

## EDITORIAL

**BY HEINO SCHONFELD, DIRECTOR, CECDE**

I hope you all had a great summer and returned with new energy to your respective areas of work! However, it appears to me that the traditional "slow" summer is rapidly becoming a myth and mere distant memory...The CECDE in any case has continued to work hard over the past three months. But more on that later.

Many of you have got to know Dr. Gemma Kiernan through her work as Assistant Director of the CECDE. Gemma resigned from her position with the CECDE in June for a new post as Lecturer in DCU. We are of course happy about Gemma's success but also very sad to see her leave. Her contribution to the work of the Centre and to early childhood care and education in Ireland has been of great importance and impact. Gemma's calm, competent and confident presence is very much missed and we wish her success in her new position.

The team of the CECDE has continued to complete many of the necessary groundwork described in our programme of work. We will publish two important documents shortly: the first is a review of international policy and practice relating to quality in early childhood care and education. The second is a survey and analysis of approaches to quality in early childhood care and education in the Republic of Ireland. I expect the latter to be of particular interest. Both publications will contribute to the work on our core objective: the development of a National Framework for Quality in early childhood care and education.

In the meantime our preparations for the International Conference "Questions of Quality" in Dublin Castle from September 23rd to 25th 2004 gain momentum and I am glad to say that the programme represents a very exciting mix of Irish and International contributions. Those of you who haven't yet registered, please have a look at Sharon O'Brien's article within this issue.

**Heino Schonfeld**

Director

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## LOOKING FORWARD TO THE CECDE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 'QUESTIONS OF QUALITY'

*Sharon O'Brien, Administrative Officer, CECDE*

If you haven't yet booked your place for "Questions of Quality" from the 23rd to the 25th of September, you may want to consider doing so this week to avail of our early registration fee of €295. See below for details on how to register.

So what can we expect from the CECDE's first international conference? A quick glance at our programme points to an eclectic mix of presentations under the themes "Defining, Assessing and Supporting Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education". The Opening Address will be given by Mr Noel Dempsey, Minister for Education and Science and our keynote speakers are internationally renowned experts in the field who have chosen to approach the issue of Quality from different but complimentary perspectives. Professor Tricia David raises the awareness of Quality as a culturally specific matter as she discusses the UK's Birth-to-three Matters Programme. Dr Mathias Urban focuses on the importance of quality management and leadership in educational systems with special reference to the German system. Learning environments are of paramount importance to practitioners and Dr Richard Clifford takes a unique look at perfecting the balance between stability and dynamism. Dr Nóirín Hayes draws together national and international research and highlights its importance in creating a National Framework for Quality.

Our three key themes of Defining, Assessing and Supporting Quality will be discussed in three separate workshop sessions. Within these sessions, 36 presentations will be given on a rich variety of topics presenting some fascinating pieces of original research. Throughout the presentations, there is a global flavour as we look at case studies on the research and impact of international approaches to Quality Standards. There is also much emphasis on encouraging creativity and diversity in early learning curricula and environments.

Presentations under the theme "Defining Quality" range from a longitudinal study of spontaneous drawings of young children, a critical examination of Fairy Tale literature to studies on numeracy and ICT in the early years. The role of nature in early learning is explored and we take a look at research conducted in the development of Quality Assurance Systems in Ireland, Europe and Australia.

There are many different approaches to the second theme, "Assessing Quality" and here the presenters introduce us to critiques of a variety of child-focused rating scales, regulations and self-assessment models. Presentations investigate how best to consult with young children as part of the process and how to regard them as actors in their own learning. Here too, presenters look at a study examining the relationship between symbolic play and language development in children with Down syndrome.

Our final set of presentations take place on Saturday morning under the theme of "Supporting Quality". This will involve a look at a family literacy programme and family support models, including an approach for infants with disabilities. An integrated holistic model of early intervention for children with physical disabilities is presented. In addition, the Community Playgroups in Ireland, and the multifunctional role of play, are examined.

The CECDE is delighted with the interest in and diversity of approaches to the themes of our conference and it emphasises the great commitment among stakeholders to improving the lives of young children. While September's conference is shaping up to be a thoroughly enjoyable and informative event, it is also a valuable step on the road towards a National Framework for Quality.

To register for "Questions of Quality", simply log on to our website [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie) or contact Sinead Marrinan at Conference Partners on +353 (1) 6677188 for a registration form.

# A REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL POLICIES, PRACTICES AND RESEARCH RELATING TO QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

BY THOMAS WALSH, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, CECDE

In January 2004, the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) commissioned the Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER) to undertake a review of quality in Early Childhood Care and Education in the international context. This research was completed by the CSER in May 2004 and is currently being edited and prepared for publication by the CECDE.

The international review forms one of the pillars that will be used to underpin and support the development of the National Framework for Quality (NFQ) by the CECDE. The other pillars are the development of 'A Conceptual Framework on how Young Children Develop and Learn in Ireland', the report of the CECDE consultation undertaken in October and November 2003, *'Talking About Quality'* and *'A National Review of Quality in ECCE in Ireland – Policy, Practice and Research 1990-2004.'* The report of the consultation was published in Spring 2004 and the remaining pillars of the NFQ will be published in the Autumn of 2004.

There has been great activity internationally on the question of quality in Early Childhood Care and Education. While the NFQ will primarily reflect Irish developments in recent years, it is important to procure an understanding of international models of policy, practice and research in relation to quality. Much can be learned from the successes and failures in other jurisdictions and cross-national comparisons provide an opportunity for critical reflection on many unquestioned assumptions and practices in Ireland.

In consultation with the CECDE, the CSER chose seven countries for inclusion within the review. These were chosen to attain a good representation of particular models of ECCE provision internationally. The countries profiled are Germany, Italy, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, Norway and New Zealand. It was considered important to include Northern Ireland by virtue of our geographical proximity and our aspiration towards enhanced harmonisation of policies under the Good Friday Agreement.

Following an outline of the context of the review and a brief analysis of the complexity of the concept of quality in ECCE, each country is profiled individually. Owing to the variations in structure and operation of ECCE provision in all countries, the review is presented within a broad framework. This includes the following aspects for each country with varying sub-headings, reflecting the organisation of ECCE within various jurisdictions:

1. Introduction
2. Context for Quality
3. Defining Quality
4. Assessing Quality
5. Supporting Quality
6. Educational Disadvantage and Special Needs
7. Implications for Ireland

The report concludes with a synthesis of the common themes from the cross-national review and an outline of the implications of the findings for the development of the NFQ in the Irish context. These implications include the need for a coordinated policy framework, the use of a broad and flexible definition of quality, the engagement of all stakeholders, the provision of adequate pre-service and in-service training and an adequate support infrastructure to assist implementation. The report will be published by the CECDE in Autumn of 2004.

# A REVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICIES, PRACTICES AND RESEARCH RELATING TO QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

BY MARESA DUIGNAN, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, CECDE

This paper presents a detailed review of documentation pertaining to quality in early childhood care and education. Policy, practice and research in this arena in Ireland, has experienced a renaissance since the early 1990's and this has resulted in a marked increase in related documentation, particularly since the introduction of statutory regulation of pre school services in 1997.

The review, whilst set in the context of modern Ireland, acknowledges the particular historical social and cultural influences that have culminated in the present day situation. Since 1990, dramatic changes in the socio-economic status of Ireland have had a profound impact on the perception and role of children in society, as well as how they are cared for and educated. The expanding economy has necessitated an increased participation of women in the workforce, with consequential effects on the demands for out of home childcare. Changing family forms have also impacted upon the experiences of children in these formative years. Children are now increasingly targeted as consumers, while technological advances have heralded changes in the way children play and interact with the world around them.

Policy, practice and research documentation is considered in separate chapters.

- The complex web of policy, related to ECCE, emanating from statutory and non-statutory organisations, is clearly and concisely presented along with its implications for the work of the CECDE towards the development of the NFQ.
- The search for documentary evidence of practical initiatives related to quality revealed a rich store of information and expertise, which provides valuable insight and direction towards the development and implementation of the NFQ. The overarching implications of this body of material are summarised and presented.
- Whilst comparatively little research has been completed at a national level on the issue of quality in ECCE, many individual organisations and researchers have been engaged in addressing the key questions of quality over the past decade. In this section, the contribution of this body of work is considered and the implications for the development of the NFQ are presented.

The report concludes with a discussion of the generic themes that have emerged from the review in relation to defining, assessing and supporting quality in ECCE in Ireland. A synthesis of these themes is presented along with eight recommendations for future actions towards the development, implementation and maintenance of a National Framework for Quality in ECCE in Ireland. This review will be published before the end of 2004.

## THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY IN ECCE IN IRELAND: WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) is in the process of drafting the National Framework for Quality (NFQ) in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ireland. The primary objective of the Framework is to promote quality provision in all services for children aged birth to six years of age. This includes playgroups, creches, preschools, family day care settings and infant classes in primary schools etc.

It is envisaged that the framework will incorporate materials and processes that will define, assess and support quality. A key aspect of the framework will be the production of a set of principles, national quality standards, and explanatory guidelines for use by all those concerned with the provision of high quality services for young children. It is also hoped that these materials will support the key role of parents, guardians and extended families in the lives of young children.

It is the position of the CECDE to work in consultation with all stakeholders. Our work to date has concentrated on building the foundation stones for the NFQ (more details on the four key pillars - the Consultation on Quality in ECCE; the National and International Reviews of Quality Initiatives (referred to above); and the Conceptual Framework of Early Childhood Learning, are available on our website). We are now ready to begin the development of the information and resource materials which will form the core elements of the NFQ and we would like to get your views on the most suitable format for the presentation of these to the broad range of practitioners in the ECCE sector in Ireland.

Go to [www.cecde.ie](http://www.cecde.ie) to submit your views online or contact us directly at the Centre to make your contribution to the National Framework for Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland.

## REPORT ON AN EARLY YEARS SEMINAR HELD BY THE NATIONAL DISABILITY AUTHORITY, JULY 13TH, 2004.

By JACQUELINE FALLON, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, CECDE

CECDE team members were delighted to attend, and make a presentation to, a seminar held by the National Disability Authority (NDA) in their offices on Clyde Road on Tuesday, July 13th. The seminar focused on recent developments which will impact on early childhood provision in Ireland in the medium term. The audience was drawn mainly from the health boards and the voluntary agencies providing early years services for children with special needs.

Mary Meaney of the NDA reviewed the forthcoming Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act in the context of current early years provision. Mary detailed the aims of the legislation; the definitions within it; the role of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and the health boards and the proposed relationship between them; regulations for assessment; the several grounds and routes for appeals; the role of the Special Educational Needs Organiser; Individual Education Plans; the role of schools; and the provision of resources as described in the Act. This is far reaching legislation, and Mary's analysis is an excellent resource for all those working with young children which special needs here in Ireland.

Arlene Forster, Director Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA, presented *Towards a Framework for Early Learning: A Consultative Document*. The NCCA have begun the consultation process on this innovative and exciting initiative which will, for the first time, provide the early years sector with a national curricular framework. Arlene's presentation provided an insight into the years of preparation which have gone into bringing this project to fruition. The NCCA has provided several pathways for all stakeholders to respond and be involved in the further development of the curricular framework. The CECDE has been closely involved in contributing to the consultation, and we encourage all interested parties to use this opportunity to shape the future of the early years curriculum in Ireland.

Thomas Walsh and Jacqueline Fallon presented on the development of the CECDE, our work to date and current projects. Thomas focused on the development of the National Framework for Quality (NFQ), which is currently underway, and also on the Audit of Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2003 produced by the CECDE. Jacqueline focused on issues of care and education, the conceptualisation of early years as birth to six and on provision of targeted services for children experiencing disadvantage and children with special needs. Our thanks to the NDA for organising the seminar.

### OPEN LETTER FROM THE EDITOR OF CHILD CARE IN PRACTICE

Child Care in Practice is a multi-disciplinary journal and contributions are invited from all those employed in and concerned with the field of Child Care.

The Group is aiming to publish an Early Years Special Edition Journal early in 2005. We intend to co-ordinate its release with our 2005 Annual AGM and Conference; consequently we would be inviting authors to present their papers at that conference. The conference will be held in Stranmillis University College on Tuesday the 22nd March 2005.

With this information in mind I would like to invite all those who work in the Early Years field to consider submitting an article for this special edition journal. All contributions to this edition must be received by the 1st September 2004 although earlier submissions are preferable. While not every paper submitted will fit the theme of the Special Edition Journal, if the paper is of publishing standard, it will be published in another 2005 edition journal.

Articles can be submitted by sending three hard copies and an electronic copy (Floppy Disk) to: Nuala Boyle, Development Officer, Child Care in Practice, School of Social Work, 7 Lennoxvale, Belfast, BT9 5BY.

I look forward to receiving your articles and I thank you once again for your interest in our journal.

Yours Sincerely

Nuala Boyle  
Development Officer  
Editorial Board, Child Care in Practice