

## EDITORIAL

BY HEINO SCHONFELD, DIRECTOR, CECDE

The core objective of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education is the development of a national framework for quality in early childhood care and education. Given the late and rather haphazard progress of early childhood education in Ireland, the fragmented nature of policy building in this area and the many different traditions and vested interests, it was always going to be a difficult task. In addition, the CECDE had been given a relatively short time to deliver this objective without losing sight of a number of other important functions.

We are therefore particularly pleased to be able to publish – in quick succession – sets of principles, standards and guidelines which will together form the first ever National Framework for Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (NFQ/ECCE). We expect to launch the full prototype of the Framework in October of this year.

In this issue of Alana, we present a considered set of 12 principles. These principles are the first and guiding part of the Framework. They are based on research evidence, Irish and International policy and practice along with intensive consultation with key stakeholders. More information on the background and context of the NFQ/ECCE can be found in this issue of Alana.

Good news: On the basis of an outline agreement with the Department of Education and Science, we are now able to advertise for the vacant position of Assistant Director. For further details please log on to our web site at [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie).

Heino Schonfeld

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Special thanks to DCULS for their work on the Irish translation of the Alana Newsletter.

# INTRODUCING THE NFQ/ECCE PRINCIPLES

BY JACQUELINE FALLON, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, CECDE

The development of the National Framework for Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (NFQ/ECCE) is the core activity of the CECDE. The role of the NFQ/ECCE is to support the provision of quality experiences for young children between the ages of birth and six years in all settings, including family day-care, infant classes, sessional services and full day-care. The development of the NFQ/ECCE is a challenging task. Our consultation process has shown that there are many different views and ideas about what quality in ECCE is and how to achieve it.

The consultation process on the different elements of the NFQ/ECCE began early last December at a meeting of the CECDE Consultative Committee. This committee is comprised of fifty stakeholder groups and is very broadly based (For more details, see [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie)). The draft Principles were circulated to the stakeholder groups for their consideration and feedback, and the Principles presented here have been changed and adapted to reflect the views and contributions of the respondents. We would like to record our appreciation and gratitude for the effort involved, and for the constructive and positive nature of the comments. The Principles have been strengthened and are more comprehensive as a result.

These Principles represent the vision which underpins and provides the context for quality ECCE in Ireland. They are inter-dependent and individual Principles are not intended to stand alone. For example, while one Principle refers to the role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences as fundamental, this must be seen in the context of the Principle which reiterates the pre-eminent role of the child's parents in promoting his/her well-being, learning and development. The role of the adult is also influenced by the environment in which adult/child interactions take place and the extent to which play is incorporated into that environment.

The second consultative stage has begun and focuses on the Standards which translate the vision provided by the Principles into practical application. The Standards will provide a benchmark for quality practice in ECCE. They will, in turn, be unpacked into the Components of Quality which will provide guidelines for quality practice, and these Components will be the subject of consultation in the near future. The prototype NFQ/ECCE will be published in October, 2005.

## PRINCIPLES AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right.

Early childhood, the period from birth to six years, is a significant and unique time in the life of every individual. Every child needs and has the right to positive experiences in early childhood. As with every other phase in life, positive supports and adequate resources are necessary to make the most of this period. Provision of such supports and resources should not be conditional on the expectations of the economy, society or other interests.

The child's individuality, strengths, rights and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences.

The child is an active agent in his/her own development through his/her interactions with the world. These interactions are motivated by the individual child's abilities, interests, previous experiences and desire for independence. Each child is a competent learner from birth and quality early years experiences can support each child to realise their full potential. Provision of these experiences must reflect and support the child's strengths, needs and interests. Children have the right to be listened to and have their views on issues that affect them heard, valued and responded to.

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

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

Responsive, sensitive and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the well-being, learning and development of the young child.

The relationships that the child forms within his/her immediate and extended environment from birth will significantly influence his/her well-being, development and learning. These relationships are two-way and include adults, peers, family and the extended community. Positive relationships, which are secure, responsive and respectful and which provide consistency and continuity over time, are the cornerstone of the child's well-being.

Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood care and education.

Equality, as articulated in Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and in the Equal Status Act (2000), is a fundamental characteristic of quality early childhood care and education provision. It is a critical prerequisite for supporting the optimal development of all children in Ireland. It requires that the individual needs and abilities of each child are recognised and supported from birth towards the realisation of his/her unique potential. This means that all children should be able to gain access to, to participate in, and to benefit from early years services on an equal basis.

Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural and linguistic identity validated.

Diversity is a term which is generally used to describe differences in individual children by virtue of gender, age, skin colour, language, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, religion, race or other background factors such as family structure, economic circumstances etc. Quality early childhood environments should demonstrate respect for diversity through promoting a sense of belonging for all children within the cultural heritage of Ireland. They should also provide rich and varied experiences which will support children's ability to value social and cultural diversity.

The physical environment of the young child has a direct impact on his/her well-being, learning and development.

The child's experiences in early childhood are positively enhanced by interactions with a broad range of environments. These include the indoor and outdoor, built and natural, home and out-of-home environments. The environment should be high quality and should extend and enrich the child's development and learning. These experiences stimulate curiosity, foster independence and promote a sense of belonging. The development of respect for the environment will also result from such experiences.

The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments.

The promotion of child well-being is a characteristic of a quality environment. This involves the protection of each child from harmful experiences and the promotion of child welfare. Additionally, the opportunity to form trusting relationships with adults and other children is a key characteristic of quality. Promotion of safety should not prevent the child from having a rich and varied array of experiences in line with his/her age and stage of development.

The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental.

Quality early childhood practice is built upon the unique role of the adult. The competencies, qualifications, dispositions and experience of adults, in addition to their capacity to reflect upon their role, are essential in supporting and ensuring quality experiences for each child. This demanding and central role in the life of the young child needs to be appropriately resourced, supported, and valued.

The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires cooperation, communication and mutual respect.

Teamwork is a vital component of quality in early childhood care and education. It is the expression of cooperative, coordinated practice in any setting. Shared knowledge and understanding, clearly communicated among the team within the setting; with and among other professionals involved with the child; and with the parents is a prerequisite of quality practice and reflects a "whole-child perspective". This also ensures the promotion of respectful working relationships among all adults supporting the well-being, learning and development of the child. Such teamwork, coordination and communication must be valued, supported and resourced by an appropriate infrastructure at local, regional and national levels.

Pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education.

Pedagogy is a term that is used to refer to the whole range of interactions which support the child's development. It takes a holistic approach by embracing both care and education. It acknowledges the wide range of relationships and experiences within which development takes place and recognises the connections between them. It also supports the concept of the child as an active learner. Such pedagogy must be supported within a flexible and dynamic framework that addresses the learning potential of the 'whole child.' Furthermore it requires that early childhood practitioners are adequately prepared and supported for its implementation.

Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child.

Play is an important medium through which the child interacts with, explores and makes sense of the world around him/her. These interactions with, for example, other children, adults, materials events and ideas, are key to the child's well-being, development and learning. Play is a source of joy and fulfilment for the child. It provides an important context and opportunity to enhance and optimise quality early childhood experiences. As such, play will be a primary focus in quality early childhood settings.

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CECDE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE

*By Peadar Cassidy, Information Officer, CECDE*

**T**hough a library and information service is not expressly included in the CECDE's Programme of Work, we have by default found ourselves with a large and diverse array of resources on Early Childhood Care and Education. Some of these have been donated by members of the early years sector in response to enquiries we made in terms of research we were compiling; some have been gathered at conferences, both national and international; some have been collected at launches we have attended in the short time we have been in operation. It fell to myself as Information Officer to organise these resources into a library which initially the staff, and eventually the greater public, could access. These resources include books, reports, resource packs and videos amongst others and can now be found in Room C310 of Belvedere House in St. Patrick's College. A searchable database of our catalogue is available both in-house and on our website at [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie).

The Library and Information Service is specific to Early Childhood Care and Education and houses over 1000 resources on this area. As such, it complements existing library services such as the National Children's Resource Centre in Barnardos which, along with both St. Patrick's College's Cregan Library and the Dublin Institute of Technology's library, are also used by ourselves to source information.

While the Library and Information Service is in its infancy and will hopefully develop into a more complete service in time, we will seek to answer all requests for information. There are no plans at present to offer a borrowing facility but users are welcome to visit the library by appointment and there is a photocopier and desk to this end. If an article or chapter is required, the Information Officer may be contacted by phone or email and will be happy to photocopy and send this out by post.

Copyright forms are available and users are asked to complete these and return them to the Information Officer where requested.

We look forward to serving whatever information needs we can fulfil and may be contacted at the address below:

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## LAUNCH OF INSIGHTS ON QUALITY AND MAKING CONNECTIONS

On February 7th, the Minister of State in the Department of Education and Science, Síle de Valera, launched Insights on Quality and Making Connections, reviews of national and international policies, practices and research relating to quality in early childhood care and education.

These reports are vital to the development of the National Framework for Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (NFQ/ECCE), and they provide a critical examination of current thinking in relation to quality in the early years, both here and abroad.

Heino Schonfeld, Director of the CECDE, said: "These two comprehensive reports are important contributions to quality standards which are both evidence based and culturally appropriate."

Commenting on the reports, Minister de Valera stated that "These studies provide a fascinating insight into policy, practices and research relating to quality in early childhood care and education at a national and international level. They represent a major contribution to the debate on early childhood care and education in this country. Each of the reports contains important recommendations which will assist in the development of a National Framework for Quality."

Minister de Valera highlighted the important work of the CECDE in developing a quality framework for early childhood education and targeted interventions for children who have special needs or who are disadvantaged.

The Minister stated: "The reports represent a valuable contribution to discussion and debate in the early childhood care and education sector."

Copies of both Insights on Quality and Making Connections are available from the Centre and are also hosted on our website at [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie). Please contact us on 8842110 for details of how to order.