



OMEP

World Organization for Early Childhood Education
Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire
Organización Mundial para la Educación Preescolar
Eagraíocht Dhomhanda um Oideachas agus Chúram Luath-Óige

OMEP Ireland Conference 2016

Change and Challenge in the Early Years

University College Cork

Sat. 23rd April, 2016



Book of Abstracts

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OMEP is an international, non-governmental and non-profit organisation concerned with all aspects of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). OMEP defends and promotes the rights of the child to education and care worldwide and supports activities which improve accessibility to high quality education and care. OMEP is currently established in over 60 countries and is represented at meetings of UNESCO, UNICEF and other international organisations with similar aims.

OMEP Ireland is a registered charity (Charity No. 14213) dedicated to working for children's needs in Early Education and Care. The objective of OMEP Ireland is to use every possible means to promote the optimum conditions for the well-being of all children, their development and happiness within their families, institutions and society. OMEP assists any undertaking to improve Early Childhood Education and supports scientific research that can influence these conditions.

The mission of OMEP Ireland is to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood experiences, both because every child has a right to a high quality childhood and because of the effect on children's future life chances.

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Keynote 1

Venue: Main Quad, West Wing, Room WW7, 9.15 a.m.

Is Ireland Ready for a Childcare Social Enterprise?

June O'Sullivan, M.B.E. (London Early Years Foundation)

Abstract

This keynote shows why a social enterprise community nursery approach can offer an effective means of delivering high quality childcare to all children but especially those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. Universal childcare has been identified by economists, researchers and policy makers as a means of narrowing children's achievement gap but little attention has been paid to the actual means of providing the high quality sustainable and pedagogically appropriate service advocated. Generally, the delivery remains dependent on the vagaries of the market or the shrinking state, although there was an unfulfilled promise by the UK Coalition Government in 2011 to promote a diverse and vibrant early education sector by encouraging new forms of provision such as mutual, and social enterprises responsive to local community needs. Therefore our challenge remains as to whether either of those options is consistently able to meet the demographic and financial demands of a universal policy of affordable and accessible childcare. The third option is to consider a modern community focused model designed to meet the needs of a global world; a social enterprise model which is based on a community approach where families from both professional and poorer backgrounds are educated together ensuring a social mix that helps build trust and social capital and reduces social segregation.

Key Words

Social Enterprise, poverty, social capital, pedagogy, community

Keynote 2

Venue: Main Quad, West Wing, Room WW7, 10 a.m.

Provocations for Learning

Alice Sharp, Experiential Play, Scotland

Every child's learning journey should be unique. How do we encourage, support and allow an individual learning journey for each child, while ensuring all are engaged in meaningful opportunities and that child development is considered? The actual process of learning is as important as the learning outcome. The more exciting, active and challenging the process, the more each child will engage with this process allowing a greater depth of understanding to be developed. We know much more about the nature of children's learning today than we did even 5 years ago. It is important then that we use this knowledge when developing strategies to deepen children's learning experiences.

Delegates will explore a wide range of **practical activity ideas and resources**, that when used effectively will excite and stimulate learning and thinking in every area of early years and child care.

Consideration will be given to:

- listening to the children;
- being sensitive to their needs;
- tuning in appropriately;
- modelling thinking;
- using open ended questions;
- teaching children to think together;
- encouraging children to ask questions;
- giving children time to talk;
- using stories effectively; and
- scaffolding children's thinking effectively



Keynote 3

Venue: Main Quad, West Wing, Room WW9, 11.15 a.m.

Developing Inclusion and active lifestyles for children with disabilities

Paul Ryan (Irish Wheelchair Association Sports Development Officer)

Paul Ryan of the Irish Wheelchair Association-Sport will be hosting a discussion and questions and answers on the following topics.

- Irish Wheelchair Association-Sport and their role in Child Development
- Societal expectations of children with a disability
- Our experience of working with children with a disability
- Typical development and lifelong pathways
- Preferred lifelong pathways
- Fundamental movement skills and inclusive practices for children with a disability
- The importance of sport and recreational activity for children with a disability
- Creating a positive environment for children to flourish

Afternoon Sessions

WORKSHOPS

Process-led Art using an Inquiry Based Learning Model for use in Early Years Education

Evelyn Egan Rainy (Cork Institute of Technology)

This experiential workshop endeavours to provide Early Years Practitioners with an insight into the pedagogic underpinning of process-led art for use in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings. Participants will have the opportunity to engage with a range of creative processes using a variety of open-ended materials from, the free and found; the natural and organic; the man-made and recyclable. Image-making through the manipulation and exploration of light, translucencies and digital processes will be facilitated by the inclusion of light boxes, projectors and webcams. The workshop will be structured around the concept of Inquiry Based Learning using Transdisciplinary approaches whereby potential learning opportunities are presented through carefully selected and displayed 'provocations'. Methods by which to address the various themes, aims and goals as outlined in The National Early Childhood Curriculum Framework *Aistear*, will be discussed.



Provocation Trays

RESEARCH PAPERS SESSION 1 (13.15 to 14.15)

Room WW5: STRAND A:

Using puppetry as a research method to help address the challenges of engaging and communicating with children with autism

Miriam Twomey (Sports Studies and Physical Education, UCC)

Children with autism experience difficulty with social interaction. According to Trevarthen (2010) to be with a person is to move in sympathy with them. Emphasis was placed upon the non-verbal and the implicit, the intersubjective, and the Now moments during reciprocal exchanges or 'vitality affects' (Stern, 1985; 2010). A research project was carried out with a junior and senior infant class groups using puppetry as a research method to help address the challenges of engaging and communicating with children with autism. Children's bodily expressions and experiences through movement were considered agentic. Children speak through their bodies.

The *Strengthening Foundations of Learning* Project: Enhancing quality through integrating training, mentoring and practice-based supports for early years professionals.

Nóirín Hayes, Emma Byrne-MacNamee and Sandra O'Neill

Early childhood services are an integral part of the world of many families with young children. To achieve positive outcomes for children attending settings, they must be of high quality, particularly for children identified as coming from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Recognising that early years professionals are critical to the provision and realisation of quality early learning experiences this paper presents preliminary findings from the *Strengthening Foundations of Learning* [SFL] project. SFL has been designed to enhance the quality of early years practices and communication in a sample of community-based settings, integrating training, mentoring and practice-based supports for early years professionals.

Room WW6: STRAND B: Curriculum and Play 1

An introduction to the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide

Mary Daly (NCCA)

The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide is available on-line since March 2015. It provides practical resources to help practitioners to use both Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework and Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education together to improve children's experiences and to support their learning and development in the first six years of life. The Practice Guide includes curriculum foundations and six pillars of practice and introduces the concept of an emergent, inquiry-based curriculum. This paper looks at the Aistear Síolta Practice Guide and its implications for practice.

How do primary school teachers understand Aistear (NCCA 2009)? How does their understanding of Aistear influence their practice?

Margaret O Donoghue (Institute of Technology Blanchardstown)

The forthcoming revised primary curriculum for Junior and Senior Infants will seek to ensure 'greater consistency' with Aistear (NCCA 2012, p14). This study was guided by two research questions: How do primary school teachers understand Aistear (NCCA 2009)? A related sub-question was: How does their understanding of Aistear (NCCA 2009) influence their practice? Adopting an interpretive position, the data collection and analysis derives from a focus group discussion. Informed ethical consent was obtained. Findings show that the children had little choice in directing their own learning and highlight the need to understand the difficult realities teachers face in implementing change.

Action research for practitioners: Early Childhood Ireland's Research Circle in Cork

Maire Corbett (Early Childhood Ireland)

Action research 'enables practitioners everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work, and to create their own theories of practice.' (McNiff and Whitehead 2005). The approach shifts the focus from an understanding of quality as universal to embracing diversity and multiple perspectives (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 1999). A very successful feature of recent Early Childhood Ireland work on *Aistear* and *Síolta* is peer sharing of practice. As part of this, Early Childhood Ireland has formed a Research Circle in Cork to identify and develop practitioner research interests and develop exemplars to enhance practice and generate discussion and peer support. The process is intended to support practitioners at local level to lead change and challenge in the early years. The process of forming the group, the lines of enquiry identified and the exploration of this enquiry will be presented along with the theoretical underpinning of this work in action research.

Free Pre-School but at what cost? A snapshot of the financial instability and mental well-being of ECCE owners and managers in Ireland 2014

Sinead Matson, Lynn Bowers (Montessori Alliance)

In 2014 a study was carried out on 221 managers and owners of early childhood services operating in Ireland. The study arose from a community of practice debate about services hiring graduates for the Free Pre-School Year (FPSY), and the reasons why employers were under pressure to do so. It examined, through the use of an online survey, the impact of the FPSY administratively, financially and on the well-being of those operating under its conditions. The results showed the majority of respondents under serious financial and emotional stress which raised the issue of quality and the impact on the child.

RESEARCH PAPERS SESSION 2 (14.15 to 15.15)

Room WW5: STRAND A: Professional Practice 2

Solutions from Hidden Voices: Insights from the Supervision of Early Years Education (EYE) Students in Cork Institute of Technology (CIT)

Joe Moynihan, Judith Butler (Cork Institute of Technology)

This study tries to capture how EYE students experience dissertation writing in CIT. Three areas were investigated: students' perception of the research process; good supervision; the relevance of dissertation to the employment sector. Data collection procedures included questionnaires and interviews. Grounded Theory was used for data analysis. The sample consisted of 42 EYE dissertation students during the academic year 2015 to 2016. Findings that emerged were: the role played by student value systems; the supervisory relationship; the ambiguity of the dissertation experience. This study also proposes possible solutions to the issues from the hidden voices of actual student experience.

Anticipating Placement - Student Perspectives prior to going on placement for the first time

Marlene McCormack

In Ireland, as in many countries placement for students of early childhood education and care (ECEC) has always been a core part of study programmes at vocational and university level. While placement or practicum in the context of early childhood education can be understood a site of learning (Flämig et al, 2015), it is not without its challenges for the institutions and actors involved. This small study, which draws on a student survey adopting a quantitative technique, seeks to identify the perceptions of 1st year BECE students prior to going on placement for the first time. Emerging themes suggest that for students 'fitting in' and 'being clear as to what is expected' loom large as they anticipate the challenge of the placement experience.

Key words: placement; student perceptions

Room WW6: STRAND B: Curriculum and Play 2

Pedagogical documentation: a tool to discovering the `rich` child, in early childhood education settings.

Rita Melia

Loris Malaguzzi founder of the approach to early childhood education in the infant toddler centres and preschools of Reggio Emilia Italy, suggests that the educators image of the child is where teaching begins. Educational settings in Reggio have gained international recognition for their approach to making children's learning visible through pedagogical documentation, which also gives visibility to the educators image of the child "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, and most of all, connected to adults and other children" (Malaguzzi, 1993, p.10). This presentation will explore how the early childhood educator can use pedagogical documentation to give visibility to the `rich` child within a broad ecological framework.

Natural Affordances: Changes and Challenges in Outdoor Provision for under 3's

Carol Duffy (Early Childhood Ireland)

In Early Childhood Ireland, we know that children need nature in their environment (Warden, 2007, White, 2008). The capacity of the natural world to instil pleasure, joy, awe and wonder is powerful (Carson, 1998). This 3 year longitudinal study, supported by Early Childhood Ireland, tracks outdoor experiences of a child from birth to three. Highlighting the affordances of outdoor engagement in natural settings, a potent tapestry of a child's outdoor experiences emerges. The powerful effect of the outdoors on young children is demonstrated. The findings support the need for systematic change. Challenges and recommendations for new paradigms of practice within early years provision are presented.

Triona O'Connor (Bessborough Centre Crèche)

This paper discusses the findings of a case study completed of three groups of children all aged less than three years in a full day care crèche setting. The paper includes an analysis of the rich learning outcomes offered through play and extensive exploration in a risk rich outdoor environment. This is a qualitative study composed thorough close observation and consultation with children and a detailed analysis of observations of the interactions between early years professionals and the children. The centres goal is to prepare and provide the most natural and life enhancing environment for the child, observing the children and continually adapting the environment to support the fulfilment of the child's greatest potential – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Early Years Practitioner’s perspectives on their own professionalism and the professionalisation of their Sector

Caroline McDonnell

The ECEC workforce has and continues to undergo an enormous metamorphosis in their level of qualifications. The number of colleges providing part-time degree courses in ECEC for experienced EYPs who are currently working in services has increased dramatically over the last number of years. For these reasons, this research explored the perspectives of experienced EYPs as they pursued higher educational attainment. It explored what defines professionalism in an ECEC context and examined the reasons for EYPs increasing their qualifications. It also investigated whether their increased learning and educational qualifications was impacting on themselves and their services and also explored the many characteristics that accompany their pursuit to higher qualifications. A small group of ECEC students, who were in their final year of academia, participated in the study. A qualitative method of research was used which included the self-administration of an open-ended questionnaire. The research identified a positive link between EYPs higher qualifications and their sense of professionalism, increased confidence, skill and knowledge base but cited a low societal level of value for the complex and diverse work undertaken by EYPs. The findings suggest that a highly qualified graduate led workforce will heighten the professionalisation of the sector which in turn will promote a societal shift in the perceptions of society about the ECEC workforce being recognised as professionals. Recommendations include that managers and room leaders in all Early Years services for children 0 – 6, should have degree levels of training in ECEC in order to support the professionalisation of the sector.

Is unionisation needed in order to improve the pay and working conditions of those employed in Irelands ECCE sector?

Colette Saunders Jenks

This research topic explored whether or not unionisation was needed in order to improve the pay and working conditions of those employed in Irelands ECCE sector. The use of a qualitative research approach elicited subjective responses rich in detail about the human side to this social issue. Findings highlighted unionisation was recognised as a need and that the time has come for our government to move beyond what has been described as rhetoric. Consequently, improved pay and conditions must be considered essential determinants of quality by all stakeholders concerned, alongside the importance and value of early childhood care and education.

RESEARCH PAPERS SESSION 3 (15.30 to 16.30)

Room WW5: STRAND A: Professional Practice 4

Participation patterns in the “Free Pre-School year”

Ciara Brady

Irish policy has put measures in place to support educational outcomes of children through the introduction of the “Free Pre-School year”. This paper explores participation patterns within the scheme. Specifically, this research explores parent’s patterns of usage of this initiative, is it a support to learning or as an extension of childcare? Data was gathered using realist and interpretive paradigms and associated methods of data collection. Early results indicate that whilst the majority of parents value pre-school, all do not. There also appears to be a desire that care and education is equally valued and nurtured within pre-schools, something that may be lost in a formalised early education environment.

Improving quality Early Childhood Care and Education: A comparison of stakeholders’ views

Wendy Oke

This study analysed the components which determine quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) based on stakeholders’ views. This was accomplished through qualitative and quantitative methods namely through a review of the literature, in-depth interviews and questionnaires.

The findings from the research show a general dissatisfaction within the ECCE sector in regard to minimal resources and supports for both Early Years Educators and Parents. These findings also show that the impact of an over-regulated and disjointed sector on the primary stakeholders is greater and more complex than previously assumed. The study concluded that quality ECCE is premised on both structural and process aspects of quality with greater emphasis placed on the latter. Although in order for high quality ECCE to become a reality, the recommendation is then for greater state involvement in regards to funding and support within the Early Childhood Education and Care.

Room WW6: STRAND B: Curriculum and Play 3

Work Versus Play: A Challenge for Montessori Practitioners?

Sinead Matson

This study examined whether Montessori materials meet the child's need for imaginative play and fantasy play. The materials were found to meet children's organic need but, practitioner's various understandings of Maria Montessori's writings influenced how they facilitated children to use and manipulate the materials. The definition of play in Aistear was examined and found to be descriptive of current practice in Montessori classrooms. Overall this study shows that the work versus play argument, which was brought to the fore by the requirement to use Aistear is a false dichotomy.

Benefits of creating animation in early childhood

Belinda Walsh

Young children today are immersed in media and in particular animation, as it is found in television, movies, and video games. Change is the basis of all animation and the exploration of techniques such as Pixilation, Time-Lapse, Hand-Drawn, Cut- Out, Slowmation and Claymation offers a fun and stimulating way to tell a story or explore social or personal issues.

This paper will look at the way animation can be used to stimulate creative thinking, promote teamwork and develop communication skills. This affordable and easy to use tool can also be used in conjunction with Aistear and the school curriculum.

Cultivated play: Extending Sutton-Smith's rhetorics of play

Annie Cummins

Play is regarded as the core of childhood and yet its ambiguity makes it difficult to define as the word itself encapsulates a multiplicity of activities. Sutton-Smith (1997) believed that idealised notions of children's play have clouded theoretical perspectives. He posits seven rhetoric's that dominate current discourse; progress, fate, imagination, identity, power, self and frivolity. During the second half of the 21st century, the institutionalisation of children's time and space created an environment for 'cultivated' play or adult directed play. This paper will outline the leading narratives of play and will examine the implications cultivated play has on children's lives.

Room WW9: STRAND C: Professional Practice 5

How 'Community of Practice' can be applied to the Early Years Profession in County Kildare.

Debbie Mullen, Julie McNamara

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a profession. It is through the process of the profession sharing information and experiences within a group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally (Lave & Wenger 1991). Early Childhood Ireland and Kildare County Childcare Committee have explored how CoP can be applied to the Early Years profession in County Kildare with the aim of sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance Early Years professional practice and to facilitate interaction on an ongoing basis between Early Years Professionals.

Being and Becoming leaderful in the early years : children as leaders within Early Childhood Care and Education settings.

Lorraine O'Connor

This paper will examine children as leaders within Early Childhood Care and Education settings. Each day, children are on a journey, in exploring their environment and leading their own learning. Waniganayake and Semann (2011) suggest leadership in childhood as a 'transition' whereby children are 'being and becoming leaders'. At the same time, Grazier and Meade (2008) speak of children's leadership as a reciprocal relationship with older peers. This paper will examine current thinking and practice towards children as leaders from an Irish perspective, and it will explore how we as adults, can support children to be leaderful.
