

Early Childhood in Ireland

Evidence and Perspectives

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ACRONYMS

BCCN: Border Counties Childcare Network

CCC: City and County Childcare Committees

CECDE: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education

DES: Department of Education and Science

DHC: Department of Health and Children

DIT: Dublin Institute of Technology

DoE: Department of Education

DSCFA: Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs

ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education

ECEA: Early Childhood Education Agency

EEC: European Economic Community

EOCP: Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme

HSCL: Home School Community Liaison

NAPS: National Anti-Poverty Strategy

NCCA: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

NCCC: National Coordinating Childcare Committee

NCO: National Children's Office

NQF/ECCE: National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education

NVCC: National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative

NVCO: National Voluntary Childcare Organisation

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

PCSP: Primary Curriculum Support Programme

SDPS: School Development Planning Service

UN: United Nations

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Section 1



Introduction

The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) is pleased to publish this discussion paper, *Early Childhood in Ireland - Evidence and Perspectives*. This document is the last of the four pillars of research which the CECDE has put in place to support the development of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (NQF/ECCE). It encapsulates the perspective from which the child's interests are being incorporated into the NQF/ECCE. It is also hoped that it will provide a useful resource for the ECCE sector and a basis for fruitful debate and discussion. It articulates well with the National Children's Strategy, *Our Children, Their Lives* (Department of Health and Children [DHC], 2000) and *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2004).

The development of a strong consensus position among key agencies with responsibility for young children will benefit the future co-ordination and cohesiveness of ECCE in Ireland.

1.1 The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE)

The CECDE was established by the Minister for Education and Science in October 2002, with a brief to co-ordinate and develop ECCE in Ireland in pursuance of the objectives of the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn* (DES, 1999a). It is managed jointly by St. Patrick's College and the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). The remit of the CECDE covers all settings for

children between birth and six years, paying particular attention to the needs of children experiencing disadvantage and children with special needs. It bridges traditional divides between care and education and childcare settings and the formal school system. In this context, the CECDE has three main objectives:

1. The development of the NQF/ECCE, which will define quality standards for early childhood settings, is the core project for the CECDE. In addition to defining quality, the framework will propose appropriate support mechanisms for those working in ECCE in Ireland. A system of assessment and evaluation will be devised to ensure that the quality standards will be realised and maintained. These three elements, defining, assessing and supporting quality, form the structure of the NQF/ECCE.
2. To develop and implement targeted interventions in the areas of special needs and disadvantage with children in the birth to six years age group. There are currently three such targeted intervention projects in progress under the auspices of the CECDE.
3. Finally, the CECDE is charged with preparing the groundwork for the establishment of the Early Childhood Education Agency (ECEA) as envisaged by the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn* (DES, 1999a).

1.2 Early Childhood in Ireland - Evidence and Perspectives

Increasing knowledge about childhood, and early childhood development and learning, has much to contribute toward understanding the nature of quality in ECCE. The primary purpose of this document is to contribute to the NQF/ECCE for Ireland. The CECDE *Programme of Work* (CECDE, 2001) and the *CECDE Research Strategy* (CECDE, 2003) prioritise the preparation of a conceptual framework discussing how children from birth to six years learn and develop:

It is envisaged that the first action relating to the development of quality standards will involve setting out a conceptual framework describing how

children (from 0 to 6 years) develop and learn. (CECDE, 2001:2)

1.2.1 Review Document

Initially, the CECDE commissioned a literature review on the five developmental domains (physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, moral and spiritual)¹ in the birth to six years age group. This resulted in a substantial and extensive review which will be of interest to students, researchers, practitioners and others with a focus on the development of the young child. This initial paper was augmented by two further sections which were researched and written by CECDE staff. The first of these sections reviews the historical and cultural context of ECCE in Ireland from the end of the nineteenth century to approximately 1990. The second section discusses current perspectives on ECCE in Ireland from 1990 to the present. The resulting complete document, known as the *Review Document* has formed the basis for this discussion paper. The *Review Document* will not be published, but will be available on request from the CECDE.

Once the *Review Document* was finalised, the CECDE used it in a number of ways. Primarily, it informed the development of the NQF/ECCE and, secondly, it provided the evidence base for this CECDE discussion paper on early childhood in Ireland. The evidence has been condensed and distilled for the purposes of this paper in order to illustrate the values which characterise the NQF/ECCE. In this context, references have not been included throughout this document. However, a select bibliography of literature published since 1990 is included in the Bibliography. This does not reflect the entirety of the literature consulted in the preparation of the Review Document.

1.2.2 Terminology

Because of the rapidly developing landscape in ECCE in Ireland, many issues to do with terminology have not yet been resolved. There are occasions within the text when terms are used as a summary of a very wide range of terminology in current use. For example,

¹ The CECDE would like to acknowledge the work of Suzanne Clendenning and the Psychology Department, Queen's University Belfast, for their work in preparing the literature review.

personnel who work with young children use a wide range of descriptive terms and titles. In order to be inclusive of the broad range of people who work with young children and the equally broad range of people such as parents, grandparents, family and friends who are also involved, all of these people are referred to as adults or significant adults. The term has no significance other than to refer to the adult who is supporting the child at any given time and on any given occasion.

Likewise, there is ongoing debate on the relationship between the concepts of learning and development. For the purposes of this document, both 'learning and development' and 'development and learning' are used interchangeably. Because of the importance of clearly understood language, the NQF/ECCE itself will have a glossary of terms and their associated meanings.

1.3 Structure of the document

Section 2 - Historical and Cultural Perspectives discusses specific issues which are, to a greater or lesser degree, the subject of debate currently within the ECCE sector and beyond. It draws on both *Section 1: Historical and Cultural Context of Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1890 – 1990* and *Section 2: Current Perspectives on Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland* from the *Review Document*. The discussion is not exhaustive and does not address every issue raised in the *Review Document*. Instead, it paints a broad picture of the context in which constructions of early childhood have evolved here in Ireland over the past century or so.

Section 3 - Thematic Perspective on the Learning and Developing Child presents the substantive discussion on child development and learning. Again, this discussion is firmly based on the evidence and

research in the *Review Document*. The sections in the *Review Document* on child development and learning were analysed to identify the key points relating to the aforementioned five developmental domains. According to our view that all learning and development is inter-related and inter-dependent, it was decided to present the information thematically. The themes were identified by close textual analysis and are as follows:

- 1 Child-centred learning and development;
- 1 Holistic learning and development;
- 1 Environments for learning and development;
- 1 Relationships in learning and development;
- 1 Diversity in learning and development;
- 1 Communication in learning and development;
- 1 Play in learning and development.

This order is not intended as a hierarchy and the themes are inter-connected. They are not intended as stand alone elements but must be understood as a whole. Each theme concludes with a number of implications for the development of the NQF/ECCE, in relation to defining, assessing and supporting quality.

Section 4 - Conclusion recaps on the document and its purpose, and outlines the next steps in the development of the NQF/ECCE.

The CECDE recognizes that research and debate on early childhood is constantly evolving, and presents this document in that spirit.

Section 2



Historic and Cultural Perspectives

2.1 Introduction

Childhood is constructed over time and in a particular cultural context. An understanding of the ways in which early childhood has been understood in Ireland in the past provides a frame of reference for our current analysis. The *Review Document* contains a wealth of information on the context in which childhood evolved over the past century or so. In light of this, some issues which are currently the subject of debate are discussed in this section. These include, among others, the history of national curricula for young children in Ireland, the changes in family life over time and the impact of the growing diversity of our society. The discussion is not exhaustive, but attempts to illustrate the changing nature of childhood and the dynamics of interaction between childhood and larger socio-cultural

conditions over the past century in Ireland. It reminds us that children have to negotiate these dynamics without such hindsight. It also reminds us of the responsibility we collectively bear to provide solid footing for children when almost the only constant is change.

2.2 Childhood in retrospect

The National Children's Strategy (Department of Health and Children [DHC], 2000:18) has, as one of its national goals, that:

Children's lives will be better understood; their lives will benefit from evaluation, research and information on their needs, rights and the effectiveness of services.

Certainly very little is known about the lives of children historically in Ireland. In recent years, a body of literature has emerged in which, sadly, the dominant image is of children's lives blighted by abuse. This image appears to have been a constant theme throughout the past century. Undoubtedly, this was not the reality for many children and there is some anecdotal information from isolated anthropological studies and memoirs to this effect. In general, given the volumes of Irish history which have been written, the paucity of literature on the lives of children is regrettable.

One could take the view that conditions existed in which abuse could happen. One of those conditions, possibly, is that the children were rendered invisible, whether within the family or institutions. The legislative and constitutional framework applicable to children contributed to this situation and will be outlined in the section on children's rights. Children, by and large, cannot ensure their own visibility within our society as can other citizen groups. Therefore it is incumbent on society to recognise and honour the child's citizenship.

The National Children's Strategy (DHC, 2000) includes several strands of research into children's lives which will hopefully sharpen the focus on, and raise awareness of, children's lives. Of course, with the gift of hindsight, the absence of the child's own point of view over the past century is now obvious. This realisation has been growing here in recent years, and it is now generally accepted that including the child's opinions on issues which affect him² will have to be a part of developments in the future.

2.3 Families changing in changing times

Family life is unique, depending on all the variables which any given family experiences. That said, there is very little information available on relationships within families over the course of the last century. There is a small number of anthropological studies, mainly conducted by international observers at extended sporadic intervals, and a number of memoirs. While these provide valuable

insights, they do not give a comprehensive picture and are drawn on judiciously.

2.3.1 Historical context

The environments in which our youngest children live, grow and play have changed dramatically over the past century. For the best part of the twentieth century, young children were cared for in the family home and went to school sometime after the age of three. For much of that time, Irish society was largely agrarian based and children worked on the farm; work which had economic value to the family. Families were large, twice as large on average as those in the rest of Europe for most of the century. Children lived in households which frequently comprised members of the extended family. Emigration was a way of life and many children must have grown up in the knowledge that they would leave and not return. The Catholic Church and the State operated a symbiotic relationship in relation to many aspects of Irish life, including education, following Independence. In particular, the Church appears to have had considerable influence in terms of family life, a position consolidated by the 1937 Constitution. Changes began to occur in the 1950s when increasing industrialisation and urbanisation began to have an impact. Around this time, too, family size began to reduce. It was not until the 1970s, though, that substantial numbers of women began to enter – and stay in – the paid workforce. This was partly due to the lifting of the marriage bar in the civil service and the beginnings of movement towards parity of pay and rights for women with their male colleagues following Ireland's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC). Out-of-home care arrangements for children then became a necessity for some families.

2.3.2 Contemporary experience

With changes in family patterns, more children are now living in smaller families, one parent families or in disparate families. Young children in contemporary Irish families are experiencing substantially different parenting trends, not least of which is that many now have the more active involvement of their fathers as well as their mothers. Traditionally, parents tended to concentrate

² The male and female pronouns will be used in alternate sections.

more on the physical well-being of their children, whereas now they are increasingly concerned with their children's holistic development, including their cognitive, emotional and social development. Widespread dissemination of research on child development in popular and accessible media formats, such as television programmes and self-help books on child development and parenting, indicate interest among the population on such issues. Such a media profile for child development also suggests an increased awareness among parents of the importance of this stage of life, and of the importance of supporting children's optimal development. However, there is also the possibility that such media will exert pressure on parents in suggesting that parenting is a complicated and fraught occupation, with the margins for error being frighteningly wide, and the possibilities for success intimidatingly narrow. In fact, parents get it right even in difficult circumstances.

2.3.3 Impact of socio-economic change

While there is greater sensitivity to children's needs in the holistic sense, there are depleted resources, notably time, within families and communities to meet them. Many aspects of the socio-economic context, including the organization of work and work/life balance, are not child friendly. House prices have risen enormously and consequently, the difficulty in finding affordable housing in central parts of cities such as Dublin has meant that many people, particularly young couples, have had to move out into the surrounding counties. The road and rail infrastructure is unable to meet the new demand and many people have had to succumb to lengthy hours of commuting. Stress and tiredness caused by parents' commuting and work is likely to put pressure on children's quality of life within their families.

There is an element of irony in the fact that while children are experiencing more environments in their day-to-day lives in comparison to children even thirty years ago, we now find it necessary to plan for children's access to, in particular, the outdoor environment. Parental and adult concern for the child's safety and security means that the range of places in which children can play has shrunk, particularly in urban areas. Traffic

volumes, development of green spaces and fear for children being out and about without adult supervision contributes to a contraction of freedom for children. Additionally, it would appear that children are spending increasing time in front of computers and televisions with consequent health risks, including diminished outdoor play, physical inactivity and obesity. It is to be hoped that the implementation of the National Play Policy (National Children's Office [NCO], 2004) will expand play opportunities in ways which are compatible with parental and caregiving adults' sense of security, and are also attractive to children.

2.3.4 Employment and childcare

While unemployment was endemic during most of the 1980s, Ireland has experienced increasingly high levels of employment over the past ten years or so. Employment growth and a greater demand for labour, coupled with the need for dual income households to meet the cost of housing, impacted on female work force participation rates. Mothers' employment participation rates in Ireland are comparatively high. Because of relatively short leave entitlements after the birth of a child, more mothers of young children are in employment in Ireland than in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. The obvious consequence of these circumstances is that more children are now being cared for outside the home than heretofore, despite continuing shortages of provision. Much of the increase in supply has occurred in the private commercial sector where costs to parents are among the highest in Europe. Substantial percentages of mothers working full-time and part-time use no paid childcare at all, indicating a reliance on informal provision provided by family or friends. There is very limited information on the nature and quality of the many and varied forms of childcare and pre-school provision for children who attend out-of-home settings.

2.4 Children's rights

A discourse which has gained momentum here in Ireland in recent years concerns children's rights. In reviewing the issue, the CECDE has found no discernible debate on children's rights prior to the 1970s.

2.4.1 Legislative context

However, the legislative context can be traced back to the 1908 Children's Act (Hayes, 2002:39), which remained the dominant piece of legislation concerning children in Ireland for almost the entire century. In the 1908 Act, the child was deemed to have a right to care and protection, but not to liberty before the law. This particular view, in which children can call on the State for care and protection but not for vindication of their rights as individual citizens, was further entrenched in Articles 41 and 42.5 of the Constitution of 1937 (Government of Ireland, 1937). This remains the defining position of State involvement in children's lives today, notwithstanding the ratification by the Government in 1992 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989). State involvement in provision for children outside of the primary school system focuses, by and large, on children at risk from disadvantaged or other circumstances, and on children with special needs arising from a disability. The growing momentum and discourse around the child as an individual citizen, with rights associated with that citizenship, may well in time change the nature of the child/State relationship.

2.4.2 Implications for ECCE provision

There are several implications emanating from this position, but just one will be considered here; that of the young child's right to educational provision. To be meaningful, life-long learning must be conceptualised on a continuum which begins at birth. There are good reasons, based on the knowledge we now have on the efficacy of early education and the magnitude of young children's potential for learning, for making provision for children from birth. However, a more fundamental argument relates to the young child's right to education in the same way that older children are entitled to educational provision. This position is underpinned by the UNCRC (UN, 1989).

2.5 Care and education

Provision for young children in Ireland has been fragmented and many of the fault lines can be traced to the historical understanding

of care and education as being separate forms of provision. It is not difficult to see how this fracture developed historically here in Ireland.

2.5.1 Home and school

The national school system was established in 1831 and there were enough infants (3-5 year olds) in the system by 1872 to warrant a specific infant programme. Figures from the mid-1940s indicate that by then, over 48,000 children between the ages of three and five were in the system. These figures represent substantial numbers of young children in school. It is possible that this indicates that parents placed a high value on their children's education and may explain why the national or primary school system here in Ireland has, since its inception, been regarded as concerned exclusively with 'education'. Throughout the period referred to above, children were 'cared for' at home up until the point at which they began to attend school. These two contexts of 'care' and 'education' were quite different, and that difference seems to have been translated to mean mutually exclusive.

While there is very little documented evidence about the care of young children at home, it appears that care was primarily the responsibility of the mother. Families were large and older siblings were involved in looking after younger children. While there were differences in urban and rural contexts, the extended family, particularly grandmothers, who often lived in the family home, were involved. Home and school were the two contexts in which children spent time so, even before the concepts were considered, it is possible to see the genesis of our traditional conceptualisation of care as what happens up to the age of three or so, and education as what happens after that.

2.5.2 Policy and implementation

At programme level, the view that childcare and early education are two separate but related issues still prevails. Key policy documents from the three main government departments involved in supporting provision of ECCE display consensus on the inseparable nature of care and education (DES, 1999a; Department of Justice, Equality and Law

Reform [DJELR], 1999; DHC, 2000), but programme implementation has so far not reflected this position. State action is being driven by different agendas – childcare policy by the need to expand provision to meet the childcare needs of working parents and early education policy by recognition of the importance of positive early years experiences, especially for children experiencing disadvantage and those with special needs. However, the beginnings of a significant shift in this pattern are evident and the emergence of a distinct ECCE sector is becoming apparent.

2.5.3 Co-ordination and integration

The instigation of coherent co-ordinating structures, including the National Co-ordinating Childcare Committee (NCCC), the County Childcare Committees (CCCs), the CECDE and the NCO, represent important milestones. To a greater or lesser degree, each has a remit for both childcare and early education. For example, in the case of the CECDE, this remit includes the development of an overarching NQF/ECCE. Furthermore, policy initiatives in specific areas are beginning to take effect; greater standardisation in staff training and qualifications is emerging, and curricular developments are leading to greater integration of childcare and early education.

Under the provisions of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP), funding was provided to the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs)³ to form an umbrella group to enhance communication and co-ordination between the groups involved. Networks of providers have been established, such as the Border Counties Childcare Network (BCCN) and more localised networks under the auspices of CCCs. A High Level Working Group has been convened by the NCO, and the CECDE has a Consultative Committee which is representative of stakeholders in early childhood provision.

Increasing the level of integration and co-ordination of policy, legislation and provision for young children is now widely accepted as necessary to progress. However, the

consolidation of a discrete ECCE sector is unlikely to be realised until there is better co-ordination at inter-departmental level, to the point where the DJELR, DHC and the DES implement a common programmatic approach to the care and education of young children. The White Paper on Early Childhood Education (DES, 1999a) has already suggested the way forward in this regard in proposing the establishment of the ECEA as a structural expression of such a common approach.

2.6 Curricular context

Early years' curricula are currently the focus of much attention with the publication of the consultation document, *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2004). While this is the first time that Ireland is to have a national curricular framework for the birth to six age group, the history of State curricular provision for young children – specifically those in the infant classes (3-6) in primary schools – stretches back over a century.

2.6.1 Revised Programme, 1900

One of the most remarkable stages in that history was the Revised Programme of 1900 (Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, 1901), though this is a somewhat arbitrary starting point. Even before this time, the philosophies of Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi and Dewey had influenced individuals who put such theories into practice here. In fact, one might locate the provenance of the concept of child-centred practice with these theorists.

The Revised Programme is strikingly familiar to the modern reader. It was influenced by Frobelian principles and incorporated heuristic approaches to teaching and learning. It advocated development from within rather than moulding from without, promoted the integration of subject areas and emphasised the environment as a context for the child's learning. The Revised Programme advocated teaching content in an integrated manner, breaking with the tradition at that time of compartmentalising knowledge. Unfortunately, however, the necessary finances for equipment, training and

³ This group has been reconstituted as the National Voluntary Childcare Collaborative (NVCC).

implementation were never put in place. While the Revised Programme led to improvements in the dire state of infant education, the Dale Report (Dale, 1904) still found that this was one of the weakest elements of the system. Then, as now, no matter how good the curriculum, it is dependent for effectiveness on resourcing, training and investment.

2.6.2 1922 and 1948 curricular change

A very different approach was taken in the curriculum introduced in 1922 following the foundation of the Irish Free State (National Programme Conference, 1922). This approach moved the focus off the young child onto curriculum content, specifically the Irish language, which was to be re-established as part of the socio-political transformation of Ireland following independence. The curricular changes introduced meant that the restoration of the Irish language became the primary aim of infant education. Following some years of implementation of this programme, teachers expressed deep reservations about its effect, stating that it inhibited the child intellectually, repressed the natural urge for self-expression and led to some children being mentally and physically damaged. This programme was replaced by the Revised Programme for Infants (Department of Education [DoE], 1948) in 1948, which returned to the values and direction espoused by the 1900 Revised Programme. However, due to continuing requirements regarding the teaching of Irish, it proved difficult to implement the philosophy of this programme.

2.6.3 New Curriculum, 1971

Major curricular change occurred in 1971 with the introduction of the New Curriculum (DoE, 1971). Play was an integral part of this curriculum which was designed to cater for the full and harmonious development of each child, with an inherent flexibility to adapt to the needs of children of varying abilities and cultural backgrounds. However, the economic recession of the 1970s meant that the comprehensive network of supports for teachers which was envisaged did not materialise. Class size remained very large during the period following the introduction of the New Curriculum. Spending on education

increased over the following decades, and while class size remained an issue at this time, the number of teaching posts in the system increased substantially. This relates to the introduction of schemes such as Home/School/Community Liaison (HSCL) and the expansion of Special Needs provision.

2.6.4 Revised Curriculum, 1999

The most recent curricular change occurred in 1999 with the introduction of a Revised Curriculum for Primary Schools. The 1999 Revised Curriculum (DES, 1999b) is designed to nurture children in all dimensions of their lives. In-service training is ongoing for teachers and structures (e.g. the Primary Curriculum Support Programme [PCSP] and the School Development Planning Service [SDPS]) have been put in place to support its roll-out into schools. A close study of these consecutive curricula illustrates the evolving understandings of concepts such as child-centred and holistic education in Ireland.

2.7 Developments in provision

One of the consequences of the relative economic prosperity of the 1960s was to increase interest and focus on education. From around this period, education became a new catalyst for social mobility, possibly on account of the introduction of free secondary education. Parents became increasingly anxious that their children's future opportunities would be enhanced through education. Ireland's increased involvement with international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Office (UNESCO), the OECD and the UN, allied with the aspiration to become a member of the EEC, contributed to a lessening of the insularity which had been a feature of the previous period. There was a shift in focus from social expenditure in relation to education and children to one of investment in the individual, the economy and society.

2.7.1 Special Education

The first remedial teachers were introduced into schools during this period, the 1960s, and the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (Commission of Inquiry on Mental

Handicap, 1965) raised awareness of the issue of special education. This led to the beginnings of integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools in the following decade. Most of the special schools in existence today were established in the 1960s and the 1970s. The roots of this development lay in the setting up of community and parent advocacy groups in the preceding decade. The Voluntary Agencies involved in service delivery for children with special needs grew out of those early advocacy groups. In the nineteenth century, in the absence of any State provision, religious orders had established schools for children who were deaf and blind. These schools were the very first to be designated as special schools and were the basis for the development of the system.

2.7.2 Pre-school provision

The early enrolment of children in primary schools in the first half of the twentieth century and the low number of mothers in the workforce resulted in a low priority for pre-school education. While there were some examples of pre-school provision and services prior to the 1960s, social change and individual effort brought about accelerated changes from that time. Additionally, from the late 1960s, the 'social risk' model of provision for young children – which underpinned the practice of placing children in institutional care – was replaced by a more developmental view.

This period coincided with the arrival of Barnardos in Ireland, the founding of the Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association (IPPA), the establishment of the first Naíonraí and an expansion in Montessori training opportunities. As with provision for children with special needs, the current landscape of early childhood pre-school provision began to take shape at that time, in the absence of State involvement. The Rutland St. Pre-school Project (Holland, 1979) was established in 1969 as an early intervention programme for children in a disadvantaged area of inner city Dublin. This remained the State's only pre-school project until the Early Start pre-schools were established in the mid 1990s in some designated disadvantaged schools.

2.7.3 Childcare policy development

A number of child advocacy groups were established in the 1970s and, following pressure from such groups, a number of Committees were convened over the first half of the next decade to examine the role and need for childcare facilities outside the home⁴. Unfortunately, there was very little tangible response to this wave of reports. It may well be that attitudes among the population as a whole did not support movement on this issue. As recently as 1972, the Report on the Status of Women (Commission on the Status of Women, 1972) urged mothers to stay at home with their child until the age of three, and only return to work if they had strong reasons to do so. That said, the report also called for a national infrastructure for childcare to facilitate working women, but that recommendation had little effect either. Nonetheless, these decades witnessed a change in attitude, indicated by the number of calls for State provided childcare that would have been unthinkable in the earlier half of the century. The perception that mothers were no longer the only carers of their child, and that out-of-home childcare was needed, now entered the zeitgeist.

2.7.4 Parental involvement

In schools, the attitude to parental involvement has changed enormously, even since the introduction of the New Curriculum in 1971. One of the problems identified with the implementation of the curricular changes then was that lack of information and communication with parents led to confusion about the new principles and ideologies underpinning the curriculum. However, the HSCL scheme, established in 1990 in designated disadvantaged schools, reflected a growing emphasis and recognition of the importance of parental involvement to the success of children in school. Other examples of the growth of awareness of the importance of including parents in their children's education was the inclusion of parents on Boards of Management since 1975, and the establishment of schools to cater for various

⁴ The Task Force on Child Care Services (Department of Health, 1980)
The Working Party on Childcare Facilities for Working Parents (Department of Labour, 1983)
The Committee on Minimum Legal Requirements and Standards for Day Care Services (Department of Health, 1985)

interests, such as Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools) and non-, inter-, and multi-denominational schools under the auspices of parent groups.

While there is little historical documentary evidence available on the development of parental involvement in services outside the school system, it appears that Community Playgroups, in certain instances, grew from the work of local parent groups. The contemporary situation is much clearer. A recent national review of policy, practice and research pertaining to quality in ECCE found consensus across all groups on the issue of parental involvement. Parental involvement is considered a key and essential indicator of a quality service by all provider groups engaged in the promotion of quality in ECCE (CECDE, 2004a).

2.8 Diversity

The rate of change between the 1960s and the end of the 1980s accelerated dramatically in the 1990s with the advent of the economic boom, a phenomenon quite new to Ireland. The environment in which children born since 1990 are growing up appears very different to anything we have experienced before. Much of the material available on the lives of children within the family in Ireland in the past consists of polarised descriptions and, as such, are typical of the range of perspectives found on the family from this period. It is clear that there was no unified, consistent or uniform experience of childhood in Ireland in the past century. Such evidence as is available indicates that, for example, the children of the Travelling community, children with disabilities, children from different socio-economic backgrounds or children from differently configured families had very different experiences of life here. This is not a judgement on whether those childhoods were happy or not, but rather to reflect that childhood was never without its complications. There was, and is, no single Irish childhood.

2.8.1 Responses to difference

While the experience of childhood during the past century in Ireland was not the same for all children, there was no discourse evident

around the concept of diversity as we now engage in it. Looking back, indeed, the impression is of a society which thought of itself as homogenous, or at least acquiesced in the Church/State consensus which projected a society based on the sanctity of the nuclear family united in faith. Those who did not meet the criteria and who deviated from the acceptable model of the family as a married couple with children were often treated harshly.

Reference has already been made to the many children who ended up in institutional care, predominantly children from disadvantaged backgrounds or from families in disadvantaged circumstances. Recent years have exposed the scandal of young women confined in the Magdalene laundries because of giving birth outside marriage or for behaviour deemed to be at odds with the prevailing orthodox morality. Further to this was the trafficking and export of babies of unmarried mothers to the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. The Travelling community, for the most part, seem to have been shunned. It seems obvious from even a cursory examination that Irish society was not as homogenous as Church and State would have wanted and sanctions were in place to control those who did not conform.

2.8.2 Socio-cultural change

Ireland gradually moved away from the isolationism which characterised the period up to the 1950s, but it has only been since the beginning of the 1990s that the growing diversity of the socio-cultural landscape in Ireland has impacted on our consciousness as a nation. We now have a multiplicity of family models: two parents, both working; single-parent headed families; remarried couples/parents; adoptive and other families. Indeed, the family, based on a division in parental roles with the father as breadwinner and the mother as a full time housewife caring for the children, is no longer the dominant model in Irish society. Evolving expectations of fathers' involvement with their children, along with increasing numbers of mothers in the workforce and more single-parent families, have changed the profile of family life in Ireland; there has been an increase in smaller families and in the diversity of family structures.

2.8.3 Disadvantage and special needs

Despite the growth in the economy, many Irish families experience poverty. The inequality in circumstances that exists between Irish families is marked with an accelerating inequality of incomes between the lowest income groups and the highest. Those most affected include children, early school leavers, lone parents, unemployed people, Travellers, ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum-seekers, older people living alone in areas of urban and rural disadvantage, people with disabilities and small farmers. Despite improvements in recent years, Ireland still has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the European Union. In a society which is proud of its educational system, it is still an uncomfortable fact that children from working class backgrounds are at higher risk of educational disadvantage. Consequently, they are much more likely to leave school without qualifications and much less likely to obtain third level qualifications.

Children from the Traveller community experience extreme poverty and educational disadvantage. Infant mortality is twice the national average and although large numbers of Traveller children attend primary school at any given time, very few transfer to secondary schools, fewer still complete the Leaving Certificate and a tiny number attend third-level college. The revised National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS), *Building an Inclusive Society* (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs [DSCFA], 2002) gives specific consideration to the aforementioned vulnerable groups and includes a number of commitments to combating educational disadvantage. There have been numerous initiatives by the DES in schools to combat educational disadvantage and a major review of these is in train. The EOCP, while not focused primarily on the children, is a very substantial State investment in the infrastructure of ECCE provision in disadvantaged areas. Other initiatives originating from various government departments also target socio-economic disadvantage.

However, in terms of provision for children with special needs, there is a lack of a comprehensive, State funded system for children with special needs and their families. The current system of provision is dependent on the contribution of the Voluntary Agencies,

but there is no nationally articulated framework for the relationship between the Voluntary Agencies and State provision. Negotiating the system is currently difficult and challenging for parents seeking to access services for their young children.

2.8.4 Cultural diversity

Ireland has experienced growing racial and ethnic heterogeneity over the last decade. The number of applications for asylum in Ireland rose substantially in the years from 1992 to 2001, but this appears to have fallen dramatically in recent years. It is estimated that in the year 2000, in excess of 5,000 asylum-seeking children arrived in Ireland, and we must be concerned as to how their needs are being met. In January 2003, the Supreme Court ruled that the non-national parents of an Irish citizen child could be deported, but the judgment also acknowledged that the rights of the Irish citizen child under the Constitution must be given consideration, and the rights of the child's parents and siblings must be respected. It is not yet clear what impact the decision will have on the future of this group of Irish children.

Another recent phenomenon has been the adoption into Irish families of children born in countries such as Romania, Russia and China. This increasing cultural diversity has severely tested the capacity of Irish society and its services to accept or integrate minority groups, as society's relationship with Travellers has demonstrated over previous decades. Nonetheless there have been many examples of efforts to combat racism and promote anti-bias education for children. The best known example is probably the Éist project (Murray and O'Doherty, 2001). Anti-bias programmes address not only racism, but all forms of discrimination. They should be in place in all settings, and not just in settings which include children from diverse backgrounds and circumstances.

2.9 Language

Our history of bilingualism adds another dimension to the consideration of diversity here, given the special position of the Irish language in Irish law. Language is generally the primary means of communication within

any culture, and in the light of the growing cultural diversity of our society, merits attention.

2.9.1 Irish language

The effort made in the early days after the foundation of the State to use young children as the conduit through which Irish would be re-established as the primary language of the people has already been described. While the approach was unsuccessful, the originators of the scheme were correct in identifying the child's early years as an optimal time for introducing second language learning. In the late 1960s, a number of Naíonraí groups were established with the support of Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge and Conradh na Gaeilge. Naíonra groups are similar to other playgroups but, in addition, the adults speak Irish exclusively. Children are free to converse in either English or Irish. In 1973, the organisers formed a voluntary organisation – Na Naíonraí Gaelacha under the auspices of Conradh na Gaeilge. An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo (now renamed Forbairt Naíonraí Teo.) was then set up and is a joint committee of Na Naíonraí Gaelacha and Bord na Gaeilge in support of preschooling through Irish. Over the past thirty years or so, the number of Gaelscoileanna outside the Gaeltacht has grown steadily, with increasing numbers of children receiving their education through Irish.

2.9.2 Second language provision

Increasingly, schools and ECCE services include children whose first language is neither English nor Irish. Indeed, the DES makes some provision for language support for foreign national children in schools. There is evidence that children learning a second language need support for their first language. The child's facility with his first language impacts on his development of the second language and on all aspects of his development. This has implications for the provision of services for young children who are at a crucial stage in language development. It is possible that this will require the presence of adults in settings for young children who are competent in the child's first language. This has not been addressed to any great degree in service provision here in Ireland.

Equally, it must be recognised that Sign/Lámh is, in many cases, the first language of children who are deaf. We must be concerned, also, that the child with serious language impairment is enabled to develop augmentative alternative forms of communication.

Not only is language an important part of our ability to function in society, it is also an expression of identity. The history of support for the Irish language here is evidence of our appreciation of the power of language in this regard. It behoves us, given the lengths to which Ireland has gone to preserve and promote our own language, to offer support to those who wish to preserve their language even as they learn English.

2.10 Play

Play is an activity very closely associated with childhood, and it is inconceivable to review constructions of childhood in Ireland without attending to children's play. However, while in recent years there has been substantial attention paid to the place of play in the child's learning and development, there is very little information on how children have played in the past, at least here in Ireland. A number of collections of street rhymes and games capture the vivacity and carefree nature of children in Dublin in the middle part of the century and they indicate the time afforded to children for play and recreation. Other studies in rural areas indicated that young children were often given make-believe tasks in preparation for future work either in the house or on the farm. Observers of family childcare practices during the period when families became smaller and the presence of extended family became rarer, tend to indicate that children spent long periods alone (Arensberg and Kimball, 1940; Scheper-Hughes, 1979). These are isolated observations and must be treated with caution, but as play is an important social activity for children, one wonders what impact such conditions would have had? On the other hand, several memoirs make mention of playful exchanges between parents and children (Walsh, 1995; Kerrigan, 1998).

The largest body of information on play from most of the past century relates to its place in curricula. However, while this tells us how play was envisaged as supporting the child's

development and the types of contexts and equipment to be provided, it tells very little of the child's actual experience. So there is very little that can be said of the changing experiences of the child at play in Ireland over the time period being considered here.

Currently, there is no argument here as to the place of play in children's lives. Many policy documents throughout the 1990s and before have made the case for play as one of the most important contexts in which the child will learn and develop.

2.11 Conclusion

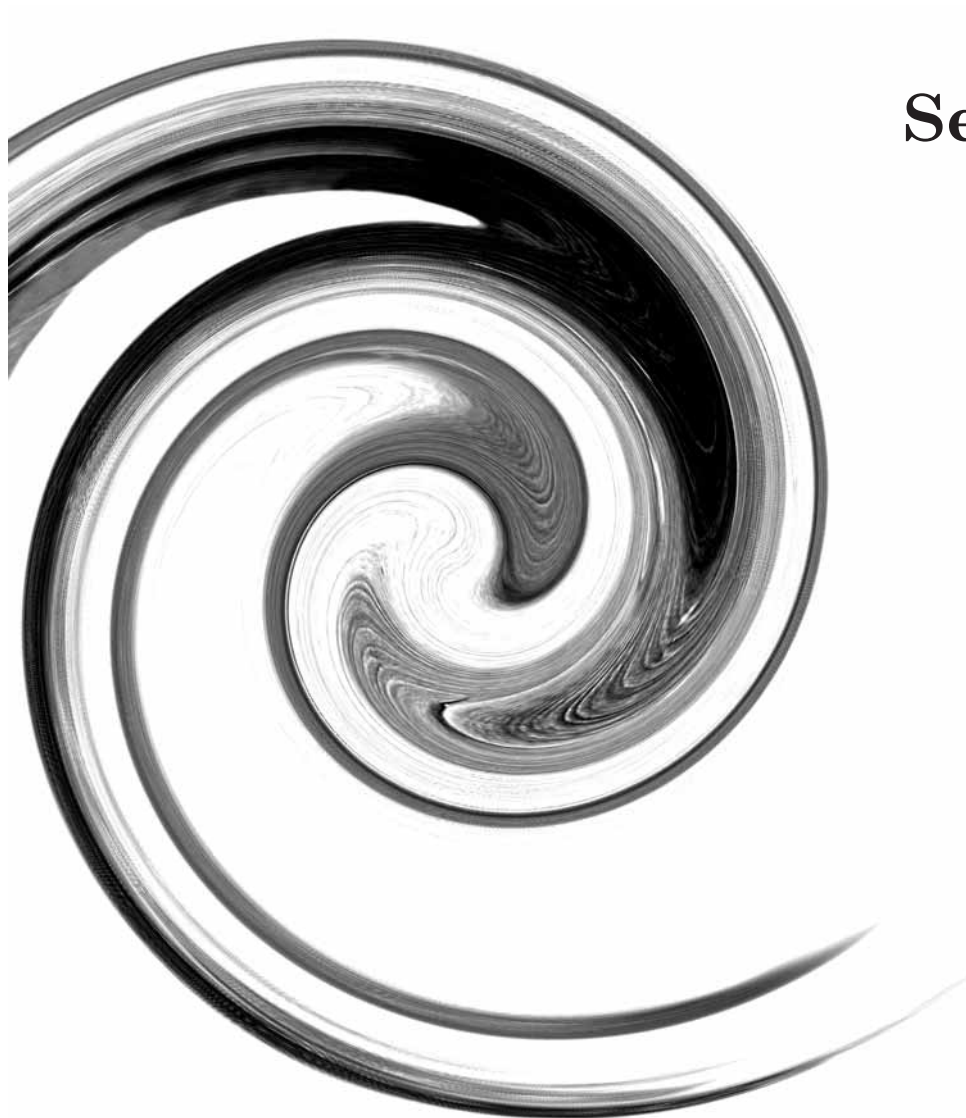
This has been a brief overview of some of the strands of change which have impacted on the way in which children live their lives in Ireland. We have no reason to suppose that children's lives will be any less subject to changing circumstances in the future, any more than we can suppose that society at large will become static. We have choices to make on the basis of the certainty of change, choices about how we can value childhood and support children. While we can certainly look back and recognize that society failed children in many cases, it would be a mistake to take no more than that from the lessons of experience. Rather, it should strengthen the resolve of everyone involved in ECCE or in advocacy for children to secure their full citizenship and rights.

2.12 Implications for the NQF/ECCE

This discussion has suggested implications for the CECDE in our development of the NQF/ECCE.

- 1 The availability of resources, training and investment has always been crucial to the successful implementation of curricular change in Ireland, and will remain so.
- 2 Maintaining a high profile for the rights and needs of children and ensuring their visibility in the wider society is necessary for their well-being and for the quality of provision.
- 3 Supporting parents towards work/life balance and in parenting practices enhances the child's life.
- 4 Developing and maintaining structures which enhance communication and co-ordination within the ECCE sector, both at service and policy level, will benefit provision.
- 5 Enhancing relationships between service providers and parents benefits the child.
- 6 Children and the wider society need support in order to promote the development of positive attitudes to diversity and equality.
- 7 The child's first language must be supported while additional languages are being learned.
- 8 There is a need for research to document how children play in their everyday lives in order to record the presence of children in our society.

Section 3



Thematic Perspective on the Learning and Developing Child

3.1 Introduction

As outlined in the Introduction, seven themes emerged from the analysis of the child-development sections of the *Review Document*. The enormous amount of information contained in the extensive literature review has been considered very closely. Following intensive analysis, the material has been condensed into the seven thematic areas presented in this Section. These themes are not intended as stand alone elements, but must be considered together. Each theme interacts with and complements the others and the order in which they are presented is not intended as a hierarchy.

Certain specific points of research from the *Review Document* are used to illustrate various points throughout the chapter. These are examples only and are not necessarily the

most important points to emerge from the research; they are included because of their appropriateness for the particular theme under discussion. The discussion revolves around children from birth to six years of age, but recognises that there are differences in approach for specific age groups in that range. While it was not possible to go into detail about each age sub-group, some mention is made of the particular approaches necessary for very young children. Because the themes centre on fundamental principles for practice, they are intended as inclusive of all settings and age groups. The discussion which follows considers the CECDE perspective on the context for quality practice with young children. Following the discussion of each theme, the implications for the NQF/ECCE are included under the headings of Defining, Assessing and Supporting Quality.

3.2 Child-centred learning and development

Taking a child-centred approach to a child's development and learning requires that the adults supporting the child focus on the child's unique individuality as the starting point for learning. This ensures that the child is at the centre of the endeavour rather than a body of knowledge that she must absorb. The child is an active agent in her own learning and development. She has, among other things, her own interests, strengths, needs, learning dispositions and potential. These co-exist with her cultural identity, gender, relationships, competencies and abilities. This complexity, of course, is much more than the sum of its parts. Childhood is a distinct and valuable time during which this unique individuality must be acknowledged and appreciated, supported, treasured and nurtured towards fulfilment and joy through relationships with the significant adults in her life. A recognition of the child's rights provides a context for this dynamic process which could be supported by rights-based legislation and policy.

The child will benefit from reciprocal communication with significant adults who gain knowledge and understanding of her life through that communication. Recognising that the child has a distinct voice in our society, allied with the recognition of the child's active agency in life, brings an acknowledgement of the child's right to a sense of control over outcomes in her life at an age appropriate level. For young children especially, it is the significant adults in the environment who will ensure she becomes aware of her own sense of self-reliance, independence and control. This emphasises the importance of high quality, dynamic and reciprocal interactions between the child and the adult. The activities and opportunities for play and discovery made available to the child through quality services and supports must foster the child's sense of purpose and give meaning to her engagement with the world. Crucially, the child must be allowed to exercise choice as a requisite part of active participation.

A child-centred approach based on knowledge and understanding of the child's life must recognise also that the circumstances in which a child lives her life are not always optimally conducive to her harmonious

development. A child living in circumstances of disadvantage, experiencing marginalisation on racial, ethnic or cultural grounds, or because of having special needs arising from a disability, has the same rights to quality experiences as her peers. It is the child who must benefit directly from interventions, and all interventions involving children must primarily focus on child outcomes which follow from the child's needs. Too often, it is the child's life which is used as a site of intervention in fulfilling other obligations, such as releasing parents from childcare commitments to participate in the labour force. The child's well-being must be the primary concern, and the child's life must be respected. Perhaps that is the essence of a child-centred approach, that the child and childhood are afforded respect and dignity by parents, significant adults, the State and society.

Current research knowledge provides useful insights in the implementation of a child-centred approach. For example, from a physical point of view, the child needs balanced and healthy nutrition, but children living in poverty are most at risk of deficient diets. This finding is of particular concern in Ireland, which has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the EU. In terms of preventative health care, the child's health and well-being is supported in the crucial developmental years by consistent, seamless, multi-disciplinary service provision in the context of knowledge of the child's individual needs and circumstances. Physical activity is a key and necessary element in a child's development and is strongly associated with parental modeling, and facilities and attitudes in childcare centres, pre-schools, schools and other out-of-home settings. Although developmental pathways have been mapped, and provide a useful paradigm, it must be recognised that children have individual developmental trajectories and abilities influenced, but not determined, by, for example, gender and abilities.

As the young child grows and develops socially and emotionally, caregivers will need to recognise the web of elements which make up her individual profile. Emotional regulation, i.e. the ability to exercise control over one's emotions, internally and externally, in accomplishing one's goals, and the ability to recognise and label emotions in oneself and in others, is a facet of the child's development.

Other aspects which require knowledge gleaned from research include the child's coping skills, sense of autonomy, attachment relationships (particularly with parents), self-esteem, self-confidence, self-identity and pro-social behaviours. Currently, three major models of children's learning and cognitive development provide a theoretical basis for practice – Piagetian constructivist theory, Vygotskian sociocultural interactive theory and information processing theory. Within this theoretical framework, research provides insights on the building blocks of active learning including curiosity, exploration and novelty seeking, mastery motivation and goal persistence, metacognition, problem solving and the inter-relationship between language and thinking.

Theory on the moral development of the child is an emerging area and one in which there is noteworthy research interest here in Ireland. The existing body of knowledge can further our understanding of the child's growth and development through explorations of morality as emotion, as conformity to rule and authority, as conforming to one's own belief system and sense of self, and the ways in which the child's developing moral sense functions in overall development. In the same way that theories of moral development are in an early stage of development, so too is the case with research on the child's emerging spiritual life. Nonetheless, there are insights available into spirituality as a human capacity and an integral element of overall development.

3.2.1 Implications for the NQF/ECCE

Defining quality:

- 1 Quality service provision is based on the child's individual profile of strengths and needs.
- 1 The child is an active agent in her learning and development and is given the opportunity to exercise choice and autonomy.
- 1 Caregivers and significant adults have an understanding and knowledge of current research and theory of child development.
- 1 Caregivers and significant adults understand the circumstances of the

child's life and have the expertise to understand and address the impact of these circumstances.

- 1 The child has the right to quality service provision which prioritises her interests and well-being.

Assessing quality:

- 1 The child's opinion must be sought and included, in an age and context appropriate way in the course of evaluation and assessment.

Supporting quality:

- 1 The qualifications and training of practitioners to ensure high levels of understanding of child development and high levels of professional expertise, is fundamental to providing quality child-centred services.

3.3 Holistic learning and development

The child's developmental domains are fundamentally inter-related, and exert reciprocal influences, each upon the others, towards holistic development. This is the case within the child's current developmental stage, and as she is supported by non-directive, responsive adults to progress to the next developmental stage on the basis of her previous experience. In order to reflect the inter-relatedness of all areas of the child's learning, the child must be respected as an active and equal participant in the learning process. This is a prerequisite for the child to realise her own potential through the deployment of her existing knowledge. Higher-order thinking skills are developed through reciprocal interaction with the adult, who is challenging the child appropriately. Development of the higher-order thinking skills is highly dependent on the quality of the interaction with the adult. These higher-order thinking skills, in which the child integrates existing knowledge and begins to create new meanings and connections, are an expression of the holistic nature of learning.

Curriculum and learning contexts, in responding to the holistic and complex personality of the child, must be child-centred

and reflect the child's interests. They must provide meaningful activities and opportunities for the child to engage actively with the learning process. Learning programmes, curriculum content and pedagogy must reflect and support the child's holistic development in which the child herself is an active participant and constructor of meaning.

This has implications for service provision in terms of continuity of care and transition from home to out-of-home settings and from pre-school to school settings. Equally important is communication between parents and other caregivers and significant adults in the child's life in order to ensure the maximum understanding and knowledge to underpin the child's full and harmonious development. The environments (relational, physical and cultural) in which the child moves and acts must be in harmony in reflecting that understanding and knowledge of the child.

The State has a key role in promoting, supporting and ensuring the holistic development of the child through co-ordinated provision and policies. Responses to individual needs, particularly in situations in which a child has additional needs related to disadvantage, disability and other circumstances, should be addressed in the context of multi-disciplinary teams. Such teams should operate, not on the basis of individuals to whom the child is brought in turn, but as a flexible whole which brings support to the child in the context of the family.

Care and education are not sustainable as separate experiences in a child's life. Just as the child's developmental domains are inter-related, inter-connected and inter-influential, and as the child's higher-order thinking skills form connections within her knowledge base, so is the child's experience of the world inter-connected and holistic. To artificially divide that experience in the structures and contexts designed for nurturing the child is not helpful. A holistic perspective on quality provision requires all perspectives to be taken into account with an acknowledgement that these perspectives – children's, parents', professionals', state bodies' – are inter-related and must form an integrated whole.

There is ample research evidence supporting

the premise of intricate inter-connectedness of the child's overall experience of learning and development. Physical activity in a child's early years of development enhances overall socio-emotional, cognitive and physical development, and forms the basis for future activity patterns. Attachment relationships, based on trust and security, promote positive development in young children. Evidence suggests that secure attachments promote social competence and cognitive development, and lay down the foundations of trust for the young child. Also, the impact of mastery motivation and goal persistence on cognitive development and competence is significant. The two major factors - genetic and socialisation influences - which impact on mastery motivation, reflect the inter-relatedness of nature and nurture. Spiritual development in childhood has the potential to significantly enrich and strengthen our understanding of core processes and dimensions of child development. Current research proposes that spiritual development is just as important to personal and social well-being as are physical, cognitive and emotional elements of development.

3.3.1 Implications for the NQF/ECCE

Defining quality:

- 1 The child's learning and development occurs and progresses holistically and an array of supports is required to reflect and support this phenomenon.
- 1 Care and education are indivisible elements of a child's life.
- 1 Quality provision requires continuity between the various contexts in which the child spends time.
- 1 Parents and all significant adults involved in supporting the child's development communicate and share their knowledge and experiences of the child.
- 1 Where children have additional needs arising from disadvantaged circumstances or a disability, interventions must be on the basis of the child's holistic development.
- 1 Policy developments must promote cohesiveness and co-ordination in provision for young children.

Assessing quality:

- 1 The child's progress must be assessed continuously by a variety of means, and the knowledge gained made available appropriately to the relevant adults working with the child.
- 1 Process quality, that is the quality of the interactions between the child and the significant adults, and the child and other children, must be included in assessment and evaluation procedures.
- 1 The systems used to assess the child's progress must be included in overall evaluation and assessment.

Supporting quality:

- 1 Ongoing professional development, training and mentoring will be necessary to maintain the high levels of skill and expertise required to respond fully to the child.
- 1 Funding will be required to ensure that the outdoor and indoor environment is responsive to the interests of the child.

3.4 Environments for learning and development

The child experiences her environment in several inter-related and ecological ways predicated on her own individual circumstances – the physical environment (e.g. indoor and outdoor, home and out-of-home), the relational environment (e.g. parents, family, friends, caregivers, community, neighbourhood, significant others) and the cultural environment (e.g. diversity, discrimination, self-identity, disadvantage, social class, race, ethnicity). This section will consider primarily the physical environment as the relational and cultural environments will be dealt with in later sections

In discussing the physical environment, it should be noted that this is conceptualised as a continuum to reflect the totality of the child's life experience. This continuum encompasses home and out-of-home environments, indoor and outdoor, the natural and built environments, large and

small spaces, public and private spaces, and all other spaces and places in which the child moves. The child should have access to both structured (e.g. playgrounds) and non-structured (e.g. parkland, woodland, back gardens) environments.

Central to the concept of child-centredness is the recognition of the child as an active agent in her own learning and development, which she constructs holistically. The physical contexts in which this child-initiated meaning-making happens should reflect the principles of child-centredness and holistic development. The child's activity can be characterised in a dynamic way, and engagement, discovery, autonomy, opportunity, experimentation, exploration, enthusiasm and wonder are some of the hallmarks of that activity. Ultimately, the interaction between the child and her environment should provide her with fulfilment and joy.

Environments structured to meet the child's needs should facilitate the child's active approach to learning in safety and security, yet with provision for appropriate level of risk. A level of risk can be challenging for the child and offer scope for the exercise of self-reliance, independence and autonomy, for problem-solving using individual strengths to overcome difficulties and give a beneficial sense of control over outcomes. The environment should also foster co-operation between the child and her peers within small groups, and overall group size and adult/child ratio must be low enough to encourage this.

The environment should stimulate curiosity, choice, interests, and be varied and dynamic without overwhelming the child. Care-givers and significant adults can, for example, use the natural world as a stimulus to the child's senses, as an inspiration to creativity, as a context for activities and play, and as a source of continuity between home and out-of-home settings. Again, planning for such engagement with any environment requires that the starting point be the child, her needs, interests, learning dispositions and so on. This is particularly the case in planning the indoor and outdoor environment in out-of-home settings, and the child should have access to outdoor play and activity daily. In planning a structured environment, care should be taken to reflect the holistic nature of learning and development. Equipment and

materials should not prescribe the activity, and the child must have the opportunity to manipulate the objects in the environment as a vehicle towards meaning-making.

Each child has individual needs, and the environment should be flexible and adaptable to welcome children with special needs. The physical environment, whichever aspect of it is in question, must be well-resourced, and demonstrate flexibility and inclusivity. It must meet the requirements of relevant regulations and contain adaptive equipment so as to ensure consistent ease of access and frequent use by the child with special needs arising from a disability. For all children, proactive health promotion in the environment, such as healthy eating policy, promotion of healthy physical activity and personal care (e.g. personal hygiene, tooth care) is an important input into the child's life.

The literature on child development gives important direction on the environmental supports which will benefit young children's holistic development. One very focused example is the importance of breakfast (in the context of good overall nutrition) for a child's overall well-being. Breakfast clubs, and the provision of breakfast to all children attending out-of-home settings are just two examples of an environmental support. Facilities and attitudes in childcare centres, pre-schools, schools and other out-of-home settings are strongly associated with physical activity in young children, with particular significance in the organisation of indoor and outdoor environments.

There is considerable evidence that the provision of public play spaces in the community impacts on children's opportunities for physical activity among their peers, and that the absence of such facilities is a feature of the lives of children in Ireland. Such environmental supports are very important, as indicated by current theories on emotional development. The functional approach to emotional development views emotions as emerging from ongoing interactions between the individual and her environment. Supportive relationships and environments in the community, particularly for children with special needs and those experiencing challenging situations, promote effective coping abilities. Stimulating environments, the provision of meaningful choices for young children and task repetition

leading to independent action promote autonomy and mastery motivation in young children. Pre-school and school environments and adults' interactive styles are also related to perceptions of autonomy.

The literature on curiosity, exploration and novelty seeking indicates that learning environments should be varied, dynamic and structured enough to stimulate curiosity and support exploration without overwhelming the child's attempts to process it. Mastery motivation in the developing child has its roots in the intrinsic desire to master one's environment, particularly the physical environment. Theories of moral development tell us that in learning to value the environment, the child can learn to respect the natural world as a source of wonder and awe.

3.4.1 Implications for the NQF/ECCE

Defining quality:

- 1 The child requires access to a range of environments across the continuum from indoor to outdoor, built and natural and so on.
- 1 The physical environment in out-of-home settings must be carefully designed and thoughtfully arranged for flexibility, stimulation and dynamic engagement by the child.
- 1 The environment must allow the child a degree of risk.

Assessing quality:

- 1 While the physical environment in out-of-home settings must meet relevant health and safety standards, the role of the environment in supporting the child's learning must also be part of the evaluation and assessment processes.

Supporting quality:

- 1 Resources to adapt the environment to be flexible to the needs of all children will be required.
- 1 Resources to develop the outdoor environment, and ensure that the child

has easy access between indoor and outdoor spaces in out-of-home settings, will be required.

- 1 Advice and training on planning the learning environment will be necessary on an ongoing basis as part of overall professional development.

3.5 Relationships in learning and development

The relationships in which a child engages, from birth onwards, form a central pillar of the environment within which the child develops and learns. A child's relational environment comprises parents, siblings, family, friends, peers, caregivers and others in the community with whom the child has social interaction.

A child's holistic development and learning is best supported in the context of secure, supportive, stimulating and nurturing relationships. These are characterised by respect, kindness, generosity, sensitivity, emotional responsiveness, empathy, sympathy and warmth. Reciprocal relationships should indicate to the child that she is valued, her contribution is important and that she is listened to and heard in the dialogue. It is generally acknowledged that parents, both mother and father, are the most important people in a child's life.

Parents are also the most influential people in the child's life, and it is, in general, a child's parents who primarily support and nurture her full and harmonious development. Moreover, it is they who provide the love and security which most enriches the child's life, and who hold most dear the child's happiness and well-being. It must be acknowledged that there are situations in which parents who employ positive parenting styles encounter difficulties because their child is unable to respond in kind. For example, this might occur in the case of a child with special needs arising from a disability or because of the child's individual temperament. It must also be acknowledged that there are instances when parents require support in being parents, perhaps because they are under stress in other aspects of their lives and are unable to provide positive parenting. In these circumstances, and other similar circumstances, parents need support

within the context of the family and the community. These supports must be family-based, and the interests of the child must be central to the outcomes.

Reciprocal relationships with siblings and peers can be an important source of friendship and support for young children. These relationships can promote moral reasoning, conflict resolution skills and social understanding in very young children. Play activities with siblings and peers can foster the development of pro-social behaviours, such as sharing and co-operating. Sibling relationships in particular can be a source of lifelong support and protection from adverse life circumstances and events. Toddlers can begin to show interest in their peers even before the age of two, and young children have an important need for playmates and friends, as these relationships act to enhance the child's self-esteem and self-worth. Adults should not underestimate the importance to the young child of her friends and friendships. Significant adults need to facilitate the child's friendships, and, in particular in out-of-home settings, foster relationships between the children in their care.

For the significant adults who interact with the child in out-of-home settings to support learning and development, it is within the adult/child relationship that much of the learning takes place. Adult interactive styles, as an element of the environment, are crucially important. The adult is required to start from the point of the child's interests in her activities and learning situations, to emphasise the child's strengths and competencies, while helping the child to cope with mistakes and frustration through to the experience of success, resiliency and problem solving. In relating to the child, the adult must be appropriately non-directive, must discuss, question and consider (rather than dictate) outcomes, and partner the child in constructing meaning. It is through the adult/child relationship and interaction that the adult has the opportunity to demonstrate cultural awareness, to practice inclusivity and to promote positive models of diversity.

As in the case of the physical environment, the relational environment is conceptualised as a continuum, not as a set of compartments which the child visits in turn. This then has implications for the caregivers, service providers, teachers and other significant

adults who inhabit the child's relational environment. Communication and partnership between the adults is essential if the child is to experience the continuity necessary to a holistic experience of life. It must be reiterated that care and education can not be fractured, but must be an integrated experience for the child in her relationships.

A child's infancy and very early years are a time of unique dependency, during which parents and caregivers have a particular role in learning and development. It is their responsibility to provide a stimulating environment in which caregiving routines are appreciated as opportunities to develop the relationship with the child. These daily routines are also opportunities to foster language and cognitive development.

During this period the child's experience is, to a large degree, mediated by the significant adults in her life, in particular her parents. This has practical implications in that, for example, the child's access to preventative health care is largely determined by parental awareness and attitude towards health care services. It is through dynamic and reciprocal relationships that the child develops emotional regulation and understanding. Additionally, positive and secure attachment relationships promote the development of positive coping skills. For moral development, the young child needs a warm and consistent framework within which to form relationships, and spiritual development is influenced by, among other things, dynamic interactions with significant others. There are many other examples of the ways in which the child's relationships with others impact on her holistic development, and the importance of positive, nurturing, reciprocal relationships cannot be overstated.

3.5.1 Implications for the NQF/ECCE

Defining quality:

- 1 The child's learning and development is best supported in the context of the family and community.
- 1 The adults in out-of-home settings relate to the child in reciprocal interactions based on partnership.

- 1 Communication and partnership between parents and significant adults in out-of-home settings is imperative.
- 1 Provision of services and facilities for families and children should take into account the child's need for opportunities and places to be with other children.
- 1 Quality provision requires acknowledgement of difficulties in relationships which may impact negatively on the child.

Assessing quality:

- 1 Systems, routines and protocols for supporting relationships between home and out-of-home settings should be included in evaluation and assessment procedures.
- 1 Evaluation and assessment must include the interactions which take place between the child and the adult, the child and other children, and among adults.
- 1 Protocols for dealing with instances in which a child is experiencing negative relationships, for example bullying or abuse, should be included in evaluation and assessment.
- 1 The process of evaluation and assessment should in itself be a collaborative exercise, reflective of the relational environment in which it takes place.

Supporting quality:

- 1 The promotion of good working relationships among the team in out-of-home settings should be part of pre-service and in-service training for managers and other professionals in the ECCE sector.
- 1 Sharing of good practice, effective strategies and practical methods for involving parents and promoting good communication and partnership between home and out-of-home settings should be facilitated through practitioner networks and/or professional mentoring.

3.6 Diversity in learning and development

The child's individuality is the basic building block of diversity among children. Individuality and diversity are companion concepts in the child's life experience. The concern of the significant adults in the child's life must be to make both individuality and diversity a celebration of the unique complexity of each child. An appreciation of this individuality contributes to the application of the principles of child-centredness and holism in reciprocal relationships with the child.

As an individual, the child has rights which must be upheld, and adults have a role in protecting those rights. Each child is a unique individual with many dimensions to her life; for example, interests, learning dispositions, temperament, family, race, ethnicity, capabilities, needs, socio-economic circumstances, gender, language. All of these elements, and others, interact and combine in forming the person who develops in ways which reflect her unique and complex profile. It is important that this individuality have visibility in all considerations of how best to make provision for the child, either at home or in out-of-home settings. The environment – relational, physical and cultural – must be flexible and responsive enough to be inclusive of the individual child. The child, in turn, is active in those environments and has personal agency. She must be able to exercise choice and experience a sense of control over outcomes in her own life, and to that end must be listened to, and heard, by those who make decisions on behalf of children.

Acknowledging that the child has rights also places an onus on significant adults to be advocates for the right of children to quality experiences and quality services. This will require, possibly, legislative action and systemic change. Knowledge and understanding of the individual child's life experiences is a prerequisite for taking action on her behalf. The child's right to quality supports precludes using her life as a site of intervention in pursuit of goals which are not related to child outcomes. Quality service provision, be it a targeted intervention or other element of provision in any setting, should start with the child. It should focus on child outcomes and the processes which occur through the different elements of the

environment to support and nurture the child towards overall well-being.

Accompanying this principle of individual profile is the awareness of diversity among children. Diversity is not about placing a child in a category in which the child is identified only by, for example, special needs arising from a disability, by ethnic origin or by the level of disadvantage she experiences. Any of these conditions can exist together in a child's life, along with – as described above – many other attributes and experiences. Accepting that diversity is a given and a constant can enable significant adults to work from a position of cultural awareness, to provide adaptive environments, to acknowledge abilities, to be positive role models for inclusive practices, and to pro-actively model anti-bias behaviours and curricula. Such behaviours should be the norm even in settings where there may be the appearance of homogeneity. This might mean, for example, in single-sex schools or settings in which the children come from similar cultural backgrounds. The child must be supported in relationships with other children towards empathy, understanding and co-operation. The child must know herself to be valued, her first language respected and supported while second-language learning is proceeding. She must find that her culture is visible, a necessary part of supporting self-identity. Her needs must be identified and met in the context of holistic development.

As outlined in Section 2, the diversity of our society is an acknowledged feature of our lives, and the life of the individual child. Knowledge of the child's life will lead to specific responses to individual children. For example, special attention may be required to meet the needs of a child whose health suffers because of socio-economic and/or cultural disadvantage. In Ireland, a child who is homeless or is a member of the Traveller community is at risk of poor health, and Ireland has one of the highest rates of child poverty in Europe.

Autonomy is central to the empowerment of all children, and perhaps more so to marginalised children, those experiencing cultural and socio-economic disadvantage and those with special needs. In this light, adaptive equipment and environments, which are suited to their age, level of need and ethnic background are essential to enable all

children to manipulate, explore and experiment in their world. There is a very large body of research on issues of ethnic identity; here in Ireland, for example, a body of literature on Traveller cultural identity has emerged. Training and support for practitioners and significant adults will need to equip them with knowledge and expertise, based on such materials, to address the diverse profiles of the children and to identify strategies to respond appropriately. But, of course, the child can also be resilient, and such resiliency must be fostered. The child is not a passive recipient of intervention, but an active participant in any such programme.

One of the aspects of diversity which is most visible is that of language. Ireland has a history of bilingualism and a substantial body of experience of second-language learning. Increasingly, the language needs of children in Ireland expand the range of languages in use as first and second languages. It appears that supporting the child's first language is very important to the development of the second language. This has implications for the provision of supports in the form of childcare workers and classroom assistants who can speak the child's first language in situations where the service is conducted in a second or additional language for the child. There are also implications for services in communicating and building relationships with parents and families for whom the language of the service is not their first language.

Through play, self-expression and guided exploration, children gain a sense of history, identity and cultural tradition as well as the development of their skill in playing and developing creatively. In an holistic approach to development and learning in educational settings, it is vital that young children are engaged in activities which allow them to recognise and appreciate the beauty and diversity of their natural environment through activities which are at the heart of cultural activities, e.g. story-telling, drama, music and dance.

3.6.1 Implications for the NQF/ECCE

Defining quality:

- 1 Each child has an individual configuration of strengths, capabilities and needs which

must be identified by the significant adults who will then develop strategies to respond appropriately. This applies at all levels, from policy and legislative development, to daily service provision.

- 1 Practitioners and significant adults must foster inclusive and anti-bias practice, and promote awareness of diversity, regardless of the presence or absence of cultural or other forms of diversity in their immediate environment.
- 1 Cultural sensitivity must be part of relationships in ECCE settings, and this sensitivity will include making the child's culture visible in the environment.

Assessing quality:

- 1 Practitioner reflective practice will include consideration of how interactions and relationships promote empathy, sympathy and understanding among the children.
- 1 Systems, routines and protocols to respond to the impact of diverse cultural backgrounds among parents on communication and partnership should be included in evaluation and assessment.
- 1 Assessment and evaluation of the environment should include the images, equipment and materials provided and the level to which they reflect and respond to diverse needs and identities.
- 1 Assessment should include an evaluation of the steps taken by practitioners to become familiar with cultural ideas and practices that might be different or contrary to the prevailing ideas and practices of the setting.

Supporting quality:

- 1 Resources should be made available which reflect a range of cultural identities, gender, ability levels and so on for use with all children.
- 1 Practitioners and significant adults may require support in developing their own positive attitudes towards diversity in the community and in their setting.

- 1 Peer support and sharing of good practice, strategies and methods, as well as the sharing of information, of accessing suitable materials, resources and supports, will be facilitated through local professional networks.

3.7 Communication in learning and development

Communication is understood here as being a reciprocal and mutual exchange between people across the range of human experience. Each child needs to share in this phenomenon. Communication is about more than language – a parent can communicate love, comfort and reassurance through a hug as, or more effectively, than with words. A child who does not acquire language, for example, because of a disability, needs to be supported in developing a recognisable – alternative or augmentative – means of communicating. Communication is conceptualised, as are the other themes outlined here, as woven through all the developmental domains and interconnected with the other themes.

While communication is most often associated with spoken language, there are many other forms of communication available; technology provides alternatives to speech, as does sign language, reciprocal communication through the senses – touch, sight, smell, hearing and taste – self-expression through the arts and so on. Each child must be supported in communicating with her environments through the most appropriate means. In most cases, this will mean supporting the child's language learning, be it first language, second language, or bilingualism, and this requires different levels of support in different contexts. For example, the effects of disadvantaged circumstances can impact on a child's language development and specific interventions may be required to offset those effects. Hearing problems can also impact on the child's ability to communicate. Hearing difficulty is a relatively common childhood occurrence making screening essential during a child's early years. Children who are acquiring English as a second language also require specific interventions. The core principle remains that each child must be able to engage in reciprocal communication within her environments.

Communication is, as with the other identified themes, inextricably interconnected with the child's environment (physical, relational and cultural). It reflects the child's individuality and the diversity of her experiences, and allows the child to express her world view, provided the child is listened to in the communicative context. Communication is embedded in the child's social development and is the basis for her relationships with parents, siblings, peers, significant adults, extended family and all the other social relationships she will experience. It is the means through which, in turn, the significant adults can come to understand and know the child's life and personality. By communicating with each other, the child's secure trusting relationships with parents, significant adults and other children, which are so essential to healthy development and well-being, are developed and maintained.

The interactive styles of the adults who are supporting the child's learning are most important in affirming the child as an active co-constructor of meaning. It is fundamental to the effectiveness of the adult interactive style that the relationship with the child be conceptualised as a dialogue and a discussion. Adults need to communicate with the child in ways which show empathy, sympathy, kindness, sensitivity and responsiveness. Communication characterised in this way contributes to the child's moral development, and, in particular, impacts on how diversity is approached. But the communicative process should also challenge the child, in an age and developmentally appropriate way, to move towards new learning, understanding and meaning-making. The literature on spiritual development talks of the child as a natural philosopher. Philosophy is characterised by mutuality and openness, encouraging the child to question, analyse, investigate, think critically and problem solve in collaboration with others.

Ongoing communication between parents and other significant adults is a further necessary element in promoting the child's well-being. Such communication is essential to a full understanding of, for example, the child's circumstances, personality, culture, interests and dispositions; in other words, to the overall integration and continuity of the child's life. It is also fundamental to developing a partnership between home and out-of-home settings, and an important

prerequisite of parental involvement. Equally, in settings and circumstances which involve more than one person working with the child – for example in centre-based day care and therapeutic teams – communication between the members of the team is crucial. Sharing knowledge of the child, maintaining consistency in meeting the child’s needs and ensuring that all relevant information is available to the team and to those keeping records is important. To this end, systems, routines and protocols to facilitate communication and information sharing will need to be established in most out-of-home settings. In addition, management skills in communication will be significant contributors to quality provision.

3.7.1 Implications for the NQF/ECCE

Defining quality:

- 1 Each child’s communicative ability is fostered in the context of reciprocal interactions within nurturing, secure relationships.
- 1 Environmental supports, materials, adaptive equipment and other necessary resources are available to the child to support her communicative abilities.
- 1 The child’s first language must be supported and developed, including in settings where the daily language is an additional language for the child.
- 1 Out-of-home settings have systems, routines and protocols to facilitate communication among the team within the setting, with other professionals involved with the child and with the parents.

Assessing quality:

- 1 Where external evaluation and assessment of a service takes place, there must be clear communication of the parameters of the process, and the process itself must be characterised by close communication between and among all involved.

Supporting quality:

- 1 Management training should include communication skills.

- 1 Communication among the practitioner community must have a range of supports, for example, networks, cluster groups and professional publications.

3.8 Play for learning and development

Play is the process and state of being in which the child will predominantly engage with her own holistic development. There is no single definition of what play is, but the child is not in need of a definition – play is what she does. Perhaps the difficulty which adults have in defining play is a reflection of the ownership which children have over the process. It may well also be a reflection of the immediacy and spontaneity of play, and the open ended, flexible nature of what happens when children are playing. What is not contested is that play is a source of fulfilment and joy for the child, a source of wonder to adults and a major contributor to the well-being of children.

Each child has the right to play and this requires supportive adults, environments and communities, in what could be characterised as an ecological model of support. Support for play is an essential part of valuing childhood, one which requires action if such values are not to become mere rhetoric. This applies in particular to the provision of public play spaces and facilities in the community.

Play is a very important context in which the inter-related domains of development – physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, moral and spiritual – are activated through discovery, exploration, experimentation, enthusiasm, creativity and curiosity. During play, the child can be solitary or social. She can deploy previous experience and knowledge and exercise meta-cognitive skills. She can explore her own developmental stage and incorporate new learning. She can engage with concrete objects and/or ideas. She can explore emotion and culture, and experience autonomy and purpose, and much, much more.

Activities characterised in this way require an element of risk if they are to be truly experimental and exploratory – difficulty and challenge are needed too. Coping with mistakes and frustration is part of learning and development. Provision for play – in whatever context or for whatever age – must provide opportunities for risk taking in what is ultimately a safe and secure environment.

The child experiences her own active agency in the play process, leading to experiences of success, independence and self-reliance. It is the responsibility of significant adults in the learning environment to ensure the child's sense of control, especially in situations of structured play towards specific learning objectives. Those adults will need expertise in recognising the appropriate adult input into play, as well as in planning for learning through play. Skilful observation of the child at play is another essential element of the training and expertise of the practitioner as a guide to future planning. One important area of observation is the child's mastery motivation and goal persistence in pursuing a play activity.

There is a large body of evidence which suggests that persistence (a primary measure of motivation) on a particular task is likely to lead to competence on that task. Furthermore, young children who are more engrossed in their free play (thereby demonstrating higher levels of motivation) have been found to demonstrate more cognitively sophisticated play than young children who are less engrossed. Exchanges characterised by positive responses and warmth have been associated with higher levels of task-directedness, to better organised and more sustained play activity and to more pride in personal achievement in young children. Play is a particularly motivating medium through which young children can develop and learn, and it has been shown to improve planning and problem solving. Furthermore, it can enable children to integrate new ideas and practice new skills. It can also be used to promote language use, creativity and flexibility of thought. In particular, the literature emphasises that 'structured' play should provide intellectual challenge and security, two factors which are largely determined by the developmental appropriateness of the activities.

Play is an expression of each child's complex individuality and of the collective diversity of any given group of children. From a very early age, the child's perceptual skills give her the potential to observe, show awareness and actively engage in her world. In this respect, the young child needs to be encouraged to enter play together with peers and significant adults and, by doing so, share a wonder and enthusiasm in their mutual explorations and expressions of their world.

This will require opportunities to touch, to feel, to taste, to smell and see the beauty and detail in the immediate environment. She must also be facilitated to develop age appropriate awareness of the wider community and world.

The play environment (physical, relational, cultural) must be flexible and adaptable to individuality and diversity, particularly in the case of children with special needs arising from disability, disadvantage or cultural marginalisation. Resiliency in children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances was found to be associated with a range of parental actions. Parents were found to protect their children from the adverse effects of poverty by, for example, providing a variety of stimulating learning materials and access to safe play areas, and being responsive and sensitive to their child's needs.

3.8.1 Implications for the NQF/ECCE

Defining quality:

- 1 All provision for children, whether at home or in out-of-home settings must, as a priority, provide play facilities, materials, opportunities, supports, resources and any other requirements identified as helpful in promoting play
- 1 The child must be encouraged to engage in play alone, with other children and with adults.
- 1 The child should have access to play opportunities across all environments described in Section 3.4.

Assessing quality:

- 1 Health and safety aspects of evaluation and assessment should, within reason, not militate against the child's ability to engage with the environment.

Supporting quality:

- 1 Theories and approaches to play and playful interactions must be central to pre- and in-service training for ECCE practitioners.

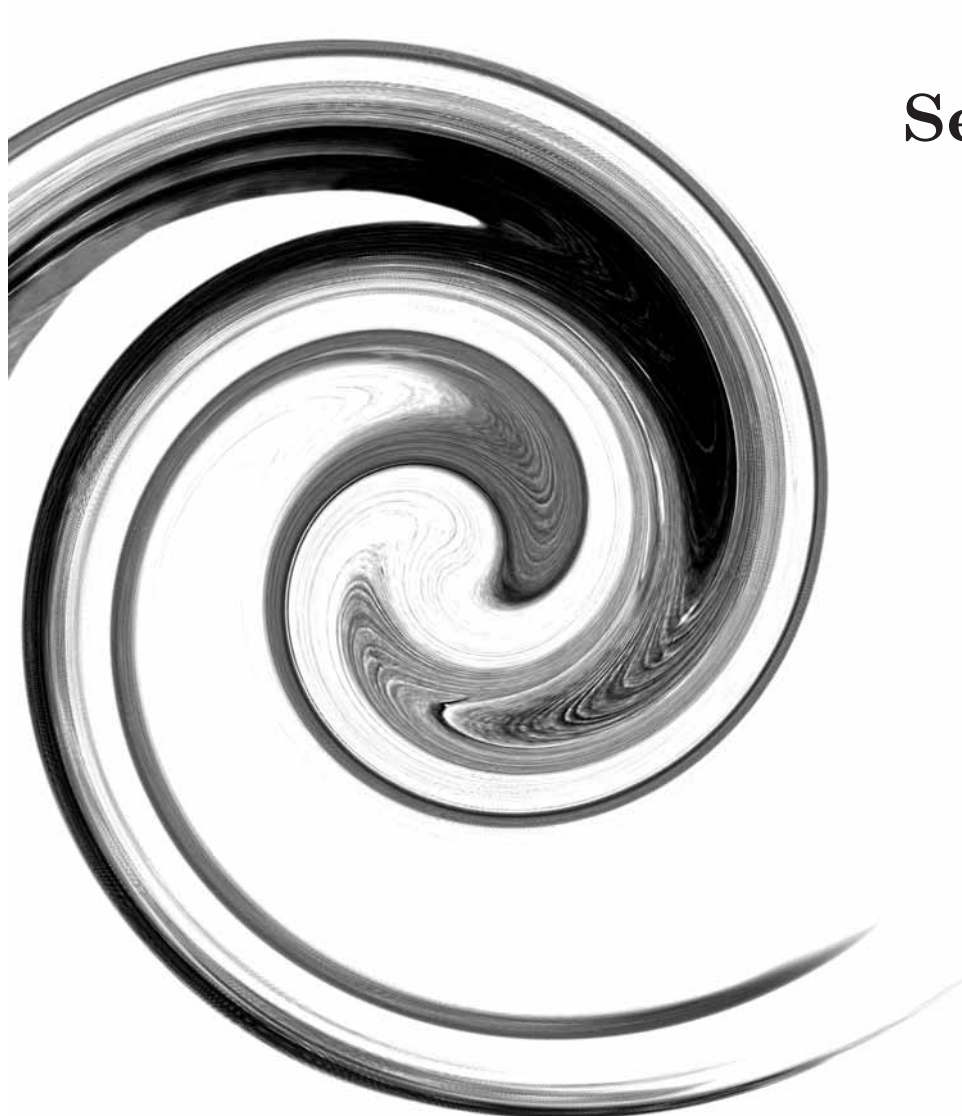
- 1 Dedicated support for the development of play activities should be available to practitioners, possibly from a play advisor working with a group of services.

3.9 Conclusion

Each child is a unique, complex and wonderful human being. Considerable work has gone into researching and documenting

the myriad elements of child development and all the processes which occur in the course of that development. Yet it is doubtful if any writer, commentator or researcher has captured the quintessence of a single child. Perhaps this is part of the continuing fascination of childhood for adults. It is very important that, in deconstructing the elements of child development theory in order to further our own understandings, we do not lose sight of the child.

Section 4



Conclusion

This document has laid out the CECDE perspective on the changing constructions of early childhood in Ireland over the last century. It has addressed some issues of current interest and debate in ECCE in Ireland. Through the thematic interpretation of child development and learning, it has illustrated the CECDE's perspective on the inter-related nature of that learning and development. Primarily, though, it has demonstrated the perspective on the child and childhood which has been incorporated into the development of the NQF/ECCE.

The development of the NQF/ECCE will be a major result of the CECDE's work. It will be the first time that the ECCE sector in Ireland will have an agreed set of national quality standards. It is vital that such an important initiative is firmly rooted in the best available

evidence and progressed through co-operation and consultation with stakeholders. The CECDE identified four elements of research which would be required to underpin the NQF/ECCE. Three of these elements of research have been completed and published, as follows:

- (a) *Insights on Quality - A National Review of Policy, Practice and Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland 1990-2004* (CECDE, 2004a)
- (b) *Talking About Quality - Report of a Consultation Process on Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education: Executive Summary* (CECDE, 2004b)
- (c) *Making Connections - A Review of International Policies, Practices and*

Research Relating to Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education (CECDE, 2004c)

The publication of *Early Childhood in Ireland - Evidence and Perspectives* completes the four pillars. These four documents provide considerable evidence on the constituent elements of quality provision from a broad range of complementary perspectives.

The CECDE has consistently taken the view that a concordant and co-ordinated national policy context is fundamental to the objective of a co-ordinated and cohesive ECCE sector. Over the past decade or so, against the background of a rapidly changing socio-economic and demographic landscape, there have been significant modernising developments in relation to policy towards young children. These developments are reflected in such seminal documents as the

National Childcare Strategy (DJELR, 1999), the White Paper on Early Childhood Education, *Ready to Learn* (DES, 1999a) and the National Children's Strategy, *Our Children, Their Lives* (DHC, 2000). In addition, as referred to earlier, the consultation document on early learning, *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (NCCA, 2004) has added to the matrix of policy on young children. The CECDE perspective, as explicated in this document, articulates well within this policy framework.

This perspective on child development and learning, as articulated by the CECDE, is now open to scrutiny and debate, a debate open to everybody with interest in ECCE in Ireland. Ongoing debate on child learning and development invigorates all involved, and hopefully enriches children's experiences. Enriching young children's experiences is also at the heart of our ultimate goal, a well-established and agreed NQF/ECCE.



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Appendix 1: Select Bibliography

N.B. This is a select bibliography of literature published since 1990. This does not reflect the entirety of the literature consulted in the preparation of the Review Document.

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