

Alana

Newsletter of the Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education

EDITORIAL: "AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR..."

BY HEINO SCHONFELD, DIRECTOR, CECDE

The beginning of a New Year is often a good time to pause and take stock as well as look at the tasks and events ahead.

2003 was another good and exciting year for early childhood care and education in Ireland and also a year of achievement for the CECDE.

An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern launched our "Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland" making a renewed commitment on behalf of the Government to develop and extend early education services.

The CECDE completed its first major structured consultation project with seven seminars nationwide and an online survey. More than 400 practitioners, parents and policymakers participated and made most valuable contributions to our work. This, and the first meeting of the CECDE Advisory Committee created a strong link between the CECDE and many stakeholders of early childhood care and education.

We designed a comprehensive research strategy in support of the objectives of the Centre and conducted or commissioned a number of important research projects. In addition, the CECDE is funding four doctoral studentships at DIT and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

A number of targeted pilot projects were agreed with the Department of Education and Science representing considerable investment for innovative developments in the coming 18 months.

Looking forward to this year, we will publish an "Audit of Provision for Children with Educational Disadvantage and Special Needs" which has been completed but needs final editing, translating and printing. Shortly after that we will consult with the public on a "Conceptual Framework" for early childhood care and education in Ireland. This will be an important contributing document for the drafting of quality standards later in the year.

Over the coming year we will continue to strengthen our consultative work with the early childhood care and education sector and the wider public through the advisory Committee and many other channels. It will be a priority to engage more effectively with parents.

A highlight of 2004 will be an international conference in Dublin Castle on the theme of quality in early childhood care and education. This

conference will take place at the end of September 2004 and you find a separate announcement with call for papers in this edition of Alana.

The policy environment for early childhood care and education in Ireland remains challenging and fast moving: We are looking forward to the publication of the OECD report on early childhood care and education in Ireland and also the consultative process on education in Ireland initiated by the Minister for Education and Science.

Other important developments include the long overdue review of the childcare regulations and the public consultation on the soon to be published document "Towards a Framework for Early Learning" by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

We are looking forward to work with you through these exciting times for the benefit of young children and their families!

Heino Schonfeld
Director

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**‘QUESTIONS OF QUALITY’
DEFINING, SUPPORTING, ASSESSING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION**

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 23RD-25TH, DUBLIN CASTLE

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT AND CALL FOR PAPERS

Welcome note

On behalf of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education I am delighted to invite you to our first international conference on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education. The conference will be held in the beautiful environs of the Dublin Castle Conference Centre, Ireland from the 23rd-25th September and will be hosted by Mr Noel Dempsey, Minister for Education and Science. The theme we have chosen is Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education. Children have a right to have their needs met by high quality services and we expect a lively exchange of diverse views and interpretations of quality from around the globe.

Below you will find some information on the CECDE and the themes of our conference and if you are interested in submitting a paper for presentation, you will find details here also.

I look forward to meeting you in Dublin in September.

Heino Schonfeld.
Director CECDE.

Who Should Go?

This conference is aimed at practitioners, policy makers, parents, academics, students and anyone with an interest in early childhood care and education (ecce). It will provide a valuable opportunity for all those working with young children to actively participate in a dynamic forum which will address key questions of quality. This is a chance for delegates to share information and experiences of practice; to discuss and debate current research findings; to exchange innovative policy approaches and to network with others who are committed to making a difference in the lives of young children.

Keynote Speakers

Dr Richard Clifford, Senior Scientist at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina and co-director of both the National Center for Early Development and Learning and the National Prekindergarten Center in the US. Dr Clifford's main interests include the public financing of programmes for children and the provision of quality learning environments for young children.

Dr Mathias Urban is from the Institute of Pedagogy at the Martin Luther University in Halle-Wittenberg, Germany. He has been involved in the development of quality programmes for many years and since 1999, has worked with the National Quality Initiative.

Third speaker to be announced.

Call For Papers

The CECDE would like to invite interested parties to submit papers under the following themes:

Defining Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education
Assessing Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education
Supporting Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education

Presentations will be 30 minutes in duration with an additional 10 minutes for questions and answers. Presenters are requested to submit an abstract on their chosen topic.

Please note the following:

- The Abstract should be no more than 200 words and should include the title and an overview of the content of your presentation. Please indicate clearly which theme you are addressing.
- Include your full name, professional title, institutional affiliation, address, phone number and email address.
- The official language for the conference is English
- Deadline for the submission of abstracts is **15th April 2004**.
- Abstract should be sent to: Sharon O' Brien, Administrative Officer, Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education, The Gate Lodge, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
Tel: +353 1 884 2110 Fax: +353 1 884 2111 Email: Sharon.obrien@spd.dcu.ie

Further Information

For further information and bookings, Please contact: Sinead Marrinan, Conference Partners Ltd., 96 Haddington Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Tel: +353 1 667 7188 Fax: +353 1 664 3701.
Email: sinead@conferencepartners.ie Conference website www.cecde.ie

REPORT OF THE PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION ON QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

By Thomas Walsh, Development Officer, CECDE

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education undertook a series of six consultative seminars on 'Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education' in October and November 2003. The primary focus of the consultative seminars was to gain the insights and perspectives of all stakeholders in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector in relation to quality. Consultation is a core value of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education; as is stated in our Programme of Work, "Consultation with stakeholders will be a crucial part of the process of developing quality standards." (CECDE, 2001: 4) The consultative seminars have provided us with key information and insights as we continue on the process of fulfilling our core function of devising a quality framework for all settings attended by children from birth to age six.

Six consultative seminars were held in total at 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
- 24th November - Hillgrove Hotel, Monaghan
- 25th November - Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone
- 27ú lá de mhí na Samhna - Óstán Cheathrú Rua, Co. na Gaillimhe

The final seminar was conducted through the medium of Irish while all documentation was provided in both English and Irish. A facility was established on the Centre's website (www.cecde.ie) to allow stakeholders who were not able to attend the seminars to complete and submit the form on-line. The seminars were promoted by a number of means including the dissemination of flyers through umbrella organizations and representative groups, through our Consultative committee, radio interviews and advertisements, use of the Centre's databases and personal contacts.

Each seminar was conducted in the evening to facilitate participants unavailable during the day due to work or family commitments. The seminars then opened with two brief presentations; the first relating to the origins and progress of the CECDE and the second describing the rationale and format of the evening. Delegates were then randomly assigned to discussion groups; each with a briefed facilitator to ensure all participants had an opportunity to voice their perspectives. Questionnaires were distributed and the discussion was preceded by the completion of background/demographic data. We chose a process of collaborative/participatory research in relation to the consultation process to promote a stimulating and active dialogue, thus yielding a wealth of research data for the devising of the quality standards. It also afforded delegates at the seminar the opportunity to engage in dialogue within groups, composed of people from diverse backgrounds, professions and disciplines. The quality standards are comprised of three distinct elements and the group were invited to focus on these three questions:

1. What does the term '**quality**' in early childhood care and education mean to you?
2. In your opinion, what are the most effective ways of **assessing quality** in early childhood care and education?
3. What **supports** do you need to receive in order to achieve and maintain quality in early childhood care and education?

The seminar concluded with feedback from the facilitators of the key points raised within their discussion groups.

We are extremely grateful to all participants, from a diverse array of backgrounds and interests who took the time to share their expertise and insights with us. These include parents, stiúthóirí naíonra, childminders, early years practitioners, playgroup leaders, service providers, national voluntary childcare representatives, students, trade union representatives, government department representatives, County Childcare Committee representatives, infant teachers, school principals, Health Board representatives, Community Development Boards and policy makers. We are especially appreciative of the excellent work of the facilitators in enabling and promoting the dialogue and in ensuring the voices of all were heard. The CECDE is committed to ongoing consultation with the sector as these standards are produced and are piloted.

The Centre has also completed a number of research projects that feed directly into the devising of the quality framework; with the consultative seminars producing an important element of the montage that will be used in producing the standards. These include a Conceptual Framework on early years learning which outlines appropriate learning goals and objectives and a number of pieces of research focusing on quality in Ireland and in the international context.

Preliminary Findings

A total of 387 respondents participated in the consultative process by attending the six seminars, by availing of the online facility to complete the questionnaire and by returning the questionnaires by post. The majority of the participants were female (95%), the majority in the 25-54 age category. Contributors represented a diverse array of backgrounds and interest groups within the ECCE sector, the larger sections comprising of Practitioners/Teachers (43%); Students (29%) and Parents (28%). An excellent balance of urban (56%) and rural (40%) participants was achieved, while 4% made no reply to this question. The main pedagogical approaches in use were Montessori (20%), Play-based (17%) and High Scope (15%).

In relation to the issue of **Defining Quality**, there were 223 individual answers, highlighting the complexity and multi-faceted nature of quality in relation to ECCE in Ireland. The main areas of consensus as evidenced by the responses relate to the Training and Qualifications of Staff (47%); the creation of a Suitable Environment for the Child (47%); Parental Involvement (32%) and the Recognition of the Individuality of the Child (31%).

The question of **Assessing Quality** proved no more conclusive, with 217 diverse responses. Parental Involvement once again featured prominently (35%), as did Reports and Observations on each Individual Child (27%) and the use of Outside Advisors and Support Workers (23%).

Lastly, the area of **Supporting Quality** once again drew great variety in its responses, with 226 separate replies. The necessity of Funding topped the poll, cited by 43% of respondents; while the interrelated issues of Training and Qualifications (35%) and Continuous In-service Training (28%) were prominent responses.

The CECDE is currently in the process of drafting a comprehensive report on the Consultative Seminars, collating the collective views and experiences of the sector as relayed in the consultative seminars, and this will be available in Spring 2004. We would like to reiterate our appreciation to all the participants who contributed to the consultative process. Your views will be decisive as we progress our work on devising a Quality Framework for ECCE in Ireland.

The full report of the findings from the Consultation on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education will be published soon. Please contact the Centre at 01 8842110 or early.childhood@spd.dcu.ie to be sent a copy when it is available.

ON TARGET?

"On Target? An Audit of Provision of Services Targeting Disadvantage and Special Needs among Children from Birth to Six Years in Ireland" will be published soon - please contact the Centre to be sent a copy when it is available at 01 8842110 or early.childhood@spd.dcu.ie and check our website at www.cecde.ie for details of the launch.

Editor

Heino Schonfeld

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If you have comments or suggestions for this newsletter, please contact the Information Officer at 01 8842113 or by email at peadar.cassidy@spd.dcu.ie

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

Also: The CECDE Submission to the Educational Disadvantage Committee on the Traveller Education Strategy is now available directly from the Centre and can also be accessed on our website at www.cecde.ie.

OMEP Ireland Annual Research Conference

Saturday 24th April 2004

Venue: Dublin Institute of Technology, Aungier Street Dublin

Title: **CHILDREN OF THE GLOBAL VILLAGE**

Keynote Speaker: Heino Schonfeld CECDE

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