereaved children have a right to tell their story in a variety of ways – telling, drawing, through dramatic play. They have the right to have their story heard, read or seen by those important to them (Winston’s Wish 2007).

Stages of Grief

Maladaptive responses to loss leading to the development of emotional problems or psychopathologies can occur if children are not facilitated to deal with the death of a parent. If children fail to mourn adequately in childhood, later in life they may present
with symptoms of depression or may often have difficulties forming close relationships (Worden 2003). Delayed or inhibited grief, exaggerated or distorted grief response and chronic or prolonged grief can lead to emotional problems and psychopathologies. Kubler-Ross (1969) identified five stages that individuals pass through on their way to a resolution of a loss. These include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Bowlby (1961) described similar stages, Stage 1 – numbness or protest, Stage 2 disequilibrium, Stage 3 disorganisation and despair, and Stage 4 reorganisation. On the other hand Engel’s stages (1964) include shock and disbelief, developing awareness, accepting the reality of the loss, working through the pain of grief, adjusting to an environment that has changed because of the loss and then emotionally relocating that which has been lost and moving on with life. More recently Mallon (1998) outlined three main stages of grief: Phase 1 – Early Grief: The Protest Stage, Phase 2 – Acute Grief: The Disorganisation Stage and Phase 3 – Subsiding Grief: The Reorganisation Stage. The length of the grief process is very individualistic and as Mallon says (1998 p.31) grieving ‘is a process not a linear pathway’. The acute stage may only last a couple of months but resolution takes a lot longer. Each stage presents milestones that must be overcome and children who are bereaved mourn and go through a series of stages. A number of factors influence the eventual outcome of the grief responses and the grief response can be more difficult if:

- The bereaved person was very dependent on the person who was lost as a means of physical and/or emotional support (such as a parent/child relationship).
- The relationship was volatile such as a love-hate relationship as this can instill feelings of guilt (again such as the parent/child relationship particularly during the teenage years).
- The cause and nature of the death (for example, if sudden or unexpected such as suicide).
- The family circumstances (if parents lived together, if major life changes will be necessary as a result of death – moving house/school etc.).
- The individual has experienced a number of losses. This involves a cumulative grief response and if previous losses have not been resolved each succeeding grief is more difficult to deal with (losing a grandparent, a pet and then a parent).
- The loss is that of a young person.
- The state of the individual’s physical or psychological health is unstable at the time of the loss (if emotional development has not been prioritised).
- The bereaved person believes (whether real or imagined) that they have some
responsibility for the loss (a child in the magical thinking stage).

- The child’s own resilience.
- The care and support they receive (Worden 1996).

Differences in mourning are determined by a number of things including the cognitive and emotional development of the child. A number of other factors influence the eventual outcome of the grief responses. The grief response can be facilitated through:

- The individual having the support of significant others to assist him/her in the grieving process (surviving parent/bereavement support services/extended family/early years services/teacher support).
- The individual having the chance to prepare for the loss. The grief response is more intense when the loss is sudden and unexpected. The experience of anticipatory grieving (experiencing the feelings and emotions of grief before the loss actually occurs with stronger feelings as the expected loss becomes more imminent) is thought to facilitate the responses that occur at the actual loss time. (Telling the child in advance that the parent is very sick and may die. The child comes to terms with the loss of a healthy parent before having to cope with losing the parent altogether).
- Sometimes the grief response can be facilitated through attending bereavement services and most of these offer some sort of counselling service. The term counselling includes work with individuals and with relationships/families which may be developmental, crisis support, psychotherapeutic, guiding or problem solving. The task of counselling involves giving the client the opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more happily (McLeod 2003).

Ways to help grieving children

It is vital to reassure the grieving child that it is normal to experience a number of strange and unfamiliar feelings after a death but it is also vital to reassure them that they will be taken care of as this is often a huge concern for them. They may worry about – Who will mind me? Will I have to live somewhere else? Who will do the cooking, washing, help we with homework? Will be have enough money? etc. It is also important to explain that it will take a long time to accept and come to terms with what has happened (Tatelbaum 1997).

Adults should provide as much routine and regularity as possible – going to bed at the
same time, going to extra curricular activities, going to school/pre-school, eating meals together and so on. All involved with the child – early years setting, carers, teachers should keep a watchful, supportive presence for the child. It is important to keep talking about the person who has died, offering information, remembering happy times, sharing feelings. The child should be allowed to talk about the parent that has died if they want to but they should not be forced to do so. Children who have lost a parent are going to be sad. It is pointless trying to cheer them up; instead provide lots of cuddles and comforts such as cuddly toys, warm drinks, small treats, looking at photos of the dead parent or visiting the grave (if that is what the child wants). Providing comfort and cosiness for the child – lighting the fire, drawing the curtains and watching a favourite video can provide an oasis of peace for a child whose world has just fallen apart.

For the young child play is one of the key strategies to help them come to terms with their loss. Socio-dramatic, role or pretend play is of particular importance here as the child may express anxieties and feelings in play that he is afraid to vocalise elsewhere. Allowing children to be creative and to use art and drawing to describe their feelings is also useful. Books and stories can also be a very useful way of supporting children in their bereavement and a list of books for pre-school aged children is given in Appendix One.

Making a Memory Box or Book may also help children in their bereavement journey. A memory box is a special box to put items in that remind the child of the parent who has died. Examples of things to include are cards, photos, flowers from the funeral, shells from a trip to the beach, tickets from an outing, small items of clothing, jewellery, perfume/aftershave. Every time the child looks at the items in the box they are thinking about the dead parent and keeping their memories alive. A Memory Book is a paper-based version of the memory box. A scrapbook can contain drawings, pictures, photographs, postcards, letters, certificates and so on, any important keepsakes of the parent who has died (Winston’s Wish 2007).

**Bereavement Services**
Most children and their families can cope with the death of a parent especially if families talk about what is happening and about their thoughts and feelings and about the person who has died. Many people feel that children should have professional help immediately after the death. However, children need time and space to come to terms on their own.
with what has happened. If the child is displaying serious behaviourial or emotional problems such as nightmares, not talking about the dead parent, deep sadness, lack of appetite/over eating or a lack of interest continue over a long period of time or the problems become more severe it may be appropriate to look for outside support (Winston's Wish 2007). In such cases good quality accessible bereavement services are vital. Counselling offers objective support and helps the child to express emotions as well as helping them understand what is happening to them in the grieving process (Donnelly 2001).

There are a number of bereavement services throughout the Republic of Ireland, both public and private, professional and voluntary, religious and secular. However at present it is often difficult to gain information on bereavement services for children. Barnardos’ Solás Bereavement Counselling for Children, the Family Support Agency’s Child Bereavement Counselling and Support Service and the support group Rainbows (a not-for-profit, international organisation that offers training and curricula for setting up support groups for children who are grieving) provide a range of services but there is no one publication available which provides detailed information on the types of support and services that are available for bereaved children. In particular there are few if any services available for the young child under six. Yet children in this age category ‘are a particularly vulnerable group’ Worden (2003 p.163) claims and should be singled out for special attention by the counsellor (ibid). In reality bereaved parents often rely on their doctors or public health nurses to point them in the right direction for services and supports and often the choices are limited. Sometimes no service is available in an area except calling a help line such as Solás which is open Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Bereaved children and families often need more than this. Children need time and space to cope with their grief and every child is at a different stage. Being the same age or in the same family does not mean that two children experience bereavement in the same way. All too often these individual differences are not acknowledged and the support and services needed to help them cope are not readily available.

To compound this lack of service there is very little written material available on the area of bereavement and its impact on young children in Ireland. In 2003 The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) published An Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2003 and this audit which included over 1100 pieces of research/publications had only one item on bereavement.
This was the Barnados (2001) publication called *Someone to Talk to: A Handbook on Childhood Bereavement* by Pat Donnelly. This is a very useful document providing accessible, user-friendly information on a wide range of aspects of grief but it does not provide comprehensive information nor does it indicate bereavement services available beyond that provided through Solás, Barnados’ own child bereavement service. Barnados also have a useful leaflet call *Death - Helping Children Understand*. Again this is very useful but only gives information on Barnados’ services. The Department of Social and Family Affairs and Comhairle (a statutory agency responsible for providing information, advice and advocacy on social services) have also jointly produced a leaflet *Information for those affected by Bereavement* (Comhairle 2005). This gives information on practical and material matters following a death and also provides a list of support and counselling services including Bereavement Counselling Service, Dublin, HEBER (an umbrella organisation for hospice bereavement groups), National Suicide Bereavement Support Network, Rainbows and Solás. Information to help parents and those who work with young children needs to be compiled in a more user/child friendly manner and a resource pack for young children including storybooks and work books as well as the types of play that can help children come to terms with their loss needs to be developed.

**Conclusion**

More research on the area of childhood bereavement needs to be undertaken. Every day young children around the country lose a parent. Some lose their mammy or daddy suddenly through a car crash; others live through months of watching their parent fade away with cancer before their eyes. When I was four and a half, I lost my dad. Nobody acknowledged my loss or thought to ask me how I felt. My primary school completely ignored the fact that I had been bereaved. Children who lose a parent must be supported to cope with their loss because if they don’t receive the support they need, long-term emotional problems may occur. However as educator and author Eda LeShan (cited in Tattelbaum 1997 p.61) says that ‘A child can live through anything, so long as he or she is told the truth and is allowed to share with loved ones the natural feelings people have when they are suffering’.
Bibliography
Engel G. (1964) ‘Grief and grieving’ American Journal of Nursing, 64, 93.
Winston’s Wish @www.winstonswish.org.uk accessed at 22 March 2007
Appendix: Useful books for pre-schoolers on death and dying

*Goodbye Mousie* by Robie Harris (ISBN 0743462130)

*I miss you: A first look at death* by Pat Thomas (ISBN 0764117645)

*When Uncle Bob Died (Talking it Through)* by Althea (ISBN 1903285089)

*Dear Grandma Bunny* by Dick Bruna (ISBN 1405219017)


*Always and Forever* by Alan Durant (ISBN 038560503X)

*Flamingo Dream* by Donna Jo Napoli (ISBN 0688178634)

*Fred* by Posy Simmonds (ISBN 0099264129)

*Granpa – The Book of the Film* by John Burningham (ISBN 0099752409)

*Saying Goodbye: A Special Farewell to Mama Nkwelle* by Ifeoma Onyefulu (ISBN 0711217017)

*The Sunshine Cat* by Miriam Moss (ISBN 1841215678)

*The Tenth Good Thing about Barney* by Judith Viorst (ISBN 0689712030)

*Sad isn’t Bad: A good-grief guidebook for kids dealing with loss* (by Michaelene Mundy. (ISBN 0870293214)

*Badger’s Parting Gift* by Susan Varley. (ISBN 0688115187)


*Saying Goodbye to Daddy* by Judith Vigna (ISBN 0807572535)


*I’ll always Love you* by Hans Wilhelp (ISBN 0517572656)

*What’s Heaven* by Maria Shriver (Hardback ISBN 0307440435)

*The fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of life for all ages* (Hardback ISBN 0805071954) by Leo Buscaglia

*The saddest time* by Norma Simon (ISBN 0807572047)

*Saying Good bye to grandma* by Jane Resh Thomas (ISBN 0899196454)
When someone very special dies: Children can learn to cope with grief by Marge Heegaard (ISBN 0962050202)

When a pet dies by Fred Rogers (ISBN 0698116666)

I miss you: A First look at Death Pat Thomas (ISBN 0764117645)

Sunflowers and Rainbow for Tia: Saying Goodbye to Daddy by Alesia Alexander (ISBN 1561231282)

Angel Stacey/Daddy in Heaven by A. Moyer (ISBN 0966618394)

Daddy Up and Down: Sisters grieving the loss of their Daddy by Lila Stensone (ISBN 096580611)

Help me say Goodbye: Activities for Helping Kids cope when a special person dies by Janis Silverman (ISBN 1557490851)

Nana upstairs and Nana downstairs by Tomie dePaola (ISBN 0698116367)
Adults Supporting Bereaved Children and Adolescents: A Discussion Paper
Public Policy Changes Needed to Ensure Children who Experience Bereavement and Loss Receive Adequate, Informed Acknowledgement and Support from the Adults in Their Lives

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**Abstract**
This paper contends that current public policy in relation to children who are bereaved is inadequate. The author advocates for the development of appropriate policy and training so that all adults working with children are aware of childhood bereavement and are appropriately equipped to provide bereaved children with acknowledgement, understanding and informed support. The paper builds on the author’s recent qualitative research on current policy and teacher practice with bereaved children within primary and post-primary schools in Cork and Kerry. The findings of this research suggest a dearth of adequate policy and training in how adults can best acknowledge and support children’s bereavement experience. This paper and the research on which it is based aims to raise the profile of childhood bereavement, to create discussion on the issue within education and other child-focused settings and to advocate for the development of appropriate policy and training.

**Introduction**

Death is a natural part of life. We cannot protect children and young people from the reality of it happening in their lives. Nor can we copper fasten them against the necessary pain of loss. What we can do, however, is accompany them on their journey through grief with informed support, information and encouragement.

This may help them rebuild their lives with hope for the future. 
(Donnelly, 2001, p.7)
Many children get through childhood without experiencing bereavement or loss. Sadly, others are not so lucky and every year some young people face bereavement or loss, through the death of a significant person or through other kinds of losses. When children experience loss, they are generally supported in their grieving by the adults in their family home (Papadatou, 2002). But children spend a lot of time outside the family unit, in preschool or school settings. The recognition and support they receive within these settings, therefore, can be significant to how children cope with their loss. Brady (1994, p.12) speaking in the Irish context says “Ideally, it is best if a child can be helped to cope with loss within the normal environment of home, school and community. This requires a recognition of the child’s needs and the provision of practical help”. Jewett (1991) and Dempsey (undated) advocate that the child is best supported by “familiar adults“ and in this way, children can hope to feel the loss, come to see its meaning for them and accommodate and adapt to the changes it brings.

This paper and the research on which it is founded are rooted in the author’s conviction that children who have experienced loss need their changed life context and experience acknowledged and understood. The author aims to promote discussion on childhood bereavement and loss and to highlight the significant role that all of us who work with children can have with those young people who are bereaved. The author’s commitment to the issue emerges from professional social work experience with children and families and personal experience of parental bereavement as a young adult. Through this paper, I hope to encourage all of us who work with children to seek further information and training on bereavement and loss so as to be comfortable and competent to help the bereaved young people we meet.

The author’s recent research (Daly, 2006) focussed on childhood bereavement through death. This paper, however, relates to children’s experiences of bereavement and other losses. The author advocates that adults working with children need to be informed about childhood bereavement and loss. Changes are needed in public policy and training so adults are better equipped to recognize and acknowledge children’s loss and to provide appropriate understanding and support.

Key definitions within the discussion of Children, Bereavement and Loss
In Irish legislation, a child is defined as ‘a person under the age of 18 years other than a
person who is or has been married’ (The Child Care Act, 1991 (s.2 (1))). Children “share the same needs as adults: food, shelter, warmth and security” (Richardson, 2005), but they also have specific needs. These include “love, new experiences, praise, recognition and responsibility” (Kellmer Pringle, 1986, p. 34) and the need to be treated as an individual (Richardson, 1999).

**Bereavement** describes the experience associated with the death of a person who is significant in some way to us and requires adaptation over time. **Loss** usually describes difficult experiences that do not involve death, for example loss of significant relationships, loss through illness and disability. **Grief** is the complex emotional response that can follow a loss, which takes different forms for each individual. **Mourning** is the outward expression of our internal experience of grief (Holland 2001, p. 19). Children, like adults experience bereavement and mourn their loss by grieving (Bowlby, 1980; Furman, 1974; Worden, 1991, 1996), and like adults, children can be bereaved or “in bereavement”, with or without “grief” or “sorrow”. The term **childhood bereavement** as used in this study refers to the situation where a child is bereaved of a significant other through death. Similar in many ways to adult bereavement, there are, however, particular factors that make children’s experience of loss different to adults. For example, the developmental stage of the child when faced with the loss affects both the child’s understanding of the loss and their grieving (see the paper by Mary Daly in this volume for a discussion on this).

**Children, Bereavement and Loss**

This paper is underpinned by a children’s rights ethos. Thompson (1997, p. 64) maintains that children are treated as less than full citizens and “seen as a relatively powerless group with little or no say in decisions affecting their lives”. It is vital that this powerless position does not adversely affect children’s opportunity to grieve. Thompson advocates that children be recognised as people in their own right and counsels that working with the “assumption that death and loss do not feature in the lifeworlds of children and young people is both false and potentially very harmful” (1997, p. 60/61), a conviction shared by this author.

In relation to childhood bereavement and loss, this paper is underpinned by the following beliefs:
“Grief is a natural reaction to loss for children as well as adults and the duration and intensity of grief is unique for each individual.

Within each individual is the natural capacity to heal oneself and caring and acceptance assist in the healing process” (Corr, 1991, p.24).

“All children have the right to information, guidance and support to enable them to manage the impact of death on their lives” (Guidelines for Best Practice, Child Bereavement Network, U.K., 2001)

Bereaved children “have the right to a therapeutic service if information, guidance and support does not meet their specific needs, especially if their experience is one of multiple losses, pathological grief or traumatic death” (Sólás, Barnados, 2003).

Children’s understanding of death

Children’s understanding of death is affected by their cognitive ability (Speece and Brent, 1996), which is related to their stage of development and also therefore their understanding of death “will change as they grow older” (Donnelly, 2001, p.28, and Daly, M. in this volume). To reach a full, mature understanding of the concept of death, children need to grasp four key concepts (Speece and Brent, 1996, p.31-34):

- Universality (“all living things must eventually die”)
- Irreversibility (“once the physical body dies, it cannot be made alive again”)
- Nonfunctionality (when you are dead all of the typical life-defining capabilities cease)
- Causality (Certain events/ conditions bring about death)

Children who have developed a “concrete understanding” of what death involves have a better start to dealing with the death of a parent than those who had not developed this concrete understanding (Furman, 1974, p.11). For adults who are in contact with very young children, it is helpful to remember that the development of a concrete, real concept of the permanence of death can be gained through the many minor encounters with dead insects, worms and small animals and by being aware when people we are not dependent on die. Understanding these experiences stand the child in good stead when they are sadly faced with a significant death. As people who work with young children, I believe we can help them develop in a natural way to understand the concepts of universality, irreversibility, nonfunctionality and causality.
**Children, Bereavement and Loss**

The experience of loss relates to more than being bereaved through death. Adults and children can feel loss when they are separated from significant people, people with whom they have a strong attachment. This is true even when the attachment is ambivalent. Children can experience loss when parents separate and the family unit is changed, when older siblings leave, when they are removed from their natural parents as in foster or residential care or removed from their kin and country as in emigration. Children who are ill can experience loss or when a significant person in their lives develops an illness or disability. Sources within bereavement literature demonstrate that most bereaved children mourn and grieve (Bowlby, 1980; Furman, 1974; Kenneally, 1999) and that they need adults to acknowledge that experience and support them (Culhane, 2004; Donnelly, 2001; Jewett, 1991). How a person deals with bereavement is influenced by a number of factors, including coping strategies, personality, cognitive understanding of death and social support available. When a person is bereaved, life is changed. The nature of the relationship or attachment to the deceased can affect their experience of the loss and their ability to grieve.

No matter what age a person is bereaved, the “ability to devote (oneself) to the task of mourning generally depends on two factors: the assurance that (our) needs will be met consistently and the continuation of (our) other relationships” (Furman et al, 1974, p.109). The general consensus of practitioners working with children who experience loss is that when someone dies or when parents separate, children have two main concerns:

- Did it happen because of something I did?
- Who will look after me?

Experienced practitioners recommend that in order for the child to be supported, a responsible adult in their circle must keep these concerns in mind even when the child does not bring them up. If we are informed, we can assist children who trust us with these fundamental questions.

Without appropriate training and policy, children's grief can go unrecognised and may be disenfranchised. **Disenfranchised grief** is when a person has experienced the loss of a meaningful and significant attachment, but that somehow the loss and grief is not
recognised or validated by others. When grief is disenfranchised, “the loss cannot be openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly mourned” (Doka, 2002, p.17). That can “exacerbate the problem of bereavement and can intensify emotional reactions” (op cit). Children’s grief can be disenfranchised in many ways. Children can distract themselves from the pain of loss, can deny the death and fantasise around it. They cling to routine and need to continue with the normal aspects of childhood. This can at times suggest to adults that they are unaffected by the loss, but this is not the case (Baker & Sedney, 1996). Adults sometimes underestimate children’s grief because they perceive children as resilient (Jewett, 1991; Silverman, 2000). Rowling (2003, p.20) states: “Being resilient does not mean they are not affected, but that, with support, they have the capacity to bounce back”. If their grief is unrecognised children can miss out on chances to alter their assumptions of the world, a practice that is essential to accommodating the changes that the death has brought.

Supporting bereaved children
Why is it important that adults are aware of and informed about children’s bereavement? Because, as Corr (1991, p.24) says

Children who are grieving have important work to undertake in a healthy mourning process. Because grief may be an unfamiliar experience to them, they may need assistance in identifying and articulating what they are feeling … and to learn to reinvest in life and in other relationships.

Adults who work with children can help to develop the child’s understanding directly and also indirectly. When loss or bereavement has been a significant loss to the child’s whole family; the other family members are likely to be struggling with the same loss as the child. In that case, the child may really benefit from the support of an adult outside the family. Being a trusted person outside the family, the caring adult can help the child with the process of safely expressing the feelings around the grief, answering the child’s questions and providing normality, routine and fun in whatever setting they meet the child (Donnelly, 2001; Wilson, 2002). In our contact with the child, we can give the child the message that grief is normal, is permissible and supported. In this way we can foster the child’s innate resilience and respect the child’s own grieving capabilities.
We can also help the child by working with the adult carers in their life. Sometimes, the child’s carers are so raw with their own grief that they do not appreciate the full extent of the child’s grief. This can minimise or disenfranchise the child’s feelings and rob them of vital support and understanding. A caring adult in education and other child-focused settings can help the significant adults in that child’s life to ‘see’ the child’s grief. This is especially true of settings where children spend a lot of time, as in families, childcare, pre-school and school settings. Informed, caring adults can help bereaved children not just by providing support to the child, but also by “imparting information to parents” (Rowling, 2005, p.115).

Grief is not always expressed in a tangible way. Very young children can regress to earlier developmental stages; for example, they can soil, become incontinent, and refuse to eat, stop sleeping or can act out their loss and anger in behaviour rather than express it in words or emotion. Oftentimes children who are experiencing loss can express their painful or confused feelings by way of aggression and outbursts of uncharacteristic behaviours (Jewett, 1991) and not through the more often expected method of sadness and crying (Rowling, 2005). Adults who understand this are more aware and thus the child may have a better chance of receiving the caring response they need. When young children’s grief is not seen, it is not publicly acknowledged or supported and is disenfranchised. When loss is disenfranchised in this way, children are not afforded the opportunity to feel and express their grief nor to use opportunities that are presented to them to make sense of and adapt to the loss. When the adult carers recognize that their young child is grieving, they can begin to work out how they can help.

Loss is cumulative and unresolved loss can have effects in later life (Ryan, 1999; Tracey & Mc Guckin, 2002). Jewett (1991) advocates that anyone who works with children should equip himself or herself so as to be able to provide support to those children who are struggling with change, loss or bereavement. If we ignore the challenges brought to children by bereavement and loss, we may “put them (children) at risk of much harsher futures than they need experience” (Corr, 1996, p.27). However, if we are informed about bereavement and loss, we can “bring experience, insight, skill and caring presence to the aid of children who may feel vulnerable and alone in the terrifying face of the unknown” (Corr, 1996, p.27). Clearly the adults in the child’s family need to do this. But with the amount of time spent out of the family, concerned adults in settings like pre-school,
schools and youth services also need to be informed so they can accept the child’s “need to grieve in their own way” (Brady, 1994) and provide a listening, understanding ear.

**Childhood Bereavement and children’s settings**

Schools and preschools settings can be affected by various different kinds of bereavement: the death of a child, the sudden death of a parent or close relative, the death of more than one pupil at a time in accidental or tragic circumstances or the death of a member of staff, or someone closely associated with the school (Cooper, 2004). Sources suggest that, at any time, most schools, (or preschools) have a child attending who has been bereaved (Holland, 1993; McGovern and Barry, 2000). It would seem likely therefore that most child-related settings have a child attending who is experiencing loss.

The author’s recent research (Daly, 2006) examines current policy on and teacher practice with children who have been bereaved through death in primary and post-primary schools in the counties of Cork and Kerry. This involved extensive documentary analysis and original qualitative fieldwork. Department of Education and Science policies were examined, as well as professional teachers’ organisations and other relevant bodies.

Telephone contact with the policy section of the Department of Education and Science and the office responsible for the Social, Personal and Health Education programme confirmed that no existing policy had been overlooked. Original independent, in-depth qualitative research was carried out: specifically one- off, one-hour semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers: 6 post primary and 4 primary teachers in the Cork/Kerry area, randomly selected from The Department of Education and Science 2002-2003 lists of primary and post-primary schools in the counties of Cork/Kerry. Sampling was done in such a way as to allow for gender and urban/rural representation in an effort to achieve findings that would be considered valid, reliable and in some way generalisable.

A significant finding of the author’s research in schools was that nine of the ten teachers interviewed had recently worked with a child who had been bereaved. Half of the participants had worked with children of different ages bereaved through parental and sibling death as well as the death of grandparents. Some participants also made reference to children who experience loss through separation and family changes. Nine of the ten participants had worked with children who felt the death of an animal as bereavement. This concurs with Butler and Lagoni’s (1996) view that children’s loss of a companion
animal needs to be acknowledged. The death of an animal is a valuable opportunity for ritual, expression of feelings and discussion of loss, which can be preparation for the loss of a significant person but must also be seen as a bereavement in itself (Butler and Lagoni, 1996). “All children want their grief to be acknowledged … but only one third want to speak about their grief on a regular basis” (Donnelly, 2001; Worden, 1996).

**Current Policy**

The author’s research focussed on school as a significant place where bereaved children find themselves. Findings from that research (Daly, 2006) indicate no specific policy was found within the Department of Education and Science or the Department of Health and Children on how teachers and schools should deal with individual instances of children who are bereaved. There is an expectation that all schools develop their own pastoral care policies and Pastoral care guidelines are provided from the Centre for Education Services, Marino, Dublin and the Irish Association of Pastoral Care in Education to facilitate this. In the wake of traumatic incidents (such as those that took place in Dunblane in 1996 or in Omagh in 1998) a number of documents from different sources provide guidelines on how schools can respond to critical or traumatic incidents and how to respond to the sudden unexpected death of a student. They contain varying amounts of information on bereavement, which can serve as a valuable resource to schools. Advice, information and support is also available from the National Educational Psychological Service when schools are responding to critical incidents. No policy exists to encourage educators to be aware when children experience changes or loss through separation or divorce, living away from their families for various reasons or when a child is bereaved through the death of a significant person in their private lives. Contrasting with this, examples from Curriculum documents in both primary and post primary settings suggest the emotional needs of children are relevant to teachers and that they have a role with them. One participant in the author’s research succinctly explains the educator’s role:

Being a person outside of the child’s home life, away from the emotions of grief who can acknowledge the death, be understanding and sympathetic and, at the same time, can help to provide a safe environment within which the child can learn, function and have friends. (Participant 3, Daly, 2006, p.76).
This paper contends that this quotation can be applied to adults who work with children and families in any service setting.

Training
Most settings where children attend are confronted with bereavement and loss every year. “Teachers are poorly prepared to deal with deaths within the school community” (a joint document by the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation and the Ulster Teachers’ Union, 2000, p. i). Training has been identified as a gap by a number of researchers (Holland, 1993; Rowling and Holland, 2000; McGovern and Barry, 2000; Katz, 2001; McLaughlin, 2001; Wilde, 2004; Lowton and Higginson, 2003). In Papadatou’s Greece-based study (2002), 80% of respondents reported feeling inadequately trained. The findings from the author’s Irish-based study indicate similar dearth of training from the Irish context, with 9 of the 10 participants indicating they had no training on bereavement and all ten participants saying they would welcome training on bereavement (Daly, 2006, p.67).

The author’s research findings indicate that current practice around bereavement and loss in schools is not informed by training, is informal, based on “common sense” and may depend on one person’s commitment and interest in the subject. Rowling and Holland (2000) in a comparative study of U.K and Australia indicate that teachers are more comfortable supporting bereaved children when they have received training on the issue.

Procedure in schools and other children’s settings would benefit from the development of policy on bereavement, provision of training and professional advice. Through training and liaison with children’s bereavement services, adults who work with children can learn to:

- Develop good communication skills;
- Be aware of grief and bereavement patterns;
- Know the content and process of grief education;
- Be aware of school policies and procedures about critical incident management;
- Know how to support an upset child;
- Maintain links with service providers; and
- Accept loss and grief as part of life (Rowling, 2005, p. 167).

Speaking about the United Kingdom, Katz (2001) advocates for the inclusion of
“bereavement issues in training of new and more experienced teachers, even suggesting that “counselling skills (be included) into teacher training” (Katz, 2001, p.155). These measures would give teachers “some understanding of children’s responses to death … would reduce teachers’ distress and would (enable students) to deal with loss and grief within the social context of the school” (Katz, 2001, p.156). This author suggests this is true for adults in all child-related services. This author believes this may also be the case for adults who work with children in other settings. If adults are to be helpful and aware of children’s needs around bereavement and loss, they need training.

**Legal, social and policy context in which the discussion takes place**

The Task Force on Child Care Services (1981, p. 34) states: “children are special in two respects. Firstly, they are persons in the process of formation; secondly they are not independent”. These two special qualities mean that policies and practices need to safeguard the rights and needs of children in their formative years. Ireland’s ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2nd Sept 1990) promises “the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” (Article3, 1990, p.114). This represents a formal, though not a legislative commitment to safeguarding children’s rights and children’s participation and opinions are now sought unlike before. Section 4.1 of The National Children’s Strategy’s states as a National goal (2000, p. 38) that: “Children’s lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services. Gaps in services will be more easily identified and resources targeted at those with the greatest need”.

**Recommendations on Policy and Training**

This author recommends that the Department of Education and Science develop specific policy on the issue of childhood bereavement. The dissemination of these policy guidelines could be done by the development of an in-service training module and the provision of a written document, providing information, training and guidelines on working with children who are bereaved. Individual schools could modify guidelines but formal policy would improve the likelihood that the issue is comprehensively covered in each school. Policy could suggest best practice principles and guidance on basic standards of care, with room for each school to develop the policy framework that best suits their students, staff and setting. The participants in this research believed that it is best to know if a child has been bereaved. Bereavement policy needs to address communication of
information about the bereavement, ensuring all relevant people are informed, both immediately after the death and as the child passes through the school.

Policy and training are necessary not to straightjacket current practice, but to ensure more formalised consideration of the issue; to equip more teachers to deal effectively with bereaved children. The development of individual school policy and procedures would increase the child's likelihood of receiving understanding and support and may decrease the chances that the child will either have unresolved loss, will underachieve or will drop out of school. Apart from policy for schools, College based courses where graduates will go on to work with children need to provide adequate training, acknowledging the many faces of grieving:

- the sadness and tearful expression of grief but equally the angry outbursts
- the distracting, attention-seeking kind of grieving but equally the withdrawn, quiet grieving
- the cognitive thinking, unmotivated grieving as well as the more active “doing” kind of grieving (Rowling, 2005).

Conclusion

Bereaved children are entitled to feel secure and supported in the presence of caring adults; their carers, teachers, social workers or doctors. Children have the right to expect that the caring professionals with whom they come into contact in the normal course of their lives, will be able to acknowledge their loss and understand the impact of that loss, at that moment and also in the future (Rowling, 2005, p. 11).

The key factor in bereavement and loss is Attachment (Furman, 1974; Bowlby, 1980; Jewett, 1991). Children usually grieve on the loss or death of someone to whom they have a relationship of attachment especially where the relationship fostered a security, even when the relationship was ambivalent (Weiss, 1993; Wortman and Silver, 1989). When we think about and work with children around loss and bereavement, we need to put aside our assumptions about what is a significant loss and see if it is significant for the child. The nature, intensity and style of the child's grief, how he/she copes, whether their
grief is noticeable and whether it is recognised and acknowledged by adults are significant factors in the support the child receives. Worden (1991) says grieving is about facing the reality of what has happened and then managing the feelings about it.

Holland makes the point that teachers (and this author suggests, other adults also) “could be expected to take the initiative at a time of crisis, (using) a gentle approach, making bereaved children aware that there (is) support available if it (is) needed, although not pushing the children, who may, actually, not welcome such an interaction” (Holland, 2001, p.98). We need to listen to how the loss affects the child and “be there” in whatever way the child or young person needs. When we acknowledge the child’s grief, listen when they want to talk and answer their questions honestly, we are respecting their own negotiation of their grief. To be able to do this we need to become more informed about bereavement, comfortable with our own experience of loss, aware of our limitations and look after ourselves so we can assist others (Dyregrov, 1990). Attig (2004,p. 210/212) uses the term ‘Enfranchising Hope’ and says caregivers can enfranchise grief and can support and encourage resilience by expressing “in word and deed a belief (that) the mourner has within her or him a drive to transcend suffering and the potential to find and make meaning and thrive again”. To me, that is a beautiful portrayal of the assistance teachers and other adults can provide to bereaved children.

Given the inevitability of change and loss, this research concludes with the hope that policy and training will be developed in schools and other child-related settings so bereaved children will receive understanding and support from informed adults. The National Children’s Strategy voices the state’s commitment to research the needs of children, to empower families and communities. This paper calls upon the Children’s Office and all of us who work with children to continue to work collaboratively toward:

An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential. (The National Children’s Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives, 2000, p.10).

The National Children’s Strategy’s vision stresses the importance of children receiving support from a wide range of sources. Children are seen to be “especially vulnerable and
need adult protection” (op cit). In the case of bereavement, this study contends children do not need adult protection, but they do need adult support.

Let us hope we can do our best to provide the bereaved children we meet with that informed support.

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The Bullying Prevention Pack:
Steps to Dealing with Bullying in your School

Peadar Donohoe

Abstract
Bullying is a major problem in our schools that affects children of all ages. Children are rarely encouraged to discuss the bullying incidents amongst themselves and are often unaware of the hurtful and negative impact of their actions. The Bullying Prevention Pack puts the child at the forefront of the discussion and activities. The issue of bullying is addressed through identifying the types of bullying, sharing personal experiences and feelings, re-playing personal school-based bullying experiences in classroom roleplays, questioning received notions, peer feedback and encouraging students to identify and use methods to prevent and stop bullying. This metacognitive method of addressing the bullying issue has the capacity to empower children and help to create a more harmonious school environment.

Bullying is repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or group against another. (Department of Education and Science, 1993, p.6)

No student should be afraid of going to school for fear of being harassed or degraded, and no parent should need to worry about such things happening to his or her child. (Dan Olweus, 1997, p. 502)

School bullying: my first memory
My earliest memory of bullying, outside of home, was when I was 5 years old in K2 (Kindergarten 2 - the American version of Senior Infants) in Boston, Massachusetts. One day as I walked home from school I became aware that a classmate was following me. Whenever I turned around I saw this dark, scowling face glaring at me. For some reason, that I didn’t comprehend or remember now, he seemed angry with me. Was it a playtime transgression? Did I say something that hurt him? Did teacher reprimand him for something I did? I just don’t remember. He snarled at me to stop. At first, I didn’t. I
recognised and was familiar with this outward negative behaviour and I knew it meant harm for me. I kept on walking, much faster now. I knew that home was only a short distance away. His voice became louder and more aggressive, the threats more frequent and coloured by ugly language. A part of me responded to this snarly voice tone, the dark contorted face, the bared teeth, the balled fists and tension in his shoulders and neck. It was something that I encountered on an almost daily basis and had learned survival strategies in the face of. Conditioning and fear got the better part of me: I stopped. He quickly closed the gap between us and grabbed me by the collar; his face was but an inch from mine as he threatened me.

What had I done to deserve this? Why didn’t I fight back? He was no bigger than me. But I had already learned a valuable lesson at early age: the bully doesn’t need a reason. It was about power. And in my short life, the earliest lesson in bullying violence I had learned was that if I fought back, the beating/punishment would be much worse. If I submitted and let him do what he wanted I might get away without too much physical damage. If I resisted, I could get seriously hurt. My gambit paid off. After he threatened me and punched me, he threw me to the ground and went on his way. I had survived. Once again. But unfortunately, the bully now realised I was an easy target. He would continue this ritual of stalking me on my way home on an almost daily basis. Why? Maybe because it made him feel good, powerful, in control, superior and maybe he needed to vent because he was bullied at home too.

Bullies aren’t born. They have learned and modelled their behaviour from those around them. Places of learning for the emerging bully are the home, school, work or social environments. Bullying can thrive in any kind of relationship or environment. Unless confronted these learned behaviours last a lifetime. If we sit back and are the silent witness who says “This has nothing to do with me” or the victim who says “This is just the way things are. No one’s going to help me”, then the bullies will continue with behaviours they have learned gets them results.

**Bullying in our schools**

Bullying is a repeated, nasty, unpleasant activity by one or more people, which causes distress and upset to the victim. (Maria Lawlor, 2006, p. 111)
A nationwide study of bullying in Irish schools conducted by A. M. O’Moore (1997) found that seventy-four per cent of primary school children cited the playground as the most common place they experienced bullying. Thirty-one per cent of pupils said that it had occurred in the classroom. Seven percent reported that school corridors were the place of the incident and fifteen percent stated that it happened in other places in or around the school.

The following types of bullying were cited:

- Verbal Bullying
- Physical Bullying
- Gesture Bullying
- Exclusion Bullying
- Extortion Bullying

Strategies to curb these types of bullying have been put forth in numerous books and pamphlets. The Department of Education’s “Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools” (1993), David Fitzgerald’s “Bullying in Our Schools: Understanding and Tackling the Problem” (1999), Trinity College’s Anti-Bullying Centre’s “Bullying at Schools: Key Facts” (2001) are just a few of the informative documents that address this issue. But what happens at a practical level according to Coloroso (2004, pp. 176-203) is that schools often just give a once-off lecture on policy to students or have posters in place but do not adopt a system that supports the curbing or ending of bullying within the school culture.

In Ireland bullying has also been addressed by touring theatre companies. Often it can be a one day performance around the issue of bullying. Generally these performances are accompanied with discussions on the issues and possibly a workshop. But unfortunately, the material covered on the day is rarely followed up. Geraldine O’Neil of the Graffiti Theatre Company based in Cork, Ireland, who works with schools on the anti-bullying issue, has told me that often she has schools calling looking for a “one-day-wonder-workshop” for their upcoming anti-bullying weeks. She refuses these schools unless they are willing to make a stronger commitment and are willing to tie in school policy with the workshop material. Few schools take her up on this offer.
Graffiti Theatre Company’s Anti-Bullying Program endeavours to bring students into the discussion. It has four modules covered over four days over the course of two years with ongoing feedback. One of their modules is entitled *The Best School in the World* and the central premise that is posed to students is that if their school was the best in the world, how would it operate with regards to bullying? This invites students into the discussion to create student solutions to the bullying problem. However, the idea of the best school in the world puts the emphasis on an imaginary utopian dream school and not the day to day real events within the school itself.

In other media there is “Silent Witness”, a recent DVD release by the Trinity Centre in Dublin (2006). “Silent Witness” contains three video modules specifically designed to be used in the classroom and includes a series of dramatised pieces in which young Irish actors play the parts of people being bullied, people who ignore the bullying, and bullies. But once again there is an emphasis on an outside environment.

What makes the Bullying Prevention Pack substantially different from the examples above is that the stories of bullying are not in the third person but in the first. These stories are not fabrications or incidents that happened elsewhere but genuine accounts of bullying experiences within the school. I have found that these first hand accounts, re-enactments of the children’s direct bullying experiences and the tools to curb and end bullying within the school gives the children a most powerful and empowering tool in bullying

**Metacognitive regulation**

The Bullying Prevention Pack is a significant toolkit in combatting bullying because it draws heavily on the metacognitive strategy of self-regulation. Metacognition is commonly referred to as “thinking about thinking” but this way of describing it tends to simplify its importance. Metacognition is a term that is widely associated with John Flavell (1979). According to Flavell (1979, pp. 906-911, 1987, pp. 21-29), metacognitive learning experiences consist both of metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation. In this learning experience the student questions their knowledge and or assumptions in a given area. This can lead to the student identifying gaps in their knowledge or realise they have made assumptions that have no credible basis in fact. They can then begin to explore their knowledge gaps and/or act on new information. The knowledge gained from this inquiry influences their externalised activity. The cornerstone
of The Bullying Prevention pack is this metacognitive inquiry. From the sharing of stories where students reveal their pain and suffering at the hands of their (unnamed) classmates to the anti-bullying strategies they are encouraged to use, the students are given information that adds to their knowledge about bullying behaviour, challenges their assumptions as to what is and is not bullying, gives them a forum to share their story and feelings and, finally, asks everyone to change their behaviour in order to bring about positive change and harmony in their school environment. I have seen this positive change in action. Sheila (an alias), a primary school teacher in Cork, shared the following with me:

I feel that the children are better able to resolve problems amongst themselves. They are more able to vocalise what is going on. They seem reasonable to each other and when there is an issue they are able to speak about it more clearly and relate their feelings. Particularly, feelings they may not have realised they had before.

This feedback above describes the fruit of metacognitive regulation that is the main aim of the Bullying Prevention Pack. With the aid of their teacher children are given knowledge and the tools to act on that knowledge to create a more harmonious school environment.

**The Bullying Prevention Pack – an accessible resource for the teacher to enable discussion and behavioural change**

The suggested program for administering the bullying prevention pack would be difficult for an outsider to implement. The best way to get students to open up and share their stories is with a person they trust and know: the teacher. It is the teacher who can create the safe environment for this exploration to transpire, who can best monitor the effects and ongoing implementation of the Bullying Prevention Pact. And it is with the teacher in mind that I have constructed The Bullying Prevention Pack. I have structured it so that it is easy to administer and direct.

In the pages following there is a step-by-step system that encourages children to discuss and deal with bullying with the aid of the teacher and amongst themselves through drama. Some of the potential benefits of using this system are that the children:

- are able to name the types of bullying
are brought into a dialogue about what bullying is
realise how hurtful and damaging bullying is through sharing their
own stories and re-enactments
know that they have a right not to be bullied
learn some useful tips in dealing with bullying behaviour
learn to feel good about themselves while respecting the rights of others
are encouraged to address the bullying problem amongst themselves.

The Bullying Prevention Pack is easy to use and its positive effects are felt almost
immediately. When I first introduced this system I was greatly encouraged by the school
principal after the first session to continue and expand on my initial work as it
couraged discussion amongst parents, teachers and students. And the more work that
is done on bullying with the students the more sublime their realisations are about its
negative effects. The following feedback is from a primary teacher in a Cork school after
three sessions (forty-five minutes each) of enacting the Bullying Prevention Pact:

… today there was talk of guilt if you bully someone … initially they (the
students) think it would make you feel better to bully someone if you had
been bullied. If you were to bully somebody else it would make you feel
powerful. But when they thought about it some of them thought you
wouldn’t solve the sadness or the fear within yourself. It would just carry on.

I would like to stress that one does not have to be a drama teacher to deliver The Bullying
Prevention Pack. The situations and experiences underlying bullying are familiar to
students and therefore very easy for them to enact. The bullying scenario is an event that
has been at least seen and often experienced as early as junior infants. In many instances
they may have been a victim of the act or have bullied themselves. When I have asked
junior infants to replay a scene where they weren’t allowed to play with a peer or peers in
a game (exclusion bullying) they needed little or no help in setting it up. It is already very
much a part of their school life experience.

Conception
A Teacher’s Concern
The catalyst for this approach sprung from a fellow teacher’s concern over widespread
bullying behaviour in her classroom. I was teaching in a Cork school as a part-time drama teacher. On my way to third and fourth class (a combined classroom of thirty plus students) I was met by teacher, Sheila (alias), in the corridor outside her classroom. Sheila was very agitated. She told me that the students were bullying each other and it was getting out of hand. She asked me if there was anything that I could do. I could hear loud voices and laughter in the classroom and knew that the students were charged up. I told Sheila I would give it a try. I entered the rowdy classroom and instead of beginning with our usual drama warm-up, I shared with the students Sheila’s concerns. I was met with amused silence as the students glanced around at each other to see what the general reaction was.

**Brainstorming**

I wrote the word “Bullying” on the board and asked the students what that meant to them. Slowly they started to respond with many of the common physical and verbal types of bullying. As they became more enthusiastic the list grew longer. Before I knew it the blackboard was full and yet the students were still raising their eager hands and voices with their suggestions. I asked them to quiet down for a second. I shared with them that it seemed they had all experienced some form of bullying in school. Many nodded and murmured their assent.

**How do we feel when we are bullied?**

I then asked if they could each take a turn at sharing a story of when they were bullied and share with everyone how it made them feel. I stressed that they were not to name names as we didn’t want to get into a blaming session. Immediately, a number of enthusiastic students volunteered. I told them we would work left to right to make sure each student had a turn. And except for one or two, each child took a turn. What they found most disarming in relating their stories was to describe how the act of bullying made them feel. Such a simple request and yet, it was this place in sharing their stories, that gave them the greatest pause. This is a common human problem. Often, when it comes to negative experiences, like being bullied, we are expected to bottle our feelings and learn to live with it. Eventually, these feelings become so submerged that we don’t even recognise them when we are experiencing them. In *Self-Made Man* the author, Norah Vincent (2006, p. 234), describes a situation where a man is asked to describe his feelings, “… it was a feat for him to realise that he even had feelings. Learning to identify
and express them, especially in the presence of other men, was asking a lot”. As a drama teacher, who is married to a counsellor, sharing thoughts and emotions comes very natural to me. I do it on a daily basis. When discussing the phenomenon of the inability to articulate basic emotions, my wife reminded me that this is the norm for most people.

And it was this request, to name and share their feelings, that almost brought the impromptu class to a standstill. The class had become completely silent. There was no commentary, guffaws, laughter, giggling or whispering. The child, who had been sharing his experience of bullying, didn't completely understand what I was asking of him. So, I suggested that he could have been feeling angry, sad, or hurt. He shyly said, “I was angry”. Once we were past this hurdle of putting a name to his feelings, the rest of children were more easily able to voice their own emotions of anger, fear, sadness, and feelings of betrayal without my prompting. I could read each child’s face to see how they had been wounded by their experiences. With this deep sharing of their personal experiences the atmosphere had become solemn and heavy in the class. Also, as I looked at the clock, I realised that I only had a few minutes left with them. I didn’t want to leave them with such strong feelings weighing heavily on their hearts. It occurred to me that it might be good to have them do positive affirmations to change the mood and have them embrace a positive state.

**Affirmations**

In *Rethinking the Role of Positive Affect in Self-Regulation* Lisa Aspinwall (1998, pp. 1-32) puts forth that recent evidence suggests that positive mind states, which can be engendered or aided by affirmations, can play a beneficial, multifaceted, and flexible role in self-regulatory processes such as tasks, goals and overall mood and behaviour.

Affirmations (see appendix one for more detail) are statements, either positive or negative, which we all use consciously and subconsciously which can affect our mental, physical and emotional life. For example, if you start the day with the affirmation “I hate school” then you are embracing that state and more likely to continue the intense dislike. Whereas if you start the day with the statement “I enjoy my time in school” then you are opening yourself to that state and are more likely to feel good. A person can purposefully create and use positive affirmations to help create mind states to achieve desired behaviours, change moods, thoughts and as an aid to achieve goals.
With the aim of changing mood, affirming oneself and with the goal of engendering better peer relations I asked each student to take a turn, stand up, and visually take in the whole class as they said the following two affirmations:

- I am a good person
- I get along well with my classmates

My choosing of these affirmations was informed by the exercises we had done. Often the bullied is stigmatised by the act and feels anything but good. S/he may feel that they deserved to be bullied for something they had done or failed to measure up to. Hence, I asked the students to use the affirmation “I am good person” to help them realise that they do not deserve the abuse and, since they are in class where everyone is making this statement, they are all equals and deserving of mutual respect. The affirmation “I get along well with my classmates” was employed as a desirable state that would help to promote goodwill amongst the students.

I shared with the students that the positive statements “I am a good person” and “I get along well with my classmates” were desirable states that may seem strange at first until they got used to them. However, if they used them regularly, they could make the desired state and feelings a reality.

It may come as no surprise that when I first put this suggestion to the students that they use the affirmations listed above I was looked at with incredulity. But I insisted that they try it. They felt a bit self-conscious but went ahead and good-naturedly attempted it. I could tell that a few felt awkward doing this last suggestion and yet for others it was another moving moment as they were making a statement to, and in a way, confronting students they had been bullied by or had bullied.

I felt that I left the class on a good note and I was so inspired by the power of the exercises that I decided to forego all lesson plans and continue with the topic of bullying with the rest of the day’s classes. By the second week I had introduced the exercises to the whole school, from sixth class to senior infants.

In the following weeks I continued with the bullying topic primarily because of the
encouragement of the Principal Mary Higgins (an alias). She reported to me that a number of parents had told her that they thought this discussion of bullying in the school was very worthwhile. This support from an interested and concerned principal and concerned parents was instrumental in inspiring me to develop The Bullying Prevention Pack.

The Bullying Prevention Pack
Below is a detailed description of each step of the Bullying Prevention Pack. The exercises have been organised under the headings of sessions to aid the teacher in their implementation

Session one: Introducing the topic of bullying
The aim of session one is to introduce the topic of bullying, get the students to talk about it what they think it is, share their personal experiences of being bullied and to be able to name the feelings they have about being bullied.

**Step 1: Brainstorming**
“Bullying” is written on the board. Students are asked what they think bullying is and their answers are written down by the teacher in category lists without headings (i.e. all types of physical bullying should be in one list). I have found that once students warm-up to the exercise they stimulate each other and will riff on a particular category of bullying. For example, one may say ‘pinching’, hearing this, another will contribute ‘pushing’, yet another ‘tripping’, etc. which are all types of physical bullying.

**Step 2: Categorising types of bullying**
Teacher now reads (or if age appropriate, the students) some of the literature on what bullying is (Recommended: Bullying Information Pack (2002) from the National Children’s Resource Centre). During this reading the teacher should emphasize that bullying is a ‘repeated’ negative act by one person upon another. The reading should include each of the types of bullying:

- Verbal Bullying
- Physical Bullying
- Gesture Bullying
Exclusion Bullying

Relational Bullying (practised more commonly by girls than boys and includes spreading rumours, damaging reputations, breaking confidences, talking loudly enough so that the victim knows they are being talking about, demeaning/dismissive looks, and abusive messages, notes and drawings)

Extortion Bullying

E-Bullying (not necessary to discuss with young children)

After each bullying type is described the teacher asks students on which category list does it belong. The teacher or a student writes it on top of the appropriate list. The teacher should also ask students if they feel anything is missing from the class created list that they would like to add.

Step 3: Personal experiences of bullying

Each student is asked to stand up and share their story of an incident where they were bullied in the classroom or on the school grounds without naming names (not naming names is extremely important as public blaming will only create tension and not encourage the students to share their feelings). Each student follows their story with how the act of being bullied made them feel. Expressing their feelings is very important. For many it will be the first time they put a name to their feelings. The teacher at this point should be patient, encouraging and sympathetic. It is often the first time the child has ever discussed the experience of being bullied. And if the teacher is aware of a child who is often the victim of bullying, they should handle this person with particular care as they may not want to verbalise their experiences at all for fear of retaliation. It is useful to remind this child that everyone is going to do this exercise and that no names are being given. This may encourage the child to make their contribution. Finally and sadly, there are often one or two children who cannot or are unable to do this exercise. Do not push them to do this exercise if they don’t want to. But in my experience the reluctant student is often a boy and the smallest in the class. Let the reluctant child watch the rest of the class do the exercise. Consider asking them again after their classmates have finished as they might feel more comfortable about doing it.

I felt “sad, angry, worried, hurt” are some of the most common answers I have noted to the question “How did it make you feel”? A few girls have said “It made me feel like crying”. This simple exercise is a powerful one. Core emotions are being expressed. What
is most powerful about this exercise is that it transmits to everyone in the classroom how hurtful the bullying act is.

*Step 4: Affirmations*

Following the raw emotions expressed in the exercise above, it is time to finish the session on positive note. The students are asked to try two positive affirmations given by the teacher. They are each asked to stand up and say them in front of the entire class: “I am a good person” and “I get along well with classmates”. These are very powerful especially after all the feelings that will have been stirred up by the sharing of their stories. With these affirmations each student affirms to the group that they are a likeable, worthy human being who deserves to be treated as an equal. The affirmations have the triple function of being an aid to help the bullied individual feel good, signalling to their peers that they didn’t deserve to be bullied, and they should not feel guilty about being bullied. It is important to remind the students that they did nothing wrong and that no one deserves to be bullied.

**Session 2: Replaying student experiences of bullying**

*Step 1: Acting Out*

Students are organised into groups of twos and/or threes and are asked to act out one of the types of bullying: verbal, physical, exclusion, etc. that occurred to at least one of them in the classroom or on the school grounds. (It is important not to allow scenes with 4 or more students as these are often cluttered with too many voices, ideas and often the progression of the story becomes confused.)

*Step 2: Discussion*

Each scene is discussed. Some good questions to pose to the class after observing these scenes are:

- What type of bullying was it?
- How do you think the bullied child felt?
- Does this kind of bullying happen often?
- Why did the other child (in a group of 3) go along with the bully?
- What could be done about it?
- Did anyone tell the teacher? If not, why not?
- Why should you report it to teacher?
Further exploration
The sessions below focus on each individual type of bullying. This further exploration allows for greater in depth discussion and analysis on the issues. I have found that once students start tackling the issues in depth they become more reflective, knowledgeable and more articulate in communicating their knowledge and experiences. I feel the potential benefits for individual, peer, teacher and school culture harmony will be greatly increased.

Sessions 3-8: Focus on types of bullying
The class now recreates and discusses scenes about the individual types of bullying behaviour which can include physical bullying, verbal bullying, exclusion bullying, relational bullying and any type of bullying that teacher may note as a relevant problem. The instructions for setting up these scenes is discussed in Session 2. Each scene should be discussed and questioned as in Session 2, Step 2. The teacher may want to keep a journal to chart classroom progress, reflect on contributions and chart the children’s deeper understanding of the issue as it develops.

Session 9: Bullying is a learned behaviour
Students describe and act out a scene in groups of twos and/or threes where they learned a bullying behaviour and tried it out on someone else. This is a very important lesson. Its aim is to bring home to children that bullying is not a natural human predisposition but a learned behaviour. Knowingly or unknowingly, they have picked up these bullying habits. Each scene should be discussed and questions as in Session 2, Step 2.

Session 10: What the bystander can do

Step 1: The Bystander
Research by Craig and Pepler (1997, pp. 13, 41-59) reported at least 85% of bullying happens within a peer group and that bullying stops in less than 10 seconds, 57% of the time when peers intervene on behalf of the victim. All children have witnessed bullying incidents. What they did or didn’t do is looked at. They may have turned away, observed, cheered the bully on or joined in.

In this session students describe a bullying behaviour that they witnessed but did not do anything about. In threes or fours the students re-enact the scenes and discuss. Some
pointed questions to pose in the discussion are:

- Why did the bystander(s) do nothing?
- Why did the bystander(s) verbally support the bully?
- Why did they join in?
- Is the bully popular?
- Was/Were the bystander(s) afraid of the bully?
- How do you think the bullied child felt when the bystander(s) joined in?
- Do you think the bully will bully more if s/he feels supported?

*Step 2: Intervening*

Many students are witnesses of bullying but don’t know what to do about it. Coloroso (2004, p. 67) puts forth, “The bystander doesn’t know what to do. He hasn’t been taught ways to intervene, to report the bullying or help the target. Just as bullying is learned behaviour, so must children be taught ways to stop it”

Following are the suggestions for intervention:

1. Say “Leave him/her alone” in a loud, clear voice
2. Tell the person doing the bullying, “You are bullying.”
Here the bully will usually deny they are bullying and so the child is coached to be more specific:
3. You “excluded” her/him from the game (an example of the most common form of primary school bullying.)
4. Ask the person bullying if they understand?
5. a) If they do, then ask the bully to say he/she is sorry and make an effort not to let it happen again.
   b) If the bully acts mean to you, ignores you and/or continues bullying, then report the incident to the teacher or supervisor.

After being coached in the above the students are now asked to redo the scene where they witnessed bullying but did nothing about it. They are now asked to imagine and play the scene as if they did something about it using the interventions suggested above.
An important caveat is to advise students that the above guidelines for intervention are only for those instances where they feel physically safe. If they feel threatened then they should go to a supervisor or teacher.

**Session 11: Playing status**

*Step 1: Awareness of status to aid students when standing up to and confronting the bully.*

Bullying is about power and contempt. A bully likes to have power over others and they show contempt for their victims (Coloroso, 2004, pp. 11-40). Contempt is a powerful feeling of dislike toward somebody considered to be inferior and undeserving of respect. Weak body language and voice can be an invitation to the bully to act.

After session 9 has been completed it is discussed how the intervener confronted the bully and what were the most effective behaviours displayed. Students generally conclude it was those who spoke in strong, clear voices, had good eye contact and strong postures. What is called in drama high status behaviours (Johnstone, 1981, p. 35).

We tell each other so much, consciously and subconsciously, about our own feelings of status by how we use our hands, feet, eyes, facial expression, tone of voice, etc. According to Mehrabian and Ferris (1969, pp. 248-52) we communicate 93% through body and tone of voice. Mehrabian and Ferris put forth in their famous paper on non-verbal communication that information and the messages we consciously or unconsciously send are much more than the sum of our words. This research demonstrated that in a presentation before a group of people, 55% of the impact is determined by body language, 38% by tone of voice and only 7% by the actual words.

**How we communicate**

When students are targeted by or are confronting a bully they can be coached to consider their body language and tone of voice. How we present ourselves in body and voice sends a strong message to
the bully. What can be of help is to consider displays of status in the body and voice. Often when people think of status they tend think in terms of a hierarchy. Status perceptions affect most people’s physical and vocal communication.

Bullies pick up quickly on displays of low status. These displays tell them when someone could be potentially vulnerable to their aggressive high status display. According to Tim Field (2007, web page) the bully is constantly sizing others up, assessing, denigrating, blaming and judging. When defending oneself from, or confronting the bully, it is important to coach the students to be aware of high and low status displays and encourage them to adopt behaviours that are going to show the bully that they are not a potential victim. Listed below are some of the major attributes and high and low status behaviours (Lyn Pierse, 1997, p. 347):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High status behaviours</th>
<th>Low status behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take up space</td>
<td>Minimise space they take up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good posture</td>
<td>Bad posture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Eye contact</td>
<td>Minimal or no eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Stance</td>
<td>Fidgety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feet and legs turned out</td>
<td>Feet and legs turned in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong handshake</td>
<td>Weak/Poorly contacted handshake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear, loud, well-spoken voice</td>
<td>Mumbly, stuttering and/or inaudible voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above lists can be used as part of an exercise in class. Divide the class in two and ask the students to stand at opposite ends of the room. Have one side adopt the high status behaviours and the other the low status. After you have gone through the list once, switch the statuses around so both sides can have a turn. Incidentally, you will find that the students find this exercise great fun as they observed or acted these behaviours in their daily lives. Once again they are playing in a context they know but may not have given much thought to.

*Step 2: Playing High Status to aid intervention*

The students are organised into teams of 3 or 4 where they imagine witnessing a bullying situation and intervene. In this variation of the scene from session nine they are asked to adopt high status behaviours in confronting the bully.
**Step 3: High Status to minimise victimisation**

Finally, have them confront the bully using high status behaviour when they are being victimised. This last scenario is a good tool for getting them to learn to sort out the problems amongst themselves.

**Session 12: Affirmations**

Finally, to aid the self-esteem of all the students we examine affirmations, what they are and how to write them. The students are given some to say and are asked to try to write out one or two empowering ones for themselves. According to Coloroso (2004, p.98) positive affirmations and the states they can help create encourage children to think for themselves. Kids who can think for themselves are less likely to be manipulated by a peer or go along with the crowd. Some useful affirmations to consider are:

- I am a good person.
- I like myself.
- I can think for myself.
- I care about the feelings of others (to encourage empathy which is “commonly lacking in bullies” (Borba, 1997, p. 4))
- I tell someone when I feel I am being bullied.
- I try to stop bullying when it happens.

The teacher can give them an affirmations worksheet (example available from author) which allows space for the student’s picture (photograph or drawing), their affirmations and some affirmations for the whole class. The teacher could also ask the students to draw and colour in their sheet to make it more personal.

Students should be encouraged to do their affirmations three times a day initially. Affirmations are useless if they are not vocalised, rehearsed and memorised. They can only become part of the student’s neurology and mind state with repetition. For the first month the teacher should set a few minutes aside for this practice at the start of the school day, before lunch break and at the end of the day.

**Dealing with bullying: a school-wide policy initiative**

*The Bullying Prevention Pack* cannot be effectively introduced unless it is well supported
throughout the school and there is an effective anti-bullying policy in place. It would be most effective if *The Bullying Prevention Pack* is introduced to the families of all the children involved in the form of a booklet that explains what the staff of the school are attempting. Along with information on *The Bullying Prevention Pack* the following items can be included:

1. A strong, positive statement of the school’s desire to promote positive peer relations and especially to oppose bullying and harassment in any form it may take by all the members of the community.
2. A succinct definition of bullying or peer victimisation, with specific examples.
3. A declaration of the right of individuals and groups in the school – students, teachers, other workers and parents – to be free of victimisation by others.
4. A statement of the responsibility of those who witness peer victimisation to seek to stop it.
5. Encouragement of students and parents with concerns about victimisation to speak with school personnel about them.
6. A general description of how the school proposes to deal with the bully/victim problem.
7. A plan to evaluate the policy in the near future.

(Coloroso, 2004, pp. 176-203)

**Implications**

Most organisations have a serial bully. It never ceases to amaze me how one person’s divisive, disordered, dysfunctional behaviour can permeate the entire organisation like a cancer. (Tim Field, 2007, web page)

Often bullies think of their domination and manipulation of others as a winning strategy and they see their victims as losers. Of course, it is nothing so puerile as winning and losing. What is happening is suffering: the bullies and ours. By our capitulation and/or caving in to their tactics, we are continuing the cycle of suffering for generations to come. What does being bullied lead to if it isn’t confronted? It leads to the stifling of the right to free speech, the dampening of the creative spark, a lowering of self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, loss of faith in authority figures and, at its worst: spiralling into deep despair and depression potentially leading to suicide. There have been so many deaths linked to bullying that it is now referred to as bulicide. The following quote is from the last diary pages of thirteen-year-old Vijay Singh. He hung himself from the banister rail
in his home on the Sunday (Field & Marr, 2000, p. 33).

\[ I \text{ shall remember and will never forget} \]
\[ \text{Monday: my money was taken.} \]
\[ \text{Tuesday: names called.} \]
\[ \text{Wednesday: my uniform torn.} \]
\[ \text{Thursday: my body pouring with blood.} \]
\[ \text{Friday: it’s ended.} \]
\[ \text{Saturday: freedom.} \]

Teachers, we have to stand up to bullies! The insidious matrix of its influence mars the fabric of all pedagogical efforts. Our highest minded strategies to enhance the learning experience of all children become soiled when smothered by this dark cloth. It affects how children learn and the marks it leaves on the young are there for the rest of their lives. In the future do you want your students to remember school as a stimulating learning experience or an environment fraught with self-doubt, danger, angst and fear? If we truly want to change things for the future then it is important to recognise bullying as a major problem and address it as such. To do so we must face up to how it has been minimised:

- Many schools give a once off lecture on policy to students or have placards in place but do not have a culture that supports these policies (Coloroso, 2004, pp. 176-203)
- Bullying is often hidden from teachers and parents (Skiba & Fontanini, 2000, p. 13)
- Adults typically identify less than 10 percent of bullying incidents (Atlas & Pepler, 1998, pp. 86-99)
- 27 percent of primary and 53 percent of secondary school teachers do not recognise bullying as a problem (O’Moore, Kirkham, Smith, 1997, 141-69)
- Educators support bullying by sending the message “it’s just part of growing up.” (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1998)
- 65 percent of primary school and 84 percent of second level victims did not tell their teachers of bullying incidents (O’Moore, Kirkham, Smith, 1997, 141-69)
- There are large percentages of students who witness bullying at school but don’t know what to do to help (Rigby, 1995, pp. 1-5)

To effectively address the bullying problem there needs to be:
A school-wide anti-bullying programme that brings students to the discussion
A recognition that principals and teachers attitudes, behaviour and supervisory routines play a crucial role in how bullying manifests itself in a classroom or a school.
Methods that can enable the silent majority to help (Rigby, 1995, pp. 1-5)
Acknowledgement that programs that teach students to recognise and intervene in bullying have been found to have the greatest impact with regards to reducing bullying behaviours (Coloroso, 2004, 159-175).

Also research by Olweus, 1993; Ross, 1998, Craig & Pepler, 1999, recommend a number of strategies to help reduce bullying:

- Make adults aware of the situation and involve them
- Make it clear that bullying is never acceptable
- Hold a school conference day devoted to bully/victim problems
- Increase adult supervision in the yard, halls and washrooms
- Emphasise caring, respect and safety
- Emphasise consequences of hurting others
- Enforce consistent and immediate consequences for aggressive behaviours
- Follow up all instances of aggression
- Improve communication among school administrators, teachers, parents and students
- Have a school problem box where kids can report problems, concerns and offer suggestions
- Teach cooperative learning activities
- Help bullies with anger control

And very importantly, it is down to leadership. The principal must be involved and supportive for these strategies to be effective. Charach, Pepler and Ziegler (1995, pp. 12-18) have noted in their research, “Bullying is reduced in a school if the principal is committed to reducing bullying”.

One of the clearest messages that can be sent to bullies that their behaviour will not be tolerated is to involve their parents. This can be done by giving the parents literature on the subject including the schools bullying prevention policy, providing them with the schools code of conduct, having an open day devoted to the issue, asking them to sign their names to a code of behaviour for their child, have a system in place that encourages them to report
episodes of bullying and a quick response by teachers and administration when a concerned parent comes forward.

Some would take a look at the information above and think it is too much. But I disagree. It is our tolerance of bullying that is too much. But what can make it an uphill battle is if we don't challenge the root of bullying behaviours. And often the root of these behaviours comes from the home. Olweus (1993, p. 41) notes “Bullies often come from homes that are neglectful and hostile and use harsh punishment. Bullying may be learned by observing high levels of conflict between parents. Care needs to be given so that they do not model bullying for their children”.

Bullying behaviour is commonplace in our world because we are too often accepting of it, turn a blind eye or are willing to brush it under the carpet. But what is acceptable in society can change when knowledge about our rights and the rights of others are given primacy. In the past human rights were so easily trampled when there was little knowledge and/or reflection over what was socially acceptable. Bullying is a relic of more violent times when people were ignorant of its effects and little could be done about it. We are now at place and time in history to do something about it. In the future I envision schools where violence, verbal, physical and psychological, is a rare phenomenon. The teachers, parents and children in these communities will look at our tolerance of bullying as something archaic and primitive.

What will bring this future about the quickest? By bringing the parents on board with clear anti-bullying polices that require their feedback and participation. If all parents are expected to row in, then those parents who are bullies or who are unaware that they engage in bullying behaviours will learn and realise that their behaviour is not tolerated in society at large. It may not change them overnight but this required contribution to the school policy will challenge assumptions about their own bullying behaviour. This challenging of assumptions is at the core of metacognition. If we are encouraged to question and reflect how we behave in the school, work, social and personal environments, and are taught new behaviours that prove more beneficial to a happy and content life and respect the rights of others, then there is the likelihood that we will adopt these new behaviours and come to regard bullying behaviours as abhorrent. Our human family just needs the enlightenment of information, tools and support.
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Appendix 1

Affirmations for young children: teacher’s reference

An affirmation is a statement that you make to yourself. Everyone uses them intentionally or unintentionally. You wake up in the morning, jump out of bed and exclaim, “I am full of energy”. This is a positive affirmation. You drag yourself out of bed in the morning and whimper, “I feel weak”. That is a negative affirmation. Both statements help to maintain the emotional state you are in. The negative is what we want to change. You did not come into this world thinking negatively. You have learned to think negatively the same way you have learned other behaviours. For the sake our health, personal life, work, relationships, etc. it is important that we choose thought and language patterns that empower us.

Positive affirmations can motivate us, elevate our self-esteem, make us feel good and help us interact with others in a constructive manner.

Guidelines for affirmations:
1. They should be stated in the present tense. You want to tell your mind that the desired state is taking place now. The sentence should start with words like “I am …” or “I have …” or “I give …”
2. The affirmation should be written about a desired state as if it is already accomplished. For example: “I get along with my classmates” works better than “I will get along with my classmates”.
3. The affirmation should be written in the positive. “I am a good person” works but “I am not scared” is the opposite of what you want. It focuses the mind on the word “scared” and increases that feeling.

What should my affirmations be about?

- Affirmations should include how you would like to feel: “I feel good, I care about others, I am confidant.”
- They can be about how you would like your life to be: “I am a good student, I am a good listener, I get along with all my classmates, I play football to the best of my ability”.
- They should also counteract any negative self-talk. If a student habitually says “I’ deserved it” with regards to bullying then they should be encouraged to use the affirmation, “I have the right to feel safe.”
When should I use them? Our mind learns fastest with what is called “massed practice”. Repeating the same affirmation five times in a row is “massed practice”. The problem is that it also produces quick forgetting. “Spaced practice”, the process of repeating all the affirmations three or more times during the day, produces slow learning and slow forgetting. Combining both “massed and spaced” practice gives us the best of both: fast learning and slow forgetting.

Saying it with feeling adds another psychological dimension to the affirmation. Any thought that has an emotion attached to it will have a greater impact on our mind that an idea devoid of feeling.

Another variation you can use to strengthen the effect of the affirmation is to add visualization to it. This will make your affirmation significantly more effective. Close your eyes and visualize yourself doing or being like the affirmation. The visualization adds another dimension of power to your affirmation.

You should also use your affirmations whenever you catch yourself using negative self-talk. Start repeating your positive affirmations as soon as possible.
New Perspectives on Irish Folk Dance Pedagogy for Young Children

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Abstract
This paper discusses the relationship between young children and Irish Folk Dance. Dance ability can be considered an innate gift. In actuality, it arises from a learning process, which occurs in an appropriate environment. Children combine divergent thought with technical skill as they choreograph and perform original dance pieces. This paper suggests appropriate teaching methodologies, which encourage creativity in dance: Rudolf Laban’s movement themes, Guilford’s convergent and divergent thought processes and Martin and Autard’s dance classifications are sources of reference. Examples are obtained from Irish Folk Dance.

Introduction
Many children under seven years of age attend Irish Dance classes and they benefit from different perspectives. They exercise self-discipline as they work towards set goals; the children operate as part of a team in figure, set and ceili dances and they learn to cope with stress, success and failure during competitions. These are valuable life skills and applicable to the ‘current educational climate, which emphasizes evaluation (and), assessment of attainment’. (Smith-Autard, 1996, p. 7)

Creativity and Irish Dance
Rudolph Laban aimed to make the dance experience positive. He placed the child at the core. Laban considered the development of creative potential central to the child’s dance experience. ‘Dance art works are not only publicly acknowledged professional dance performances but also the dances that children make for themselves.’ (Smith-Autard, 1997, p.1) Laban’s principles underlie the approach to teaching Irish dance in this paper.

The development of convergent and divergent thought processes occur within education. In convergent thinking the individual is said to converge upon the single acceptable answer to a problem’. (Fontana, 1986, p.135) Convergent thinking occurs during an
Irish dance session, when the child copies the teacher’s skills, techniques and steps accurately. The training refines the child’s fine motor skills and it prepares the child for public performance.

Guildford considered divergent thinking central to the artist’s work. S/he must ‘generate a range of possible solutions to a given problem, in particular to a problem to which there is no single right answer.’ (Fontana, 1986, p.134). In dance, choreographers create several movement phrases before they compose a final sequence.

‘I posit that technique should be acquired by the young in connection with making and appreciating and not in isolation.’ (Preston-Dunlop, 1996, p.xvi) Combining technical training with creative thought challenges the child’s convergent and divergent thinking processes during dance sessions. As improvisation encourages divergent thinking, the next section will concentrate on the notion of incorporating improvisation and composition sections into Irish dance sessions.

**Improvisation and Irish Dance**

There are many advantages surrounding the inclusion of an improvisation section into a dance session. As the child improvises, s/he repeats and perfects previously acquired techniques. This is important in Irish dance, as its technique is precise and often complicated.

Usually, set rhythms and/or music stimulate the Irish dancer. But, different types of stimuli will create unique Irish dance works. Stimuli can be kinaesthetic, visual, ideational, and tactile. Auditory stimuli can be musical, percussive, and silent and include sound effects. Besides encouraging creativity of thought and expression, a broader range of stimuli encourages interdisciplinary learning and challenges age-old dance stimuli.

As the child improvises, s/he becomes an artist. S/he seizesthe stimulus, responds physically and creates something new. Responses are spontaneous and original; existing movement patterns are broken and something instinctive and untaught transpires. Even if other dancers performed the movement skill or phrase before, it is immaterial. The child is unaware of this fact and s/he perceives the skill or phrase as his or her own work. The Irish dance teacher becomes a co-worker during the improvisation section of the session and the child retains power over his or her unique Irish dance composition.
Because there are no set routines, the pressure on the child to dance ‘correctly’ decreases and error becomes a natural part of the learning process. This comfortable atmosphere aids the learning process.

Mixed abilities are accommodated during the improvisation section of the Irish dance session. As the Irish dance teacher circulates, each child receives individual attention in accordance to his or her needs. The teacher’s assessment criteria include originality of expression, appropriateness of movement and levels of technique. These criteria acknowledge a child’s creative ability as well as the child’s physical ability.

‘The strands of the dance form, like locks of long hair, plait into one meaningful whole. The interlock is all.’ (Preston-Dunlop, 1998, p. 1)

The gifted young choreographer unites these ‘strands’, of which movement skill is one, with ease. The other strands include lighting, sound, accompaniment, props, set, costumes and many others. Sometimes, the choreographer possesses average dance technique and skill, but this is irrelevant. It will not impinge on the child’s ability to create.

The ‘nexus’ is explored in Irish dance since the 1960s. Then, Pat Ahern, founding director of Siamsa tire – the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, used theatre aids to enhance the Irish dances on stage. Today, the child identifies with Riverdance and other similar shows. There the ‘nexus’ is integral.

Finally, improvisations usually occur in duet and small group situations. The success of the new Irish dance piece relies on ‘the relationship of the people in the group to the group as a whole’. (Schneer, 1994, p.5) The children must co-operate and appreciate each other’s efforts. They must become team players.

**Irish Dance: A Cultural Experience**

During Irish dance classes, children usually learn from an established repertoire of steps established by the Irish Dance Commission. It is a sizeable dance repertoire. Standard dances include the conventional four-hand reel, the ‘St. Patrick’s Day Dance’ and ‘The Siege of Ennis’. As these dances differ technically, they serve children of different ability levels. But the Irish dance system which existed in Ireland before the 20th century provides
another perspective. Then, dance masters inherited material, experimented with it and created unique dance works. All regions boasted of their own dance masters and their own particular style of dance.

Children can become part of the latter dance tradition. Provided with an opportunity to explore local dances, the children connect with their local culture. They become part of its living tradition, when they improvise with the local dances and create new dance works of their own.

One of Laban's basic principles was to relate the customs and working practices of a period to the dance forms, techniques and styles extant within it. Although the old dance master based his compositions on the raw life of his own community, these stimuli, revisited, may not prove inspirational for small children in the 21st century.

But children can search their own lifestyles for movement themes. For instance, they can relate their movement pathways to travel networks and computer games. Their accompaniment can be trendy music or technological sounds. It places Irish dance into a modern context.

**Natural Movement Patterns**

Younger children's energy levels are high. They want to move freely. They use large body actions. An Irish dance teacher challenges a child physically, when s/he analyses the natural movement patterns of the child according to his or her own age and stage of physical development.

Laban commented 'what is interesting to the investigator of dance is the great resemblance of the first stirrings of a human being to the first dancing jump which a child attempts a few years later.' (Laban, 1973, p.14) He noted babies often stretched out from a closed position; used two-sided body actions, which were strong, direct and fast; moved rhythmically and employed large body actions. Therefore he adopted these movement principles with younger children and chose to avoid light, curving, sustained, isolated movements.

Irish dancers use gross body skill as they leap, hop and jump; they use fine motor skills
when they rock, batter and point their toe. Many Irish dance techniques are inappropriate for the young child's stage of physical development. However, this does not prevent young children from studying folk dance. Laban compared the dance actions of younger children to the 'Primitive dances of adults' (Laban, 1973, p.14). Therefore, primitive folk dance types will suit them; these dances are as much a part of the Irish Folk Dance tradition, as more recent group dances and step dances.

As discussed previously, dance reflects the working skills and lifestyles of the community. During the Mesolithic period, the Irish used gross body actions to pull harpoons, hurl spears, and to negotiate wildlife. Irish dance teachers can devise dances which incorporate similar actions. While dancing these new Irish dances, the child will rise to optimum energy levels. S/he will employ body actions concurrent with her stage of physical development. The dance will release the child from the restrictive movement patterns of modern day living.

Professional dance groups such as Siamsa and Riverdance respect primitive Irish dance. Siamsa describes the coming of May Eve in a pagan scene called Bealtaine. There, the dancers use gross body actions, as they move around a central fire. Eventually, as they jump over the flames, they symbolise the cattle which were originally driven through flames to rid them of disease. In Riverdance, dancers praise the power of the sun in the opening scene: 'Reel around the Sun'. This scene reflects the birth of Ireland.

Irish Dance: A Social Activity or an Art Form?
John Martin approaches Irish dance from three perspectives: recreational, spectacular and artistic. Recreational Dance is fun-based. Although Irish dance was always pure craic, teachers rarely encourage it. But, craic is an integral part of the Irish dance tradition; it encourages motivation, and it is sociable. Most teachers approach Irish dance from a spectacular perspective. The spectacular demands technique and skill and it requires an audience. Children exhibit their spectacular aesthetic talents at feiseanna. Finally, the artistic perspective encourages originality of expression and style. As s/he improvises and composes, the child becomes an artist.

Jacqueline Smith-Autard's Midway Dance Model incorporates all three perspectives. Smith-Autard identified two common teaching models. The Professional Dance Model is
geared towards performance, whereas, the *Educational Dance Model* is process-based. The *Midway Model* retains aspects of the *Educational Model*, (personality development and individual creativity), but it also encourages movement technique and artistic produce. Her approach suits Irish Dance, because it provides a holistic approach and promises technical as well as artistic end points.

**Conclusion**

A group of pre-school children wait for their folk dance class to begin. The aim of this class is to allow them respond to traditional rhythms, reflect nature and use large body shapes as they dance. The ice-breaker sets the tone. The children play a game of statues. The teacher controls the game using a bodhrán. After exploring basic elements such as fire, water, trees, and animals with their bodies, the class improvise themselves to reel, jig or hornpipe rhythms. The fun element returns when they dance together to bongo drums, in a communal fashion, at the end of the class. Afterwards, the children discuss the class with their teacher and each other.

There are many ways to improve the teaching of Irish dance to young children. This paper focused on the inclusion of improvisation sections into the dance sessions. It advocated the teaching of Irish dance from a cultural perspective. It linked young children’s physical development to Irish dance techniques and suggested alternative approaches to movement skill among younger children.

Many children succeed well within the current system. They have physical talent. However, denied the opportunity to create, many children become bored. Others lose their self-esteem, as they struggle with technique. If all children are to benefit holistically from their Irish dance sessions, then other teaching methodologies are crucial.
Bibliography

From the Field:
Perspectives on Practice
Active Storytelling

Karen Meikle

All children are different and unique individuals. As well as the obvious differences there can be in ethnic or linguistic background, children differ in personality, family make up, home situation and so on. In this paper, I will look at the role storytelling has to play in promoting inclusion and celebrating difference in the preschool setting. This is not an academic paper but rather a sharing of my own experiences of story telling and how I have found it useful. I hope this will encourage you to have fun telling stories and give you some ideas and suggestions for how to go about it.

Look in the door of almost any preschool or crèche these days and you will see children from a variety of different backgrounds. Most preschools will have children of different colour, language, ethnic/cultural background, religion, and physical capacity. What seems normal to me in terms of child rearing, education, family relationships etc. can seem very strange to some children and their parents.

I experienced this from the other side, living for several years in Kenya with two toddlers. Kenyan friends were horrified at my efforts at childrearing. Convinced that my first new baby was in danger of freezing to death as I had dressed her merely in a babygro they insisted on wrapping her in layers of blankets and towels till all I could see was the tip of her nose. While I was keen to be up and about and lose some weight my friend insisted that I sit and drink large quantities of cocoa and fermented porridge and ‘get fat’ so that I could feed the baby properly. I never did pluck up the courage to tell her when the baby moved to her own room as she probably would have called the social services! The arrival of a new baby was greeted with huge celebration. Women arrived laden down with fruit and vegetables for me and the new baby. People I knew only a little made long trips to greet the ‘visitor’ as new babies are known as. On the one hand it was quite disconcerting to have everything I considered normal in childrearing to be seen as distinctly odd by those around me but on the other hand people accepted that I was different and welcomed me and my children in the way in which all children were welcomed. The whole experience has made me much more sympathetic to the situation of parents and
children trying to settle here in an environment very different to what they are used to, where what is normal behaviour for them is viewed as strange by those around them. It has also brought home that all children whatever their cultural, religious, ethnic or social background have the same basic needs.

Difference is not just in the obvious such as colour or ethnicity. Among any group of children there will be other differences just as important but not as obvious that will only be noticed as we get to know the individual children. These are differences in family situation, personality, home environment. Even in children who come from the same area and background there will be big differences. There will be differences in character. A child may be shy and reserved or boisterous and lively. Children may come from a home where they are encouraged or where they are constantly put down or there may be big expectations put on them. Instead of what was the traditional family grouping parents may live at separate locations, there may be step parents, step brothers or sisters. All these things as well as cultural background, colour, religion etc. go to make a child what s/he is.

Every child is different. Sometimes these differences are obvious and sometimes less so. What I want to do as a preschool teacher is celebrate those differences so that each child can be confident in themselves and all the elements (e.g. ethnicity, language, family, personality …) that go to make them who they are. I also want them to appreciate and enjoy the different elements that go to make other children what they are.

In any preschool setting each child is different but all children will have the same basic needs. The child needs to be loved and valued for him/herself. She/he needs to feel safe and secure. She/he needs to feel part of the group, accepted by the others and she/he needs to have fun.

There are lots of ways in which we can make a child feel special and valued even in a large group. We can notice something about each child or encourage them e.g. ‘You did a great job of tidying the toys/ wiping the tables/ you were very kind to Mary / that was a great story’.

We can ask them about what they did/ holidays/ shopping/ get them to tell the story of what they did. We can compliment the children in front of each other and let the children
see that all children have gifts and abilities, all different and all important. We can recognize and appreciate diversity and individuality while at the same time promoting inclusivity. When the children can appreciate the differences in each other they can see that all these different people make up ‘our group’. We are all different but we enjoy doing things together and have things in common.

One way to enjoy doing things together as a group and to help all children to feel part of the group is active or participatory storytelling. I am not talking about reading stories here but telling stories. There is an unlimited supply on the market of wonderful children’s books, beautifully illustrated but reading from a book to a group of young children has its difficulties. If you have more than four or five children it will be hard for them all to see the pictures and more effort will be put into shuffling around trying to see than hearing the story. Also unless you are a contortionist you will have to be able to read upside-down or learn the story off by heart so that you can read the words at the same time as the children look at the pictures. Telling a story rather than reading it does away with these problems. It also means you are making eye contact with the children rather than the book.

Storytelling is part of almost every culture. Long before languages were written down history and life lessons were passed on by word of mouth and through stories. People learned important lessons by way of stories, for example Aesop’s Fables, the parables in the bible and so on. People have always loved a good story and still do. We love to hear stories and to pass them on. Try telling a group of friends a funny or sad incident and immediately you will have everyone clamouring to tell their story. The reason TV soaps are so popular is because they tell an ongoing story. They leave us wanting to find out what happens next and make sure we tune in for the next instalment. Children love stories. They love to listen to them and they love to tell them.

Often in a preschool, children are playing or working in small groups or on their own. Story time or circle time is the one time in the day when all children are together focusing on the same thing at the same time. Story time is an opportunity for everyone to feel part of the group. A good story grabs us. It can take us out of ourselves. A good story can be familiar or it can be unfamiliar. It gives children the opportunity to experience different emotions such as excitement, anticipation, and humour in a safe and non-threatening environment.
It can sometimes be difficult for young children to only sit and listen to a story but active story telling allows them to participate in the telling as well as listening. The children provide the sound effects, do actions, repeat phrases, and handle props. The simplest most familiar story can become an exciting participatory experience just by adding some actions and sound effects and repeated phrases. Because everyone participates at their own level everyone feels part of the group and part of the storytelling experience. The out-going children will be right there in the middle of it but the shyer children will be brought out of themselves and enjoy participating in their own way. As storytelling is common to all cultures then the story will be a familiar situation for all. Even children who are just beginning to learn the language will feel included because they can join in the actions even if they don’t yet understand all the words. We have a girl in our group who has very little English but loves story time for just these reasons mentioned above. I have seen another child who is quite nervous and shy of the other children throw herself into story telling and finish the day grinning from ear to ear. The emphasis in story time is on everyone feeling part of what’s going on and on everyone having fun.

Start simple. Begin with a story you know well, something like the ‘Three Little Pigs’ or ‘The Enormous Turnip’. Think of how you can make it fun e.g. squeaky voice for the pigs, gruff voice for the wolf. Exaggerate your facial expressions and vary your tone and volume. This will help to keep the children’s attention. Now think of ways you can involve the children. Are there phrases that are repeated that they can join in with e.g. ‘I’ll huff and I’ll puff ...’ Are there actions or sound effects that the children can make e.g. slapping their hands on their laps to make the sound of the pigs walking or running? You can also use props or puppets to help you tell the story. You can either pull these out of a bag yourself at the relevant point or they can be divided out between the children for them to hold up at the right time. For example with the story of The Enormous Turnip you could have several dolls representing the different members of the family and a toy dog or cat for all those who tried to pull up the turnip. The children can do the digging and pulling actions and repeat the phrases ‘they pulled and they pulled ...’

Most traditional and familiar children’s stories have plenty of repetition and opportunities for sound effects and actions.

This type of storytelling provides a great opportunity to introduce the children to stories
from different countries and cultures to different religious festivals or to stories about children with disabilities or different family or living situations. This is especially useful to introduce the group to celebrations or aspects of life of children within the group who come from a different background. The emphasis in this case is not singling out a child as different but rather allowing everyone to join in that child’s celebration. Because the emphasis is on fun and participation no one should feel threatened. This obviously will take more effort on the part of the story teller to familiarize themselves enough with these stories to tell them with confidence. But again keep it simple and provide lots of opportunity for participation. Ask parents for props. For example if you are telling a story about an African child ask an African parent for story books or things from their particular country such as traditional clothing, food, musical instruments etc. It’s also an opportunity for learning a greeting or phrase from the country by getting the children to repeat it throughout the story. Stories about children with a visual or hearing impairment give lots of opportunity for touchy-feely props that the children can explore without looking or the actions could be words in sign.

Once you start looking for ways to make stories participatory you’ll see that the possibilities are endless. You’ll also start to see opportunities for stories in every situation. Let the group guide you. Choose stories that are relevant to the children in your group. Listen to what the children are talking about amongst themselves and see if a story could come out of it. Story time is a time for everyone to have fun together on an equal footing whatever their abilities, language, culture. It is also an opportunity to enjoy and experience each others’ stories, to celebrate our diversity and individuality and bind us together as a group.

(Note: If you need some ideas for stories about children from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds Trocaire have a catalogue with lots of great resources for children.)
Childminding Ireland Survey of Members 2005
Summary of Findings

Childminding is the largest sub-sector within childcare in Ireland. Childminding Ireland was founded in 1983 by a small group of childminders providing family day care, and is now the national body for childminding. The aims of Childminding Ireland are to:

- Promote high standards in family-based day care for children
- Promote the interests of Childminders as a very important component in the workforce
- Provide training, support and advice for Childminders and parents
- Establish a network of local groups
- Maintain a Register of Childminders who are trained, insured and healthy and providing high quality family based day care

Childminding Ireland carry out an annual survey of their members, in order to establish the types of services members require as well as to identify emerging issues and concerns. The following are the results from the 2005 survey. The results from the 2006 survey will be published in April 2007.

Demographics
Replies came from Childminders throughout the 26 counties, with an even spread between rural and urban locations. There was a wide age spread reported, with 35% of respondents being 34 years and under, 41% being 35-44 years. 86% of respondents had their own children. The remaining 14% had no children.

55% of respondents have been Childminding for longer than 5 years, with a surprising 29% Childminding for longer than 10 years.

98% of respondents had some form of formal training and/or qualifications,

The average number of children minded by respondents was 4.

38% of respondents provided after-school care, 47% of respondents provided care for a
baby (under 1 year old) and 94.5% of respondents minded children aged between 2-5 years. 71% of respondents were not related to any of the children they minded.

**Pay & Conditions**
Survey results revealed significant variances in fees for Childminding throughout the country. The overall national average rate for a full-time place is €128.90 per week, with prices ranging from €80 to €200.

Most respondents (79%) had a Contract or Agreement in place with parents. On average, respondents worked 42.5 hours a week.

74% of respondents were not paid for Bank Holidays. 65% of Childminders are not paid for any holidays. Of the 35% who get paid for holidays, on average they received holiday pay for 15 days (3 weeks).

**Sources of Support**
100% of respondents indicated *Childminding Ireland* as a source of support. 98% of respondents are in contact with their local County Childcare Committee, 86% with a Pre-School Inspector and 76% with a Public Health Nurse.

**Emergent Issues and Concerns**
Childminders are concerned about the following aspects of their work:

- Keeping up to date with changing legislation (42%)
- Account Keeping (34%)
- Keeping child records (23%)
- Meeting the required standards for inspection (23%)
- Childminder/parent relationships – ‘managing parents’ ‘trying to get paid’ ‘feeling undervalued by Parents’ ‘lack of respect from Parents’ ‘discipline’(20%)
- Dichotomy between Childminding fees, set by Registered Childminders annually –, and those actually achieved.
- Discipline and challenging behaviours of the child (11%)
Balancing safety with providing quality childcare a stimulating educational programme for the children (35%)

The emergent picture would seem to indicate that these Childminders are successfully balancing professional issues, (e.g. keeping financial accounts and child records) whilst delivering a quality professional childcare service.

This survey also identified services that members wish to be provided with by *Childminding Ireland*.

These services include:
- Providing information on both professional and management issues
- Local networks and networking facilities
- Social events and social opportunities
- Local and regional events

While balancing safety and quality childcare with stimulating activities for the children, Childminders have identified a need (35%) to increase their knowledge, skills and ability to create and sustain a stimulating environment.

For further information on childminding in Ireland and on the range of services and information provided by *Childminding Ireland*, see the organisation's website at http://www.childminding.ie

**Call for Papers**

The International Family Day Care Association (IFDCO) will be holding its triennial International Conference in Cork, 26-29th July 2009, at the close of the Irish Presidency of IFDCO. Childminders, researchers, tutors, advocates and persons or bodies interacting with childminders and the care of children, infants, pre-schoolers or school age, are invited to submit abstracts (approx. 500 words) of proposed presentations.

For further details see the IFDCO website, http://www.ifdco.com or contact Patricia Murray, Chief Executive, *Childminding Ireland*, President IFDCO 2006-2009, email pmurray@childminding.ie
Notes for Intending Contributors

*An Leanbh Óg – The OMEP Ireland Journal of Early Childhood Studies* is a peer-reviewed journal presenting research on topics relating to young children. *An Leanbh Óg* welcomes articles relating to the field of early childhood studies in the broadest sense, including those relating to early years education and care, social studies, child health, child development, policy issues and issues relating to practice.

**Submission of Papers:**

Papers submitted should meet the following criteria in terms of presentation and content:

Papers should be original; they should not be under consideration by another journal and they should not have been published elsewhere. Papers should be written in a clear straightforward style, avoiding technical jargon as far as possible. Papers should not exceed 3,000 to 5,000 words in length; shorter papers are acceptable. The name, address, institution or affiliation if applicable, and contact details (phone, e-mail) of the author(s) should not appear on the paper itself, but should be given on a separate sheet, along with an abstract of 100 words.

It is the responsibility of authors to show that they have addressed any ethical issues that may arise in connection with their research and that they have obtained the necessary consent from children, parents and settings if they wish to include photographs, examples of children’s work and so on. A statement to this effect should accompany papers submitted.

Papers should be submitted in Word format. They should be double or 1.5 spaced, in Times New Roman 12 point. The use of sub-headings is recommended to enhance readability. Diagrams, tables etc should be clear and legible. Any photographs or other illustrations should not be incorporated into the text, but should be sent separately, with the place where they are to be inserted clearly indicated in the text, e.g. Photo 2 here.

The author, date system should be used for citations in the text, e.g. Murphy, (2006). All works referred to in the text should be included in the list of references at the end of the paper. The required style for references and citing works in the text along with the other
academic conventions in papers is to be found in Exploring Children’s Lives: A Handbook of Early Childhood Research (2006), available from OMEP Ireland, c/o Dept of Education, University College Cork.

Papers should be submitted to the Editor, Dr. Rosaleen Murphy, by e-mail to omepireland@eircom.net, with a copy also to aridgway@education.ucc.ie
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