

EDITORIAL: BY HEINO SCHONFELD, DIRECTOR, CECDE



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

The 29th of September was an important day for the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education. An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern T.D. launched our first major publication "An Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990 - 2003" and the inaugural meeting of our Consultative Committee took place on that day.

In his speech An Taoiseach confirmed the commitments of his Government to develop early childhood care and education on the basis of the White Paper "Ready to Learn" and the Programme for Government. He impressed by pledging his personal support for these commitments.

The first meeting of the Consultative Committee of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education enjoyed a very encouraging attendance from across the interests within the early years sector. Over 40 organisations, Government Departments and personalities were represented and agreed their terms of reference. There was discussion around a number of areas such as the continuing split between "care" and "education", the "Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill 2003" and the role of Irish language in early childhood care and education. The atmosphere at the meeting was very supportive and positive and we are very grateful to have such a great source of expert knowledge to assist us.

The day was very enjoyable but also highly significant. It brought home the overwhelming support and interest in early childhood care and education in Ireland. The presence of An Taoiseach confirmed the high level of priority accorded to early childhood care and education by the Government.

Heino Schonfeld
Director



AN TAOISEACH, BERTIE AHERN LAUNCHES "AN AUDIT OF RESEARCH ON EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN IRELAND 1990-2003"

An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern launched the first report of **The Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education (CECDE)** entitled "An Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2003" in the **Skylon Hotel, Drumcondra** on the **29th September**. Speaking at the launch, An Taoiseach acknowledged the significance of this body of work and re-affirmed his commitment to early childhood care and education. The event was well attended by a wide variety of familiar faces in the early childhood care and education sector, including members of our own Consultative Committee, who then held their inaugural meeting in the afternoon.

This report, researched and written by Thomas Walsh, collates all research on the early childhood sector in Ireland in the past 13 years and presents the findings with analysis and recommendations. With no previous review of publications in this area, this audit will provide an important landmark and a valuable tool to all stakeholders in the early childhood care and education sector. At the launch the author acknowledged the co-operation of the sector in compiling the research and observed that "this research reflects and contributes to the sector's growing professional identity and the developing professional status of early years practitioners."

Both the publication and an accompanying database are now available on our website at www.cecde.ie; the database is fully searchable and will be kept up-to-date.

To obtain a copy of the report "An Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2003", please contact the Centre directly or access it online at <http://www.cecde.ie/english/database.php>.

ON TARGET?; AN AUDIT OF PROVISION OF SERVICES TARGETING DISADVANTAGE AND SPECIAL NEEDS AMONG CHILDREN 0-6

By Jacqueline Fallon, Development Officer, CECDE

Almost exactly a year after we started work on the audit of services which target disadvantage and special needs among children in the birth to six years age group, we are in the final stages of the project. Caught up as we are in the day to day work of analysing data and considering the issues which arise from that data, it is agreeable to have the opportunity to look back over the past year, and recall the experience.

Beginning in November 2002 until April 2003, we were engaged in data collection in consultation and co-operation with a broad range of stakeholders. We were, and remain, deeply grateful to the very many people, from individual service providers to local, regional and national organisations, who generously helped us, both with their expertise and in making information available to us. This is the first time an audit of this nature has been conducted, and it is perhaps useful at this stage to consider the difference between it and a census. This difference has arisen in questions of how this audit differs from the census conducted some years ago by Area Development Management [ADM] on behalf of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The census set out to log the entire population of childcare services throughout the country, and to provide a directory of those services. *'On Target?'* is conceptualised as a systematic review of specific categories of provision for development purposes. Through this publication we will also be raising issues for subsequent discussion with stakeholders, issues which the audit process has brought to light and which impact on the delivery of services. The audit will not function as a directory of services, and services will not be identified individually.

Once the cut-off point for information gathering was reached, the challenge then was to collate information which had come in many different forms from many different sources into a harmonized format. This process took some time, and provided an interesting challenge. Once this had been achieved the database was coded to reflect the diversity and variety which is such a feature of provision in Ireland. Work then commenced on finding an appropriate method of illustrating the findings, and a mapping project was undertaken.

In keeping with the rationale, which sees this project as a starting point for consultation within the sector, *'On Target?'* sets the research findings in the context of an exploration of the nature of provision here, and of the issues which impact on the type of service focused on in the audit.

'On Target?' will be published in the near future. It is hoped it will stimulate debate on the nature of provision of targeted services for children experiencing disadvantage and children with special needs. For the first time information pertaining to all types of provision will be combined to provide a perspective on the entire range of services for children in the 0-6 age range regardless of the origin of such services. The CECDE recognises that all those involved in the care and education of our youngest children hold the children at the heart of their work, and that is the cement which will hold together the building blocks of co-ordination and development.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING IN IRELAND – INFORMING THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY STANDARDS

By Gemma Kiernan, Assistant Director, CECDE

We are currently preparing a conceptual framework discussing how children from 0-6 years develop and learn in Ireland as part of our work in developing national quality standards for the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector. Increasing knowledge about childhood and child development and learning has much to contribute toward understanding the nature of quality in early childhood care and education. With this in mind, we intend to use the framework to help us develop national quality standards in the areas of curriculum/methodology, equipment/materials, staff/qualifications, and parental involvement. We recognize that much of the knowledge about child development and learning is already documented. However, we believe that its distillation to consider current perceptions of what is best for children and the ensuing implications for developing quality standards in the Irish context, is innovative.

Although the framework is currently only a work in progress, it will be informed by a number of guiding principles.

- It will be **eclectic** in orientation, critically examining a variety of theories and documented evidence to explore early childhood (0-6 years) development and learning.
- It will adopt an **holistic** approach to understanding children's development and learning emphasising the interplay between the physical, psychological (cognitive, emotional, moral, spiritual) and social aspects. It will actively examine how to best facilitate children's development and learning recognising the diversity of their lives, as it relates for example to gender, ethnicity, ability and socio-economic status.
- It will contextualise children's development and learning in an **ecological** context, considering the micro and macro elements of environmental influence. In particular, it will examine children's relationships, activities, and surroundings including their wider socio-cultural setting in Ireland.
- It will look at children's **achievements** in light of their diversity and examine their development of a sense of mastery, emphasising their successes as well as their challenges.
- It will view children as **actively engaged** in co-constructing their own and other's experiences.
- It will adopt both a **rights and needs** based perspective.
- It will emphasise both **protective and risk factors**, exploring their influence on children's development and learning.
- It will examine the historical and contemporary influences of **practice, policy and research** on children's development and learning in Ireland.

In terms of structure and shape, the framework will cover themes such as the historical and cultural context of early childhood care and education in Ireland, the developing and learning child and facilitating children's development and learning. In particular, it will consider what is best for children in terms of facilitating their development and learning during the early years. It will also consider the vision we have for our children in Ireland, what we want our children to be, recognizing their similarities and differences and their diversity.

We hope to have a draft of the framework available for consultation with the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector by early next year (2004). We envisage that the framework will provide a sound theoretical and evidential basis for the national quality standards we will produce, and a common language for constructing quality in the Irish context.

CONSULTATION ON QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

In October, the Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education held a series of seminars entitled "Consultation on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education" in the following locations:
20th October: Sheldon Park Hotel, Kylemore Road, Dublin 10
23rd October: Rochestown Park Hotel, Douglas, Cork
29th October: Galway Bay Hotel, Salthill, Galway

The seminars were aimed at everyone with an interest in Early Childhood Care and Education (e.g. Early Years Practitioners, Infant Teachers, Parents). Local facilitators were recruited to co-ordinate the break-out groups and assist with their discussion.

Each seminar involved short presentations on the CECDE and on the issue of Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education. Participants then had the opportunity to discuss the topic, provide feedback and so, take part in the consultation process that will assist us in our work, developing quality standards for all settings for children aged 0-6 in Ireland.

The questions asked on this issue were:

- **Defining Quality**
What does quality in early childhood care and education mean for you?
- **Assessing Quality**
What do you think are the most effective ways of assessing quality in early childhood care and education?
- **Supporting Quality**
What support do you need to achieve and maintain quality in early childhood care and education?

The feedback forms are also available by contacting the Centre directly or by taking part in our [online survey](http://www.cecde.ie) at www.cecde.ie. We are hoping to conclude this survey by November 30th, giving us over a month from the first seminar to compile as many responses as possible. Results will be made available on our website as soon as possible and will be published in the next issue of Alana.

More seminars are planned for November as follows:
24th November: The Hillgrove Hotel, Monaghan
25th November: The Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone
27th November: Óstán Cheathrú Rua, Co. na Gaillimhe
For more information, please contact the Centre directly.

We would like to take this opportunity to everyone who participated in this consultation process. The responses will provide us with valuable information towards the development of a quality framework for early childhood care and education in Ireland.

Research Students

We are pleased to announce that we have recruited two PhD students as part of our Research Strategy to complement and strengthen the research capacity of the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector. The CECDE, St. Patrick's College and the Dublin Institute of Technology will jointly supervise these students.

Anne Boyle

Anne has taught in a traveller pre-school in Galway since 1986 and also serves on our Consultative Committee representing the Traveller Pre-School Teachers Association. She will undertake her PhD studies in 'Parental Involvement in Traveller Pre-Schools' over 3 years, supervised by designated staff in the CECDE and in St. Patrick's College.

Mary O'Kane

Mary is just completing her MPhil where she studied the effect of pre-school regulations on early childhood care and education. Mary will start her PhD studies in 'The Transition from Pre-School to Primary School' in January. Again this will be completed over 3 years, supervised by designated staff in the CECDE and by Noirin Hayes in the Dublin Institute of Technology, based in Mountjoy Square.