



# OMEP 2019

## IRELAND CONFERENCE



Relationship Matters &  
What Matters in Early  
Years Relationships

# Book of Abstracts





## *Promoting early childhood*

### **Education and Care**

OMEP assists in undertakings that have the objective of improving early childhood education and care in its broadest interpretation.



## WELCOME TO OMEP IRELAND NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2019

**Dear colleagues and friends,**

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to Cork Institute of Technology for our National OMEP Conference 2019.

OMEP is an international, non-governmental and non-profit organisation concerned with all aspects of Early Childhood Education and Care. The mission of OMEP Ireland is to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood experiences by supporting early year's research and sharing knowledge about what we can do to improve children's lives.

We are delighted to have you with us to participate and share in our National Conference. Many delegates have travelled long distances to be here and this serves as a reminder to us all just how important our work with and on behalf of children is.

OMEP annual Conference is the premier forum to present and discuss progress in research, development, standards, and applications of the topics related to early childhood. Today's conference offers high quality research sessions, review sessions, workshops and symposia.

The conference theme for 2019 is '**Relationship Matters & What Matters in Early Years Relationships**' and is of particular significance. Relationships are important on so many levels across the life course. Creating environments for children that promote a culture of care, a sense of belonging and positive relationships are at the heart and soul of professional practice.

We are delighted to welcome members from **PLÉ, the National Association of Higher Education Institutions**, who launch their **Best Practice Guidelines for Professional Practice Placement Experience in Initial Early Childhood Education and Care Professional Development** today. Furthermore, following a vigorous review, the **2019 OMEP Ireland Student of the Year award** will be presented today. We would like to thank every lecturer and student for their impressive submissions and congratulate our very deserving winner. The award winner will have their work published in *An Leanbh Óg* vol. 13, which will be published in 2020, so keep an eye out for this inspiring piece of writing.

All of this has been possible thanks to your participation, and the support of our sponsors including the generosity of our expert keynote speakers, Dr Maeve Hurley and Ms Lorraine Hurley. We would also like to acknowledge the tremendous support given to OMEP Ireland by CIT, and in particular by Dr Cian O'Neill Department of Sport, Leisure and Childhood Studies, and Professor Margaret Linehan Head of School of Humanities.

We sincerely hope you enjoy your attendance today.

### **OMEP National Committee 2019**

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OMEP is an international, non-governmental and non-profit organization 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 and within 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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# Abstracts

## **1. Examining Trauma-informed care as an approach that addresses early childhood experiences of trauma through relationships.**

**Presenter: Maria Lotty**

Trauma-informed care is an approach that seeks to address the experience of early trauma. This presentation will describe the approach and its application. It will emphasise the importance of relationships, specifically developing skills in creating positive co-regulatory relational experiences in their interactions with children and how these promote children's feeling of safety, capacity to develop trusting relationships and a pathway for promoting the child's coping skills. This presentation will draw from a current PhD study which designed, developed and evaluated a trauma-informed care intervention. It will demonstrate that the child-adult relationship is the key mechanism of change for reducing the child's trauma-related difficulties.

## **2. How Communities of Practice inspires the Early Learning and Care Sector in Kildare.**

**Presenter: Debbie Mullen**

Communities of practice (CoP) are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. (Lave & Wenger 1991). Early Childhood Ireland and Kildare County Childcare Committee have explored and researched how a community of practice can be applied and inspire the Early Learning and Care Sector in County Kildare. Relationship building among the Early Learning and Care professionals from local settings and the mutual support and encouragement they have for each other was one of the most significant research findings.

## **3. Hearing infant voices within patterns of infant-practitioner interactions in nursery provision**

**Presenter: Caroline Guard**

The enduring benefits of reciprocal relationships in the home have been extensively documented, yet there has been an insufficient exploration of the infant-adult relationship in nurseries. Little is known about the interactions that occur in baby room environments, although they will differ from those in the home, which are underpinned by intimacy and love. Emerging from an interpretivist paradigm of ethnographic origin, this study situates the infant as a sophisticated storyteller who takes a conscious role within emerging relationships, using their 'voice' to entice adults into their world. Frequent synchronised encounters with others enable infants to construct an understanding of their social world and these encounters will be shaped by various components including; parents, staff, nursery culture and structural organisation. This study documents the patterns of communication that

occur between infants and practitioners across four nurseries in England whilst acknowledging how the broader culture of the nursery may shape encounters and emerging attachments.

\*This study is sponsored by the Froebel Trust.

#### **4. The Therapeutic Benefits of Clay Work with Preschoolers.**

**Presenter: Julie Meighan**

Clay is a strong expressive medium and is ideal for enhancing children's development and holistic learning. Children are attracted to clay's visual appeal and it is an intense sensory experience of touching and haptic involvement. Clay allows children to express their creativity as well as enabling them to articulate their thoughts and feelings in a non-verbal way. The therapeutic qualities of clay stem primarily from its malleability and its physical qualities and it can embody a symbolic or concrete form. This presentation will examine the therapeutic benefits of clay and how it facilitates self-expression, emotional release and communication in preschoolers.

#### **5. How do I improve my practice as a volunteer activist supporting trade unionisation of Ireland's Early Years workforce?**

**Presenter: Colette Saunders**

An explicit aim of my action research project is to identify how I can improve my practice as a volunteer activist supporting trade unionisation of Ireland's early years workforce. I feel strongly, that trade union representation means the workforce will be taken seriously and as a result, the relationships formed during the process will ensure that Ireland's early years workforce will continue to matter. As my practice evolved, I recognised I was engaging in continuous cycles of action and reflection. Two "core" action research cycles emerged. The first cycle focused on how I could become active in my own right as an early years professional and researcher. The second action research cycle incorporated the write-up and dissemination of findings associated with the project. When considering the wider societal impacts my research will have, there is a real possibility the workforce and its relationships with stakeholders will flourish once the sector is collectively organised. I intend to share my knowledge in order to educate and empower potential union members so as to enable them to make choices pertaining to their profession. These choices will send a clear message that trade union representation is an important feature of early years relationships now and into the future.

## **6. The Impact of having a sibling with a Life-Limiting Illness.**

**Author: Michelle Hartnett**

Can having a sibling with a profound disability or LLI, as Rossiter 2001 suggests, have a detrimental effect on the psychological functioning of a healthy sibling? Research from Vermaes et al illustrated a statistically significant negative effect with children exhibiting more internalising and externalising problems. Literature was first retrieved with a search strategy in nine major health-related databases. While siblings reported feeling different from peers, most adopt strategies to manage and balance both their home and school commitments. Furthermore, carving a role for themselves as a carer appears to contribute to a sense of self-worth within the family.

## **7. Relationship Matters & What Matters in Early Years Relationships**

**Presenter: Dr Carol Yelverton-Halpin**

The inter-reliance between young children and adults in Relationship Matters is key today. Bourdieu's Cultural Capital and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems are essential in informing this discussion. The First World phenomenon of how technology impacts verbal and nonverbal communication, is creating a rift between children and adults causing relationships to be eroded. Relationships and communication are central to human behaviour and the development of listening skills is a crucial part of the process of communication. Discussing the challenges of the current social environment to optimum communication between adults and young children is the best place to begin the socio-ecological discussion of 'What Matters in Early Years Relationships'. Over the century's children basic need to communicate hasn't changed, however, many other circumstances have influence change for them. The interdependence of communication between child and adult is the bedrock of society. How one affects the other is the key to understanding how we have developed as both child and adult.

## **8. Big Start Campaign**

**Presenter: Theresa Butler**

Parents are paying too much for childcare. Educators are paid too little and are struggling to make ends meet. Providers are struggling to retain staff and sustain their services. Everyone is getting a raw deal. Simply put, the Early Years sector is in crisis. This is why SIPTU launched the "Big Start" Campaign in 2016. By bringing educators, parents and providers together we are becoming a strong voice that the Government cannot ignore. We are demanding adequate investment into the Early Years sector to make it affordable, accessible, high quality with professional pay & conditions for educators and sustainable services for providers.



## **9. Valued aspects for professional practice in the socio-educational context of Daycare: Perspectives of Portuguese parents and practitioners.**

**Presenters: Barbara Tadeu & Amelia Lopes**

This work explored the aspects valued by parents and practitioners in daycare practices, specifically, in baby rooms. We define the research context and present results from other studies that had identical objectives. The articulation of the theoretical framework with the participants' voices, examined through three focus discussion groups, contributed to the study and in-depth knowledge of the theme, as well as to the study of the professional identities of the early childhood educators who perform their professionals in baby rooms. All participants valued the same aspects, giving supremacy to the affective characteristics and to the emotional components existing in the relationships between professionals and children.

This work was supported by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) and by the European Social Fund – Human Capital Operational Programme (POCH) from Portugal 2020 Programme, under the Doctoral Programme in Education of the University of Porto [PhD grant nº. PD/BD/ 135471/2017]; and by the Portuguese Government, through the FCT, under the strategic funding awarded to CIIE – Centre for Research and Intervention in Education [grant nº. UID/CED/00167/2013].

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## **10. Universal Design creating nurturing spaces for all.**

**Presenter: Maire Corbett**

In 2018, Early Childhood Ireland and partner organisations (Trinity Haus, Mary Immaculate College and Nathan Somers Design) were commissioned by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Centre of Excellence in Universal Design to develop Universal Design Guidelines for Early Learning and Care settings, to support the access of all children to nurturing, rich, early years environments. These settings must be comfortable and accessible for parents and practitioners. This kind of accessibility is vital so authentic relationships can be developed and deepened.

The presentation will outline ethical considerations and findings from the case studies and the literature review and will describe the content of the guidelines and the self-audit tool.

## **11. What's Love got to do with it?**

**Presenter: Maire Corbett**

In 2009, I completed my MA dissertation called What's Love got to do with it. This practitioner research study was informed by the polyvocal ethnography approach used by Tobin et al (1989) in their study of Preschools in Three Cultures. I was also influenced by the Interaction Analysis discourse of Jordan and Henderson (1995). The rationale for and the research underpinning this dissertation along with the ethical considerations and implications for practice will be outlined and discussed. Chief among these implications is the need for practitioners to be supported in their work in supporting children's emotional development. Parents also need to be emotionally supported themselves to appreciate the importance of their child being.

## **12. In, out and through digital worlds. Hybrid-transitions as a space for children's agency**

**Presenter: Dr. Federico Farini**

By discussing ethnographic observations undertaken during computer-enhanced learning activities in a kindergartner in Boston, this presentation introduces hybrid-transitions as a theoretical tool to conceptualise transitions between the use of digitally enhanced and non-digitally enhanced experiences as spaces of children's agency. During hybrid transitions, digital experiences are combined with non-digital experiences to generate personal narratives that are "interlaced" in co-constructed group narratives authored by children via face-to-face interactions. The construction of narratives displays agency because firstly, it is underpinned by children's choices and secondly, it influences the context of children's participation by supporting mobile group identities including temporary, but nevertheless important, small group cultures

## **13. Everyone has a story to tell: Parents perceptions of 'child's voice' through a community engagement model.**

**Presenter: Alison Moore**

Early findings from my PhD, explores practitioner and parent understanding of child's voice in Children Centres in the UK, examining how the child's voice can be authentically heard in ways that create an open listening climate.

The theoretical framework draws on Bronfenbrenner (1993) and a rights model of participation (Lundy 2007) forms a basis of reflection

Using multi-methods to collect data, working alongside practitioners and parents. Constructing narratives of 'thick' descriptions (Geertz 1973) for reporting, analysing and disseminating findings.

The research has ethical approval from the Institution, drawing on EECERA Ethical

Code (2015) and the UNCRC (1989).

The presentation will stimulate a discussion based on early findings and analysis of exploring parents' perspectives on community engagement. To facilitate a sharing of good practice, informing change, advancing for understanding and influencing both policy and practice.

#### **14. Relationship Matters & What Matters in Early Years Relationships' through the lens of respecting babies' and toddler's participation rights in ECEC.**

**Presenter: Sandra O' Neill**

2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). Children's right to participate has become synonymous with 'choice and voice' but more recent research espouses a relational approach to children's rights in ECEC. Following the conference theme 'Relationship Matters & What Matters in Early Years Relationships' this session will explore the importance of relationships in enabling children's rights in ECEC, with a particular focus on birth to three.

#### **15. Exploring the Significance of Micro and Macro Relationships in the Experiences of Young Children on the Autism Spectrum as they and their Families Navigate the Irish Early Years' Education System.**

**Presenter: Dr Sarah O'Leary**

Recent changes to Irish education policy on the inclusion of children with special education needs have deeply impacted the experiences of young children on the autism spectrum as they navigate the Irish Early Years' Education System. The inclusion of these young children now relies, not only on the availability of supports and the level of understanding of autism within different contexts but moreover, on the relationships forged in their homes, schools and the wider community. This research explores these inter-contextual experiences, guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Theory of Child Development, to encompass and interpret the dominant micro and macro narratives present.

## **16. Interactive, Intentional, Impactful: Improving Communication to Support Development: Using Mindful Communication to Deepen Understanding, Strengthen Relationships, and Support Development.**

**Presenter: Dr Molly K. Gerrish**

Meaningful communication and interactions with young children are vital to their overall development. This session will explore the various communication patterns used with children and the relationship between communication and social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development as well as explore ways to make interactions more intentional, interactive, and impactful. Techniques for making meaningful changes to early childhood programs and how to be more mindful in communications with young children will be shared as well as ways to support parents and families in doing so with their children. The importance of communication to forming and strengthening relationships is a highlight. Research findings focused on techniques and outcomes of implementing powerful communication interaction techniques using varied types of communication (verbal, non-verbal, informal, formal, written, visual) and their importance in forming intentional relationships and communicating with more impact and meaning will be discussed

## **17. Locating meaningful creative experiences within the ECEC environment**

**Presenter: Evelyn Egan**

The environment can positively or negatively affect learning and development. Isenberg and Jalongo (2018) explain how a positive environment makes the child feel valued and recognised. A negative environment, on the other hand, creates unease and stress, giving the child a sense of poor self-worth.

The environment is not to be perceived as merely a physical space within a centre but rather as a multi-faceted concept. Davis et al., (2013) refer to the multiplicity of environmental factors which constitute a learning environment. The physical space or surroundings, accessibility to educational resources and materials, use of the outdoors, the pedagogical environment and environments beyond the school all constitute an 'environment'. It also includes play-based learning, as well as the relationship between the educator and the child. Time is a fundament of the creative process and Runco (2019) stresses that children need to be afforded adequate periods of time to engage meaningfully in creative engagement. Davis and McGregor (2016) in specific reference to early years, claim that themed areas with set goals and defined parameters deny children the imaginative freedom to move and learn between environments. Learning environments ought to be open and adaptable, rather than rigid and closed, in their use of space, in order for creativity to truly flourish within and between spaces. Children should be facilitated with sensory experiences and allowed to explore kinaesthetically, stimulating their sense of wonder, inquiry and imagination. Organization of materials is necessary, as a materials-rich environment welcomes discovery and interactions.

This presentation aims to demonstrate how the learning environment when used effectively, by locating meaningful creative experiences within that environment, fosters the child's holistic development.

## **18. Children's relationship with their community and wider society**

**Presenter: Aishling Silke**

Síolta: the National Quality Framework, notes the importance of enabling children to engage with their local community. Standard 16 – Community Involvement, promotes the creation of a sense of community belonging and attachment to support the relationship between a child and their community. Declining visibility of children in the community and society caused by advances in technology, urban sprawl, and the demand for parents to remain in employment, impacts on children's ability to develop this relationship. A discussion on why relationship matters, is required to ensure children remain visible and for society to value the contribution they make as citizens of the State.

## **19. The term 'child-friendly': a hindrance or a facilitator to young children's intergenerational relationships**

**Presenter: Chris Gomez**

This paper builds upon a comparative study undertaken from 2006-2012. In this study, I looked at societal attitudes towards young children in England and Spain. A key part of this investigation focused upon the term 'child-friendly' and how it was interpreted in different contexts. It became evident that this term was used to welcome children but also to warn adults that children would be present. In this paper I revisit this term to look at how it is being employed in 2019 and to think about whether it acts as a hindrance or a facilitator to young children's integration into intergenerational spaces.

## **20. How are Young Children's Relationships with Nature Currently Valued and Supported through Play in the Early Years Setting?**

**Presenter: Mary Coleman**

Children's habitats have changed. Working parents, busy lifestyles, safety fears, urbanization and addictive technology, allow less time to play in nature. This research explored early years practitioners' views on the value and benefits of playing in natural environments; what barriers exist; how these may be overcome.

This research took place across County Cork, in 2018. The research found ECEC practitioners valued the benefits of nature play, especially towards physical health, well-being, happiness and holistic development. However, they needed more time

and professional development to support more ethical values of sustainability and spirituality. Barriers included adult attitudes, relationship with nature, and access and regulations.

## **21.Supporting the development of children’s well-being in preschool**

**Presenter: Juliette Aherne**

Interest in children’s well-being has increased over the last number of years due to emergent statistics on children’s mental health. This presentation, based on a minor research dissertation (BA/NUI Galway), explores the importance of recognising childhood as a unique stage of identity and how preschool is an optimum setting to support children in developing well-being. Comparing the interdependent nature of the areas of well-being to a web – touch the web anywhere and the effect is felt throughout. This research explored how early years practitioners are supporting areas of well-being development, such as agency, secure relationships, self-esteem, through quality care and education experiences.

## **22.Reading activity and its effect on the development of children's learning and relationships**

**Poster Presentation: Emma Ambrose**

During my placement as part of the Early Years and Childhood Studies course at University College Cork, I conducted a reading activity with a small group of children in an early years setting. The reading activity involved reading a book, engaging with the children afterwards in a discussion, and using a handmade prop to further promote interactions and child development. According to Vygotsky, it is through peer and adult interactions that children learn and develop relationships, and it was Piaget who said that it is through play that children are able to form relationships. Therefore, this reading activity was a good way to develop relationships between the children themselves and the children and myself. The handmade prop is a story timeline, with figures, which encourages the children to retell the story in their own words, as well as engage in free-play. This encourages children’s social, cognitive, emotional, and language development. In conclusion, this reading activity promoted the development of relationships while also promoting child development. I will present such conclusions in the form of a poster with video links.

## **23.Planning for Play in an Outdoor Preschool**

**Presenter: Steve Goode**

The outdoor preschool was set up with the intention to give children a different early years’ experience. With the introduction of the two-year ECCE programme in Ireland and the change in the economic situation that means children are attending

preschool for two years full time all years. Inspired by new ideas from a spatial understanding of play (Lester, 2018) and the difficulty of representing what is happening just in words (Lorimer, 2005), this action research considers ways of observing and planning for play in the outdoor preschool using a range of approaches (Wilson, 2018, Lester et al., 2014)

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## **24. Early years educators' information-seeking behaviours and their use of research evidence**

**Presenter: Liz Kerrins**

Accessing research findings and outputs and using them to improve professional practice, alongside contributing to the development of the professional knowledge base, are elements of being a professional early years educator. Early years educators in Ireland are emerging as a professional grouping. Yet, there is a dearth of Irish research literature on the information-seeking behaviours of early years educators (research outputs are considered a form of information); on the extent to which they access and use research findings; how they utilise research; and the barriers and enablers they encounter.

This paper reviews the international research literature to explore current understandings of:

- the information-seeking behaviours of early years educators;
- the extent to which they access and use research findings;
- How they use research and integrate research findings with their existing knowledge;
- The barriers and enablers to early year's educators' use of research in their professional practice.

## **25. Strengthening Foundations of Learning by Placing Relationships at the Centre of Early Childhood Education and Care.**

**Presenters: Sandra Cully**

Strengthening Foundations for Learning (SFL) is a professional development programme for early years educators working in an area of disadvantage in Dublin as part of the Preparing for Life Programme. Following an evaluation by Professor Nóirín Hayes, phase two provides educators with a nurturing mentoring experience and encourages reflection on practice within a quality development programme.

This new program aims to build the capacity of educators to be “responsive, sensitive and reciprocal” in their interactions with children. These nurturing stable relationships can provide buffering effects against the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on children’s development. The paper will provide a discussion of the above.

## **26. The relationship between neighbours, neighbourhoods and outdoor play in young children**

**Presenters: Dr Jennifer Pope and Dr Suzanne M. Egan**

Research shows both the physical environment and the social capital of neighbourhoods influence levels of outdoor play. Drawing on data from a nationally representative sample of 5-year-old children in the Growing Up in Ireland study, the aim of this research was to investigate the effect of these factors on levels of outdoor play. Key findings suggest that levels of outdoor play were predicted by parent’s perceptions of neighbourhood safety. Factors relating to neighbourhood cohesion, neighbourhood facilities, anti-social behaviour and heavy traffic also predicted levels of outdoor play. The practical and policy implications of the findings are considered.

## **27. Happy Talk; How Targeted Universal Models of Care Can Work to Engage Parents Living in Disadvantage**

**Presenters: Aoife O’ Shea**

**Background:** Happy Talk (HT) is an HSE model of care, targeting the language development of children aged 0 – 6 years, working in Cork City since 2011. HT currently works in 75+ early education settings and DEIS schools, as well as other community-based settings. HT has been shown to consistently achieve >60% parental engagement in its Parent Coaching and Training Programmes. High levels of parental engagement are key to the positive outcomes of HT.

**Research Aims:** Explore how a targeted universal approach to community-based language development interventions can work to engage parents in an active and meaningful way by presenting quantitative and qualitative data re parental engagement in HT and presenting and exploring the techniques and resources used in HT to engage parents.

**Method:** Sharing results from parent questionnaire, parent focus groups, as well as stats with regard to parental attendance and engagement in Happy Talk Programmes.

**Results:** Results indicate that the techniques and resources used by Happy Talk encourage high levels of parental engagement (>60% since 2011). Questionnaires and focus groups reveal that teachers and parents value the Happy



Talk service. It reduces inequalities and gives an increased sense of power and agency. **Discussion:** Description of techniques and resources developed and used by Happy Talk Team to encourage and improve parental involvement. Correlation between the input of resources and attitudes, and levels of parental engagement. Barriers and challenges to parental engagement.

**Conclusion:** Outcomes suggest that parental engagement is key to the success of universal targeted speech and language therapy models of care.

## **28. My Place to Play Programme: creating a dedicated place to play for infants and their families living in emergency accommodation.**

**Presenters: Marion Byrne & Alison Pidgeon**

This action research project presents an inter-agency response to supporting infants living in emergency accommodation. Through providing families with a play mat and accompanying materials, and creating a dedicated space for play, parents are equipped with the knowledge to support their infant's development. To date, 80 practitioners and 220 families across Dublin's City North have participated in the programme with findings from a post-implementation survey highlighting how the mat was a safe and secure place for the babies to play, and facilitated discussions on the importance of tummy time and play. Future directions of the project will be shared.

## **29. 'The importance of play in enhancing the social relationships of children on the Autism Spectrum'**

**Presenters: Christina O'Keeffe and Dr Tish Balfe**

Play is an integral aspect of early childhood and the vehicle through which young children develop lifelong social interaction skills (Barnett, 2018). For students on the Autism Spectrum (AS), difficulties in social communication are compounded by challenges in accessing play opportunities. Such difficulties potentially further exacerbate feelings of isolation (Hess, 2006) and may inhibit the development of social interaction skills and the formation of friendships (Kasari et al., 2016). This paper argues for a fresh consideration of how to support play opportunities for young children on the AS in order to best support social relationships and opportunities for learning and development.

### **30. Building Strong Partnership between the Educational Institution and the Placement Supervisor**

**Presenter: Patsy Baissangourov**

Practice Placement affords the ECEC student the opportunity to contextualise learning in a concrete manner (Cousins 2006; Hunt 2006). This paper will discuss measures which the educational institution can adopt to support a strong partnership with the ECEC service provider in offering placement experiences that assist in empowering future leaders in practice. Student perceptions from a qualitative study will be discussed along with input from service supervisors.

It is anticipated that this presentation can promote reflection on individual roles and experiences in the relationship between college and setting. Furthermore, how best to collaboratively empower students to grow and develop as competent practitioners, who will direct and question practice in the child's interest and hold the child at the forefront of all practice decisions.

### **31. The '5 Pillars of Parenting' programmes enable significant alterations in family relationships, with a positive influence on family life and wellbeing.**

**Presenter: Kathleen Roche Nagi**

Approachable Parenting successfully engages with parents who were previously reluctant to engage with parenting programmes, either because they are not linked to their culture or beliefs, or they felt they were not for them. Although research has identified a need for cultural specificity, most have been strongly influenced by Western values (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, and Bellamy, 2002)

The presentation looks at how a specially designed parenting programme can influence parental relationships and outcomes by using psychological principles within an Islamic framework to form a motivational change within families.

### **32. Paradox, Challenge and Opportunity in Early Childhood Education Developments Globally**

**Presenter: Dr Mary Moloney**

Education policies in individual countries are shaped by national and international influences including cultural, social, political and economic aspects. At a national level, policies are underpinned by certain values, assumptions and beliefs about children, parents and educators Drawing upon models of Early Childhood Curriculum (Finland, New Zealand and Ireland), the International Early Learning Study (OECD, 2016), and the proposed revisions to the primary school curriculum in Ireland, this

paper queries how children, parents and professionals are positioned within the early childhood education policy domain. It challenges assumptions of managerialism and neoliberalism, where issues of accountability are intertwined with the discourse of outcomes, investment and value for money and, it explores opportunities for early childhood professionals to resist top-down directives to engage in performance-driven outcomes that are at odds with a rights-based approach to children's early education.

### **33. 'Leave the key and they come in': Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education and Care**

**Presenter: Dr Mary Moloney**

Parents are considered to be the most important partners in their child's education and care (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009; DCYA, 2015). Indeed, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory stresses the importance of 'bi-directional' influences in the child's immediate surroundings of home and pre-school for example as being paramount. However, parental involvement takes many forms ranging from communicating to volunteering to decision making (Epstein, 2002). During a research sabbatical at the Centre for the Study of Childcare Employment, UC Berkeley in 2018, I visited ten early childhood settings located in the Bay area. Through interviews with setting managers and teachers as well as observations of practice, I was struck by the various ways in which parents contributed to and, were involved in their child's early childhood setting. Practices included taking responsibility for the garden, washing bed linen and, cooking meals. While some of the practices would certainly prove difficult in an Irish legislative/regulatory context, they provide a unique insight into how professionals and parents can work together in innovative ways to support children's early education and ensure the efficient running of early childhood services.

### **34. An exploration of the regulations and policies that guide Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) practice in Ireland.**

**Presenter: Johanna O'Flynn**

This study aims to explore the regulations and policies that guide Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) practice in Ireland. It explores the rationale, regulations, policy-making process and impact of regulation and policy on the ECEC sector and practice. In total 5 participants contributed to this qualitative research, identifying what has informed ECEC regulation and policy, highlighting the impact of implementation and exploring changes to further enhance policy and provision. Key findings suggest that regulation and policy in the ECEC sector has progressed significantly over the last two decades, predominantly protecting and safeguarding the welfare of children and prioritising the provision for inclusion of children with additional needs. However, whilst funding has increased, there continues to be a lack of provision for the workforce, with poor standards of pay and lack of consultation

as stakeholders. Fundamentally, the increase of regulation and policy, and indeed pressure to meet criteria and requirements from three independent inspectorate bodies (POBAL, TUSLA and DES) together with the lack of support to implement practice frameworks have appeared to overwhelm the ECEC workforce. Key recommendations call for a unified inspectorate body, unionisation of the ECEC sector and considerable consultation with stakeholders in relation to all issues that impact on the profession and sector. Finally, this research also recommends, regular subsidised Continuous Professional Development in relation to the understanding and implementation of National Frameworks: Aistear (2009) and Síolta (2006) for all practitioners, so that all children have access to high-quality early childhood care and education.

### **35.Home Visits: Say goodbye to tears and hello to secure relationships with both child and parents**

**Presenters: Denise Flood & Natasha Murphy**

Throughout a child's life, they experience various transitions. The first major transition is often from a child's home to an early years' service (CECDE, 2007). The role of the practitioner is to lay the foundations to support this transition (DES, 2017). A home-visit prior to the child starting school fosters a secure and safe relationship between child, family and practitioner, therefore smoothing the settling-in process (CECDE, 2007). My setting is a two practitioner, Montessori school located in an inner-city area. It caters for 36 children in total. Within the setting, the child and families come from various cultural backgrounds and there are sixteen different home languages. Due to the variety of cultural backgrounds and nationalities, I felt ill-equipped in supporting their transition to the setting, and inadequate in nurturing their sense of identity and belonging. Therefore, I wanted to gain a greater understanding of their home culture/language prior to the school start date and to aid their settling in process, while also giving parents an opportunity to share their knowledge on the child as they are the primary educators (Datta, 2000; NCCA, 2009). Most parents welcomed the visit. The home visits aided a smooth settling-in process, the children who had been visited shed no tears on the first day of school as staff had an insight into the children's interests, languages etc. and this supported planning for the first weeks.

### **36. We want to be Early Years Educators”: An exploratory study of the lived experiences of Early Years Educators’ journey to becoming qualified degree graduates and their subsequent transition to full-time employment within an Early Years setting.**

**Presenter: Caroline McDonnell**

This paper will explore the lived experiences of newly qualified Educators (NQE) on their journey of training for and their early career experiences as NQEs, now working in Early Years settings. It investigates the factors within their personal and professional lives that support or hinder, not only their continued learning and development, but also their intrinsic motivation to remain working as Early Years Educators (EYE), despite the current low remuneration, and the complex and diverse work challenges of working in EY settings. An interpretivist approach was employed in the design of the research. In-depth interviews were collected, with data analysed using a thematic approach. Preliminary findings suggest that EYEs professional practice placement during their studies had a profound effect, both positive and negative, on their future career perspectives; appropriate induction programs for NQEs was absent in all of the participants’ workplaces; lack of communication with management caused overwhelming stress and anxiety among NQE. Ultimately, 57% of the participants have made the decision to leave their current employment, some in pursuit of alternative employment outside of the ECEC sector and some to gain postgraduate qualifications. The remaining 43% of participants plan to remain in their current jobs as EYEs, but despite their admission of low pay, they enjoy a supportive work environment, emotional capital and experience high levels of job satisfaction that currently meets their lifestyle needs.

### **37. The importance of home-school relationships in the early years of children’s education. Marino Institute of Education**

**Research team: Dr Joan Kiely, Dr Leah O’Toole, Dr Maja Haals Brosnan, Emma O’Brien and Cliona O’Keeffe**

Between 2017 and 2019, Marino Institute of Education (MIE) conducted a piece of research jointly funded by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the National Parents Council (NPC) to study the processes of parental involvement, engagement and partnership in their children’s learning in the primary school years. Part 1 consisted of a review of relevant national and international literature which was published in March 2019 (available at <http://www.npc.ie/publications/books>). Part 2 called for the development of case studies of parental engagement in five primary schools in Ireland. The perspectives of key stakeholders were to be sought, including parents, teachers, children and other relevant participants. A key finding of the research is the importance of relationships between school personnel and children’s parents in facilitating parental meaningful involvement in children’s education. The nature of such relationships, their value, nature and significance will be explored in this presentation and will be theorised within the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner’s Person-Process-Context-Time.

While the findings arose from a primary school context, important lessons can be drawn for the early childhood education context.

### **38.Examining the impact of teacher/pupil relationships on the realisation of children’s right to be heard.**

**Presenter: Jane Sullivan**

This paper presents findings from an ongoing PhD study that explores the barriers and enablers of children’s everyday lived participation within a primary school context. Relationships play a key role in children’s right to be heard (Graham et al. 2018; Wyness 2012; Mannion 2007), with educators having a dominant role in determining the boundaries and nature of relationships between educators and children. Employing Lundy’s (2007) model of participation and taking a spatial/relational approach to the research question, this paper identifies and unpacks the key issues in regards to teacher/pupil relationships which impact on opportunities for children’s informal participation.

### **39.Adopting the Laura Lundy Model of Participation to facilitate the active engagement of children and young people in their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).**

**Presenter: Sarah Gallagher**

The rights of the child, the voice of the child is very much spoken about and discussed among professionals dealing with young people and families engaging in different services. This paper will examine the adoption of the Laura Lundy Model of Participation in different settings and services that young people engage in. Through the adoption of the Laura Lundy model, young people are able to communicate more effectively with one another thus building stronger relationships built on mutual respect, gained from the facilitation of the Lundy Model. This paper will explore how relationships can become more transparent and clear among young people when the Lundy model is facilitated where appropriate. It will also explore the need for this to be adopted more within Irish services to see the impact it can have of young people’s lives that are lacking direction and guidance and to show how this model can also contribute to the aims of the Better Outcomes Brighter Future document.

## **40.Examining the impact of teacher / pupil relationships on the realisation of children's right to be heard.**

**Presenter: Jane O'Sullivan**

This paper presents findings from an ongoing PhD study that explores the barriers and enablers of children's everyday lived participation within a primary school context. Relationships play a key role in children's right to be heard (Graham et al. 2018; Wyness 2012; Mannion 2007), with educators having a dominant role in determining the boundaries and nature of relationships between educators and children. Employing Lundy's (2007) model of participation and taking a spatial/relational approach to the research question, this paper identifies and unpacks the key issues in regards to teacher/pupil relationships which impact on opportunities for children's informal participation.

## **1. Self-organized symposium:**

### **Symposium title: Meaningful relationships at the centre of a child-rights-based approach in Early Years**

This self-organized symposium brings together pressing findings from doctoral and other research studies related to the bases of relationships in the early years, embedded in a child-rights based approach. Please, see below each one of the abstracts and its author's respective contact details.

#### **Paper 1: Respect, Reciprocity and Responsibility**

**Author 1:** Oluwabunmi Olaniran

**Author 2:** Sheila Long

**Abstract:** The Irish Government, as a signatory of the UNCRC, has agreed that the education of babies and young children shall be directed to the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own. Adopting a children's rights perspective, and a critical orientation towards Western ECEC scholarship, this paper will critically examine the concept of respect in adult/child and in educator/student relationships, drawing on African Children's rights scholarship, ECEC scholarship, and Nigerian feminist scholarship to illuminate the empirical findings of Long (2017), a mixed-methods study on children's rights education with ECEC students and Olaniran (2019) a small scale qualitative study on ECEC educators views of identity and belonging.

#### **Paper 2: Trusting relationships between Early Childhood Teachers and parents - The relevance of an open relationship on parent partnerships**

**Author:** Melissa Bonotto

**Abstract:** The overall aim of this research is to examine the concept of early intervention 'happening early on a child's life' within the Family Support preschool context. It is embedded in the Bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and is primarily qualitative research, approved by the NUI Ethics committee.

Relationships emerged as a theme on how meaningful interactions are supported by Family Support preschools for children with additional needs. This paper will touch on preliminary findings showing how early childhood teachers build up an honest and open relationship with parents and how these partnerships help children with additional needs, access the supports they need.



## **Paper 3: Relationships the key to wellbeing and involvement**

**Author:** Rita Melia

**Abstract:** This research explores the quality of the adult/child relationship as a quality indicator and considers how relationships impact on preschool children's level of wellbeing and involvement as quality outcomes. The research was conducted in Ireland and Boston, USA. A mixed-methods ethnographic approach was used and data was collated using questionnaires, interviews and case studies. On-site observations were conducted, using the observational scales set out by the Reflect Respect Relate assessment toolkit in the Early Years. Data was analysed using SPSS, NVIVO and the observation tool. Findings identify that the quality of relationships impacts on children's levels of wellbeing and involvement.

## **2. Symposium title: Relationships the Key to Quality Early Years Provision. TUSLA**

**Contact:** Rita Melia

Self-organized symposium:

This self-organized symposium highlights the importance of relationships between and across the voluntary and statutory agencies which support and enhance quality provision in early year's settings. Four presentations will provide evidence of the importance of developing and maintaining relationships in supporting and improving quality early years provision.

### **Paper 1: Relationships: The key to supporting the development of the Quality and Regulatory framework.**

This paper outlines the public consultation process initiated by Tusla Early Years Inspectorate to explore the needs and challenges identified by the early year's sector, based on the introduction and implementation of the new Quality and Regulatory Framework. The findings of the research are being used to develop further supports for the early year's sector.

### **Paper 2: Relationships: Supporting policy decisions and implementation.**

The Early Years Inspectorate Consultative Forum, the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Support Forum and The Early Years Inspectorate Third Level Colleges Consultative Forum, have been established by Tusla to facilitate and support on-going relationships and mutual understandings. The representatives and stakeholders through relational consultation and dialogue contribute to supporting quality provision through, research policy and practice. There have been significant benefits resulting from the consultative processes, following the initiation of the three consultative Forums.

### **Paper 3: Relationships: Supporting compliance with the Early Years Services Regulations (Tusla & CCC)**

This pilot study conducted between Tusla Early Years inspectorate and County Childcare Committees in the North West, will identify the process and findings of a pilot programme where staff in the county childcare committees provide support to prospective and current early years providers in relation to the registration processes and following inspection and the corrective and preventative action processes. The importance of developing and maintaining relationships between organisations and providers will be highlighted in this presentation.

### **Paper 4: Relationships: Supporting the implementation of Siolta and Aistear (Better Start & Tusla)**

Tusla Early Years Inspectorate and Better Start (The National Early Years Quality Development) developed a memorandum of understanding which resulted in a Forum to facilitate collaboration between TUSLA and Better Start, in supporting quality improvement in early year's settings in August 2018. One year on, this paper will present an evaluation of the processes and identify the importance of positive relationships when supporting a quality improvement programme.

## **3. Workshop**

### **Title: Parental Conflict - Evidence and Impact**

**Dr Maeve Hurley**

**Ag Eisteacht**

Key messages from research, show the impact of parental conflict on children. Dr Maeve Hurley, founder of Ag Eisteacht, will introduce conflict as a normal part of relationships and will look at the effects of destructive and constructive conflict on children's health and wellbeing. Her presentation will include a powerful DVD, 'Kids talk', highlighting the impact of parental conflict on children. The different ways that children respond to conflict will be identified and participants will have the opportunity to consider the children in their care and what they observe.



## *Promoting early childhood*

### **Education and Care**

OMEP assists in undertakings that have the objective of improving early childhood education and care in its broadest interpretation.

