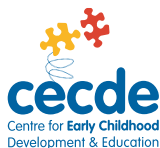


In-Career Development Programme for Staff and Management of Traveller Pre-Schools



CECDE Research Series 2006
In-Career Development Programme for Staff and Management of Traveller Pre-Schools
Executive Summary

Barnardos and INTO Professional Development Unit

Research Commissioned and Funded by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

The full report may be accessed online at http://www.cecde.ie/english/targeted_projects.php

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education.

Published by the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

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ISBN: 0-9551894-8-9
ISBN-13: 978-09551894-8-7

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CECDE Research Series 2006

In-Career Development
Programme for Staff
and Management of
Traveller Pre-Schools

Executive Summary

A white puzzle piece is centered in the upper half of the image, set against a solid orange background. The puzzle piece has four interlocking tabs and blanks. Inside the white piece, the text "Developing and co-ordinating early childhood education in Ireland." is written in an orange, sans-serif font, following the curve of the piece.

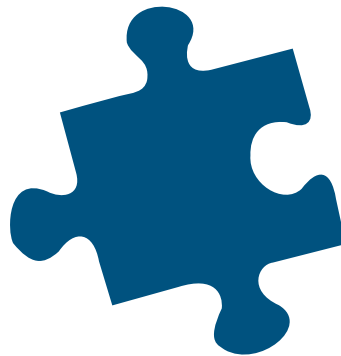
Developing and
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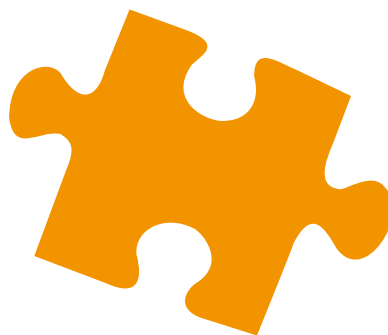
List of Acronyms

CE	Community Employment
CECDE	Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
DELR	Department of Equality and Law Reform
DES	Department of Education and Science
DHC	Department of Health and Children
FETAC	Further Education and Training Awards Council
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
JI	Job Initiative
NCVA	National Council for Vocational Awards
SCM	Staff Certified Midwife
SRN	Staff Registered Nurse
RNMH	Registered Nurse for the Mentally Handicapped
TPTP	Traveller Pre-school Training Programme



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1. Introduction and Context

This Executive Summary provides an overview and summary of the main findings of the Traveller Pre-school Training Project (TTP) undertaken collaboratively by Barnardos and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). The overall report can be accessed on the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education website, www.cecde.ie.

1.1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the main issues relating the development of Traveller Pre-schools and the key elements, with regards to training, contained in the evaluation of the pre-schools carried out by the Department of Education and Science (DES) Inspectorate in 2000/1 (DES, 2003).

1.2 The Development of the Traveller Pre-Schools

From the 1970s, there was a growing awareness within the educational system of the need to provide for Travellers' participation in the school system. Between 1978 and the mid-1990s, a number of pre-schools catering for Traveller children were developed on an ad hoc basis in various places around the country. By 2000, 52 such pre-schools were in existence, catering for 530 pupils and receiving 98% funding from the DES (DES, 2003:10).

The White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future* (Department of Education, 1995), committed the government to achieving full participation by Travellers in the education system. The *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (Department of Equality and Law Reform [DELR], 1995) made many recommendations in the area of Traveller education. The Report argued that pre-school provision for Traveller children would help to ensure more successful participation in mainstream education, and recommended that this facility should, under the Department of Education, be extended to all Traveller children for a two-year period before entering primary school (DELR, 1995). Furthermore, the Task Force recommended that an evaluation of existing pre-school provision be carried out. In addition, it highlighted the need to ensure that qualified personnel should staff the pre-schools and that they would be supported by local management structures. The Task Force also emphasised the need to promote links between Traveller parents and the pre-schools, through their involvement as childcare assistants and teachers. Given the lack of national policy on pre-school education, noted by the Task Force, it was recommended that the Department of Education should develop guidelines on the operation of pre-schools generally.

The importance of early childhood education in the enhancement of children's lives was highlighted in the Report of the National Forum on Early Childhood Education (Coolahan, 1998), the White Paper on Early Childhood Education Ready to Learn (DES, 1999) and reiterated in the National Children's Strategy (Department of Health and Children [DHC], 2000). In addition, the DES issued *Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools* (DES, 2002).

The developments outlined above formed the context in which the DES decided to carry out an evaluation of current pre-school provision for Travellers. There was an increasing awareness of the educational disadvantages experienced by Travellers, a desire to promote the inclusion of Travellers and an acceptance of cultural diversity in mainstream schooling and in society in general. There was also recognition that specific measures were needed to compensate for the low educational achievements of Travellers. The role of early childhood education in children's development and in the prevention of educational failure and social exclusion was acknowledged as well as a recognition that the quality of early childhood education provision was critical (DES, 2003:16).

The DES Inspectorate was asked to conduct the evaluation of the Traveller Pre-schools in 2000. The evaluation was overseen by a steering group established under the direction of the Inspectorate's Evaluation, Support and Research Unit. The subsequent report, *Pre-Schools for Travellers: National Evaluation Report*, was published in 2003 (DES, 2003).

1.3 Pre-schools for Travellers: National Evaluation Report, 2003

The National Evaluation Report on Pre-schools for Travellers considered various aspects of pre-school provision for Travellers, including management of the pre-schools, pupil admission, registration and attendance, accommodation, funding, staff and staff training, teaching and learning, and making linkages. The Inspectorate, in carrying out the evaluation, took into account the emerging definition of quality in early childhood education which encompassed criteria such as the quality of curriculum and methodology; the quality of staff qualifications, training and retention; the extent to which parents were involved in the life of the pre-school; the nature of the educational setting; and a number of quantifiable inputs such as staffing ratios, standards of equipment and premises, and compliance with the Childcare Regulations.

The Report found that teaching staff and childcare assistants in the pre-schools possessed a wide variety of qualifications, ranging from little or no formal training to university degrees. The evaluation did not explore the reasons why the teachers were drawn from this wide variety of backgrounds but did suggest that the origins of the pre-schools in the voluntary sector may have been a contributory factor. The lack of a regulated standard qualification for pre-school educators may have contributed to the establishment of a number of courses for pre-school educators and thereby to a proliferation of qualifications (DES, 2003:46). Furthermore, it was suggested that the lack of certainty concerning the status and development of the pre-schools, combined with the demand for fully trained teachers in primary and secondary schools, may have led to teachers moving from the pre-schools to permanent positions in mainstream schools. The Report also acknowledged that the lack of an incremental salary scale for teachers and other staff in the pre-schools acted as a disincentive in the recruitment and retention of teaching and childcare staff (DES, 2003).

Nevertheless, the Report stated that significant benefits could be achieved by the provision of accredited pre-service courses for teachers of pre-school children, as teachers valued the in-career development courses that had been made available to them and were keen to have more regular courses. The challenges pertaining to provision of in-career development for teachers, posed by the diverse nature of the teaching cohort working in the schools was recognised. However, it was considered that the availability of courses would gradually allow for all pre-schools to employ

teachers holding suitable teaching qualifications. It was recommended that such a move would have to be consistent with developments for teachers in general pre-school education, and that courses might offer optional specialist modules for teachers wishing to specialise in pre-school education for Travellers and other educationally disadvantaged groups. It was suggested that training provision should take account of the diversity of qualifications already held by pre-school teachers, and should involve the provision of modular courses that would enable individual teachers to complement the skills and training they already had. It was also stated that significant benefits could be achieved by the provision of adequate training opportunities for childcare assistants (DES, 2003:45-49).

Areas suggested by teachers who participated in the Department's evaluation for inclusion in pre-service training were as follows:

- Studies of child development and psychology;
- Language acquisition and therapy;
- Age appropriate curricula and learning activities;
- Traveller culture and intercultural education; and
- Curriculum planning and pupil assessment (DES, 2003:46-47).

The need for training in some of these areas also emerged from the inspector's evaluations of the curricula provided in the pre-schools.

1.3.1 Recommendations for Staff Training

The National Evaluation Report (DES, 2003) contained broad-ranging recommendations, including a number referring specifically to training and qualifications, such as curriculum, assessment, teaching methodologies, planning and the learning environment (DES, 2003:77-78). These are summarised below under Professional Development for Teachers and Professional Development for Childcare Assistants.

Professional Development for Teachers

Accredited pre-service courses leading to a recognised minimum qualification should be provided for pre-school teachers. The content of such courses should be in line with best practice in early education and could contain specialist options such as Traveller culture and intercultural education. In relation to teachers in the Traveller Pre-schools, in-career development should be continued and developed, with consideration given to the provision of modular courses. Pre-service and in-career development courses for pre-school teachers should draw on the expertise already developed through the Early Start initiative of the DES. (DES, 2003:47)

Professional Development for Childcare Assistants

The provision, expansion and accreditation of courses for childcare assistants should be discussed with the Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education and Development (CECDE) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), again drawing on the expertise developed through the Early Start Initiative of the DES. Childcare assistants should be encouraged to avail of such training (DES, 2003:48).

1.4 The Traveller Pre-school Training Programme

The National Evaluation Report on Pre-schools for Travellers acknowledged the important role played by Traveller Pre-schools in the provision of early childhood learning experiences to Traveller children and recommended that steps be taken to further enhance the quality of the experience for present and future cohorts of children attending these pre-schools (DES 2003:77). Training and development for staff and management of the pre-schools was considered an important dimension of this process, and the Report recommended that the CECDE, as part of its early years focus, would oversee the implementation of the training-related recommendations of the National Evaluation Report (DES, 2003).

The CECDE response to the recommendation in the National Evaluation Report on Pre-Schools for Travellers regarding training for teachers and members of management committees of Traveller Pre-schools was to seek tenders from interested organisations to undertake such training. One of the key objectives of the CECDE is to establish targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs. A number of targeted projects were developed to address this objective, one of which was the TPTP. In the latter half of 2004, tenders were sought to design and deliver training to the management and staff of Traveller Pre-schools. Both Barnardos and the INTO tendered separately to the CECDE for the training contract. However, they were subsequently approached and asked to consider forming a partnership to deliver the training jointly, thereby sharing their expertise. Barnardos and the INTO submitted a joint proposal to the CECDE and were jointly awarded the contract to deliver the TPTP. This was a new departure for both organisations. The INTO Professional Development Unit, established in 1994, has a successful track record in providing professional development courses for primary teachers, and is recognised by the DES as a provider of in-career development for teachers. Barnardos has provided services for children in Ireland for over 40 years, including the National Children's Resource Centre which provides a library, publications and training service. The TPTP was a collaborative project between both organisations.

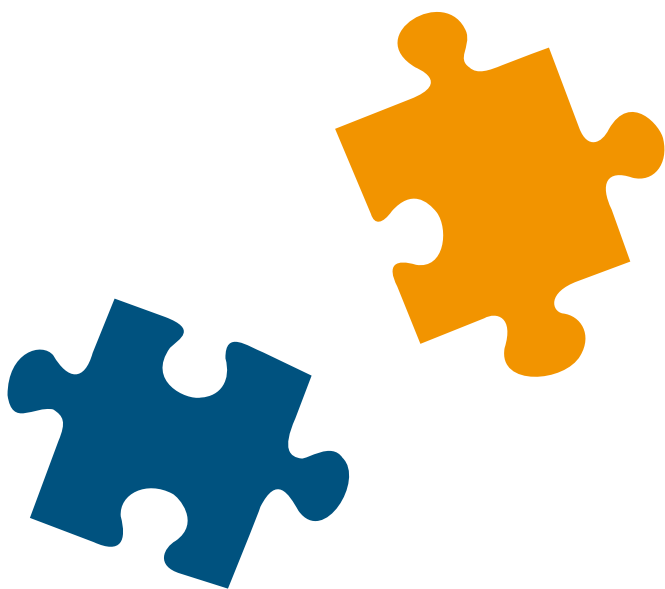
1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Pilot Project

The aim of the pilot project was to enhance the experiences of children and personnel in Traveller Pre-schools. In this context, the objectives were as follows:

- To enable all personnel to engage in professional development that was nationally accredited;
- To give a voice to children and parents in the context of participating in the pre-schools;
- To develop age-appropriate practice (curriculum and pedagogy) in Traveller Pre-schools;
- To promote a network with other personnel in early years settings and use the developed network as a possible model for encouraging networking among early years practitioners;
- To develop the capacity of the management committees to manage pre-schools as effectively as possible;
- To provide rigorous ongoing evaluation that could act as a model of in-career development in this area for future reference.

The training was to be delivered, at least in part, to both staff and management of the Traveller Pre-schools. It was decided that the staff component would include all staff (teachers and childcare assistants), and that the management group would receive training during the first and last weekend of the six scheduled sessions.

A Steering Committee was established to steer the work of the Pilot Project, and to give overall guidance, with representatives from Barnardos, the INTO, the CECDE, the DES and representatives from two of Barnardos' Traveller Projects (Labre Park and Finglas). A smaller Project Committee, comprising representatives of INTO, Barnardos and the CECDE, met more frequently in order to manage the project. Progress reports were provided to the CECDE on a regular basis.



2. Pre-implementation Phase

2.1 Introduction

This section outlines the pre-implementation stage of the TPTP and the methods employed in developing the training programme.

2.2 Consultation Process

While the rationale for the training was established in the National Evaluation Report (DES, 2003), more specific consultation was carried out at the preliminary stage of the project through the dissemination of training needs analysis questionnaires to potential training participants. The questionnaire considered the role of the respondents, their current level of training and self-identified training needs, with a view to ensuring that the design of the training reflected the needs and expectations of the client group. Pre-schools were also requested to indicate whether they were interested in participating in the pilot training project.

The questionnaires were developed based on the experience of the INTO in relation to survey work and documentation from Barnardos (French, 2003). Experts in adult literacy reviewed the draft questionnaires in order to ensure that they would be suitable for the mixed levels of knowledge and qualifications in the target group. Two sets of questionnaires were developed: one for staff and another for management committees.

The Needs Analysis questionnaires were circulated to the staff and management of all Traveller Pre-schools, a total of 45, as per lists from the DES. A total of 24 individual responses were received from staff and 14 from management. The findings of this process are outlined below.

2.2.1 Results of Staff Training Needs Analysis.

Respondents were asked to indicate their job title/ role within the pre-school. Responses were as follows:

**Table 1:
Title of Personnel in Pre-schools**

Title	Number (Total 24)
Manager	-
Teacher	6
Supervisor	2
Coordinator	3
Childcare Assistant	6
Montessori Teacher	3
Childcare Worker	4
Community Employment (CE) / JI Participant	-
Leader	1

As indicated, the majority of participating staff identified themselves as either teachers or childcare assistants. None identified themselves as managers or Community Employment (CE)/ Job Initiative (JI) participants. Two participants indicated that they had two roles within the pre-school.

Respondents were asked to indicate their qualifications. Some respondents indicated more than one qualification, which is reflected in the numbers represented. A summary of the qualifications held is outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2:
Summary of Qualifications Held

Primary Teaching Qualifications	4
Montessori Qualifications	4
Degree Qualifications in Early Childhood / Social Studies	2
FETAC / NCVA Level 2 Qualifications	9
FETAC / NCVA Level 3 Qualifications	5
Others	4

Further Training

In addition to the qualifications held by personnel in the pre-schools, many had received training in other areas such as First Aid, speech and language, intercultural education, behaviour management, special needs and child protection. The responses to the questions on qualifications and training experience reflect the diversity amongst the staff, with qualifications ranging from basic FETAC levels to degree level.

Support for Staff

Staff were asked to indicate the general supports they required in fulfilling their role. Responses to this question also indicated a wide range of needs, and included the need for the development of a diploma or degree course for people working in this area; more time to develop policies and programmes; improved in-service and training and the opportunity to network with other providers of services to Travellers.

Interest in Future Training

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in potential training topics. The highest levels of interest were indicated in the following areas: whole school planning and policies; early years curriculum development; intercultural education; special needs; play in the curriculum; and working with parents. Responses are outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3:
Respondents' Interest in Training Topics (Staff)

	Very Interested	Interested	Not Interested
Total Number of Respondents	24		
Whole School Planning/ Policies	16	8	-
Early Years Curriculum Development	16	1	4
Intercultural Education	15	3	1
Special Needs	15	3	2
Play in the Curriculum	15	1	4
Working with Parents	12	7	1
Child Protection	10	6	3
Child Development	9	7	4
Behaviour Management	9	6	4
Team Work	7	6	3
ICT/ Technological Training	6	9	4
Pre-school Legislative Issues	6	8	3
Social and Personal Development	6	6	5
Health and Safety Issues	2	10	3
Development and Planning of Pre-school Policies and Programmes	2	-	6

Further suggestions

Finally, respondents were asked to suggest any other ideas regarding work in the pre-school. Issues raised included the temporary nature of the positions in the pre-schools; the desirability of employing more Travellers; the lack of in-service and networking opportunities and the paucity of resources to improve the existing facilities. These issues related to conditions of employment and resources in addition to training needs, issues that the project was not in a position to address.

2.2.2 Management Training Needs Analysis

Of the fourteen responses received, four described their role as 'Chairperson', three members described their role as 'Secretary' and two described their role as 'Treasurer'. Three respondents felt that their role was that of reporting or putting forward general views or the views of parents on the committee, while one respondent felt that their role was to make sure policies and procedures were adhered to. One described their role as that of 'Principal'.

Management committee members identified many tasks which they perceived to be part of the remit of the management committee. These included the day-to-day running of the centres; providing information, support, feedback and advice as needed; financial record keeping; staff representation and liaison with official bodies such as the Health Service Executive.

The respondents were then asked to list ways in which the management committee’s work could be improved and better supported. Five respondents mentioned the need to have more frequent meetings. There was also a request for more training for members and for the development of a definite, meaningful role for all members. In addition, more financial support, more committee members and full commitment from all members were listed as resources that would improve the work of the committee.

Regarding the level of interest among members of the management committees in receiving training, three indicated that all members of their committee would be interested, three indicated that one member was interested and one indicated that three members were interested. One respondent commented that “...all are voluntary workers and cannot afford to give more time, energy and expertise.”

Respondents were asked to indicate their interest in receiving training on a number of topics listed. Their responses are outlined in Table 4 below.

Table 4:
Respondents’ Interest in Training Topics (Management)

	Very Interested	Interested	Not Interested
Total Number of Respondents	14		
Intercultural Education	8	3	1
Working with Parents	8	-	1
Conflict Resolution	7	1	1
Health and Safety	7	1	1
Planning and Policy Development	7	1	1
Organising Meetings	7	-	1
Financial Matters	5	1	1
Technological Training	5	-	1
Child Protection	4	2	1
Curriculum Issues	4	-	1
Social and Personal Development	-	5	1

In addition to the topics listed above, other areas for possible future training included information on legal responsibilities, liability and insurance issues as they affect committee members; committee procedures and training on child psychology and behaviour.

In relation to the format of such future training, suggestions included locally-based evening and weekend courses as being most appropriate. Expert tuition was seen as important, while group and practical work was also mentioned. One respondent felt that any information would be welcome, whether it came in the form of in-service, lectures, courses or books.

2.3 Programme Planning and Design

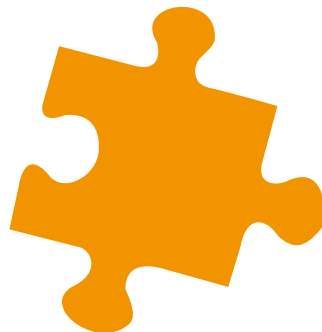
The information gathered during the consultations informed the structure and content of the pilot programme. A framework was outlined around which the syllabus for the programme developed organically over the course of its delivery, taking into account ongoing feedback as well as the initial consultations. Tutors/ trainers were selected among existing, experienced Barnardos and INTO personnel and included those with experience of early years education, teamwork, communications, special needs, behaviour management, diversity, home school community liaison, the Early Start Project, curriculum planning and Traveller culture. Support was provided to these tutors/ trainers by key Barnardos and INTO staff.

The Hodson Bay Hotel in Athlone was selected as the venue for the training. This was due to its central location in the midlands and the suitable quality of the hotel.

As a pilot course, it was decided to seek accreditation at FETAC Level V on the National Qualifications Framework. In order to meet the requirements of accreditation at this level, participants were expected to complete a learning journal and to undertake a number of assignments, based on the topics covered at each session.

2.4 Summary

In summary, staff in the pre-schools for Travellers held a variety of qualifications at various levels and identified their main training needs as those of planning, curriculum, special needs and intercultural education. The training needs of members of the management committees related to intercultural education, working with parents, conflict resolution, health and safety, planning and policy development and issues pertaining to the organisation of meetings. The information provided in the questionnaires informed the design of the course that was subsequently delivered.



3. Course Outline

3.1 Introduction

This section provides a description of the TPTP delivered by Barnardos and the INTO in order to meet the project objectives as outlined in section 1.5.

3.2 Course Structure and Content

The training commenced in early 2005 and was delivered over six residential weekends between January and May, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5:
Course Schedule

Sessions	Group	Topics
Weekend 1: Jan 28 th & 29 th	Staff and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications • Teamwork • Self-care • Learning Styles • Technical Support Set-up
Weekend 2: Feb 25 th & 26 th	Staff only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Culture and Ethos • School Vision • Diversity • Partnership • Policies and Planning
Weekend 3: March 11 th & 12 th	Staff only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with Parents • Developing Policies with Parents • Liaison with the Community • Practical Policy Writing
Weekend 4: April 15 th & 16 th	Staff only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play and Learning • Language Development through Play • Cognitive Development through Play • Personal and Social Development of Children • Curriculum • Working with Materials
Weekend 5: May 6 th & 7 th	Staff only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour Management • Special Needs • Equality and Diversity
Weekend 6: May 27 th & 28 th	Staff and Management	<p><i>Parallel Sessions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management Skills - Leadership Skills - Staff Support - Legislative Context - Health and Safety • Staff Modules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality in the Pre-school - Curriculum Planning (additional information) <p><i>Group Session</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traveller Culture

3.3 Additional Support and Resources

In order to facilitate participation in the programme, a mentoring support service was provided to participants. A mentor was employed by the project to link regularly with participants, monitor their progress, offer support, and provide feedback to the course organisers, thereby contributing to the organic development of the course.

In addition, a website (www.tptp.ie) was established as an additional support for participants. It was envisaged that this would support and facilitate networking amongst the participants, as well as providing a forum for discussion and comment on training topics and assignments. The website included a bulletin board, where constant regular access and support could be provided, and continued for a period after the conclusion of the project to facilitate further networking, and could possibly provide a more permanent networking structure.

3.4 Child Consultation

Originally, it was intended that consultation with children would be undertaken prior to the development of the training in order to feed into the programme. However, time constraints did not allow for this and instead the child consultation was undertaken during the programme.

The child consultation took the form of camera work. Each pre-school was provided with a sufficient number of cameras to allow for groups of three children to take their own photographs of their life in the pre-school. This exercise proved enormously successful. The resultant photographs were developed and copies given to each pre-school. The photographs were analysed based on previous research of a similar nature which was conducted in Iceland (Einarsdottir, 2005). Categories included Play Area and Playthings; Other Spaces; People; Own Artwork; Other. The dominant theme of the photographs was of the children's peers, whether deliberate or engaged in activities. Of approximately 1,400 photographs analysed, 536 were of peers. The quality of the photographs was outstanding, and the feedback from the teachers was that it was a hugely enjoyable exercise. The theory, benefits and different mechanisms of child consultation were covered in the closing conference.

3.5 Parent Consultation

The project team proposed to carry out 'focus group' discussions with two groups of Traveller parents – one urban and one rural – in order to seek their views and expectations for their children in the Traveller Pre-schools. However, due to logistical issues, the focus group session with urban parents did not take place. Having discussed the organisation of focus groups with the Visiting Teacher for Travellers in the rural area selected, and based on her advice, it was decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with a number of individual parents. The considered view of the Visiting Teacher, whose role it is to liaise between the Traveller Community and the education system, was that parents would be more open in their views in a one-to-one situation. The local Visiting Teacher carried out the interviews in June 2005 and an overview of the parents' views is given below.

When asked what aspects of the pre-school their children enjoyed, parents listed activities such as playing, colouring, lunch, having friends, drawing and bringing home pictures, storytelling, rhymes and songs. However, the emphasis was not so much on the specifics of what the child enjoyed, rather the fact that the child enjoyed going to pre-school.

All respondents noted that the experience of pre-school had been a positive one. They felt that their children were prepared for 'big school' and that, in some cases, their oral language had improved.

While parents accepted that the children were too young for formal learning, counting and basic 'ABCs' were seen by parents as areas they would like to see their children be introduced to. In addition, mixing with other children and overcoming shyness were mentioned as issues that were important. Parents viewed activities such as listening to stories, looking at books and doing work with building blocks as being of most use to their children in developing the above skills.

According to the parents, the greatest advantage of going to pre-school was clearly felt to be the preparation it gave for the experience of primary school. Their concerns were fear – "*they won't be frightened going into the big school*", "*they won't be crying*" – and fitting in. The perceived benefits of attending the pre-school were the children being familiar with the routine of going to school and being in a classroom situation with a teacher. The fact that not everything would be new to the children when they started primary school was also seen as very positive. Some parents noted the great interest that their children were now showing in books. Attending the pre-school, it was felt, would help their children fit into primary school in terms of confidence and understanding the routines.

When parents were asked to list the positive aspects of the pre-school, many different areas were mentioned - from the provision of sandwiches and milk to the free transport to and from the school. One pupil's aunt worked as a pre-school assistant, and this familiarity helped the children. The staff were seen as being very interested in the children and any problem that arose was discussed with parents.

The parents were asked to suggest possible changes to the pre-school. The only change suggested by some parents was the possibility of having an integrated pre-school. It was felt that settled and Traveller children mixed in primary school, and the pre-school could also provide an opportunity for early integration. One parent felt that the pre-school was too small and couldn't cater for enough children.

3.6 Closing Conference

In addition to the weekend training events, it was decided to hold a closing conference in September 2005 in Dublin, thus providing a link between the last school year and the subsequent year. The aims of the conference were to reinforce the initial network that had emerged between participants, to extend this network to involve other Traveller Pre-schools and to provide further professional development opportunities. A report was given on the project, and speakers were invited to speak on issues of Child Consultation, Community Playgroups and Diverse Communities.

3.7 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Support

In order to gain the most benefit from the website, it was decided to provide training in the use and basic functions of such technology, for example, accessing the internet, sending and receiving emails and using the bulletin board. Some of this training took place during the summer and the remainder during the autumn term.

3.8 Action Research and Evaluation

The development of the project was facilitated by a process of action research, with the following definition guiding the process:

Action research is a process by which change and understanding can be pursued at the one time. It is usually described as cyclic, with action and critical reflection taking place in turn. The reflection is used to review the previous action and plan the next one. (Dick, 2005)

The initial plan was for regular written feedback to be provided by members of the steering group and project groups. However, in practice, the reflection took place during and after each of the training weekends, with changes being planned and implemented satisfactorily through the discussions and decisions taken at project and steering group meetings.

3.9 Conclusion

The pre-implementation and planning phase of the TPTP project took place between September 2004 and January 2005, when the first weekend session was delivered. The training involved a further five weekends, running to the end of May 2005, and covering a wide range of topics. Project participants were also supported by a mentoring service and a website set up specifically for the project. The completion of the training was marked by the closing conference and additional ICT training.

According to the parents, the greatest advantage of going to pre-school was clearly felt to be the preparation it gave for the experience of primary school. Their concerns were fear – “they won’t be frightened going into the big school”, “they won’t be crying” – and fitting in.

4. Participation Outcomes

4.1 Introduction

This section outlines the outcomes of the programme in terms of attendance, assignment and course evaluations, and accreditation.

4.2 Attendance

Attendance was high throughout the programme. Only one person who commenced the course was not in a position to complete the course. Some issues were raised around timing through the mentor and these were accommodated in some slight adjustments to the schedule, which met with satisfaction and facilitated attendance. A total of 13 pre-schools participated, involving both staff and members of management committees from a range of geographical areas.

4.3 Coursework and Accreditation

The majority of participants completed the coursework and ongoing journals. The standard in most cases reflected the mixed levels of existing qualifications. A module descriptor has been developed, following feedback from FETAC, and approval for accreditation at Level V was received in January 2006. Certificates of attendance were awarded to all participants and the process of accreditation is ongoing.

4.4 Course evaluations

Each weekend training seminar of the course was evaluated. Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with both the seminars as a whole and the individual sessions. In addition, suggestions were sought for improvement of the structure and content of the weekend training. In general, participants indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the overall course. Responses to individual training sessions varied from 100% satisfaction rating for the sessions on Parents in Education/ Involving Parents, to 30% for the sessions on Introduction to Play. Many of the comments received from participants referred to the desire for practical guidelines, resources and policies. In relation to the weekend training that focused on Culture and Diversity, it was noted that it might have been useful to have a presenter from the Travelling community give one of the sessions. Overall, participant comments about the training were very positive, commenting on both the content and the delivery by the tutors/ trainers. The opportunity to meet up with other practitioners and share experiences was highly valued by all participants. The course was also externally evaluated. The findings of the external evaluation are outlined in the following chapter.

5. External Evaluation of Programme

5.1 Introduction

Approximately mid-way through the programme delivery, Unique Perspectives were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the TPTP. This evaluation provided an analysis of the programme development and delivery. The process involved consultation with members of the Project Steering Committee, tutors/ trainers involved in the course, and participants (both staff and management). The findings of the evaluation are presented according to key themes.

5.2 Pre-implementation Phase

A number of issues were raised regarding the pre-implementation phase. The CECDE's request that Barnardos and the INTO submit a joint proposal, which led to a delay in awarding the contract, consequently shortened the time available for planning and consultation. This was thought to have impacted on the programme in a number of ways:

- It was suggested that the Steering Committee was not as representative as it may have been, and that some members or potential members were not given adequate notice regarding its establishment. Therefore, they either could not participate at all or were unable to attend all meetings;
- With regards to the Steering Committee, a particular gap identified was the lack of Traveller representation;
- It was suggested that the involvement of Visiting Teachers working with Traveller Pre-schools, would have been beneficial at the planning stage;
- Difficulties were identified regarding the initial correspondence and consultation (postal questionnaire) with Traveller Pre-schools. The DES database used for this process was somewhat out-of-date and inaccuracies resulted in a small number of pre-schools being inadvertently excluded from the process. It was suggested that more time may have allowed this problem to have been identified and overcome;
- Some of the tutors/ trainers suggested that more consultation with them around planning, and particularly around time requirements, would have been beneficial. It was also suggested that once the broad subject areas to be covered were identified, an initial group meeting for all the participating tutors/ trainers may have helped contextualise and structure the training;
- It was noted by some participants that they were unclear about the details of the course during the initial stages. While it was acknowledged that this was to be expected given the pilot nature of the programme, it was suggested that a greater level of detail or explanation would have been helpful at this point;
- Finally, some stakeholders suggested that consultation with parents would have been beneficial at this stage and that the design of the programme could have included an opportunity for parents to speak to the group about their relationship with the pre-school.

Notwithstanding these issues, it was generally acknowledged that much was achieved during the short pre-implementation stage. In particular, it was felt that the consultation process facilitated buy-in and ownership amongst the participants and was beneficial in identifying the range of issues to be addressed by the training. Also, while there may have been gaps in the composition of the Steering Committee, particularly in terms of Traveller representation, on a practical level the smaller group was successful in developing the programme in a short timeframe.

5.3 Delivery Approach

From the outset, the course organisers recognised the challenges relating to the provision of training to adults, and particularly those coming from a variety of backgrounds and with varying levels of qualifications and experience. In this respect, it was considered appropriate to take a participative approach, recognising the experience, self-direction and self-motivation of adult learners. Therefore, it was decided to focus on the process of learning, including peer learning, rather than prescribed content requirement. In this context, it was expected that having identified the broad topics to be covered, the training would develop somewhat organically, according to ongoing communication with the participants.

In practice, this delivery approach was thought to have been largely successful. However, it was noted that there were some difficulties in terms of its implementation. These difficulties concerned style differences amongst learners, tutors/ trainers and organisers. Some had a preference for a more traditional approach, placing more emphasis on the role of the tutor/ trainer as the information giver, with participants taking a more passive role, thereby providing more structure but less opportunity for the adult learners to influence the process. Consequently, some participants noted that they were not always given adequate opportunity to input in the training process, while others indicated difficulties in terms of lack of structure or direction with regards to some elements of the training programme. This is likely to reflect the individual learning and/or teaching experiences of the participants themselves.

Generally, it was noted that tutors/ trainers needed to ensure that concepts were clear to participants as they progressed through the session. The participants indicated that the use of role play and practical workshops was beneficial. In terms of delivery, it was suggested that more time could have been dedicated to establishing and agreeing ground rules for each weekend, thereby addressing issues such as participants leaving early or taking breaks during sessions.

In summary, it was suggested that while the approach employed was appropriate to the training programme, and beneficial to the participants, there might have been some inconsistencies in terms of its delivery. It was suggested that, from a tutor/ organiser perspective, more comprehensive consultation (with and between tutors/ trainers) during the planning stage might have helped clarify any issues in relation to the delivery approach. From a participant perspective, it was suggested that more information at the outset regarding the approach to be employed would have been beneficial in shaping their expectations.

5.4 Training Content and Level

The training content was informed by:

- The initial recommendations of the National Evaluation Report (DES, 2003);
- The consultations carried out during the pre-implementation stage;
- The input of the steering committee; and
- The ongoing feedback received during the training delivery.

This approach to deciding on content has been considered largely successful in allowing participants to experience a broad range of topics and also to revisit topics if such a need was identified. However, some concerns were raised that with such a broad-based programme and time limitations, there may be a danger of losing focus. This may have resulted in inadequate treatment of core topics and confusion for participants, particularly those with lower levels of previous training.

It was also noted that those participants with no previous training would have benefited from some form of introductory course/ session to make them aware of terminology and basic concepts. It was suggested that this would have increased their confidence to participate in the training and enable them to engage more fully in the process. Notwithstanding this, it was noted that this group had benefited considerably through their participation in the course and through their interaction with more experienced staff members. A side issue noted with regard to this group is that many were scheme workers – particularly CE – with no job security. Therefore, while the training was beneficial for them both personally and in terms of career development, it is likely that the pre-schools will not be able to retain them in the future.

At the other end of the spectrum, some participants had a high level of training and experience. This group suggested that the range of topics covered had reinforced and refreshed what they had previously learned, as well as exposing them to new ideas and topics.

Overall, it was noted that the eclectic content of training such as this, while focusing on core topics, could offer tasters of more specific topics that participants can pursue through further training, if interested.

5.5 Child Consultation

Child consultation was carried out during the latter half of the training process and mainly involved children being given cameras to take photos illustrating various aspects of their pre-school. While it was suggested that the children enjoyed the experience, the staff indicated that they did not understand this element of the programme or what was expected to be achieved. Likewise, other stakeholders questioned how this was relevant to the training process.

5.6 Ongoing Action Research

At the outset, procedures were put in place for ongoing action research amongst the steering committee which would allow for regular feedback from the group around their perceptions of progress and learning involved. While it was intended that written feedback would be provided from the committee members, in practice this did not occur. One reason alluded to was the time commitment involved, and another reason seemed to be that members, not being involved in the day-to day delivery and planning of the course, did not feel they had feedback to contribute on such a regular basis. It was also suggested that there was not a full understanding amongst all members of what was expected in this regard.

5.7 Administration

Administration relating to the course was managed jointly between Barnardos and the INTO. Generally, this arrangement was thought to have worked well, once clear roles were assigned to each organisation.

5.8 Networking

All of those involved in the training, and particularly the participants, strongly emphasised the importance of the networking that took place. It was noted that staff in Traveller Pre-schools can often feel quite isolated and that there is little opportunity for networking, or exchange of information and support. The residential nature of the training was thought to have complemented this element of the process. Tutors/ trainers also referred to the positive relationships that developed within the group and the general enthusiasm of the participants. Likewise, participants noted that the inclusion of assistants in the training was important, giving each team a chance to work together, compared to previous in-service which had been directed only towards certain members of staff.

It was hoped that the relationships that have been developed would be maintained through the website, and through participation in further training or conferences and seminars. With regards to the latter, it was suggested that following their experience, participants would be more confident in attending relevant events.

5.9 Accessibility and Supports to Participants

Overall the TPTP was thought to have been accessible, both on a practical level in terms of venue and location, and also in terms of the approach used and the supports offered. While it was recognised that the Athlone venue involved considerable travel for some participants, this was thought to be inevitable, regardless of the venue chosen, given the national nature of the programme. There were few difficulties noted in terms of the course being residential, and generally it was felt that this contributed to networking opportunities. Notwithstanding this, it was suggested that in terms of future training, organisers might consider a combination of locally-based and national level training, or that options around rotating the venue could be considered.

Problems were identified relating to the days chosen – Friday and Saturday, in that many participants were not granted time off in lieu, and therefore they indicated that Thursday and Friday may have been more appropriate, unless time off could be arranged with management committees. Likewise, some participants, particularly those travelling longer distances, indicated that it was necessary to finish the course early on Saturday afternoon to allow them time to travel home.

A mentoring service was provided to participants and was thought to have been worthwhile and beneficial in terms of offering ongoing support and advice, particularly with regard to assignments, and also in providing a further opportunity for participants' feedback. This mentoring support was thought to have been an innovative response to supporting participants with diverse needs on a one-to-one basis and facilitating their participation in the training process.

A TPTP website was also provided and was up and running approximately mid-way through the process. While participants and other stakeholders consulted were positive about the idea of a website, particularly as a networking tool, some were not aware of the facility or others suggested they did not have adequate information in this regard.

5.10 Assessment Methods

The assessment methods used involved the keeping of a learning journal and completing assignments based on each weekend session. Overall, feedback was positive regarding this approach. The learning journal was thought to have been beneficial in that it provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on the topics covered and the issues raised. In this respect, it was mentioned that time might have been allocated towards the end of each weekend session to write the learning journal.

The majority of participants and other stakeholders were also positive regarding the assignments, indicating that they were generally practical and that often the work completed could be directly applied to the participants' pre-school work. However, some participants, particularly those with higher levels of training were not enthusiastic about the accreditation being offered and had difficulties with the time commitment involved in completing the assignments.

Moreover, some tutors/ trainers indicated confusion regarding the assignments, such as who chose the topics and how these were chosen, and what was expected of them in terms of marking papers. For the tutors/ trainers concerned, it appears that these issues were not clarified during preparatory meetings.



5.11 Management Participation

While staff were the main focus of the training, it was intended, from the outset, that members of the Boards of Management of the Traveller Pre-schools would also be catered for. Therefore, it was decided that the first and last weekends would provide for management as well as staff, with the management component of the training focusing on issues such as teamwork, communications, role of management, and health and safety. The attendance level of the management group was low for the first weekend but higher on the last weekend. A number of issues were raised regarding management involvement in the training, as follows:

- Many of the Traveller Pre-schools did not have functioning management committees, and the needs of management committees varied enormously according to their history, development, and the level of community-based supports available to them. It was noted that members of management committees needed to be aware of their roles and responsibilities and need to be up-to-date on issues such as the regulatory environment, transparency and funding. However, the organisers and tutors/ trainers suggested that it was beyond the scope of the programme to do more in-depth training with management, and that instead supports were required at the local level;
- Notwithstanding this, it was noted by all those involved that training such as this can be provided in such a way as to benefit both management and staff and that there was value in having the two groups together for some elements of the course, particularly in terms of developing a shared understanding of key issues in relation to the running of Traveller Pre-schools, and improving communication within the pre-schools;
- The management group that attended the last weekend was positive about the experience (in terms of both the staff and themselves) and many noted a need for management training and indicated that they would have like to have participated in the full course. They noted the benefits of learning more about how other committees operate and suggested that committee members might be more interested and involved in the pre-school if they knew more about its operation. Likewise, they suggested that if they had participated in the full training they would be better able to advise and help teachers, and that it would help them to work towards promoting parental involvement, both in terms of consultation and involvement on management committee. However, there were reservations amongst other stakeholders in terms of the relevance of this training to the management committee, particularly when effective management structures had yet to be established, and more immediate training needs, around the role and functions of a management committee, exist;
- Some staff felt it was beneficial to have some management involvement and that the training experience had improved communications within the pre-schools, as well as increasing their confidence in dealing with management. Nonetheless, they suggested that it would not have been appropriate or relevant for management to have been involved in all the sessions, and, in fact, this might have stifled the learning process. Therefore, they indicated that this process had highlighted a need for training for management that was beyond the scope of this programme.

Amongst the various stakeholders, there were mixed opinions regarding the appropriate level and type of management involvement in the training, with many suggesting that the arrangements made for the pilot programme, of attending the first and final session, offered a reasonable solution.

5.12 Accreditation

Amongst the organisers and the tutors/ trainers, there was a general consensus that FETAC Level V was an appropriate accreditation for the training and no difficulties were envisaged with regards to gaining this accreditation. Also, it was indicated that this accreditation offered the potential of a progression ladder for participants.

However, there were mixed opinions amongst participants regarding the award, with perceptions generally being dictated by the current level of qualification held. Those with little or no formal qualifications tended to be positive about the accreditation, and the opportunities this provided for progression. However, those with higher-level qualifications felt that a more advanced (post-graduate) qualification would be appropriate for the time committed. Notwithstanding this, it was acknowledged that the FETAC Level V could be used as an add-on to existing qualifications.

There were also queries regarding the possibility of having a Certificate of Attendance/ Participation for participants who did not complete assignments. These certificates have subsequently been made available.

Finally, some participants indicated that they would have liked more clarity or explanation of the accreditation provisions at the outset of the training process.

5.13 Outcomes for Participants

Participants were generally very positive regarding their training experience. Amongst the benefits noted were:

- The value of the networking opportunity afforded to participants. It was indicated that the training had the effect of 'opening up the pre-school' with, for example, more outside trips now being organised;
- The benefits of both teachers and childcare assistants training together and the resulting teambuilding within individual schools;
- Positive outcomes with regards to issues such as anti-bias, discrimination and parental involvement;
- Extra confidence in the day-to-day work, and more awareness of new techniques to use within the pre-school setting;
- Participation on the course was thought to have confirmed and reinforced good practice within the pre-schools, and refreshed staff skills.

Specifically amongst staff participants, there were mixed opinions regarding the involvement of management, but generally they suggested that their participation on at least one weekend (focusing on teambuilding, communications, and roles and responsibilities) was useful.

Amongst management participants there was also a positive reaction to both the training they received themselves and that given to the staff of their pre-schools. As considered above, management participants indicated a need for more comprehensive training, both in terms of their role and more specifically relating to the Traveller Pre-school service. In this respect, other stakeholders suggested that some elements of the training required by management might be outside the remit of the TPTP and that these needs should be addressed at a local level from a community development perspective.

Generally it was noted that in addition to the benefits outlined above, training such as that provided by the TPTP was important in terms of potential career enhancement for the participants and in professionalising the pre-school service.

5.14 Progression Routes

The TPTP tended to be viewed as a general taster course that would facilitate participants to undertake more specialised training in areas of specific interest. Many participants indicated that participation on this course had increased their confidence to participate in further training and/or networking events such as relevant seminars or refresher courses. Some stakeholders suggested that a Level VI qualification would be an appropriate progression from this experience.

5.15 Replication of the Model

The training module developed through the TPTP could be replicated or adapted and could have application beyond the Traveller Pre-schools. The course was thought to be of relevance to other childcare training providers, voluntary organisations and County Childcare Committees. In this respect, it was suggested that the programme should be run again in 2006/7 to facilitate those schools that did not participate on the pilot course.

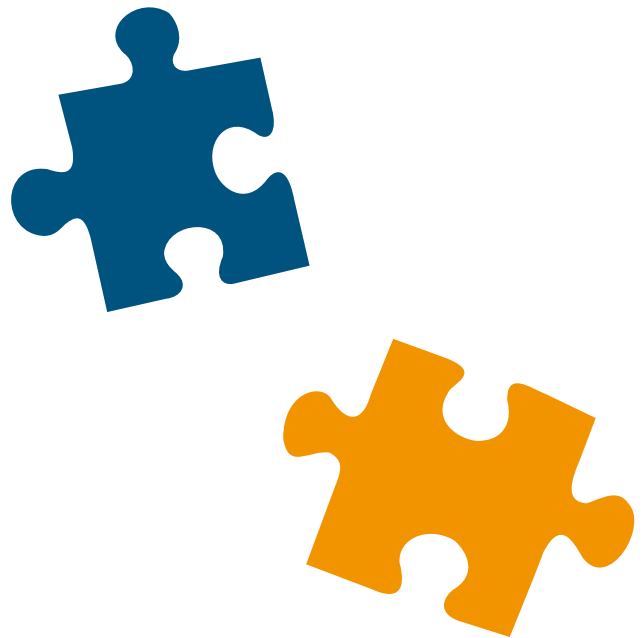
5.16 Policy Issues

Amongst the broader policy issues raised in the context of discussing the TPTP training process were:

- A number of those consulted by the external evaluators suggested that the experience of the TPTP indicates that there was still a role for a dedicated Traveller Pre-school service. This was insofar as it specifically supported the needs of both Traveller children and parents and provided locally-based dedicated services, compared with the barriers perceived in terms of mainstream, integrated schools or services;
- Conversely, others suggested that the topics considered in the training were not necessarily exclusive to the Travelling Community but that, more generally, discrimination is the main issue to be addressed. Therefore, the need to avoid segregation and isolation was emphasised, as was the need to recognise and take account of multiple discrimination, in terms of, for example, gender or disability. In this light, it was suggested that the programme could evolve into more general anti-discrimination training for those in the childcare/ pre-school sector and there could be electives on specific topics such as Travellers/ disability/ ethnic minorities;
- More generally, it was noted that the TPTP experience emphasised the need for training among both staff and management of Traveller Pre-schools. Furthermore, it was suggested that the under-resourced nature of Traveller Pre-schools was highlighted on a number of levels in terms of comparisons with the Early Start facilities, capacity at management level and staffing problems, particularly in relation to the insecure nature of CE schemes.

5.17 Conclusion

The various elements of the TPTP were considered in the context of the course evaluation. The overall feedback was generally positive and highlighted the potential for the further development and delivery of the TPTP, subject to modifications. This is now considered in terms of general conclusions outlined in Section 6.



6. Findings and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The independent evaluators of the TPTP concluded that the project made a positive and sustainable contribution to the professional development of Traveller Pre-school staff and to the general delivery of the Traveller Pre-school service in the context of early childhood education, and met its stated aim of enhancing the experiences of children and personnel in Traveller Pre-schools. The evaluation stated that the pilot project had been beneficial for all involved. While there were some challenges in relation to the joint running of the course, particularly in terms of the differences in the approaches or focus of Barnardos and the INTO and the different administrative procedures, the evaluation concluded that the organisations worked well together, both contributing equally to the success of the training.

The 'SWOT' analysis below outlines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/ challenges of the training experience. This is followed by consideration of the stated objectives of the project, in light of the training experience, and by final conclusions.

6.2 SWOT Analysis

Strengths

There are many strengths associated with the project, not least the experience of collaboration between Barnardos and INTO and the benefits brought to the project of both organisations' expertise. In addition, the involvement of both the CECDE and the DES on the steering committee lent experience and authority to the project. It was an innovative programme with a flexible, learner-centred approach to delivery. A supportive environment and the availability of a mentor facilitated teambuilding and the attendance of staff at all levels, including management. Another positive aspect of the project was the development of networking and the strengthening of the pre-schools as a group. This went some way to addressing the sense of isolation felt by some participants. There was a high level of enthusiasm and commitment among those involved and there was increased confidence among staff at the end of the project. Therefore, in addition to the new skills acquired and the reinforcing of skills already learned, the project promoted the professionalisation of the Traveller Pre-school service and highlighted the need for training for both staff and management.

Weaknesses

Among the project's weaknesses were practical issues such as the incomplete information provided at the initial stages, regarding the database of Traveller Pre-schools and lack of time at the planning stage. There was a low level of management committee attendance on the first weekend, which may reflect weaknesses in the communication flow between staff and management in some participating pre-schools. Time constraints were also identified as a weakness, with a limited number of weekends and limited time at each. The involvement of parents, Traveller groups and Visiting Teachers could have been more developed at the planning and delivery of training.

Opportunities

The project highlighted the many opportunities that had emerged in the area of pre-schools for Travellers, for staff, students and management. In terms of training, there is scope to develop the existing training modules for future programmes, and to extend the training to those pre-schools or staff that did not participate in the pilot. The course could be further developed for replication or adaptation for use in broader childcare and early education contexts. Consideration could also be given to including other socially excluded groups such as ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. The potential to facilitate ongoing networking and professional development through the promotion of relevant conferences and seminars and through use of the website also became apparent. There were also opportunities for progression amongst participants – building and expanding on what had been learnt in the project. Opportunities for further research, publications and participation in European Projects with a view to comparative analysis of training for pre-school personnel are also further possibilities.

Threats / Challenges

A number of threats or challenges to the future of programmes such as the TPTP were identified. In seeking to provide broad training, such a course could lack focus. The ongoing uncertainty about the future of Traveller Pre-schools also poses a threat to Traveller-specific training programmes, as does the lack of resources made available for Traveller Pre-schools – specifically, lack of funding for training provision. There is a need for in-service programmes for staff in Traveller Pre-schools to be provided by the DES.

6.3 Review of Project Objectives

The experience of the training delivery and the feedback from the evaluations is now considered in terms of the original objectives, as identified at the outset of the process (see section 1.5).

To enable all personnel to engage in professional development that is accredited.

Through the use of a flexible and supportive approach, including the provision of a mentoring service, the TPTP succeeded in ensuring an excellent participation rate, as well as building the confidence and capacity of the trainees to engage fully in the process and to achieve accreditation. Engagement among participants was extremely high, evidenced by the continued high participation rate.

To give a voice to children and parents in the context of participating in the pre-schools.

Through developing the skills of the pre-school staff, it is expected that they will be in a position to facilitate greater parental and child involvement in the pre-school service. Moreover, some parents, as management committee members, benefited directly from participation in the TPTP. However, it was suggested that this element could be enhanced by greater consultation, particularly with parents, and by parental (and Traveller) involvement at the steering group/ management level. The concept and practice of child consultation has been introduced to participants, some have already initiated mechanisms for implementation and others intend doing so.

To develop age-appropriate practice (curriculum and pedagogy) in Traveller Pre-schools.

The participant feedback indicated that the TPTP, in terms of content and approach, has been successful in promoting and developing age-appropriate practice in Traveller Pre-schools. Ongoing support, training and networking would be necessary to reinforce and further develop this aspect of the programme.

To develop the capacity of the management committees to manage pre-schools as effectively as possible.

The inclusion of management committee members in aspects of the programme served to highlight their need for specific training on management skills, and stimulated their interest in relevant training. While their level of involvement in the TPTP programme was generally considered appropriate and beneficial in terms of teambuilding and increasing awareness, it was felt that their full training needs were outside the scope of such a programme. In this respect, it is essential to promote the development of specific management related programmes, possibly at a local/ regional level.

To promote a network with other personnel in early years settings and use the developed network as a possible model.

The networking opportunities afforded by the training programme were considered a particularly successful and beneficial outcome of the project. The opportunities now exist to build on the networks developed through ongoing promotion of the webpage, and the provision of occasional networking opportunities at conferences or seminars.

To provide rigorous ongoing evaluation that will act as a model of in-career development in this area for future reference.

The provision of the TPTP has highlighted the training and support needs in the Traveller Pre-schools. The action research model, involving continuous reflection and adaptation of the programme, facilitated the development of a programme that has met, to some extent, the needs of the participants. However, the participants have further needs for continuation and progression that would need to be met by additional training and professional development opportunities. Follow-up support through networking and regional meetings would go some way to ensuring the delivery of quality services to Traveller children. The success of the project has given momentum to the process of quality development within this sector.

6.4 Key Findings and Recommendations

The key findings and recommendations that emerged from all of the evaluation and analysis are as follows.

6.4.1 Mainstreaming in-Career development

The opportunity for consistent and regular contact ensured that strong links were forged between participants. Many of the participants never had an opportunity to meet, since the regular in-service days of previous years had been discontinued. This enabled the development of a good support system.

It is recommended that the provision of regular in-career development be re-instated without delay, in order to build upon the momentum established.

It is also recommended that Traveller Pre-schools that did not participate in this project should be facilitated to avail of a similar programme of in-service training.

6.4.2 Successfully integrating qualification levels

The range of qualification levels, combined with the format of the training, meant that there was ample opportunity for participants to share ideas, learning and experiences with each other. This provided a very rich environment which accommodated prior experiential learning, as well as utilising formal learning.

It is recommended that annual professional development involving the whole staff team in the pre-schools be organised, in addition to the development of modules at different levels in a variety of topics to meet the needs of staff with varying levels of qualifications.

6.4.3 Mode of training

The intensive nature of the training provided short and sharp bursts of content, knowledge and skills. The coursework was assigned to be conducted in the intervals between sessions which ensured that there was an immediate opportunity to put the learning into practice, to reflect upon it and to follow-up any emergent issues at subsequent sessions. Whole-school staffs were encouraged to participate thus enabling immediate discussion and follow-up of learning from each weekend session.

Opportunities for reflection and practice between the delivery of modules should form part of the delivery structure of further professional development in this sector.

6.4.4 Mentoring

The provision of a mentor proved to be a valuable link for participants, both for individuals and for each pre-school. It facilitated the transfer of learning and also the establishment of a network. It also enabled problems to be addressed at an early stage and remedies introduced where needed.

It is recommended that mentoring and tutorial support form part of the delivery structure of further professional development.

6.4.5 Website

The idea of the website was new to most participants, and initial take-up was slow. Further training was provided during the Summer and Autumn of 2005 with a view to improving engagement. Innovative methods of engaging participants through using the new concept of SMS gateways (which allow for convergence of mobile phones and the website), and ultimately deriving immense benefits from this new methodology, were also investigated, with a view to enhancing the use of web-based support.

In order to support the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in pre-schools for Travellers, it is recommended that:

- Training in ICT be available to all pre-schools;
- ICT equipment be made available by the DES to all pre-schools for Travellers;
- The Traveller Education Support Service be given the resources to support the use of ICT in pre-schools for Travellers.

6.4.6 Personnel and tenure

A number of pre-schools used the services of CE workers as childcare assistants. There was universal agreement that the insecurity of tenure of such positions led to instability for the children, which had implications for quality, and created difficulties around planning. There was also an issue concerning the time and resources required in inducting new staff each year.

It is recommended that all pre-schools be staffed by teachers and childcare workers, paid for by the DES, in order to reduce the reliance on CE schemes for core staff.

6.4.7 Management

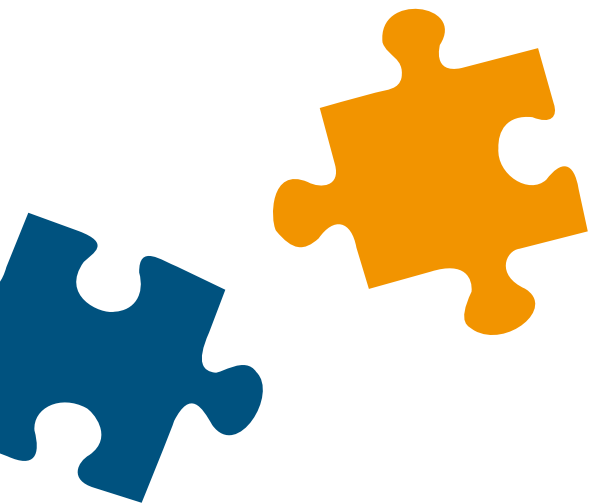
While both staff and management of the pre-schools indicated interest in receiving further training, management in particular would benefit from targeted training.

It is recommended that training be provided to management personnel in the areas of management skills, pre-school education, Traveller and intercultural issues.

6.5 Conclusions

Despite some initial teething problems, particularly relating to time constraints during the planning phase, and also challenges in terms of the range and scope of the training, the success of the programme in meeting some of the diverse needs of the participants and in fulfilling its objectives has been identified and acknowledged by the stakeholders involved and by the independent evaluation conducted on behalf of Barnardos and the INTO.

In terms of developing the learning from the TPTP experience, there is potential for the module developed to be replicated, or adapted and delivered on a much broader basis, both to Traveller specific services and to childcare or early education providers. In this respect, linkages could be explored and developed with training providers to promote the programme and its potential application in the development of general courses on cultural diversity from a childcare/ early education perspective.



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