

CHAPTER 4 - QUALITY

CAIBIDIL 4 - CÁILÍOCHT

Quality of services in early childhood care and education must be viewed in a holistic way including planning, staff training and qualifications, physical and social environment, parental involvement, curriculum and methodology and child-adult interactions. It can be viewed from a variety of perspectives – that of the child, the parent, practitioner or external agency (French, 2003). Thus, quality is a highly subjective term, dependent on so many variables. It is this complex multiplicity of reasons that makes the demarcation and concept of quality difficult to define in simple statements and checklists (DES, 1999a).

Quality services are vital in the early years (French, 2003). The experiences of children during the formative years helps to shape their future – roots them in the world, helps them to relate to one another, allows them to feel included and involved and provides a foundation for all subsequent learning (DES, 1999b; DHC, 2000a). Services of a high quality develop positive lifelong learning dispositions in children while poor quality education and care can have a minimal or even detrimental effect on development (DES, 1999a). The improvement of quality requires an investment and commitment but it yields positive results for the children, parents and practitioners in the wider community involved in the service.

The early years sector in Ireland has developed with many integral positive features of quality such as the diversity in the range of services, the availability of services locally and a strong spirit of voluntarism. There are however many challenges to the strengthening of quality in the Irish context. Foremost among these are the low-status afforded to early years personnel, issues in relation to the training and education of practitioners, the prohibitive costs to parents and the deficiencies in state supports (IPPA, 2002a).

A number of government initiatives and publications in recent years have advocated the crucial role of quality in the provision of services and have progressed the implementation of quality services for children, including:

- The Childcare (Preschool Services) Regulations 1996 (DoH, 1996a) provide minimum standards, primarily for the health and safety of early childhood care and education settings.
- The National Childcare Strategy (DJELR, 1999c) cites Quality as one of its 5 objectives.
- The White Paper on Early Childhood Education, Ready to Learn (DES, 1999a) places quality at the core of all its services and proposes a Quality in Education Mark (QE) for service providers complying with regulations.

Ní mór breathnú ar cháilíocht seirbhísí i gcúram agus oideachas Luath-Óige ar bhealach iomlánaíoch, lena n-áirítear pleanáil, oiliúint foirne agus cáilíochtaí, timpeallacht fhisiceach agus shóisialach, páirtíocht tuismitheoirí, curaclam agus modheolaíocht agus imoibriú idir leanaí agus daoine fásta. Is féidir breathnú air ó réimse peirspictíochtaí – peirspictíocht an linbh, an tuismitheora, an chleachtóra nó na gníomhaireachta eachtrannaí (French, 2003). Mar sin, is téarma an-suibiachtúil é a bhraitheann ar chuid mhór nithe éagsúla. Is mar gheall ar an iliomad seo fáthanna atá sé deacair sainmhíniú a thabhairt ar chríochú agus ar choincheap cáilíochta le ráitis agus seicliostaí simplí (DES, 1999a).

Tá seirbhísí d'ardcháilíocht ríthábhachtach sna luathbhlianta (French, 2003). Cuidíonn eispéiris leanaí le linn na mblianta múnlaiteacha a dtodhchaí a mhúnlú – fréamhaíonn siad sa domhan iad, cuidíonn siad leo caidreamh a bheith acu lena chéile, ligeann siad dóibh a mhothú go bhfuil siad páirteach agus soláthraíonn siad bunús do gach foghlaim ina dhiaidh sin (DES, 1999b; DHC, 2000a). Forbraíonn seirbhísí d'ardcháilíocht dearcadh dearfach i leanaí i leith foghlama ar feadh an tsaoil agus is féidir go mbíonn íos-éifeacht nó droch-éifeacht fiú ag oideachas agus cúram de cháilíocht íseal ar fhorbairt (DES, 1999a). Chun feabhas a chur ar cháilíocht teastaíonn infheistíocht agus gealltanais ach tagann torthaí dearfacha as do na leanaí, na tuismitheoirí agus na cleachtóirí sa phobal níos leithne a bhíonn páirteach sa tseirbhís.

Tá forbairt tagtha ar earnáil na luathbhlianta in Éirinn agus cuid mhór gnéithe dearfacha cáilíochta comhtháite leis sin, mar atá éagsúlacht an réimse seirbhísí, infhaighteacht seirbhísí go logánta agus spiorad láidir deonach. Tá go leor dúshlán ann, áfach in éadan láidriú cáilíochta sa chomhthéacs Éireannach. Chun tosaigh orthu siúd tá an stádas íseal a bhronntar ar phearsanra na luathbhlianta, saincheisteanna maidir le hoiliúint agus oideachas chleachtóirí, costais a chuireann bac ar thuismitheoirí agus ganntanas tacaíochtaí Stáit (IPPA, 2002a).

Tá an ról mórthábhachtach atá ag cáilíocht maidir le soláthar seirbhísí molta ag roinnt tionscnamh agus foilseachán Rialtais le blianta beaga anuas, agus tá cur i bhfeidhm seirbhísí cáilíochta do leanaí curtha chun cinn acu, lena n-áirítear:

- Soláthraíonn na Rialacháin Chúram Leanaí (Seirbhísí Réamhscoile) 1996 (DoH, 1996a) íoschaighdeáin, go príomha le haghaidh sláinte agus slándáil shuímh chúram agus oideachas Luath-Óige.
- Luann an Straitéis Náisiúnta Chúram Leanaí (DJELR, 1999c) cáilíocht ar cheann dá cúig chuspóirí.

- The National Children's Strategy (DHC, 2000a) outlines Ireland's vision for children and childhood and places quality at the heart of policy development and service delivery.
- The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education has been charged with the task of producing a Quality Framework for the early years sector.

However, quality must be an integral component of services and not a reaction to an imposition from outside authorities (French, 2003). Compliance with minimum standards is no real measure of quality and often deflects attention from the real quality indicators from the child's perspective (IPPA, 2002a). The structural aspects of early childhood care and education are easier to implement, as they are objective and quantifiable. The real difficulties arise in the identification and implementation of the more subtle and subjective nuances of the early childhood care and education setting, such as adult-child interactions and the quality of the learning environment (French, 2003). As Hayes (1995: 12) cites, the more important elements include:

"more dynamic, intangible aspects of quality such as interaction between adults and children and the developmental appropriateness of activities and expectations."

There have been advancements in the area of quality in relation to practitioners with the publication of the Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector (DJELR, 2002b). This document, which was produced following wide consultation, outlines the core skills and knowledge appropriate to each occupational profile within the sector. Investment in the training and education of practitioners is one of the most important elements to enhance the quality of the adult-child interaction, which is at the heart of early childhood care and education. In addition, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment are currently working on a curriculum framework for use in all early childhood care and education settings.

Up to €75 million of the €437 million in EOCP funding has been allocated directly to quality improvement. To date, approximately one third of this funding has been disseminated within the sector to organisations such as the IPPA for their Quality Improvement Programme and the NCNA for their Centre of Excellence initiative. Other umbrella organisations such as the BCCN have received funding to enhance and promote quality in services under their remit.

External regulations must be complemented by external supports to assist services to meet quality regulations. Services must be empowered to adapt and localise national strategies, incorporating their local values, beliefs and goals. Universal standards that are objective and measurable often miss the crux

- Cuireann an Paipéar Bán faoi Oideachas Luath-Óige, Ready to Learn (DES, 1999a) cáilíocht mar lár a sheirbhísí go léir agus molann sé Comhartha Cháilíocht in Oideachas do sholáthraithe seirbhísí a dhéanann de réir rialachán.
- Déanann an Straitéis Náisiúnta Leanaí imlíne ar íomhá na hÉireann le haghaidh leanaí agus óige agus cuireann sí cáilíocht mar chroílár fhorbairt bheartais agus sheachadadh seirbhísí.
- Tá sé mar thasc ag an Lárionad um Fhorbairt agus Oideachas na Luath-Óige Creatlach Cháilíochta a tháirgeadh d'earnáil na luathbhlianta.

Ní mór cáilíocht a bheith mar chuid riachtanach de sheirbhísí agus ní mar fhreagairt ar údarais eachtracha a bheith a dhéanamh buannaíochta (French, 2003). Ní slat tomhais ceart é déanamh de réir íos-chaihdeán agus go minic sraonann siad aird ó na fíor-tháscarí cáilíochta ó pheirspicéitocht an linbh (IPPA, 2002a). Tá sé níos fusa na gnéithe struchtúracha de chúram agus oideachas Luath-Óige a chur i bhfeidhm, mar tá siad oibiachtúil agus is féidir iad a thomhas. Tagann na fíor-dheacrachtaí chun cinn maidir le haithint agus cur i bhfeidhm na ngnéithe níos fíneálta agus níos suibhachtúla de shuíomh chúram agus oideachas Luath-Óige, cosúil le himoibriú idir dhaoine fásta agus leanaí agus cáilíocht na timpeallachta foghlama (French, 2003). Mar a luann Hayes (1995: 12), áirítear leis na gnéithe is tábhachtaí:

"more dynamic, intangible aspects of quality such as interaction between adults and children and the developmental appropriateness of activities and expectations."

Tá dul chun cinn déanta i réimse na cáilíochta maidir le cleachtóirí le foilsiú an Chreatlach Mhúnlaithreach d'Oideachas, Oiliúint agus Forbairt Phroifisiúnta san Earnáil Chúram agus Oideachas Luath-Óige (DJELR, 2002b). Déanann an cháipéis seo, a táirgeadh i ndiaidh comhairliúcháin leathain, imlíne ar na bunscileanna agus eolas atá oiriúnach do gach próifíl cheirde taobh istigh den earnáil. Tá infheistíocht in oiliúint agus oideachas chleachtóirí ar cheann de na gnéithe is tábhachtaí chun cáilíocht an imoibríthe idir daoine fásta agus leanaí a mhéadú, mar tá sé sin mar chroílár chúram agus oideachas Luath-Óige. Chomh maith leis sin, tá an Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta ag obair ar chreatlach churaclaim a mbainfear úsáid as in gach suíomh chúram agus oideachas Luath-Óige.

Tá suas le €75 milliún de €437 milliún maoiniú an Chláir um Chomhdheiseanna Chúram Leanaí leithdháilte go díreach le haghaidh feabhsú cáilíochta. Go dtí seo, tá tuairim is an tríú cuid den mhaoiniú seo scaipthe taobh istigh den earnáil ar eagraíochtaí cosúil le Cumann Réamhscoile agus Ghrúpaí Súgartha na hÉireann dá gClár Feabhas Cáilíochta agus an Cumann Náisiúnta Naiscoileanna Leanaí dá dtionscnamh maidir le hIonad Feabhais. Tá maoiniú faighte ag scáth-eagraíochtaí eile cosúil le Gréasán Chúram Leanaí na gContaetha ar an Teorainn cáilíocht

of the issue and it is imperative that any quality indicators must be rooted in the unique social and cultural context of the education setting. As French (2000b: 12) elucidates:

"...quality is no longer viewed as one standard of excellence identified for all children in all services, but rather a set of core criteria towards which services may progress and against which their progress can be measured."

Moreover, quality is a dynamic and evolutionary concept, which must progress with advancements and changes in cultural, economic and social terms. While there is a role for external and objective evaluation, quality may be better regulated by ongoing internal review and evaluation in the early childhood care and education setting, which serves to empower the practitioner (IPPA, 2002a; Carswell, 2002).

The following **categories** emerged following thematic analysis of the collected data:

- 4.1 Government Publications
- 4.2 International Perspectives
- 4.3 Quality Indicators
- 4.4 Quality of Service Provision

The 4 categories are treated, as outlined in the Introduction, under the following **sub-categories**:

- Description/Analysis
- Evaluation
- Guidelines
- Policy

i seirbhísí atá faoina shainchúram a mhéadú agus a chur chun cinn.

Ní mór rialacháin eachtracha a chomhlánú le tacaíochtaí eachtracha le cuidiú chun seirbhísí rialacháin cháilíochta a chomhlíonadh. Ní mór cur ar chumas seirbhísí straitéisí náisiúnta a leasú agus a chur in oiriúint don cheantar logánta, a luachanna logánta, a gcreidimh agus a gcuspóirí féin a ionchorprú. Is minic a chailleann caighdeáin uilíochta atá oibiachtúil agus intomhaiste croílár na saincheiste, agus tá sé riachtanach táscairí cáilíochta a fhréamhú i gcomhthéacs sonracha sóisialach agus cultúrtha an tsuímh oideachais. Mar a shoiléiríonn French (2000b: 12):

"...quality is no longer viewed as one standard of excellence identified for all children in all services, but rather a set of core criteria towards which services may progress and against which their progress can be measured."

Lena chois sin, is coincheap dinimiciúil agus éabhlóideach í cáilíocht, agus caithfidh sí dul chun cinn a dhéanamh i gcomhar le dul chun cinn agus athruithe i dtéarmaí cultúrtha, eacnamaíochta agus sóisialacha. Cé go bhfuil ról ann do mheastóireacht eachtrach agus oibiachtúil, b'fhéidir go ndéanfaí rialachán níos fearr ar cháilíocht trí athbhreithniú agus meastóireacht leanúnach inmheánach i suíomh chúram agus oideachas Luath-Óige, rud a thabharfadh cumhacht don chleachtóir (IPPA, 2002a; Carswell, 2002).

D'eascair na **catagóirí** seo a leanas i ndiaidh anailíse téamacha ar na sonraí a bailíodh:

- 4.1 Foilseacháin Rialtais
- 4.2 Peirspictíochtaí Idirnáisiúnta
- 4.3 Táscairí Cáilíochta
- 4.4 Cáilíocht Sholáthar Seirbhísí

Pléitear leis na ceithre chatagóir, faoi mar atá leagtha amach sa Réamhrá, faoi na **fochatagóirí** seo a leanas:

- Tuairisciúil/Anailísiúil
- Meastóireacht
- Treoirínte
- Beartas

4.1 GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

There is some government research in relation to quality in the Irish context, though not as many as might be expected given the importance afforded to quality in national debate. However, all documents pertaining to early childhood care and education contain the issue of quality as an integral element. A number of regulatory acts have been passed to control the health and safety aspects of early years services (DoH, 1991; 1996a). To date, there is no national inspection mechanism to assess other indicators of quality, such as curriculum and qualifications of practitioners. There is, however, a system of inspection

4.1 FOILSEACHÁIN RIALTAIS

Tá roinnt taighde Rialtais maidir le cáilíocht sa chomhthéacs Éireannach, ach níl an oiread agus a bheifí ag súil leis nuair a chuirtear san áireamh an méid tábhachta a thugtar do cháilíocht sa díospóireacht náisiúnta. Tá saincheist cháilíochta mar ghné riachtanach de gach cáipéis, áfach, a bhaineann le cúram agus oideachas Luath-Óige. Tá roinnt Achtanna rialaithe reachtaithe chun gnéithe sláinte agus slándála sheirbhísí na luathbhlianta a choinneáil faoi smacht (DoH, 1991; 1996a). Go dtí seo, níl aon mheicníocht náisiúnta chigireachta ann chun táscairí eile cáilíochta, cosúil le curaclam agus cáilíochtaí

in state funded primary schools, which includes the infant classes.

chleachtóirí a mheastóireacht. Tá córas cigireachta ann, áfach, i scoileanna a mhaoiníonn an stát, lena n-áirítear ranganna naíonán.

4.1.1 Description/Analysis - Tuairisciúil/Anailísiúil:

Coolahan, J. (Ed.) (1998). *Report on the National Forum for Early Childhood Education*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2002b). *Quality Childcare and Life Long Learning: Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

4.1.2 Policy / Beartas:

Department of Health (1991). *Child Care Act*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education (1992a). *Green Paper on Education – Education for a Changing World*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education (1995). *White Paper on Education – Charting Our Educational Future*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health (1996a). *Child Care (Preschool Services) Regulations and Explanatory Guide to Requirements and Procedures for Notification and Inspection*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (1997a). *Child Care (Preschool Services) Regulations 1996 and Child Care (Preschool Services) (Amended) Regulations 1997 and Explanatory Guide to Requirements and Procedures for Notification and Inspection*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (1997b). *The Children Act 1997*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (1998b). *Education Act*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (1999a). *Ready to Learn - A White Paper on Early Childhood Education*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (1999b). *Primary School Curriculum*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (1999c). *National Childcare Strategy, Report of the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Education and Science (2000a). *Education Welfare Act*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (2000a). *The National Children's Strategy. Our Children-Their Lives*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (2000b). *The National Children's Strategy. Our Children-Their Lives: Executive Summary*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (2000c). *The National Children's Strategy. Our Children-Their Lives. Report of the Public Consultation*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (2000d). *The National Children's Strategy. Our Children-Their Lives. Report of the Public Consultation: Executive Summary*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (2000e). *The National Children's Strategy. Our Children-Their Lives. Report to Children on the Public Consultation*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Health and Children (2000f). *The National Children's Strategy. Our Children-Their Lives: Children's Version*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2001c). *The Children Act 2001*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

4.2 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The quest to comprehend the concept of quality has led to some international comparisons and reviews. While the indicators in one country may not suit the context of another, the sharing of expertise aids the process of understanding this complex term. Organisations such as the European Commission and the OECD have conducted studies and reports that highlight the diversity in interpretation and implementation of quality in various jurisdictions (OECD, 1991; European Commission, 2002).

4.2.1 Description/Analysis - Tuairisciúil/Anailisiúil:

Balaguer, I., Mestres, J. and Penn, H. (1992). *Quality in Services for Young Children: A Discussion Paper*. Luxembourg: European Commission Network on Childcare.

McKenna, A. (1992). *Early Childhood Services and the European Commission*. Paper presented at the NCB/ OMEP/ NES Arnold Conference, Investing in our Future: Quality Early Childhood Care and Education in the 1990s, Dublin.

European Commission (2002). *European Report on Quality Indicators of Lifelong Learning – Fifteen Quality Indicators*. Brussels: European Commission.

4.2.2 Guidelines / Treoirilinte:

European Commission Network on Childcare (1996a). *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children*. Luxembourg: European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities.

4.2.3 Policy / Beartas:

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1991). *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Ireland*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

4.2 PEIRSPICTÍOCHTAÍ IDIRNÁISIÚNTA

D'eascair as an sprioc chun coincheap na cáilíochta a thuiscint roinnt comparáidí agus athbhreithnithe idirnáisiúnta. Cé go bhféadfaí nach mbeadh na táscairí i dtír amháin oiriúnach do chomhthéacs tíre eile, tugann comhroinnt sainiúlachta cúnaimh do phróiseas tuisceana an téarma chasta seo. Tá staidéir agus tuarascálacha déanta ag eagraíochtaí cosúil leis an gCoimisiún Eorpach agus an Eagrais um Chomhoibriú agus Fhorbairt Eacnamaíochta a léiríonn an éagsúlacht maidir le léirmhíniú agus cur i bhfeidhm cáilíochta i ndlínsí éagsúla (OECD, 1991; European Commission, 2002).

4.3 QUALITY INDICATORS

Quality indicators are subjective and context-linked constructs that evolve with advancements in modern society (Carswell, 2002). There are certain core quality indicators that apply to all settings, for example, those in relation to health and safety and the physical environment (French, 2003). Regulations must allow the adaptation of indicators to the needs and context of individual services and settings. Evaluation of these indicators must involve the empowerment of practitioners and service providers as active agents in evaluation, rather than rely on outside regulation and inspection alone (IPPA, 2002a).

4.3.1 Description/Analysis - Tuairisciúil/Anailisiúil:

Hayes, N. (1992b). *Good Quality Early Childhood Care and Education: Issues and Trends*. Paper presented at Quality Early Childhood Care and Education in the 1990s. Dublin: OMEP.

Hayes, N. (1996b). Quality in Early Education. *Irish Educational Studies*, Volume 15, pp. 1-13.

Bernard, J. (1997). *Training – The Key to Quality: A Training Needs Analysis of Early Years Staff in the Western Health Board Region*. Mayo: The Council for the West.

4.3 TÁSCAIRÍ CÁILÍOCHTA

Tá táscairí cáilíochta déanta go suibhachtúil agus bíonn siad nasctha le comhthéacs agus déanann siad éabhlóid i gcomhar le dul chun cinn sa tsochaí nua-aimseartha (Carswell, 2002). Tá buntáscairí cáilíochta ann a bhaineann le gach suíomh, mar shampla, iad siúd a bhaineann le sláinte agus slándáil sa timpeallacht fhisiceach (French, 2003). Ní mór go gceadódh rialacháin leasú táscairí le bheith oiriúnach do riachtanais agus comhthéacs sheirbhísí agus shuíomh indibhidiúil. Ní mór do tháscairí cur ar chumas chleachtóirí agus sholáthróirí seirbhísí mar ghníomhairí gníomhacha luachála, seachas a bheith ag brath ar rialachán agus ar chigireacht eachtrach amháin (IPPA, 2002a).

Byrne, C. (1999). *Education for Early Years Teachers*. Paper presented to the Enhancing Quality in the Early Years International Conference, November, 1999

Hayes, N. (1999b). *Partnership in Curriculum Development*. Paper presented at the Enhancing Quality in the Early Years International Conference on Practice and Policy in Early Childhood Care and Education, Dublin.

Smith, A., (1999). *The Role of an Early Childhood Curriculum: Promoting Diversity Versus Uniformity*. Paper presented at Enhancing Quality in the Early Years Conference, Dublin, November, 1999.

Horgan, M. and Douglas, F. (2001). "Some Aspects of Quality in Early Childhood Education." pp. 119-144. (in) Cleary, A., Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, M. and Quinn, S. (Eds.) (2001). *Understanding Children, Volume 1 - State, Education and Economy*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

McKeown, K. and Galvin, M. (2001). *Springboard Indicators of Quality in Family Support Services*. Dublin: Department of Health and Children.

Hayes, N. (2002b). *Quality in Early Childhood Education*. Presentation to the National Children's Nurseries Association Annual Conference, Dublin Castle.

Corbett, M. (2003). *NCNA Centre of Excellence: The Contribution to Quality*. Paper presented at the OMEP (Ireland) Conference, Cork.

Kiernan, G. (2003). *The Best for Children: Developing Quality Standards for Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland*. Paper presented at the National Children's Nurseries Association Annual Conference, Dublin Castle.

Langford, S. (2003). *Striving for Quality Childcare*. Paper presented at the National Children's Nurseries Association Annual Conference, Dublin Castle.

4.3.2 Policy / Beartas:

Hayes, N., (1995). *The Case for a National Policy on Early Education*. Combat Poverty Agency Discussion Paper No. 2. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

IPPA, The Early Childhood Organisation (2001). *Quality Discussion Paper – Presented to the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee*. Dublin: IPPA, The Early Childhood Organisation.

IPPA, The Early Childhood Organisation (2002a). *Quality Discussion Paper – Presented to the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (Revised)*. Dublin: IPPA, The Early Childhood Organisation.

4.4 QUALITY OF SERVICE PROVISION

The importance of quality in early years services has been well documented in recent years (Carswell, 2002; O'Kane and Kernan, 2002). As stated in the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, early interventions are of benefit to the child only when services are of high quality (DES, 1999a). As already outlined, it is difficult to define the complex nature of quality, especially when some of its most important aspects are the subtle and subjective nature of adult-child interactions (Hayes, 1996b). Some evaluation of quality has been carried out, yet difficulty remains in grasping the true nature of quality.

4.4.1 Description/Analysis - Tuairisciúil/Anailísiúil:

National Children's Nurseries Association (1990). *Quality Nursery Care for Your Child*. Dublin: National Children's Nurseries Association.

Hayes, N. and Moore, N. (1998). *Quality in Services for Young Children in Rural Areas*. Unpublished Report to

4.4 CÁILÍOCHT SHOLÁTHAR SEIRBHÍSÍ

Tá aghaidh tugtha go mór ar an tábhacht a bhaineann le cáilíocht i seirbhísí na luathbhlianta i gcáipéisí le blianta beaga anuas (Carswell, 2002; O'Kane agus Kernan, 2002). Mar atá luaite sa Pháipéar Bán ar Oideachas Luath-Óige, bíonn leas ag baint le hidirghabhálacha luatha sa chás amháin go mbíonn seirbhísí ar ard-cháilíocht (An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta, 1999a). Mar atá leagtha amach cheana féin, tá sé deacair nádúr casta cáilíochta a shainmhíniú, go háirithe nuair atá nádúr fineálta agus suibachtúil an imoibríthe idir daoine fásta agus leanaí ar cheann de na gnéithe is tábhachtaí di (Hayes, 1996b). Tá roinnt luachála ar cháilíocht déanta, ach go fóill tá deacrachtaí ann maidir le fíor-nádúr cáilíochta a thuiscint.

the Cross-Border Rural Childcare Project.

Bernard, J. (2002a). *'On the Journey to Quality'. An Examination of Quality and Customer Focus in Early Childcare Services*. M.Sc Thesis. Dublin: Trinity College Dublin.

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