Parish Pedagogies: an Analysis of Irish Pre-school Practice using the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales
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Under the supervision of
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Abstract

Parish Pedagogies: An Analysis of Irish Pre-school Practice and Pedagogy using The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales

This research applies the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales/Revised* and the *Extension four Curricular Subscales* (ECERS/R/E) in a systematic way to measure standards of pre-school provision in Ireland. This exploratory study is the first application of the scales in the Irish context. The evidence based data is analysed using both quantitative (ECERSR/E findings) and qualitative (Relational Pedagogy) approaches.

In keeping with *The National Children’s Strategy* (2000) this research uses a post-modern pedagogical analysis (Relational Pedagogy). In the strategy, the Irish State’s policy emphasised post-modern pedagogical principles such as the ‘whole child perspective’. This recognises the capacity of children to interact with and shape the world around them. It regards the child as an advocate in his or her own learning and seeks to listen to the voice of the child is in keeping with EU and Nordic approaches.

This philosophy (RP) guides new ECEC quality and curriculum frameworks, namely *Síolta* and *Aistear* and Regulation 5 in the 2007 revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations. These are in essence the new Irish pre-school standards, though not a curriculum and are soon to be implemented. Furthermore, qualitative phenomenological research was used to understand the ‘lived experience’ of the pre-school practitioner. This method involved interviews and observations and informs the interpretation of the findings.
The research population is small but significant, 26 pre-schools throughout Ireland. The findings reveal a minimal standard in many aspects of pedagogy. Pre-math and pre-science provision standards are inadequate. The title Parish Pedagogies comes about as the findings vary from Parish to Parish with no national standard evident. The parish as a unit of organisation is relevant as one third of the cohort have expanded through Parish support systems.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Gerardine Neylon

Signed:……………………………………………………………..

Date:……………………………………………………………….
Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to extend my thanks to my fellow researchers in the Department of Politics and Public Administration, Dr. Chris Mc Inerney and Dr. Éidín Ní Shé, for your support and continued academic interest in my studies. Thanks to Lisa Kiely my fellow data collector and co-pilot on the national pre-school adventure. Thanks to Tracey Butler for her assistance with the administrative duties of college life and to all my colleagues in the departmental research cluster EP3 for providing me with an opportunity to discuss my work at its various stages of development. Thanks to Dr. Maria O’Dwyer in the Sociology Department, for highlighting potential problems and useful suggestions. Similarly, I would like to thank the organisers of the various conferences (in Strasbourg, Belfast, Philadelphia and Birmingham) at which I delivered papers over the past few years.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my brother Cannon Mick Neylon for his love and support; he knows what it takes to develop effective pre-schools and he has done so in many parishes.
# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. i
Declaration ........................................................................................................ iii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................ iv
List of Figures .................................................................................................. vii
List of Tables ................................................................................................. viii
List of Situational Samplings .......................................................................... viii
List of Appendices ........................................................................................... ix
List of Abbreviations ......................................................................................... x

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... xii

THE QUALITY OF PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION IN IRELAND .............. xii

CHAPTER 1: PRE-SCHOOL PEDAGOGY ............................................. 1
Part 1: Pre-school pedagogical influences from Montessori to Malaguzzi ......................................................... 3
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 21
Part 2: Irish Pre-school care - a multitude of different pedagogical approaches .................................................................................................................. 23

CHAPTER 2: CHARTING THE COURSE OF PRE-SCHOOL POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND ................................................................. 30
Interpreting Developments in Irish Pre-school’s expansion .......................... 54

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ......................................................... 60
Positioning this Research .............................................................................. 60
Quantitative Method ........................................................................................ 64
History and critique ECERS/R/E across Modern and Post-modern pedagogies ............................................................................................................................ 65
Post-modern pedagogies .................................................................................. 67
Items measured by ECERS/R and ECERS/E .............................................. 70
Qualitative Methods ......................................................................................... 84
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>..............................</th>
<th>90</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL RATING SCALE/ REVISED</td>
<td>..........................................................</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category One: Space and Furniture</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Two: Personal Care Routines</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Three: Language and Reasoning</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Four: Pre-school Activities</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Five: Social Interaction</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure Six: Programme Structure</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Seven: Parents and Staff</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS; EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL RATING SCALE EXTENDED</td>
<td>..........................................................</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Eight: Literacy</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Nine: Mathematics</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Ten: Science and Environment</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 11: Diversity</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of research findings</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Components of Good Irish pedagogical practice</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for improvements in pre-school provision</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Effective pre-school provision (Short-term)</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Graduate Training Programme (Mid-term)</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Management/support (Mid-term)</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Legislation and policy development (Long-term)</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>..................................................</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1: William Perry Stages of Practitioner Practice (1970) .......... 18
Figure 2: Relativism in Action................................................................. 20
Figure 3: Pre-school Governance Mechanisms .................................. 39
Figure 4: The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education United
Kingdom (2004).................................................................................. 62
Figure 5: The Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland (2006)
.............................................................................................................. 62
Figure 6: Irish Pre-School ECERS- R and E findings ....................... 84
Figure 7: Category One: Space and Furniture .................................. 97
Figure 8: The Genoeffa Cervi Centre: map of infant - toddler centre... 103
Figure 9: Suggested plan for Irish Pre-school lay out......................... 105
Figure 10: Category Two: Personal Care Routines........................... 116
Figure 11: Category Three: Language and Reasoning....................... 132
Figure 12: Category Four Pre-school Activities................................. 144
Figure 13: Category Five Social Interaction......................................... 159
Figure 14: Category Six Programme Structure................................. 170
Figure 15: Category Seven Parents and Staff...................................... 183
Figure 16: Category Eight: Literacy................................................. 201
Figure 17: Category Nine Mathematics............................................. 213
Figure 18 Category Ten Science and Environment............................ 221
Figure 19: Category 11 Diversity......................................................... 231
List of Tables

Table 1: Chronological table of the policy development ......................... 32
Table 2: Category one - Sub-category 7, Space for gross motor play ...... 72
Table 3: Scoring mechanism for ECERS ............................................. 73
Table 4: County list of childcare reduced to pre-schools ...................... 79
Table 5: HSE ECEC Typologies ........................................................... 81
Table 6: Emerging typologies captured in Irish ECERS Pre-school study ................................................................................................. 82
Table 7: Agreed appropriate level of award for each ECEC occupational profile .................................................................................................................. 181
Table 8: Pre-school's to advance social inclusion .................................. 234
Table 9: Effective pre-school provision components ............................. 242

List of Situational Samplings

Situation Sampling 1: A little bird told me........................................ 138
Situation Sampling 2: 'I'm watching who is singing - They Will Be the Ones to Get Sweets' ................................................................. 151
Situation Sampling 3: "I'll give you a hand though I know I shouldn't" 151
Situation Sampling 4: Behaviour-Versus- Thinking .............................. 163
Situation Sampling 5: Polite Conversations ........................................ 164
Situation Sampling 6: "We're getting a new baby sister" ....................... 176
Situation Sampling 7: Rudolph ......................................................... 205
Situation Sampling 8: Plumbers, Firemen and Garda .......................... 207
Situation Sampling 9: No writing materials allowed ........................... 208
List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Sheet for Parents ........................................... 275
Appendix 2: Information Sheet ............................................................. 276
Appendix 3: Recruitment Letter ........................................................... 279
Appendix 4: Consent Form ................................................................. 280
Appendix 5: Decline Offer ................................................................. 281
Appendix 6: National Qualifications Framework .................................. 282
Appendix 7: Pre-school Buildings ........................................................ 283
Appendix 8: Interview guide ............................................................... 284
Appendix 9: The Hundred Languages of Children by Loris Malaguzzi . 285
# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>Applied Prior Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCCN</td>
<td>Border Counties Childcare Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCCN</td>
<td>Border Counties Childcare Network</td>
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<td>BTEI</td>
<td>Back to Education Initiatives</td>
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<td>CCC</td>
<td>County Childcare Committee</td>
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<td>CNG</td>
<td>Comhar Naoínraí Na Gaeltachta Teo</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>Community Service Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSER</td>
<td>Center for Social and Educational Reserch</td>
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<td>DAP</td>
<td>Developmentally Appropriate Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>DCYA</td>
<td>Department of Children and Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>DES</td>
<td>Department of Education and Science</td>
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<td>DHC</td>
<td>Department of Health and Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>DLO</td>
<td>Desirable Learning Outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSFA</td>
<td>Department of Social and Family Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSFA</td>
<td>Department of Social and Family Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECCE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Education</td>
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<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education and Care</td>
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<td>ECERS-R</td>
<td>Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales – Revised</td>
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<td>ECERS-E</td>
<td>Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Extension</td>
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<td>EOCP</td>
<td>Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme</td>
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<td>EPPE</td>
<td>Effective Provision of Pre-School Education</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EYQISP</td>
<td>Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme</td>
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<td>FÁS</td>
<td>Foras Áiseanna Saothair</td>
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<td>FETAC</td>
<td>Further Education and Training Awards Council</td>
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<td>FSA</td>
<td>Family Support Agency</td>
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<td>FNT</td>
<td>Forbairt Naonraí Teo</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRC</td>
<td>Family Resource Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAA</td>
<td>Gaelic Athletic Association</td>
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<td>GTF</td>
<td>Graduate Training Fund</td>
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<td>GSE</td>
<td>Harvard Graduate School of Education's</td>
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<td>HB</td>
<td>Health Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSE</td>
<td>Health Service Executive</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICA</td>
<td>Irish Country Women’s Association</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
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<td>INTO</td>
<td>Irish National Teachers‘ Organization</td>
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<td>IP&quot;s</td>
<td>Individual Plans</td>
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<td>IPPA</td>
<td>Irish Pre-school Playgroup Association</td>
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<td>ISKA</td>
<td>Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association</td>
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<td>JELR</td>
<td>Justice Equality and Law Reform</td>
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<td>JI</td>
<td>Job Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAEYC</td>
<td>National Association for the Education of Young Children</td>
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<td>NCCA</td>
<td>National Council for Curriculum Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCCC</td>
<td>National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee</td>
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<td>NCIP</td>
<td>National Childcare Investment Programme</td>
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<td>NCNA</td>
<td>National Children's Nurseries Association</td>
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<td>NESF</td>
<td>National Economic and Social Forum</td>
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<td>NQF</td>
<td>National Framework Qualifications</td>
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<td>NVCO</td>
<td>National Voluntary Childcare Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>OMCYA</td>
<td>Office of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>PESP</td>
<td>Programme for Economic and Social Progress 1990 to 1993</td>
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<td>ROI</td>
<td>Republic of Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>Pre-School Playgroups Association</td>
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<td>RP</td>
<td>Relational Pedagogy</td>
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<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Education Needs</td>
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<td>SIT</td>
<td>Standardised Inspection Tool</td>
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<td>SME</td>
<td>Small to Medium Enterprises</td>
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<td>SPSS</td>
<td>Statistics Package for Social Scientists</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNCRC</td>
<td>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Fund</td>
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<td>VEC</td>
<td>Vocational Educational Committees</td>
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INTRODUCTION

THE QUALITY OF PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION IN IRELAND

In January 1996 the European Commission Network on Childcare published *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children. European Commission Network on Childcare and other measures to reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibilities Proposals for a ten year action plan* (European Commission Network on Childcare 1996). A decade later when attempting to assess Ireland’s performance in relation to those targets the gap on Irish data concerning quality in pre-school services was apparent (Neylon, 2006).

While there is some research on individual early year’s education projects, there is a significant dearth of data on standards of pedagogical quality in Irish pre-schools. This is not a surprise given that there is no nationally applied understanding of what quality means in Irish early years provision. The range of research when appraised tends to focus on particular individual projects, reports on expansion figures, pilot studies and policy development. Some information was available from the variety of pre-school stakeholders on their individual projects such as HighScope and Naionraí (Irish language pre-schools) but no data on national standards of pedagogical practice was available.

Research in the field has focused on fragmented agency issues with data on pre-school services mixed in across services for children from birth to six years of age. Irish research in the field of ECEC is often disappointing for the pre-school researcher as studies are mostly reports of research carried out in infant primary school classrooms.
This doctoral research differs from much of the current Irish research in the field of early childhood studies in that it targets and measures a representative sample (one per county) as an exploratory study. The pre-schools are randomly sampled and the results offer a vignette of current pedagogical standard in pre-school care and education. The research separates pre-school from the domain of childcare and primary school infant class to focus on pre-schools provision.

The most significant Irish work in the field published are the background papers written for the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) in developing the national *Early Childhood Curriculum Framework: Aistear* (Hayes 2007, French 2007, Kernan 2007 and Dunphy 2008). Along with its predecessor *The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education Síolta* (CECDE 2006) these policy documents have introduced and promoted Relational Pedagogical (RP) ideas. A national roll out of the frameworks is very slowly being implemented in Irish pre-school settings (*Aistear* and *Síolta* are explored in chapter two). This research measures the standard of provision in pre-schools services prior to the implementation of the new frameworks and it identifies gaps in provision using international standards.

This research identified the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales/Revised* (Harms et al. 1998) as a suitable tool by to measure Irish pre-school provision to measure a wide range of pedagogical issues. The rating scale has been applied globally for the past two decades. In the UK an extension of the scale was recently developed: *Extension Four Curricular Subscales* (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart 2003). Both scales are used in this study.
and are explored further in chapter three. Together these combined rating scales offer a comprehensive framework by which to assess the effectiveness of pre-school provision.

Both scales had been applied in research in the UK, first in Britain (Sylva et al. 2004) and then in Northern Ireland (Melhuish et al. 2006). This doctoral research has now added empirical data that measures the quality of pre-school provision from an Irish sample. The findings for the UK and Ireland are illustrated in chapter three. The use of ECERS/R/E in the Irish case is justified as a means to explore the level of environmental quality, albeit in a context where pedagogy is not regulated to the same degree as in the UK. The research is justified as making ‘a start‘ in what has up to now been unknown, this is a first application of the rating scales ECERS/R/E in a systematic way in the Irish pre-school context.

This research is the largest piece of independent research conducted in pre-school care in the history of the state. The ECERS/R/E quantitative study is augmented by qualitative data from interviews conducted with 16 practitioners. In addition, eight situational samplings from practice are reported to reflect the levels of Relational Pedagogical (RP) practice found during data collection. Finally a case study of three pre-school services for children deemed to experience educational disadvantage by the state are included.

The findings of this research offer the pre-school inspectorate, trainers and higher education institutes, students and policy maker’s access to empirical results on pre-school quality. A comprehensive account of the organic development of Irish pre-
school provision is explored and situational samples found in provision are discussed.

Due to complex overlaps of pedagogical and policy issues in the area of pre-school public policy these complex issues are dealt with first. The chapters thus, in turn, focus on pedagogy, policy, methodology, reports, findings and conclusions.

Chapter one explores pedagogy, specifically provision in pre-school. It is written in two parts. The first part presents an historical perspective on traditional pedagogical influences in pre-school provision that have gained currency in Ireland and internationally and maps pedagogical theory from Montessori to Malaguzzi. The second part of the chapter reports on the range of pedagogical approaches currently in use of Irish pre-school. These include institutions offering pedagogical training and provision.

Chapter two identifies key developments and stakeholders in pre-school policy development. It considers the heightened awareness of the importance and benefits of pre-school coupled with an increase in investment, which led to the expansion of services in Ireland over the past four decades.

Chapter three outlines the methods of enquiry used to measure and assess current Irish pre-school pedagogical practice. The results are reported and analysed in chapters four and five. Finally, chapter six concludes with recommendations and points to areas of concern particularly in pre-school practitioner training and supports to implement quality assurance systems in services.
In light of the diverse and often heterogeneous definitions and understanding assigned to Early Childhood Education and Care components and in order to explicate these terms that may have particular meanings in the Irish context, the following section clarifies terms that are central to the research.

This research is concerned with pre-school playgroups (hereafter ‘pre-schools’). These groups traditionally accept children older than three years of age for one year prior to moving on to National primary school infant class.

The term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is used to describe all services for children under six years of age by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and across government departments. The term is understood to include all arrangements providing care and education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours, or programme content. The terms ECEC and/or pre-school are used interchangeably throughout the thesis. This study is confined to pre-school playgroups.

The study coincides with the recent state scheme The Free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme implemented during January 2010. The use of ECEC and ECCE may confuse the reader, in order to clarify the difference when writing about the new ECCE the word ‘scheme’ is included.

While it is not the intention of the research to focus on pre-school as a female gender dominated service the reality is that all the practitioners in the study are female consequently practitioners are referred to in the feminine.
This research set out as an exploratory study to measure the standard of pre-school provision using Relational Pedagogy to inform the analysis.

The research identified a mixed model of provision in pre-school practice and management with standards varying greatly from service to service. Irish pre-schools measure minimal to good in many aspects of pedagogical provision but inadequate in terms of pre-math and pre-science provision. A lack of any real policy to support practitioners to achieve tertiary training in the field of ECEC was identified. The findings conclude that the most effective way to increase pedagogical standards is to develop a national system to support practitioners (who work directly with children) to achieve graduate accreditation.
CHAPTER 1: PRE-SCHOOL PEDAGOGY

The first part of this chapter reports on international early childhood education pedagogical principles and traces the development of pedagogical thought from the Modernist era through Constructivist and Contextual ideas to Post-modern Relational Pedagogies (RP). This chapter starts with the Montessori’s Modernist pedagogical theory and ends with the Post-modernist theory of Malaguzzi found in Reggio Emilia. It is important to clarify the use of the term Modernist and Post-modernist and how they impacted on ECEC ideologies. Here Modernism refers to an approach that looks to scientific proof for universal truths. The Modernist paradigm in the field of ECEC related to how pedagogues relied on scientific knowledge through observations which has become associated with developmental psychology. This normative approach sees each child as being the same the world over. Penn posits that casting children as ‘developers’ is synonymous with being a ‘minor’ and being ‘worth-less’ consequently their views and feelings are of less importance than that of an adult (Penn, 2005).

Dalberg and Moss see that in ECEC this resulted in the notion that;

Scientifically guided principles, based on generalisations that are considered sufficiently reliable, indicate the continuing efforts to find a universal and scientific guide for ‘who’ the child is and how to govern his or her progress and development (Dalberg, and Moss, p.7, 2005).

Conversely the Post-modern approach marks a move away from rational, scientific truths. Post-modern thinkers challenge the idea that we can ever find the real truth about anything as many
different truths about an issue are possible. This Post-modern paradigm goes beyond systematic studies. This draws a great deal from philosophers such as Foucault and Derrida \(^1\) who were concerned with issues of knowledge, power, equity, language, truth, freedom and ethics. Post-modernism unites ideas in sociology, economics, education and politics.

ECEC Post-modern approaches overrule the normative ‘universal child’ idea. Consequently, each child has his or her own truth is valued for its individuality. This is based on a strong belief that no two children are the same and that context matters. The term Relation Pedagogy (RP) describes the approach where each child is related to as an individual, coming from a unique place.

Having explored Modernism to Post-modernism pedagogies, this section focuses on the contemporary issues in early childhood teacher education programmes pertaining to training students in the Post-modern paradigm of Relational Pedagogy (RP).

The second part of the chapter narrows the focus to current Irish practice where a multitude of different pedagogical approaches are found (both Modern and Post-modern). The findings show that Irish pedagogical policy is slowly moving toward the acceptance of Post-modern Relational Pedagogical principles such as the Reggio Emilia approach.

**Part 1: Pre-school pedagogical influences from Montessori to Malaguzzi**

**The Montessori Method**

Maria Montessori followed in a line of European pedagogical philosophers (Rousseau, Pestalozzi) who, during the age of Enlightenment studied children’s moral development and child centred teaching approaches. The Montessori methodology is a good starting point to begin to trace Modernist pedagogical pre-school influence. Montessori’s theories applied a scientific approach. In her seminal book (published in 1912) *The Montessori Method – Scientific pedagogy as Applied to Child Education in the Children’s houses* she outlined specific pedagogical methods. She focuses on the education of the senses using didactic material such as the algebraic binomial cube, sand paper numbers and the sound box (Montessori 1912). Montessori observed children closely, which led her to develop hand eye co-ordinating exercises; she was the first to develop and use child size furniture. Her child-centered ideas soon became popular in England. Six month training courses on the Montessori Method were run for teachers in England from 1919 to 1938 (Whitbread 1972, p. 57). The Montessori Method has remained a popular early year’s pedagogical approach and continues to be taught and practiced worldwide.
Steiner-Waldorf

In the 20’s Rudolf Steiner developed a curriculum, which holds that the highest pursuit of education should be to develop the whole child to become a free and creative thinker capable of self-actualisation (Steiner 1995). He agreed with Montessori that children absorb their surroundings. He also believed that the early years should be a time for creative and imaginative play. Practitioners, he argued, should move through ages or grades with the same children for two years or more. This practice is called ‘looping’.

Piagetian Approach – Constructivism

Piaget, like many early childhood observers studied and recorded the behaviour of his own three children. He published on the child’s conception of space, geometry, time, physical causality and on the child’s moral judgement. His analysis concluded that every child passes through roughly the same stages in the same order whether negotiating the domain of causality or the domain of morality (Piaget and Inhelder 1969). He focused on how children acquire knowledge and argued that children must find things out for themselves, thorough experimentation and taking the lead themselves. It has been posited that Piaget provided a theoretical legitimating of ‘learning through play’ and his ideas were especially popular with those working with young children (Penn 2005).

Piaget’s theories caught the imagination of philosophers, teachers, policy makers and practitioners. His work has been a cornerstone in early childhood training across Europe and the United States.
is by its nature a ‘normative’ approach to studying children based on children reaching various developmental milestones. Piaget’s research also advanced the concept of Constructivist learning which holds that all knowledge is constructed from a base of prior knowledge.

Gesell advances this normative approach by monitoring and recording children’s achievements in terms of psychological and physical development. Having invented the one-way mirror Gesell was able to observe children at play without disturbing the play process. He concentrated on age related changes in patterns of behaviour. Like Piaget, his findings show that children go through stages of development, in fixed sequence. Furthermore, he emphasises the child’s intelligence in problem solving. Recently, the normative approach has been criticised as a Modern phenomenon that fails to recognise the particular nature of child development and the context in which the child lives (Penn 2005, Dahlberg 2005).

**Contextualist / Vygotskyian Approach**

A move beyond developmental/normative approaches is central to Vygotskyian writings which reinforced an understanding of the importance of the social environment to foster learning. “The basic claim of Vygotsky's theory is that all higher mental functions have their origin in social relations and practice” (Williams and Fromberg 1992, p.200) consequently educational approaches wishing to mediate between society and the child’s mind necessarily must be simultaneously social, mental and meaningful. Vygotsky also emphasised the social nature of development. He coined the phrase ‘zone of proximal development’ to describe the intellectual space between the learner and the teacher. He held that adults should provide a child with ‘scaffolding’ e.g. supports of
familiar repetition, only possible in that individual child’s context that helps direct their cognitive development, within a cultural context.

Dewey came from the Constructivist school of thought but he also saw the child as a social individual connected and contextualised. In *The School and Society* (1919) he criticised the waste in education of children’s life’s, he believed that ‘the child should study his commercial arithmetic and geography, not as isolated things by themselves but in reference to his social environment’ (Dewey 1919, p. 78).

Both Dewey and Vygotsky

Share similar ideas concerning the relationship of activity and learning/development especially the roles everyday activities and social environment play in the educational process (Glassman 1991, p.3).

The shift from seeing the child in normative terms to the child who actively engages in society has been described by Follari as the development of ‘a theory of knowledge and learning that posits that children actively engage with their world – people experiences, materials and build their beliefs and knowledge through interaction and internal processes’ (Follari 2011, p.74).

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

The term Developmental Appropriate Practice (DAP) was introduced in 1986 in the United States of America by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The following year the principles of DAP were published in what is known in the field of ECEC as ‘The Green Book’. No one theorist
is responsible for the approach; rather it takes cogensis of historical theory and literature about how children develop and learn. The approach aims to enhance development and learning in a framework to provide an optimal balance between children’s self-initiated learning and the guidance or support offered to them. Puckett and Diffey highlight several common misconceptions about the approach which can be traced to "the way DAP was presented in the 1987 document. In it practices are listed as appropriate or inappropriate” (Puckett and Diffey p.14, 2004). How strictly pedagogues stick to the guidelines taking a "dichotomies of position" approach that sees practice as appropriate or not, without taking account of children’s individuality is a common mistake they suggest (Puckett and Diffey p.p16-19, 2004).

After a decade of debate and learning through practice the association put forward a position paper on DAP (2009). It sets out three challenges they perceived to be relevant to early childhood education. The first challenge is the reduction of learning gaps and the increased achievement for children. The second challenge is to improve connected education for pre-school and elementary school and finally to acknowledge the importance of teacher knowledge and decision making as vital to educational effectiveness (NAYCE, 2009).

In attempting to define DAP the association point to how hard it is to do "justice to the complexity of the phenomenon that is child development and learning” (NAYCE, p. 10, 2009). That said, the following 12 principles set out to capture the essence of DAP.

1. All the domains of development and learning—physical, social and emotional, and cognitive—are important, and they are closely interrelated. Children’s development and
learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains.

2. Many aspects of children’s learning and development follow well documented sequences, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.

3. Development and learning proceed at varying rates from child to child, as well as at uneven rates across different areas of a child’s individual functioning.

4. Development and learning result from a dynamic and continuous interaction of biological maturation and experience.

5. Early experiences have profound effects, both cumulative and delayed, on a child’s development and learning; and optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning to occur.

6. Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.

7. Children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers.

8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.

9. Always mentally active in seeking to understand the world around them, children learn in a variety of ways; a wide range of teaching strategies and interactions are effective in supporting all these kinds of learning.

10. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence.

11. Development and learning advance when children are challenged to achieve at a level just beyond their current
mastery, and also when they have many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills.

12. Children’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, such as persistence, initiative, and flexibility; in turn, these dispositions and behaviours affect their learning and development.

(NAYCE, 2009, p.p.11-16)

These principles span both Constructivist and Contextual philosophies. The association acknowledge that in order to promote DAP certain components are vital, they include: a caring community of learners, teachers that can enhance development and learning, curriculum planning to achieve goals, assessment of development and learning, and establishing reciprocal relationships with families (NAYCE, 2009).

Critics of DAP argue that it is naive to think that it can be applied irrespective of time and place. It has been argued that DAP assumes:

There are universal and essential truths about young children and how to care for and educate them. These are said to apply everywhere in the world, with, minor cultural variations (Penn, 2005, p.104).

The World Bank, by promoting the DAP model ignores social economic conditions which make a critical difference to the way children learn and feel. This idea has been expanded by Pence and Nsamonang in A case for early childhood development in sub-Saharan Africa where they argue that “the international image of children is becoming increasingly homogeneous and Western-derived, with an associated erosion of the diversity of child contexts” (2008, p.3).
Whether or not DAP principles and components (or elements of) are in place, what actually happens in the pre-school is, in practice the result of choices at all levels. Those involved include policy makers, administrators, pre-school practitioners and families about the care and education of young children.

**Play pedagogies**

The role of play came into focus leading to the concept of ‘play therapy’ as a way to advance children’s education. The rigidity of the Montessori Method was questioned as not offering the child freedom of expression. A mixture of the didactic Montessori equipment and various types of play are now commonly found in pre-school provision. Play pedagogies can embrace Developmental, Constructivist Contextual and Relational philosophies.

In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself (Vygotsky 1978, p.102)

Experts in the study of play are beginning to expand on the concept of ‘play pedagogies’ (Papatheodorou and Moyles 2009, Abbott and Moyles 1999). While the importance of play is still central, experts agree that there are many interpretations and no consensus has been reached on its definition. Although defining play can be problematic this research contests the idea that children ‘just play‘. An alternative view is offered that values the importance of play for young children as a vital learning tool. This enhanced value on play is in keeping with the views of Abbott who hypothesises that play ought to be constituted as a ‘high value activity” (Abbott 1999, pp. 78-79). The level of Relational or Constructivist practice in pre-school varies in the extent to which these theories are applied. The HighScope model uses a Relational approach. The
concept is gathering interest through alliances and training initiatives.

**HighScope**

HighScope is an American pedagogy which places a high level of emphasis on play, Constructivist and Contextual philosophies. This approach has emerged from a pedagogical research programme initiated by Weikart. The HighScope principles see the child as central in his/her own learning. The child's day is timetabled using a system of ‘Plan, Do, and Review’. The first part of the morning is spent planning; discussing with children what they would like to do, and how they might do it. This encourages children to link language and action. The largest part of the session is spent in the ‘Do’ phase. Here children carry out the tasks they have set for themselves individually, in pairs, or in groups. Finally, the children are encouraged to become ‘knowers and tellers’ (McGough 2010) by reflecting verbally for the group on their morning’s work.

The practitioner’s role is to support and help the children by using suitable language, helping the child remember what they said they would do. The practitioner also give them words and help them make meaning of what happened during the morning and encourage the children to ‘learn to talk and talk to learn’ (Gjems 2010, p.142). This precise pedagogical skill requires training and pedagogical practice.

Weikart went on to develop the HighScope Educational Research Foundation a non-profit organisation, with headquarters in Ypsilanti Michigan. The foundation proved the financial sense in directing support to early year’s services by showing that less money is required to finance family, social and remedial
educational support in the teenage and later years (Schweinhart and Weikart 1997, Levin 2008).

**Post-modern / Relational Pedagogy**

Post-modern approaches build on Vygotskyian writings that reinforced an understanding of the importance of the social environment to foster learning (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory was extended by Bronfenbrenner, in the “Ecological Systems Theory” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which proposed that higher mental functions have their origin in social relations. His theory proposes layers of influence on a young child’s development. This consists of *microsystems* of immediate family influence; *mesosystems* are of neighborhoods and school, *exosystems* of local government and finally *macro* systems made up of dominant beliefs and ideologies that permeate through each system. Consequently, educational approaches wishing to mediate between society and the child’s mind must be simultaneously social, mental and meaningful. ECEC practitioners using this ideology are more likely to educate with attention to these issues and see children as active contributors who can be creative partners with adults.

Thus in Relational Pedagogical (RP) the value of play as a learning activity is acknowledged and seen as part of a bigger picture where relationship and context matters. In this approach, *how* the child learns is as important as *what* the child learns. The RP approach emphasis a link between people, places and ideas and the effects of these on education, educators and learners (Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009). Here the child is seen as a learner and constructor of its own intelligence.

In order to move into providing a RP approach the concern of the
practitioner must shift focus from the child’s behaviour to the child’s thinking (Brownlee and Berthelsen 2005, p.2). The philosophy is more likely to regard children as active contributors who can be creative partners with adults using democratic practices in the classroom (Dahlberg et al., 2005). Children are valued for their individuality; this is based on a strong belief that no two children are identical (Penn 2005).

A radical RP approach goes beyond quality, toward activism. Here Post-modern ideas are used to examine “how particular ideas come to dominate our understandings of and actions in the social world and contribute to inequities in it” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p. 8). Education is therefore linked to a wider social project to create a social justice for all and ultimately to make the world a better place. Teaching then moves from being a technical task to creating the possibility for societal change.

Mac Naughton (2005) in Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies sets out how to apply post-modern ideas found in the work of the French philosophers Foucault and Derrida in ECEC. For example the concept of deconstruction is a specialist term used in their philosophical scholarship. It means to take something apart or to “unconstruct” it. In Post-modern theory deconstruction refers to taking apart concepts and meanings in a text to show the politics of meaning within them. When MacNaughton applies this to how we use language in ECEC she finds that; “Deconstruction can be a tacit to examine how our language choices in early childhood studies can fix and/or disrupt power relations” (2005, p 78). By examining closely the language used in ECEC settings the practitioner begins to see the ideas and meaning behind what is said and understood. Later in chapters four and five the use of language is explored (Situation Samplings 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8). The
application of Post-modern ideas in ECEC can be traced to the town of Reggio Emilia in north Italy.

**Reggio Emilia**

Just after the end of the Second World War in the town of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy, a primary school teacher (Loris Malaguzzi) and parents built a new school.

Money to begin the construction would come from the sale of an abandoned war tank, a few trucks, and some horse left behind by the retreating Germans (Edwards et al. 1998, p. 43).

Seven more schools were added in the poor areas surrounding the area where the “school of the tank” had ignited a philosophical approach to teaching and learning. The approach involved parents, the community, the child and the teacher working together. The schools that emerged began to break traditional educational patterns. Yet key aspects of established best practice in European Kindergartner practice were maintained. The importance of nurturing plants and outdoor play is central to the Reggio approach. The practice of ‘looping‘ is maintained. The schools were of a new kind: better quality offering universal access, free from charitable tendencies and not merely custodial. The approach uses Post-modern ideas that aim to recognise the right of the child to be a protagonist in his or her own learning. Rather than having a set curriculum, they sought to find ways to sustain each child‘s spontaneous curiosity at a high level. The curriculum combines both planned pedagogical objectives with emergent objectives. The emergent objectives are identified by the practitioner by means of listening to the voice of the child and documenting the child‘s ideas. This is followed by working in a collegial manner with a second professional to interpret and respond with activities, experiments and projects for the senses. From this standpoint, dialogue between the children and practitioners broadens and deepens the curriculum. This has
been described as giving the child an extra resource or an extra ‘pocket’ of skills to drive their own learning (Hunter 2001).

A subtle difference in how the children are viewed within Reggio is exemplified in how the child experiences citizenship. The approach sees the child as a citizen and bearer of rights from birth. The pedagogy gives the child full rights from birth. This differs from most other pedagogies that see young children as being prepared for citizenship when they mature. The pedagogy goes further and encourages the child to express original points of view. This pedagogical approach encourages children and teachers to make their pedagogy visible by going to public parks and squares such as the colonnade of the local municipal theatre.

The Reggio approach has been gaining currency in pre-school pedagogy in Europe and in many parts of the world. Gardner’s ideas on multiple intelligences are consistent with this approach. Gardner and the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s (GSE) have engaged with the Reggio project and recently initiated Project Zero, which explores how people learn and work together in groups (Potier, 2002).

The Reggio ideas were easily transferred to Sweden as social and cultural similarities existed such as a strong commitment to funding ECEC services with parent involvement and a high standard of living (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). Many of the successful Nordic ECEC philosophies take their lead from the Reggio philosophy.

This research holds the Reggio approach as the optimum in Post-modern ECEC pedagogy and sets it as a measure by which to reflect on Irish ECEC practice. This is guided by the philosophies set out in the National Childcare Strategy, Siolta and Aistear which hold Post-modern principles.
Early Childhood Teacher Education Programmes

Internationally, the study of early childhood care and education has traditionally involved teaching students theories on child development and education. It has been argued that metaphors of ‘developmental stages’ now dominate pedagogical practices. This has helped to ensure that child development theory is the main approach not only to understanding and to managing children in personal individual cases but also to informing public opinion and policy generally (Alderson 2005, p.128). For example, all children are given the same lesson, based on their chronological age.

From an anthropological perspective, Penn questions how child development takes account of socio-cultural and economic conditions? She holds that child development psychology has been a positivist science that claims universal truths. “Children are assumed to pass through the same stages and to show the same age-related characteristics whether they live in remotes parts of Nepal or in Chicago” (Penn 2005, p.105). The tensions between ECEC as a positivist science or as a post-modern relational science continue to dominate the current teacher training debate. Gardner believes that constraints limiting students to either side of the debate are inappropriate. Mastery in the field of ECEC (as with any other endeavour) can only be obtained after painstaking years of training and practice.

Each discipline (like physics or history) and each domain (like chess or sculpture or marketing) exhibits its own particular practices and approaches, which have developed over its lengthy if idiosyncratic history. One cannot begin to master a domain, or to understand it, unless one is willing to enter into its world and to accept the disciplinary and epistemological constraints that have come to operate within it over the years. (Gardner 1991, p.8)
In Reggio and throughout the world a growing body of research goes beyond teaching basic pedagogical theory and is concerned with how early childhood teacher education programmes impact on practice.

In order to move into providing a Relational Pedagogical approach the concern of the practitioner must shift focus from the child’s behaviour to the child’s thinking (Brownlee and Berthelsen 2005, p.2). This is a major change in pedagogical practice that calls for teacher training programmes to be of a high graduate level because RP practice is a complex skill, which draws from a wide range of disciplines (education, care, philosophy, science and sociology). Early childhood is seen as a formative time and a professional approach to the child's education goes beyond simply minding children with a variety of toys.

Perry examined what he calls the development of ‘epistemological beliefs’. These are the underlying assumptions students hold regarding the sources and development of knowledge; they are in essence how students view the world. He identified four progressive stages these he categorised as: dualism (naïve), multiplism, relativism and commitment (sophisticated).
Perry discovered that over time students progressively found more complex and integrated ways of viewing the world as they progressed through their studies. In Perry’s work, in the first stage (Dualism) the practitioner sees knowledge as simple and able to be transmitted by authorities. In the second stage (Multiplism), the practitioner understands that as well as absolute truths there are some things cannot be known for certain. In the third stage (Relativism), knowledge is actively and personally constructed and evaluated in context. Finally, the practitioner reaches the highest stage of commitment to beliefs where beliefs are held in ‘Relativism’ but some beliefs are more valued than others and ‘commitment’ to certain beliefs is held over others.

Early childhood practitioners who hold relativistic beliefs and who are reflective about their own knowledge are more likely to engage in Constructivist practices and seek to develop active teaching and learning partnerships, even with very young children. Studies using the framework of ‘epistemological beliefs’ found teachers with naïve epistemological
beliefs have a simple view of classroom problems and consequently, solved them by drawing on some past personal experience (Brownlee and Berthelsen 2005).

Similarly, Van Manen (1977) linked ways of knowing with ways of being practical, by reducing pedagogical practice to three responses: technical, interpretative and constant critique. Technical offers no critique, interpretative offers analysis; finally constant critique is more radical. It critiques dominant discourses of institutions and oppressive forms of authority in how it co-constructs pre-school provision.

Pre-service teachers with more sophisticated epistemological beliefs were more likely to see complexity in classroom problems and seek out alternative viewpoints, including those of the child, family and school, before deciding on a course of action (Brownlee and Berthelsen 2005, p.4).

For example, during the data collection for this research the following practice was noted:

At snack time, the children were encouraged to sit around the pre-school tables for their food. Yet two boys were encouraged by the practitioner to take a picnic under a table where they privately giggled and chatted. Later, in discussion with the practitioner, she explained that she flexed (snack time sitting down) rules to accommodate the possibility of friendship. One of the boys she explained is unpopular; he is not well behaved and suffers from enuresis (bed-wetting) resulting in bad odour and is rarely befriended by others. On this occasion, she noticed that he was playing with another boy. By making that decision to foster friendship, the practitioner showed that her practice is high on Perry’s stage of epistemological beliefs. She
said “I am happy that this may be the first friendship he ever formed – friends are important” (Pre-school 10).

Figure 2: Relativism in Action

With this response she demonstrated Relativism (context matters). It is important to note that this practitioner is one of the few graduates (level 7 NQF) with European experience leading a pre-school. She explained placement experience had helped her develop her practice.

**Interviewer:** So you went to Holland on a FETAC level 5 training course.

**Interviewee:** Yeah it was a Leonardo de Vinci grant they still run them as far as I know from the Training College and I wasn’t the only one. I went over with seven other students and two girls from my class went to Sweden two went to Italy from the college. But the best thing I got out of the course was that was work experience – work experience in a different country. I found that the place I was doing my work experience in myself – the College did not even tell me what I was looking for they did not even tell us what is a good place, what we should be looking for.

I went in and I just thought from my Irish work experience that it was normal to be pulling and the dragging the children. But when I did my work experience in Holland I just was blown away by how they communicate with children, how simple everything was, how creative everything was. The outdoor spaces would be better than the outdoor spaces you have in a village here in Ireland they have them as part of their crèche like unbelievable stuff. No cracked ideas about health and safety. The other girl I was with
compared the work experience we had; she was blown away by how very little emphasis on health and safety, there was more emphasis on fun. Like the kids had access, the door was open they could be playing out in the hall up and down the school like the doors were never locked. There was no security code to get into the building or anything like that which was very different to our experience here in Ireland (Pre-school 10).

Promoting Reflective Practice
Developing reflexive practice requires teacher training not only to present ECEC theory. Training must include a module that accommodates students to discuss and analyse personal theories (prejudices, likes, own ECEC experiences) as this will influence how students/practitioners structure learning environments. Professionals in the field of ECEC have posited that in order to challenge students to develop critical thinking the use of deep approaches to learning ought to be used. These include the use of co-operative learning groups, case studies, linking content to personal experiences, reflective journaling and assessments that focus less on surface learning. Training should offer assignments that encourage deeper learning across multidisciplinary topics (O'Donoghue and Brooker 1996). Contemporary graduate level early childhood teacher education programmes that promote deep approaches to learning are not a feature of Irish training for those who work directly with very young children; no national policy on ECEC training has been agreed. A consultation has been carried out on Workforce issues in ECEC and published (NCCA 2009) yet none of its recommendations are in place.

Conclusion
This first part of this chapter outlined Modern and Post-modernism thought. It set out how pedagogues, philosophers, teachers, scientists, medical doctors and developmental psychologists first came to observe
and understand child development using the science of the time. Modernists hoped that the 'universal child' would benefit from new teaching methodologies through the education of the senses as well as creative and imaginative play therapies. Constructivist ideas introduced the importance of family and peers in learning.

While these theories may seem contradictory; this research regards this as enlargement and extension of ideas, positing that Vygotsky's contextualist approach builds on Piaget's constructivist ideas. The extent to which these theories are applied in pre-school varies in terms of result of decisions at all levels—by policy makers, administrators, teachers and families about the care and education of young children.

Post-modern RP emphasises the importance of the social life of the child. The range of RP spans from HighScope, through to Reggio Emilia, Nordic practice to Radical Pedagogy as described by Mac Naughton (2005)

Later in Chapter three Modern and Post-modern ideas are critically evaluated in terms of how they relate to ECERS/R/E. The issue of where Modernist approaches fuse into Constructivism, Contextual and Post-modernism in ECEC practice is an issue in this enquiry. This thesis holds that from a historical perspective, modernistic scientific, normative approaches were followed by constructivist ideas in teaching and caring for children to understanding child development. Although it is impossible to pinpoint an exact moment, when Modernist perspectives were replaced by Post-modernist it is clear that these ideas came slowly to gain currency as society began to question issues of power, knowledge, language and equity. The findings of this exploratory study show that all stages of pedagogical ideology are found in pre-school practice.
Part 2: Irish Pre-school care - a multitude of different pedagogical approaches

A range of pedagogical approaches are found in Irish pre-schools. This next section looks historically at how various pedagogies came to be used. In 2003 the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform identified five types of preschool provision (pedagogies) on offer in Ireland: Montessori, Steiner-Waldorf, Naíonra (Irish language groups), Play based Groups and HighScope (Ireland, Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform 2003, p.42). The services use a blend of approaches combining mixed market provision. These various theories of care and education have continued to form the core of pre-school provision in Ireland along with some new approaches. A short introduction to each follows.

St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland

The St. Nicholas Montessori Society started in 1970. Nationally 73 certified Montessori schools exist. This number is surprisingly small when compared with the hundreds of pre-schools, throughout Ireland using Montessori in their name. The Montessori name has become a synonym for pre-school and used by pre-schools where practitioners are not fully trained in the method.

In this research, six of the 26 groups represented themselves as providing a Montessori curriculum yet only one of them is recorded as a certified Montessori group on the St. Nicholas Montessori Society association’s list (Pre-school 14). This anomaly arises as pre-schools wishing to be certified as teaching the Montessori Method must register with St. Nicholas Society and only after a successful inspection, the group is certified for a three-year period. In practice, most practitioners using the Montessori name in their advertising are found to use aspects of the Montessori Method combined with play as their pedagogical approach. The one Montessori pre-school in this study is the only pre-school in this research to have
undergone any type of a pedagogical inspection. The society is a national organisation.

The Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association (ISKA)

ISKA was formed in 1992 as a forum for the professional development of its members. There are 20 Kindergartens registered with the association. The membership is an all island affiliation. Three of the ISKA pre-schools are in Northern Ireland, and therefore were outside the remit of this research. Of the remaining seventeen Kindergartens, none emerged in the random sampling used in this research. One practitioner in (Pre-school 10) said that her practice was informed by the Steiner philosophy that she had studied in college. This pre-school was amongst the highest scoring in the cohort.

The HighScope Ireland Institute

The HighScope Institute Irish branch was formed in 1999. The Institute is a non-profit-making body, made up of representatives from the voluntary, statutory and independent sectors aiming to advance the pedagogical approach. Like ISKA, membership is an all island affiliation. The HighScope Ireland Institute is based in Belfast and is currently engaged in rolling out all-Ireland road shows in Enniskillen, Mayo and Cork. Training in topics of Social and Emotional Development, Attachment and Early Childhood Practices and Language, Literacy and Communication are on offer. Unlike St. Nicholas (Montessori) association the HighScope movement does not list or inspect member pre-schools, rather it concentrates on training. From its extensive training prospectus, it offers a variety of ways to train in the pedagogy. This approach is proving popular in Ireland. In this study, five groups used this approach (Pre-schools 12, 23, 24, 25 and 26).

Naíonra (Irish language groups)

Naíonra is a term used to denote an Irish language pre-school. In 2003, the movement split into Forbaír Naíonraí Teo (FNT) (Pre-school
Development Company) and Comhar Naoinraí na Gaeltachta Teo (CNG) (Association of Pre-schools in the Gaeltacht). The Gaeltacht is the name given to Irish speaking regions.

Both groups use the Irish language yet they differ in management structures and in target groups. Forbairt Naiónraí Teo (FNT) support pre-schools for children for whom Irish is a second language. Practitioners apply specific approaches to second language acquisition by modifying their use of language with gestures, repetition, paraphrase and the use of short simple sentences (Mhic Mhathúna 2004).

In contrast, Comhar Naoinraí Na Gaeltachta Teo (CNG) is an independent organisation founded to administer and manage pre-schools for those that use Irish as their native language. Comhar Naoinraí Na Gaeltachta Teo employs five full-time employees, one part-time employee and 140 practitioners called Stiúrthóirí are employed in the running of the day-to-day preschool activities throughout the Gaeltacht across eight counties. Over one thousand 3-4 year-old children attend 70 established pre-school groups in the Gaeltacht where the Irish language is a natural part of the children’s day-to-day activities (Údarás na Gaeltachta, 2011). Although invited to participate in the research no Irish language pre-school consented to partake in this study.

**Play based groups**

During the study a wide variety of types of play were found. The pre-schools offer a range of quality in activities and environments. The weakest pre-schools offer “environments which merely keep them busy, and help them to pass the time pleasantly” (Brooker 2008, p.127). The higher scoring groups extend young children’s thinking through practitioners providing opportunities for sustained shared thinking\(^2\).

\(^2\) This idea comes from the work of Sylva *et al* (2004) in the EPPE project. They emphasise the importance of high quality adult-child interactions sustained shared
Family Resource Centers (FRCs)

Family Resource Centres (FRC’s) vary in origin, but in general they have evolved from the existing local community groups. FRC’s are managed by the Family Support Agency which is a Government Agency operating under the aegis of the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. The Agency is overseen by a board appointed by the Minister for Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs. There are 107 Family Resource Centres (FRC’s), funded by the Family Support Agency, located throughout Ireland.

The aim of the Family Resource Centres is to help combat disadvantage by supporting the functioning of the family unit. They aim to provide services and supports to families, lone parent families, men, women, youth, the elderly and others in need of support. In theory they can cater for birth to after-school age range. The FRC’s integrated (crèche and pre-school provision in the same building) aim to offer a range of services. The FRC concept is found in the Sure Start programme (UK) and in the integrated services found in the Reggio Emilia services of Northern Italy.

In this study six such services are included (Pre-schools 1, 3, 12, 16, 17 and 24). The FRC’s were found to be at varying stages of development. Four of the six offer full day care and after schools services. Two provided pre-school and return to work schemes only (Pre-schools 16 and 17). The other four offered crèche, pre-school and afterschool care. In pedagogical terms the FRC’s offer a mix of HighScope and play based pre-school pedagogy and aim to add value and reshape local services for young children.

thinking is when two or more think about an issue or a problem by clarifying, evaluating and extending narratives. This can be a child or adult initiated.
Reggio Emilia: the Relational „listening pedagogy”

Training visits to the town of Reggio Emilia are now organised by the Irish National Children‘s Nurseries Association (NCNA). They joined the „Reggio Children International Network” in late 2009. Reggio Emilia has now become a meeting place for numerous lecturers and researchers visiting from universities, foundations, ministries and organisations with which joint research projects are carried out. To this end, it organises courses in professional development, seminars, study meetings in Italy and abroad and oversees the publication of books and resources. The Relational Pedagogical theory found in Reggio is finding its way into several languages. Visits to the various nursery schools and pre-schools are part of the meetings where visitors can see the post structural pedagogical approach in action.

Two Reggio inspired groups are recorded as part of this research (Playgroup 25 and 26). More detailed aspects of the Reggio philosophy concerning the use of space and furniture, teaching roles, and pedagogical approaches are found throughout chapters four and five concerning the eleven areas of investigation in this research. The expansion of „Reggio Children‘ continues internationally through an exhibition called The Hundred Languages of Children that tours the world (Seem poem of same name Appendix nine). This exhibition first started out twenty years ago. It reflects on the past forty years of learning that the groups have experienced. The exhibition offers teachers an opportunity to find examples of how to use the Reggio approach in their own ECEC settings.

Conclusion

The Irish state has not implemented a pedagogical policy to cater for all Irish pre-school children. Instead individual groups (private, public, and state) have developed services for the pre-school child along the lines of the child as a consumer of a „private‘ service (Montessori), or an Irish language service (Naionra, further divided by district) and special services for the
underprivileged child (FRC’s) and pre-schools for children with Special Educational Needs (SNE). The outcome in practice is that Irish pre-school provision is a complicated and convoluted variety of pedagogies applied across fragmented pockets of provision. The research findings show that provision is highly stratified combining publicly funded community-based, private owned and managed settings and a variety of state run services.

The recent ECCE scheme offering one year free pre-school to all children brings with it an urgency to fulfil a long held aspiration to inculcate ‘good quality‘ into all pre-schools, bringing Ireland into line with best international practice. We know that nearby countries have successfully implemented such policies. In the UK all four year olds now have access to good quality part time nursery education for one year at age four (Abbott, 2001). Since last year, most Irish pre-schools are now entering into contractual arrangements with the state to provide one year's pre-school for all children as a right, not just a privilege.

In assessing the range of pedagogical practice (Montessori, HighScope, and Reggio) as well as play based pedagogies; this research shows that Irish pre-school provision is very mixed in terms of standards. While all these approaches, within themselves, have components of play as central to provision, what is understood as play varies from service to service. In this study ten of the 26 groups, represent themselves as offering a ‘play based’ theoretical approach. In practice they offer a cocktail of approaches, Montessori (didactic work), HighScope (review discussion time), outdoor play, story time, free play etc. Others simply offer a minding service with toys and others offer an introduction to Relational pedagogy.

Moloney’s research in the field of Irish pre-schools point to the fact that pedagogical training and inspections are not a statutory feature of
provision (Moloney 2010). No mandatory training requirement for pre-school practitioners or pre-school inspectors exists. Yet during this research, some very good practice was found in Irish pre-school provision. The pedagogical approaches observed during the research identified practice that fit into Perry's stages of epistemological stages of practitioner’s levels of reflection from Dualism (naive) to Commitment (sophisticated). However, the majority of the practice is found in Dualism (naïve).

In the past decade, great strides have been made in Irish pre-school expansion. Building provision, employment and training opportunities and now curriculum developments have advanced in the field of early childhood studies. Yet there is no clarity concerning how new pedagogical frameworks are to be used in training. Whether training will be to graduate level, the role of third level institutes and universities, NVCO’s and inspection services all have yet to be debated. Without clarity in this matter, it is likely that training will also become fragmented, regional and not nationally cohesive. The findings show that Irish pedagogical policy is slowly moving toward the acceptance of post-modern pedagogical principles such as the Reggio approach. Unfortunately, even this slow progress is not being matched in practice.

In identifying and measuring current pre-school pedagogical provision in the Irish research cohort, it is clear that a variety of typologies exist along with as many pedagogical approaches and wide variety of stakeholder involvement. In fact there is almost a different pedagogy for each parish. The economic, social and political context that has led to current pedagogical practice and provision in Ireland are explored in chapter two.
CHAPTER 2: CHARTING THE COURSE OF PRE-SCHOOL POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN IRELAND

Introduction

This chapter charts the course of pre-school provision in Ireland. From informal provision to current formalised models and more recently state funded pre-school provision. Special attention is paid to the past decade, which has been a time of significant expansion of ‘childcare places’. Key developments including the transformation of governance, labour market reorganisation, training, policy improvement and new curriculum frameworks are discussed.

This chapter shows that pre-school provision crosses a variety of policy domains, including economic, employment, education, and family and child policy. Management structures of pre-schools provision traverse public, private and state sector, which has resulted in a complicated and fragmented provision with sectorial interests advancing individual policy agendas without any real national policy concerning how all Irish pre-schools should operate.

During the past two decades of expansion, the Irish state has classified pre-school care along with infant care and after-school care under the heading of Childcare. Pre-school services for young children have not been developed in terms of pedagogies of care and education. Rather, in some instances, such as community projects have been developed to offer opportunities for back to work schemes. Where pre-schools are developed in the private sector, they are Small to Medium Enterprises (SME’s). State provision, however, offers a mix of services targeted at the needy. All have developed without implementing a nationally agreed early year’s pedagogy.
Attempts by the state to implement pedagogical changes are hindered by the nature of introducing changes where forty years of established pre-school practice exists. Furthermore the variety of stakeholders involved in provision operate without relevant graduate ECEC qualifications. The approach by the state has also been fragmented and duplicative which has resulted in the publication of two frameworks on Quality and Curriculum (Síolta and Aistear). As a result no clear pedagogical curriculum is available to practitioners or trainers to guide on specific pedagogical aims and objectives in one single document. Consequently, pre-school provision is a jumble of varied service types.

The recent (2009) introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme had disentangled pre-school from the ‘childcare’ mix and now pre-school is uniquely state funded. Now pre-schools work as contractors to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). Still, clarity in achieving quality in pre-school provision is hampered by the fragmented composition of stakeholders in pre-school provision developed during the period of expansion. In turn, the variety of stakeholders involved in ‘support’, ‘inspection’ and ‘management’ maintain administrative posts and raise institutional costs which are funded the state and by members (pre-school practitioners).

The remarkable journey of pre-school services from *ad hoc* provision run in the informal economy to fully state supported services offering universal access for young children can be seen in the following table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Irish Pre-school Playgroup Association formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>European Union membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>First partnership agreement called the <em>Programme for National Recovery</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Childcare Act (Section VII deals with pre-school inspection).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>State run Early Start Pre-School Programme was introduced in eight schools in disadvantaged areas and expanded the following year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>First inspections of pre-school services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2000 | 1. National Voluntary Childcare Organisations formed  
2. FÁS enter Childcare training and work placement  
3. Expansion of early year’s in the labour market  
4. The *National Children’s Strategy* |
| 2006 | *The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*  
*Síolta* Centre for Early Childhood Development Education. |
| 2006 | Fitzpatrick’s value for money review of pre-school expansion programmes. |
| 2008 | ‘The Childcare Transition’ - *A league table of Early Childhood Education and Care in Economically Advanced Countries* by UNICEF. |
2. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme announced  

**Table 1: Chronological table of the policy development**

This table shows key policy developments since the foundation of the Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association to current moves in universal and pedagogical provision. Each of the developments is discussed below.
The Irish Pre-School Playgroups Association (IPPA)

In 1969 the Irish Pre-School Playgroups Association (IPPA) was formed. Its inspiration is traced to the English Pre-School Playgroup Association (PPA) established seven years earlier in 1962. The origins of the English Pre-School Association can be traced to September 1960 when an English woman called Belle Tutaev established, for the benefit of her own child, the first playgroup in England. She subsequently wrote a letter to the Guardian newspaper offering advice and help to others to do likewise. Estimates show that “From this one letter the playgroup movement snowballed, from one child in 1961 to approximately 500,000 in 1982” (Crowe 1983, p.79). Pre-schools were developed by parents and social service organisations and run in a variety of settings. The movement preferred the term Playgroup to Pre-school, as often the person running the group did not hold qualifications to teach school consequently some groups embodied both names and became known as Pre-school Playgroups.

The first National Advisor to the Pre-school Playgroup Association in England drew a clear distinction between ‘Home’ based groups and ‘Hall’ groups. The first category, Home groups included spaces such as farmhouses where children could gather several times a week and the curriculum included expeditions to gather eggs, blackberries, apples, frogspawn etc. In a small terraced house, the advisor noted how children could paint in the kitchen, water play in the sink and other play was spread out across the living room and hall. In one case the advisor recalls visiting a group where “No pains had been spared to turn it into a haven for children whose need was great; even the piano had been painted spindle berry pink” (Crowe 1983, p.62).

Hall groups were sometimes private enterprises and several variations on community playgroups such as committees of privileged or
underprivileged parents, private enterprise, as well as the ‘every mother a leader’ group, where money was so tight that no pay could be found for a fulltime adult to run the group. In the case of the Hall groups permission was usually sought from the local social services. Additionally requests could be made to the Pre-school Playgroups Association for guidance which would include the purchasing of relevant publications. In order to establish constitutions were drawn up, elections were held and whatever community hall space and furnishings could be found used.

The UK Department of Education remained professionally at a distance from the parent self-help services. The Department of Health supported pre-school development through small start-up grants, which contributed to the payment of advisors varying from district to district. This period has been described as the ‘heyday’ of provision. England offered a beacon of liberal and progressive practice which was sustained by the idealism of practitioners and professionals, through periods of conservative backlash to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s” (Brooker 2008, p.118).

When formed in 1969, The Irish Pre-School Playgroups Association (IPPA) adopted similar structures as its neighbouring organisation. It was located in the community and voluntary sector with advisors developing services in a makeshift fashion in all types of settings. Social Service groups secured funding from the Health Authorities to promote pre-school services. The Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association (IPPA) appointed a National Advisor in 1970/71 and then drew up its Code of Standards for Playgroups, which in the absence of any legislation was the only guideline that play leaders and parents had to assist them in choosing or running a playgroup. The first branch outside Dublin was founded in Limerick in 1972. In 1972/73 the IPPA Group Insurance Scheme was offered to members for the first time. 1972/73 also saw the first ‘News sheet’ which
was sent out to members, later to become the Newsletter and now News link. In 1973/74, the first membership cards were issued.

The English pre-school model was imitated in Ireland. The current director of information in the Irish Pre-school playgroups association attributes UK influences on the project as including that “the discussions and the exchange of views and newsletter between IPPA and PPA in England” (P. Walker, personal communication, January 6th 2011). Pre-school groups developed in a variety of settings; Parish halls, private houses, Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) dressing rooms, and even in a church sacristy. Once a space and some furniture were secured, the next issue became ‘room layout’. Issues of unwanted fixtures such as billiards tables, stacks of chairs, drama props, had to be overcome in order to make room for the home corner etc. Halls had to be shared often after the pre-school session, parents and children had to carry equipment and toys into cellars and attics.

From 1974 the expansion of both private provision and community playgroups increased. Local advisors were appointed through social service groups in Co. Limerick and Co. Clare in the early 1980’s. Irish mothers attended IPPA branch meetings and IPPA training courses provided an opportunity to discuss practical issues concerning developing pre-schools. Many would continue to develop pre-schools as community groups or as private ventures. The Irish Country Women’s Association (ICA) training centre at An Grianán in Co. Louth ran Pre-school week-long training courses in conjunction with the IPPA. Grandparents, volunteers as well as parents were encouraged to help with what would come to be known as the ‘Playgroup Movement’.

The organic expansion of pre-school premises led inevitably to many settings having poor or no outdoor gardens, which are vital to the
philosophies of Steiner and Montessori. The playgroup movement had grown from a self-help spirit and the ‘can do‘ philosophy extended to the inclusion of children with special needs in local settings. In Ireland segregation between regular school and school for children with disabilities lasted until the late 1990’s.

**European Union (EU) Membership**

Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973. In the following decades, EU grants combined with high levels of direct foreign investment from the United States resulted in the Irish economy experiencing an economic boom. In the UK and Ireland, the 1970‘s saw pre-schools advance albeit through different management frameworks. In the UK issues of safety, child protection and training in pre-schools came to be supported by Local Government municipal structures (as in many EU and Nordic countries). Social Services organisations led the advance of pre-school services in Ireland.

The possibility of pre-schools coming under the management structure of Irish Local Government municipal structures was ruled out with the implementation of the Fianna Fáil Election Manifesto of 1977, which introduced tax cuts, the abolition of local rates, first time buyer grants of £1,000 and other ‘giveaways‘. The removal of local rates had a catastrophic effect on funding to local Government. It destroyed the hope of a formal local structure in which pre-schools could find a niche for employment and support as the sister organisation PPA had done in the UK.

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3 Clare Social Services along with Kilkenny, and Limerick Social Services were established in 1968. All three organisations were led by the Catholic Church, hence the focus on the parish as a unit of organisation. See [http://www.clarecare.ie/who-we-are/40th-anniversary-of-clare-care/](http://www.clarecare.ie/who-we-are/40th-anniversary-of-clare-care/).
Weak local government could not provide a structure to employ pre-school staff and other auxiliary staff such as childcare support workers, early year’s specialists and child psychologists as elsewhere. By the early 90’s an expert in the field of Irish public policy asserted that:

New approaches to local development have resulted in local authorities acquiring new functions: instead of operating as administrative agents of central government, with responsibility for a limited number of services, they now act as central co-ordinators for the ever-widening arena of actors in sub-national development (Adshead 2003, p.119).

These new sub-national structures (partnerships) contributed to a multiplicity of services and support agencies becoming involved in pre-school services in the ‘hey day’ of social partnership. These included state run training Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC), employment, Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), management (Pobal) and inspection agencies (HSE) throughout that time.

New structures are proposed to deliver better co-ordination between government departments and the agencies providing services to children so that the Goals can be achieved” (Department of Health and Children 2000, p. (i)). The strategy provided for City and County Childcare Committees (CCC) to develop. These contribute to the expansion of ECEC services over the next decade. The National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCO) would also play a role in development.

The Early Years expansion process benefitted from EU grant aid. Increases in exchequer surpluses brought about by ever-increasing building construction projects and direct foreign investment continued to provide employment. The country experienced an economic boom.
Alongside these developments, new systems of governance known as social partnership were promoted by the State. A stipulation of drawing down EU structural funds led to the development of ‘Social Partnership’ processes which contributed to the involvement of a multiplicity of support agencies (local and national) in ECEC services. New agencies hitherto without pedagogical remit now entered the field of ECEC. These included the County Enterprise Boards, Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), Health Service Executive (HSE) as well as the Further Education

Social Partnership

In order to understand the expansion of pre-school into current practice (including issues such as the turn from informal to formal systems, employment, training and governance) it is vital to understand the role played by the social partnership process in ECEC expansion. Although the social partnership process is abandoned now (The Croke Park public sector pay deal is attributed to ending the process), it is through this system that pre-school expansion occurred. For that reason, the complicated system of social partnership and how it works is now outlined.

Although National and Local Government exists in Ireland (Local Government has limited funding), a parallel form of governance has developed through a system of social partnership. For the past two decades, Ireland has operated under a uniquely Irish –form of negotiated governance named social partnership” (O’Donnell 2008, p.73). This can be seen in the following figure three.
Figure 3 plots the structures through which ECEC is represented in social partnership. The meaning of the term ‘partnership’ in the Irish context divides into three different levels and meanings concerning three groups. The first group (Partnership I) refers to a group that participate at a high level in state facilitated agreements known as the Programme for Government that ‘aim to maximise economic and social development, negotiated by leaders of business, farming trade unions and laterally the community and voluntary sector’” (Kirby 2002, p.44). These are leaders of trade unions, employee and employer representatives experienced negotiators who advance the agenda of their organisation in developing a Programme for Government.

The second level (Partnership II) refers to a variety of development organisations (representing civil society) that receive funding from the European Union through an administrative intermediary called Pobal. This institution was established by the Irish government, in agreement with the
European Commission, to promote social inclusion, reconciliation and to counter disadvantage through local social and economic development. Pobal funds over 400 Community Services Programmes varying from rural transport initiatives, to equality for women programmes. In terms of early years education Pobal finances The National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCO's)\(^4\), to support its members and the County Childcare Committees (CCC’s) to expand ECEC services.

The third (Partnership III) level refers to specific social policy programmes run through local Partnerships Development Companies (Social Service Providers). Here several local agencies with legal status unite to tackle issues relating to social exclusion. Several have developed crèche and pre-schools as well as after school programmes. These groups consist of volunteers and paid staff concerned with the needs of carers, low-income farm households, older people, and people with disabilities, unemployed people, women and young people at risk. Family Resource Centres (FRC’s) have developed in such partnerships.

For example, (Partnership I) in advancing the agenda of the construction industry along with ECEC expansion the development of building integrated Family Resource Centres (FRC’s) advances the aims and objectives of both the construction industry ECEC expansion. Thus, the Programme for Government is progressed. The second level (Partnership II) finances the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and the County Childcare Committees to support their members and clients (state, private and public) to apply to Pobal for funding to build, extend and staff ECEC services thus increasing the number of childcare places. Local development companies (Partnership III) apply in their own right to Pobal

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\(^4\) These include: Barnardos; Border Counties Childcare Network (BCCN); National Child Minding Association of Ireland (NCMAI); Forbairt Naionrai Teoranta (Irish speaking pre-schools); IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation; Irish Steiner Waldorf Early Childhood Association (ISWECA); National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA) and St. Nicholas Montessori.
for funding to develop ECEC services, thus ensuring training schemes and employment for their clients as childcare workers. Through this system a variety of typologies of ECEC services have been supported by Pobal across a mixed market model.

State policy did not see the need to develop a national pre-schools system; instead the open market economy was favoured;

The role of the Government is to stimulate the development of child care services by employers, individually and collectively, and also including partnerships between public authorities and employers (Ireland: Department of the Taoiseach 1990, p. 40).

Figure three shows the key stakeholders in provision of ECEC services are largely involved through social inclusion and labour market paradigms. The reason for the high reliance on non-professional pedagogical partners stems from the second Programme for Economic and Social Progress 1990 to 1993 (PESP) (Ireland, Department of the Taoiseach, 1991) which addressed childcare in terms of labour market participation. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the Federation of Irish Employers (FIE) were identified as key players (these institutions had no background in the field of early childhood). The following provision in the Programme for Government makes it clear that the New Opportunities for Women (NOW) European funding programme would be fully exploited by the Minister for Labour with no mention of developing pedagogy:

104. The Minister for Labour will identify in the first half of 1991 a number of prototypes of child care services appropriate to Irish conditions. This will be done in association with Irish Congress of Trade Unions ICTC and Federation of Irish Employers FIE. The potential for support from the European Community and particularly
the New Opportunities for Women NOW programme will be fully exploited (Ireland: Department of the Taoiseach 1991, p.40).

In 2000 an Expert Working Group reported (Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group Report, 1999) that many ECEC workers gained skills and knowledge through experience rather than through formal training processes. Work in the Early Childhood Education sector has not generally been well paid or well regarded. The low occupational status accorded to childcare has implications for the quality of provision. The report also acknowledges that low pay has led to difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff.

During the 1990’s, the rate of Ireland’s economic development was rapid. The social partnership process formalised civic society at a national and local level. In a new era of prosperity it changed the traditional role and consultation process between government and the voluntary sector. As religious influence declined, new ways of providing local services were embraced by communities. In Ireland an attitude of ‘build first and debate quality later’ prevailed.

While several types of services for young children (including pre-school) developed through Pobal funding a whole range of pre-school services were developed outside the Pobal structure. In 1994 ‘The Early Start Pre-School Programme’ was introduced in eight schools in disadvantaged areas and expanded the following year. This programme operates in selected schools in designated disadvantaged areas throughout Ireland. It is funded and managed by the Department of Education and Science, in a completely different funding stream with paid teachers working in classrooms.

Pre-schools for children from the Traveller community were also
established with different management structures. The outcome of the rapid expansion across state, community based and home based provision has resulted in numerous structures that require a high level of administrative staff to manage the various levels of (Partnership and State) administration. No attempt to develop professional positions for staff working directly with children was made during the expansion phase; jobs in the field of ECEC were concentrated in administration.

Pre-school inspections 1996
Following the 1991 Childcare Act the first ever pre-school inspections began in 1996. More recently the updated Childcare (Pre-school Services) Regulations (2006) are now enforced by the Health Service Executive (HSE) through pre-school inspection teams. The legislation is the only statutory policy governing pre-school provision. Since the formation of the inspection teams the issue of their pedagogical skill-sets have been questioned (Kiernan and O’Kane 2006, Moloney 2010). The inspectorate largely consists of district health nurses and environmental health officers. Rarely are pedagogues employed as inspectors. Training in ECEC pedagogy is not a requirement for employment in the inspectorate. The regulations also take a minimal stance on the pedagogical qualifications required for those working directly with children in pre-school. It permits “a sufficient number of suitable and competent adults working directly with the children in the pre-school setting at all times” (Ireland: Department of Health and Children 2006, p.37).

In 2007 the revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations came into effect. The new regulations envisage a broader remit for the inspectorate to include inspection of children’s development and well-

5 An employment embargo in the Health Board at the time resulted in most staff being sourced within the system.
being. Regulation 5 has given the inspectorate new pedagogical responsibilities:

A person carrying on a pre-school service shall ensure that each child is learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the service through the provision of the appropriate opportunities, experiences, activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child and the child’s cultural context (Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No 2) 2006, p.9).

A National Assessment Guide for Regulation 5 is now under development—The Inspector is required to make a decision on whether the service is overall compliant or overall non-compliant using their professional judgment which is based on their professional knowledge, skills and evidence found on Inspection” (Government Ireland, Guidance Note 2011, p.2). A feature of the unplanned development of Irish ECEC is the fact that the pre-school inspectorate does not necessarily hold training as professional pedagogues. This combined with the unqualified and under qualified personnel working directly with children in ECEC mean that it is hard to see how quality will be enhanced from the roll out of Regulation 5.

The National Voluntary Childcare Organisations NVCO’s
The grouping together of the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations NVCO’s to represent parents and providers (civil society) in early childhood sector from birth to six years of age is a construct of Social Partnership (the old and the new voluntary sector fit in Partnership II division). In the past, members of the NVCO’s (IPPA for example) would be seen as a lobby group. This has changed under Social Partnership. In order to be awarded funding each of the seven National NVCO members and each County Childcare Committee (CCC) write an annual plan of
work which, if deemed suitable by Pobal funds are allocated for the plan’s implementation.

**Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS)**

Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), Ireland’s National Training and Employment Authority, was established in 1988 as the driving force behind training and labour market re-organisation. It also plays a major role in the management of training in the field of early childhood in Ireland. One training method called *The Back to Education Initiative* (BTEI) run by various Vocational Educational Committees (VEC’s) provides part-time further education programmes for young people and adults. The aim is to give people who have experienced educational disadvantage an opportunity to combine a return to learning with family, work and other responsibilities. Anyone who has left full-time education can take part in a course being offered, but priority is given to those with less than upper second level education. Fees are not charged for people who are in receipt of social welfare entitlements or hold medical cards. Back to Education Initiatives BTEI training does not progress past level 5 and rarely level 6 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Level 8 on the NQF is graduate level; there are 10 levels in total⁶.

Another programme that offered training and placement in the sector is the ‘Youthreach Programme’. The programme is the principal official response to the needs of unemployed young people, generally aged between 15-20, who left school early having attained less than 5 D’s at Junior Certificate level. Such models of education are described as ‘deficit models, the rational for the intervention hinges on the aspiration to improve the trainee’s opportunity for employment in the labour market” (O’Sullivan 2005, p.275). Tormey holds that this approach focuses

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⁶ A diagram of how the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is included in Appendices (See appendix six).
attention on the disadvantaged person while directing attention away from the possibility that processes of disadvantaging may be built into the educational system” (Tormey 2010, p.195). Through the Social Partnership process students are placed for work experience in Family Resource Centers, community based crèches and preschools and in the private sector.


The broad thrust of the strategy sets out a series of objectives, to guide children’s policy over the next ten years. This was a significant development because for the first time the state presented an overall commitment to children and to the services they need. The strategy outlines a ‘whole child perspective’, which recognises the capacity of children to interact with and shape the world around them. In terms of a pedagogical approach, it sees the child as an advocate in its own learning and seeks to listen to the voice of the child.

The ‘whole child perspective‘ allows those working with or supporting children to focus on their own particular interest and responsibility while at the same time recognising the multidimensional aspect of children's lives. It identifies the capacity of children to shape their own lives as they grow while also being shaped and supported by the world around them (Ireland, Department of Health and Children, 2000, p. 24).

It proposes a more holistic and Post-modern way of thinking about children that reflects a contemporary understanding of childhood. It is, however, vague on implementation details. The Strategy is the product of social partnership. The strategy was prepared by a government cross-departmental team that comprised of ten government departments involved with children. Also involved were non-governmental
organisations advisory panels, a research and information advisory panel, international experts, and members of a Health Board liaison group. The "whole child perspective" as outlined in the strategy has informed the subsequent quality and curriculum frameworks which are discussed at the end of this chapter.

A Value for Money Review of Expansion Programmes

A 2006 review, written by Fitzpatrick Associates, spans the life of two programmes, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) 2000 to 2003 and Sustaining Progress 2003 to 2005. This review examines the implementation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme EOCP over the period 2000-2006 and makes recommendations with regard to the development of its successor programme, the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP) 2006-2010.

The review details the money spent across three measure shows totalled €5 million; Capital buildings received 52.67%, Staffing grants 33.21%, Quality Improvement 14.12%. A further breakdown of the capital investment at 52.67% shows that investment was divided between 87% community building projects and 13% private sector in total. The quality improvement measure primarily was spent on the setting up of the City and County Childcare Committees, and their staffing costs. An increase in places shows that 33,582 new childcare places were created because of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, of which 14,799 are fulltime (Fitzpatrick 2006, p.64).

The examination of one year's grant approvals (2003) from The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006 to childcare facilities approved for grants across capital (community based and private) and

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staffing (community based), show that the total spend on developing services for children under six years of age amounted to €206,522,378.00. For this childcare places for children in full-time care increased by 10,627. In pre-school 16,333 places were developed. The ECEC expansion figures were a positive result for the state’s investment. However, the neglect of quality in ECEC services was reported internationally by UNICEF in Report Card 8 Innocenti Research Centre A League Table of Early Childhood Education and Care in Economically Advanced Countries (2008).

Early Childhood Education and Care in Transition
The publication of the league table of Early Childhood Education and Care in Economically Advanced Countries by UNICEF, in 2008 produced results of education and care in 25 economically advanced OECD countries. Ireland was placed bottom of the table. The report challenged policymakers to reconsider current systems of ECEC, particularly concerning group care of children under three years of age. The UNICEF report card shifted the debate from a woman’s right to work, to the appropriateness of day care for small babies. The report highlights new neuro-scientific research as demonstrating that loving, stable, secure, and stimulating relationships with caregivers in the earliest months are critical for every aspect of child development. Babies and infants lacking close interaction with parents find it more difficult to regulate his or her response to the world. Research in Sweden and Australia has shown that parents prefer to mind their own babies if financially supported to do so (UNICEF 2008, pp.6-15).

The report quotes the Australian human rights lawyer Cathleen Sherry’s view that from a rights based perspective no one has an absolute right to a career – men or women. People choose to have children; a subsequent effect on the individual’s career is a realistic consequence. From a gender
perspective, the current way of providing childcare can allow men to avoid responsibility by paying women to mind children at a low wages. The report offered an opportunity to debate a variety of views on nurseries.

Hitherto, the Irish debate on nursery provision has been conceptualised as the answer to women's right to work and to their career progression (PESP 2001, p.40). While the UNICEF report questions the value of group-care for babies and infants it has no such misgivings about the provision of good quality pre-school care for children from three years on age onward. The report acknowledges the benefits of high quality early childhood education and care from long term evaluations conducted in Sweden, France, United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. High quality ECEC is understood to be a system of pre-school with trained staff, led by graduate pre-school practitioners, who implement an agreed pedagogical philosophy.

In the ‘The Childcare Transition’ report ten ECEC standards were evaluated and compared in 25 OECD countries, Ireland’s performance was unsurprisingly dismal. In terms of pre-schools the report found that ‘most European governments already guarantee a place to all four year olds” (Innocenti Report Card 2009, p.23). It was clear from an Irish perspective that action to improve the results was a matter of urgency. The annual Irish competitiveness report of the same year revealed that the number of children of three years of age attending pre-primary education programmes is less than 5%. Both reports agreed in principle that pre-primary education rather than childcare is found to have significant individual and social returns” (Forfás 2008, p.106).

A few years earlier the National Economic & Social Forum in its report on ECEC had called for legislative reform that would connect early years care and education with the primary school” (Chevalier et al. 2005, p.71).
National and international reports firmly pointed the focus away from crèche building to provision of quality pre-primary education and care. The publication of the *Developing the Workforce in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector, Report on the Findings from the Consultative Process* highlighted the need to increase flexible models of training, define roles, reasonable pay scales and expressed a concern regarding –“The prominence of private training organisations offering accelerated ECEC programmes is a concern due to uncertainties around quality assurance” (2009, p.13). Yet none of these recommendations had time to be implemented when government announced a national one year free pre-school year for all children.

**Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme**

Less than a decade after the National Childcare Strategy was launched, Ireland like many other countries worldwide was in the grip of a global recession. By 2009, unemployment began to rise. The sharp rise in the rate of unemployment, from 4.3% in 2007 to the rate of 13.5% (in early 2011) caused a marked fall-off in the demand for full-time day-care. During the boom the government financially supported parents to pay for pre-school provision by awarding an Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) which was a direct, non-taxable payment for all children from birth to six years of age. This supported the mixed market model of provision.

The economic downturn resulted in a contraction of public expenditure. The Government replaced the ECE in January 2010 with a free pre-school year. The Free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme is now offered to all children between the ages of 3 years 3 months and 4 years 6 months at September 1st each year, consequently achieving €77 million of savings in a full year (Ireland: Office of the Minister for Children (2009). The scheme is offered on a universal basis to children irrespective of parent’s income. All are entitled to pre-school. The
universal nature of the policy change goes further than had been expected. The National Plan for Social Inclusion had called for targeted pre-school education to be provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan” (Ireland, Department of the Taoiseach, 2007, p.32). The Free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme now tacitly acknowledges pre-primary education as a universal right for all children.

Forthcoming Irish Pedagogical Frameworks, *Síolta* and *Aistear*

Ireland has no single agreed ECEC pedagogy. The on-going evolution of Irish praxis can be traced to *The National Childcare Strategy* (2000) which emphasised a whole child' approach. The document recognises the capacity of children to interact with and shape the world around them. In terms of a pedagogical approach it sees the child as an advocate in its own learning and seeks to listen to the voice of the child. This philosophy guides quality and curriculum frameworks *Síolta* and *Aistear’s* philosophical approaches are also rooted in relational pedagogical philosophies.

Both policy documents contribute towards an agreed Irish ECEC pedagogy, a quality framework and a curriculum framework. Curiously, from a policy perspective both are devised by different institutions. At the time of the data collection, they have not been implemented. On reflection, it may have been less confusing if just one curriculum document was published. However, it can be argued that from a policy perspective the later publication of *Aistear* (NCCA 2009) built on post-modern ideas that were brought into vogue in *Síolta* (CECDE 2005).
The Síolta Framework

*Síolta* is the Irish word for ‘seeds‘. The framework defines a number of quality standards for services; it is intended to provide support and guidance to different type of childcare services from birth to six years of age. Therefore it crosses many of the traditional divides between care and education and between the statutory run school sector and the mixed market ECEC sector.

Although published in 2006, *Síolta* has not yet been implemented\(^8\). In 2007 revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations came into effect. Section 5 of the new regulations envisages a broader remit for pre-school services than previous and named *Síolta* as a tool to support services.

The Aistear Framework

The early childhood curriculum framework *Aistear* aims to set out broad goals for children’s learning and development. *Aistear* is the Irish word for ‘journey’ and this framework views early childhood as the beginning of children’s lifelong learning journey. It targets both parents and practitioners and (like *Síolta*) is also concerned with children from birth to six years of age. It is an attempt to inform parents, practitioners and infant school primary school teachers on how children learn. There are three principles: Children’s lives in early childhood, Connections with others and Learning and developing. Four themes across developmental domains: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communication and Exploring and Thinking. The framework does not focus on pedagogical theory; rather it sets out ‘sample learning opportunities’.

\(^8\) During the research it was noted that a handful of practitioners had attended information sessions on *Síolta* through involvement with County Childcare Committees and NVCO’s.
The development of the Irish early year's pedagogical curriculum framework, *Aistear* was tasked to the state's National Council of Curriculum Assessment (NCCA). Up to then the Council has developed and implemented curriculum in the formal school system. It has no connection or tradition in the field of the pre-school care and education. *Aistear* has been rolled out in some primary school infant intake classrooms, but not yet in ECEC settings.

The *Aistear* framework is Post-modern in its philosophy. Users are encouraged to reflect in a “Thinking about my practice” exercise where Practitioners draw from strong pedagogical epistemology. This is of value. Where Practitioners draw from a weak pedagogical base it poses problems. The framework is no substitute for professional training.

**Rollout of ECEC frameworks**

*Aistear* was published in December 2009 (NCCA). No implementation strategy was announced at publication. When implemented it is expected to govern Irish Pre-school provision in the future. The *Aistear* curriculum framework, like its forerunner *Síolta*, traverses pre-school and infant classes in primary school. No clear policy how both frameworks are to be taught as pedagogies or how they relate to each other has emerged from their fractious development. It is evident that no clarity exists around training or roll out of the implementation of the frameworks. Added to the confusion is the Health Service Executive's new role in inspecting for Regulation 5 in the 2007 revised Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations.

In this research, the emerging theme of multi-stakeholder involvement in provision and management has been identified. This theme re-emerges now in curriculum delivery as the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations, County Childcare Committees and the Pre-school
Inspectorate of the HSE become invested in the roll out of three quality initiatives. The development of administrative posts continue to gain momentum as County Childcare Committees and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations employ staff to monitor the implementation of Síolta, Aistear and the HSE inspectorate assess for Regulation five.

Background papers written for the National Council for Curriculum Assessment in developing Aistear (Hayes, 2007; French, 2007; Kernan, 2007; and Dunphy 2008) make reference to the Reggio approach. The four themes of Aistear: well-being, identity and belonging, communicating and exploring and thinking. These value relational pedagogical ideas. Furthermore guidelines on the application of the framework recommend partnerships with parents and families, interacting with children, learning through play and using assessment to support early learning and development (NCCA 2009, 16). This research argues that the Post-modern Reggio approach is particularly relevant in the Irish context as Constructivist and Relational pedagogy have influenced the philosophy driving pedagogical aspects of Irish Policy.

Interpreting Developments in Irish Pre-school”s expansion

Efforts to comply with European norms in pedagogical provision have been difficult for Ireland to achieve for a multitude of reasons. Early year’s provision is not rooted in the education system rather it crosses a variety of policy domains, including economic, employment, education, and family and child policy.

The difficulty can be distilled down to two factors, firstly, legacy issues and secondly, the advent of social partnership structures. Legacy issues include a traditional high level of services where pre-schools had been

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developed as extensions of family and parish life. Also, educational policies that have not managed to embrace the pre-school period as an important part of the pre-primary process and maintained a split system between school and pre-school. Social partnership financed structures requiring high levels of administration and consultative processes resulting in less finance (and status) for those working directly with children. With the elaborate social partnership structures in place national and international reports brought about a new understanding of the importance of quality pre-school intervention (Hayes 2005, Spodek 2006 and Chevalier 2006). This is manifest in The Free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. The scheme is a paradigm shift in terms of how pre-school is valued and it is remarkable that despite these difficulties pre-schools have demonstrated they have the capacity to move from *ad hoc* services run in the informal economy to embrace fully the scheme as partners with the state in offering universal access.

**Informal provision in a Split System of Education and Care**

A legacy of informal and home run services continues to this day. In this study 65.38% of pre-schools visited started from such beginnings, prior to Government and EU expansion funding. 31% of pre-schools visited were run directly from the home of practitioners. Three settings currently share premises with other services such as Youth Clubs, Community Groups and Dramatic Societies. The evidence of diocesan support through premises owned or previously owned by religious orders is evident in pre-schools 1, 3, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 22 and 23. All of these groups are now legal entities capable of operating as trading businesses.

The National Primary School Curriculum was developed by the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) and launched in 1999. Children attending primary school in the Republic of Ireland enter a
setting where a nationally agreed pedagogical approach is delivered by
teachers holding a professional qualification. Pedagogical inspections are
a statutory feature of the care and education. This differs from pre-primary
pre-school services where national inspection of curriculum is yet to be
implemented.

In terms of school management, statistics from the Department of
Education and Science show that for the academic year 2009/10 the State
aided 3,165 National Schools (Mainstream) and 130 Special Schools
(Department Education and Skills, 2011, p.7). Like the ECEC sector the
Irish primary schools system also uses the free-market model. Primary
schools traverse a variety of provision. A move from the traditional parish
national school began in 1978 when the first Educate Together schools
were established; now running 60 national schools nationwide, all
teaching the full primary curriculum, these multi-denominational schools
are managed by parents (Educate Together, 2012). One of the fastest
growing fields of education in Ireland for over 30 years is in the number of
Gaelscoil (Irish-medium schools). Irish is the language through which all
subjects are taught and all communication is conducted. Pupils attending
Gaelscoil follow the Department of Education standard curriculum
(Gaelscoileanna, 2012). There are also some Montessori and Steiner
schools throughout the county.

No policy to integrate new pre-school buildings into local primary school
campus emerged during the pre-school expansion phase. This failure can
be identified as a missed opportunity to make a link between pre-primary
and primary schools. The lack of policy to integrate pre-schools into the
education system has kept the split system between care and education a
feature of Irish pre-school.

In principle, the issue of disturbing transitions from childcare to
ever education does not arise in countries with integrated
administration of early childhood services, where a common
curriculum across the age range 1-6 years is generally employed (OECD 2006, p.67).

**Conclusion**

Social partnership dominated the development of the early years sector over the past two decades communities wishing to develop pre-schools had to use the partnership process. However, attempts to up skill the ECEC workforce were placed in the domain of FÁS which is not a graduate training institution. Irish professionals in the field of early childhood studies have pointed to the fact – As yet, no agreement has been reached on what constitutes an appropriate qualification” (Moloney 2010, p.169). The light touch pedagogical approach to regulation of pre-school services is reflected in these research findings when ECERS/R/E are applied. The absence of mandatory pedagogical training levels for the entire workforce from those who work directly with children to those who inspect services plays an important part in the overall results.

The social partnership structures are thought to be inclusive yet at a philosophical level it presents a dilemma for traditional civil society (from where the IPPA emerged). Traditionally the role played by civil society was to act as advocate for social needs and critique policy. This role was changed when Pobal’s funding brought with it exchequer surpluses, Government employment, capital funding for buildings, jobs and training schemes.

From a labour market paradigm, the approach meets many targets such as those at risk of long-term unemployment being filtered into low paid pre-school posts. Conversely, students holding graduate degrees in early years are not attracted by the low pay rates to work directly with children. Neither are graduates likely to find work in governance structures due to embargos in public service staffing and the dominance of the nursing
profession in the pre-school inspectorate.

Pre-schools were, in the past, conceived as either operating as community based charities for the underprivileged or private groups catered for those who could afford private pre-school (informal economy). Financial and management support came from civic society and the charitable organisations. This has now changed due to a high level of investment throughout the 1990’s the Equal Opportunities Childcare Fund EOCF (E.U. co-funded). More recently the National Childcare Investment Plan (NCIP) placed a strong emphasis on the construction and refurbishment of crèche, pre-school and after school services. In order to avail of funding all pre-schools had to become legitimate legal entities. Pre-schools had benefited from the many growth periods endured through the previous two decades of regulation of employment, inspection, and capital investment.

Pre-school is now seen as an important stage in pre-primary care and education. Although not specifically mentioned as a target in the National Childcare Strategy (2000), written a decade earlier the zeitgeist in the last decade of the 21st Century placed a strong focus on pre-primary education and care. From a social and financial perspective, the long term benefits of quality pre-school provisions are well documented (Hayes 2005, Spodek 2006). In Ireland, the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) have outlined the merit of investing in policies to foster quality pre-school care in the early years. They argue that “if human capital investment were directed more toward the young and away from older and less-skilled for whom human capital is a poor investment higher returns in human capital would follow” (Chevalier 2006, p.5).

In the absence of an agreed national pedagogical approach, what has developed can be described as a system of unique parish pedagogies. The term parish is used as historically many pre-schools grew organically from
religious and civil society support structures. The social partnership process advanced the development of these groups through ready-made parish networks. Private pre-schools are also situated within a parish structure. This is of interest to this research because each parish is a social and economic entity in itself across a range of social strata:

Social stratification documents inequalities of condition of opportunities and outcomes, and the ways in which groups maintain class or status boundaries (Scott and Marshall 2005, p.369)

Pre-schools by their historic organic development reflect a stratified provision. In essence, children from disadvantaged areas attend pre-schools in their community where services are largely run through labour market trainee projects. Middle class children are more likely to attend settings in private homes where the practitioner hold various levels of training from 5-8 on the NQF. From the very start in children's pre-school educational experiences, inequality is a factor. The ECCE scheme is an attempt to offer an opportunity for all children to get a fair start on the education ladder. But without national standards inequality is set to continue in the sector. The need for an agreed pedagogical approach to pre-school was never more urgent as the new Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme is implemented. It focuses on the issues of standards i.e. why one child benefits from good quality provision and another poor quality. Up to now, these were issues for paying parents, now payments come from the state. A national debate on pre-school standards in inevitable.

The next chapter outlines the methodology used in measuring pre-school standards.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research set out to measure standards in twenty-six pre-schools throughout Ireland. The research methodology applies two rating scales. The *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales – Revised (ECERS/R)* (Harms *et al.*, 1998) and *Assessing Quality in the Early Years: Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Extension (ECERS/E) Four Curricular Extension Four Curricular Subscales* (Sylva *et al.*, 2006). The results are analysed using both a quantitative (ECERS findings) and qualitative (Relational pedagogy) approaches. The mixed methodology and analysis was selected because the development of pre-school care has been fragmented and not governed by a single pedagogical influence. It is clear that Irish pre-school governance in line with broader EU standards is moving toward a RP approach. Therefore, a RP approach is used to interoperable the ECERS/R/E findings.

In order to better understand the issues behind the quality of pre-school provision, interviews were conducted with pre-school practitioners to include their views on ECEC issues. Additionally, field notes and observations are recorded as ‘practice samples’ this chapter outlines both the quantitative and qualitative research design. The first part of the chapter reports on the quantitative method, the second on the qualitative method. Before discussing the methods a background that positions the research in terms of similar research conducted in neighbouring countries is discussed.

**Positioning this Research**

The *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales – Revised (ECERS-R)* (Harms *et al.*, 1998) was devised in the US. It is a global rating scale which measures a wide range of pedagogical issues. In the UK a second scale the *Extension Four Curricular Subscales (ECERS-E)* (Sylva *et al.*, 2006) was devised to marry the research to the education principles in use there. The UK extended scales were devised as one component part of a
national state sponsored research project called *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education EPPE England 1997-2004* (Sylva et al., 2004). The scope of the UK research was large. It explored characteristics of different kinds of early years provision e.g. nursery school, private day nursery, home group etc. The study followed children to the end of age seven. It explored the impact of pre-school on children's cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes, as well as other important background factors such as family and home learning environment.

In Northern Ireland the *Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI)* (Melhuish et al., 2006) was concerned with issues of family, home and childcare history. The ECERS/R/E tool was used as a component of the national research to measure quality in pre-school as an aspect of children’s lives. A longitudinal approach was used by returning to examine if the effects of pre-school continue through ages six-years of age and seven-years-of age. The nature and scope of the both *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* (EPPE) research (size, variety of research questions) was extensive. The number of expert researchers involved in the UK projects is monumentally larger by comparison with the scope of this individual PhD research. This doctoral research is concerned with ECERS/R and E as a tool to measure quality in Irish pre-school for this thesis. In designing a method of enquiry to measure the standard in Irish pre-school provision it was vital to use a measuring tool that was reliable and produced rigorous data. The scales matched the requirement and therefore, were applied for the first time in Ireland.

The two following figures show the findings from the research conducted in the UK (2004) and Northern Ireland (2006).
Figure 4: The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education United Kingdom (2004)

Figure 5: The Effective Pre-School Provision in Northern Ireland (2006)

**Irish Longitudinal Research**

The scope of the *EPPE* research compares better with the *National Longitudinal Study on Children,-Growing up in Ireland* officially
launched on the 2007 which was initiated by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMC&YA).

The *Growing up in Ireland* study is one of the largest and most complex studies ever undertaken in Ireland. By tracking the development of two cohorts of young children for at least seven years (approximately 11,100 infants and 8,500 nine-year old children), the study aims to:

Examine the factors which contribute to or undermine the wellbeing of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families (Ireland OMC&YA 2010, p5).

The *Growing up in Ireland* study was initiated before the introduction of the ECCE Scheme and does not apply the ECERS/R/E rating scale in Irish pre-schools. The findings of this doctoral research bridge that gap. This is more important now than ever since the policy changes of the ECCE scheme ensures that all children growing up in Ireland are entitled to one year in pre-school. National pre-schools standards as an issue is gaining importance due to the states new commitment to service provision.

Hitherto the only use of ECERS/R in Ireland has been for use as an individual quality assessment conducted in a pre-school in Dublin. The individual ECERS/R scale was used to explore the issue of whether parents and service providers share the values of the rating scale (Hennessy and Delaney 1990).

The publication of the ECERS/R/E research findings for both England and Northern Ireland inspired and offered this research project a framework to similarly assess Irish pre-school quality. The analysis of the Irish findings however does not focus on comparative analysis. Instead, the focus of the
analysis explores why each scores measure as it does from a pedagogical perspective. The analysis is informed by Relational pedagogy.

**Issues in the application of the ECERS-R and E in Ireland**

In practice, the majority of the practitioners had limited knowledge of pedagogical approaches. It is acknowledged that the UK studies were devised to measure the UK particular pedagogical approach. It may be perceived as a weakness in the method that this Irish study was not. However, it is posited that the research can only measure what exists. *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006) and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) are in essence the new Irish pre-school curriculum. These are soon to be implemented but are not yet in practice.

An issue for this research is the fact that pre-school services are largely run by practitioners without graduate accreditation. It was not realistic to think that the service knowing that an ECERS/R/E was about to be conducted would prepare accordingly. One practitioner had heard of the scales but had not seen them. Nor was any other centre or practitioner visited familiar with the scales. Despite the lack of a national pedagogical approach in Irish pre-schools, the use of ECERS/R/E is justified as it is a global rating scale with a high standard of relevance in ascertaining the standard of provision from the pre-schools involved in the research.

**Quantitative Method**

This section describes in more detail the application of the scales, the pilot studies, ethics, sampling and a typologies framework devised from the enquiry. Firstly the origin of the scales are explored and an evaluation the scales in relation to their capacity to measure both Modern and Post-modern pedagogies.
History and critique ECERS/R/E across Modern and Post-modern pedagogies

*Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Revised, ECERS/R (1998)*

ECERS originated in the Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina. The scale was first published in 1980. It is clearly linked to the Development Appropriate Practice (DAP) ideology. Subsequently it has been used in a variety of US, European, Asian and Nordic research projects. In 1998, the scale was revised by its American authors to include a greater emphasis on cultural diversity, family concerns, and individual children’s needs (Harms, *et al*, 1998). The revised edition has the letter ‘R’ added to the original acronym (ECERS/R). The authors acknowledge that the revision was progressive and in keeping with trends such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) re-examined the DAP approach (1997). The result was a move to include greater emphasis on cultural diversity, family concerns and individual children’s needs. In the revised edition, techniques that identified and fostered the developmental needs of children, both individually and in groups were considered as relevant (Harms, *et al*, 1998). In so doing the NAYCE challenged the normative approach associated with the early modernist pedagogy. The revised ECERS/R reflects the changes to the DAP approach (Bredenkamp 1978).

On the one hand, we wanted to be sure to retain those features that had, for over 15 years, made the ECERS a useful instrument for both research and program improvements. On the other hand, we wanted to update and expand the instrument to reflect changes in the early childhood field that had occurred since ECERS was published in 1980 (Harms, *et al* p.2.1998).

In terms of the pedagogical progression here we see that both ECERS/R and DAP are moving to place a stronger emphasis on contextual pedagogy. It is the revised scale which has been applied in this study. The
seven subscales of the ECERS/R are Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure and Parents and Staff. This doctoral research used the revised scale alongside a 2006 UK extended version which is now discussed.

**Early Childhood Environment rating scale Extension (ECERS/E) (2006) Four Curricular Subscales**

In the UK, the *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* (EPPE) researchers (Melhuish Quinn, Hanna, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2006) were exploring the impact of the education principles in use in the UK at the time known as ‘Desirable Learning Outcomes’ (DLO). Devised by the Department for Education and Employment, Desirable Learning Outcomes comprise of six areas of learning; Personal and Social Development, Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Knowledge and Understanding of the World, Physical Development and Creative Development (Department for Education and Employment, 1998). These are learning goals for children in ECEC aimed to support children up to the time that they enter compulsory education (the term after the child's fifth birthday) to emphasise early literacy, numeracy and the development of personal and social skills.

The UK researchers planned the use of ECERS/R and anticipated the need to expand on ECERS/R to supplement it with “more fine-grained assessment of curriculum and pedagogy in Early Childhood settings within the English Curriculum Guidance to the Foundation Stage” (Sylva *et al*, 2006). It was also felt that the US scale adopted a light touch to assessing provision for developing children’s emerging literacy, numeric and scientific thinking. Moreover, it is also light on assessing provision aimed at cultural and intellectual diversity in the setting” (Sylva *et al* 2006, p.9).
The UK project therefore assesses seven American existing subscales: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure and Parents and Staff, as well as the additional four English subscales, Literacy, Maths, Science and Diversity. The extension uses the same structural lay out as the original scale. This doctoral research adopts a similar approach by measuring 11 categories.

**Post-modern pedagogies**

This doctoral research conducts the first application of the rating scales ECERS/R/E in a systematic way in the Irish pre-school context. However, neither DAP nor DLO fit Irish pre-school practice as no agreed pre-school curriculum is in place. In Irish practice, despite the lack of an agreed curriculum, several pedagogies are found. It is this very *ad hoc* pedagogical approach, which is the target of the Irish ECERS/R/E research.

The use of the scales are justified in the Irish context on three accounts. Firstly, no analysis of Irish Pre-school practice is available. This gap in knowledge is addressed by this doctoral research. Secondly, both *Aistear* and *Síolta* have been published within recent years but there has been no research into how early years educators are engaging with and introducing them into their practice. Finally, by using both scales the results (all be it a vignette in the Irish case) of similar EPPE research conducted in neighbouring Northern Ireland and Britain. This comparative analysis between the EPPE results and the findings of this exploratory research study is beyond the scope of this research. The link between Irish and UK pre-schools is well established. Irish pre-school has been influenced by the UK ideals, (PPA and IPPA collaborations) and the border counties benefited from collaborative ECEC projects such as cross-border finance and training (HighScope).
The question remains then, how do the combined scales relate to current mixed market pedagogical practice across Irish pre-school? This research acknowledges that there is no current Irish ECEC curriculum in place. However the direction that Irish ECEC pedagogical policy is taking can be seen in the post-modern nature of both *Aistear* and *Síolta*. Therefore the data is interpreted through a Relational Pedagogical Post-modern paradigm which takes account of the direction.

**International critique of ECERS/R**

There are conflicting views from a National and International perspective on the use of the original rating scale. The international use of the original scale has informed practice globally. In the field of early childhood studies several publications have explored the scales themselves; others use the methodology to measure practice and to conduct comparative analysis (Sakai *et al* 2003, Douglas 2005). Douglas, writing a critique of ECERS/R, highlights the lack of agreed pedagogical consensus as to what is understood to be good practice:

A dilemma for any researcher attempting to measure quality in Early Childhood Care and Education services is the lack of universally accepted norms in ECCE, that there is an explicit and agreed *pedagogy* of what constitutes *‘good‘* quality childcare (Douglas 2005 p.113).

However, as no agreed pedagogical practice has been approved in the Irish case it is difficult to find consensus on what is regarded as good or *‘bad‘* pedagogical practice. On the other hand, the *Handbook of Research on the Education of Young Children* contends that the scales have become synonymous with quality.
The ECERS/R has become more than a mere measure. In the lacuna of international early year's curriculum, the rating scale measure has come to hold a standard of pedagogical care and education. When statements in the early childhood research literature are made attributes correlating with “quality” or predicting “quality” the referent for “quality” is usually the ECERS measure (Spodek 2006 p.461).

The real value of the scales is that as a tool it facilitates staffs self-critique. Both the ECERS/R and E measure specific pedagogical practice by rating it as inadequate, minimal, good or excellent. In so doing, it clearly outlines an action by a staff member or a provision that must be observed to achieve a higher rating. Hence, if an improvement is to be achieved, there is clarity as to what has to be done to reach the next score. Local government staff in seven regions across England used the scales as part of a professional development programme for improving practice. The scales are used alongside state monitoring of services as these state reports are found to be short on sufficient detail. The scales have been found to offer transparent and measurable means of assessing and improving quality. Despite differences in national regulations, curricular guidelines, the scales are valuable tools in helping practitioners improve their practice.

The scales have the capacity to act as an audit tool for local authorities to rigorously assess quality standards, identify areas for improvement, or monitor change in quality over time: or offer centers (and the professionals who support them) specific and practical guidance on how to improve (Mathers et al 2007, p.263).
The scales have gained in popularity in contemporary practice since the start of this research. A software company ‘Environmental Rating Scales ERS Data Systems‘ has been launched. The business offers training in use of the scales with the advantage of a paper free service (Environment Rating Scales Data Systems, 2011). This doctoral research is among the first to use both scales. Since the second scale was developed (2006) for use in the UK the combined scales have been used to investigate aspects of quality in Australia (Ishimine et al 2010). The next section outlines the quantitative methodology used in applying the ECERS/R/E scales in this Irish study.

**Items measured by ECERS/R and ECERS/E**

The ECERS/R measuring instrument has seven categories. ECERS/E scale has four. Each scale has four to ten sub-categories which describe ‘environmental quality‘ of pre-school provision along a continuum concerning materials, facilities and pedagogy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECERS-R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Space and furnishings – sub-category 1-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Personal care routines – sub-category 9-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Language and reasoning – sub-category 15-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Activities sub-measures – sub-category 19-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Interaction – sub-measures – sub-category 29-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Programme structure – sub-category 34-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Parents and staffing – sub-category 38-43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECERS-E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Literacy – sub-category 44-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Math’s – sub-category 51-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Science and environment – sub-category 55-58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Diversity – sub-category 59-61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sixty-one sub-measures in total are measured
Reliability
The process used to ensure the reliability and consistency of the ECERS measurement, or the degree to which an instrument measures the same way each time it is used under the same conditions with the same subjects is now explained.

Of the sixty one sub-categories one example is now used from the first measure ‘Space and Furnishing’ (‘Space for gross motor play’ sub-measure 7) to show the process used. This was carried consistently through the sixty one sub-measures across both ECERS/R and ECERS/E the marking scheme is now explored.

Category 1: Space and Furnishings
1. Indoor space
2. Furnishings for routine care, play and learning.
3. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort
4. Room arrangement for play
5. Space for privacy
6. Child related display
7. Space for gross motor play
8. Gross motor equipment

Table 2 below shows the format used in rating ‘Space for gross motor play’. Each of the sub-categories uses a similar format which is set out across one page per sub-category. For each sub-category exact indicators in terms of pre-school quality are given. Furthermore, footnotes indicate to the researcher ways to probe deeper into quality issues. These footnotes of clarification provide valuable guidance and must be adhered to strictly.
Space for gross motor play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inadequate</th>
<th>Minimal</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.1 No outdoor or indoor space used for gross motor physical play.

3.1 Some space outdoors or indoors used for gross motor/physical play.

1 Adequate space outdoor and some space indoors.\(^{11}\)

7.1 Outdoor gross motor space has a variety of surfaces permitting different types of play (Ex. sand, black top, wood chips, grass).

1.2 Gross Motor Space is very dangerous (Ex. access requires long walk on busy street, same space used for play and parking lot, unfenced area for pre-schoolers).

3.2 Gross motor space is generally safe \(^{11}\)(Ex. sufficient cushioning under climbing equipment, fenced in outdoor area).

5.2 Space is easily accessible for children in group (Ex. on same level near classroom, no barriers for children with disabilities).

7.2 Outdoor area has some protection from the elements (Ex. shade in summer, sun in winter, wind break, good drainage).

5.3 Space is organised so that different types of activities do not interfere with one another (Ex. play with wheel toys separated from climbing equipment and ball play).

7.3 Space has convenient features (Ex. door to toilet and drinking water, accessible storage for equipment, class has direct access to outdoors).

Table 2: Category one - Sub-category 7, Space for gross motor play

\(^{10}\) In assessing space for gross motor play, include both outdoor and indoor areas, except when one is only specified in an indicator. All areas regularly available for gross motor play to be considered, even if children are not observed in the area.

\(^{11}\) For a rating of 5 space must be adequate for the size of the group using the area. Find out if class groups rotate or if several groups use the same space at the same time. Some indoor space must be available for use for gross motor play, especially in bad weather. This space may usually be used for other activities. When required by environmental conditions (ex. extreme weather or pollution, dangerous social conditions), facilities may be given 5 if they have adequate space indoors and some space outdoors.

\(^{12}\) Although no gross motor area that challenges children can ever be completely safe, the intent of this indicator is that the major causes of serious injury can be minimized, such as injury from falls, entrapment and injury to body parts and protrusions from equipment.
Table three demonstrates how the ratings are to be assigned by taking into account exact indicators for each item rated in terms of space for gross motor play. The notes for clarification assist with issues that may pose questions for the researcher. Table three below shows the marking scheme (Harms, T., Clifford, M. & Cryer, D. 1998).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A score of 1 must be given if any indicator under 1 is scored ‘yes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A rating of 2 is given when all indicators under 1 are scored ‘No’ and at least half of the indicators under 3 are scored ‘Yes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A rating of 3 is given when all indicators under 1 are scored ‘No’ and all indicators under 3 are scored ‘Yes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A rating of 4 is given when all requirements for 3 are met and at least half of the indicators under 5 are scored ‘Yes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>A rating of 5 is given when all requirements for 3 are met and all indicators under 5 are scored ‘Yes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A rating of 6 is given when all requirements for 5 are met and at least half of the indicators under 7 are scored ‘Yes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A rating of 7 is given when all requirements for 5 are met and all indicators under 7 are scored ‘Yes’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A score of NA (Not Applicable) may only be given for indicators or for entire items when permitted as shown on the score sheet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Indicators scored NA are not counted in determining the rating for an item. Items scored NA are not counted in calculating subscale and total scale scores.

**Table 3: Scoring mechanism for ECERS**

The repeatability of the scale as a measurement instrument holds up to examination as a reliable tool. It can be considered reliable, as the preschool will score the same if the test is given twice resulting in similar outcomes. Each sub-measure is rated as inadequate (1), minimal (3), good (5) or excellent (7).
Validity

Training on the application of the tool and agreement on coding procedures were vital to ensure validity (strength of conclusions) across the data collected. This involved training in the use of the instrument including desk research, video instruction and pilot studies in pre-schools. From this combination of approaches, a system of coding procedures was applied. The use of the instruments involved becoming familiar with the marking system of both rating scales. A multimedia package which demonstrates the use of ECERS/R was studied. A training package containing an *Interactive video and an Instructor’s Guide* (Harms T 2006) which provides answers and explanations for any questions that may arise along with a Video Guide and Training Workbook, written by Harms was also studied. Two pilot studies were conducted. The first in a pre-school visited on campus in the University of Limerick; the learning from this trial run identified two issues. The first was the need for better preparation in terms of photocopying the marking sheets across the two scales. Subsequently twenty-six ‘visiting packs’ were designed and prepared. Each pack contained score sheets for ECERS/R/E and consent forms from practitioners. The second is the sheer physicality of marking sheets of data while referring to the rating scale for a value to score each item.

At the start of the autumn semester 2009, a second researcher from the department of Politics and Public Administration was drafted to assist in the data collection concerning the ECERS/R/E study. The ECERS/R/E data was shared across two PhD research projects. Two data collectors are vital to determining inter-rater reliability, and to carry out the workload involved in the data collection.

A second pilot study was arranged in a pre-school setting. The support of an expert pre-school practitioner, who offered her expertise and pre-school setting during the mid-term Halloween break, was enlisted. Together (two
researchers and one expert practitioner) went through each item on the subscale, discussed, debated and came to agreement on how to code the sub-scales. This was of immense benefit practically, by having the physicality of the pre-school present to address each item and agree a score. Also in giving meaning to the 'notes for clarification' section within the subscales, this required more discussion and examples between the researchers in order to reach a clearer understanding of the ECERS/R/E process. The marking the scale also took some degree of familiarisation (an entire day) and after trial and error a proficiency in marking scheme was reached.

**Coding procedure**

Both researchers had different levels of training in the field of Early Childhood Studies. The researcher with less experience of pre-school applied the ECRES/R. The researcher with the most experience in pre-school practice (23 years working as a pre-school advisor and a graduate in the field of Childhood studies) applied the ECERS/E as it was deemed to be more nuanced in how it coded Relational pedagogy.

An agreement was reached on a coding practice to ensure inter-observer reliability whereby each one or other researcher applied the ECERS/R and ECERS/E scale exclusively. Therefore each researcher marked the ECERS/R scale in 26 pre-schools and the second researcher marked the ECERS/E scale in the same 26 pre-schools. Each pre-school was observed from 'greeting to departure' and discussion with practitioners concerning items that were not observable were discussed when the children had departed. It was important to get good levels of agreement on the scoring and in the event of any uncertainty the researchers discussed any issues that arose and agreed the final score. This discussion took place during and after the data collection. In an effort to reduce coding discrepancies each evening both researchers reviewed each other's coding and further
discussions resulted about the findings. Finally, an overall score was agreed for each setting. Very few discrepancies were noted, one example was where a researcher had not seen an area devoted to blocks (Pre-school 19). This was because the pre-school was located across four rooms with the children divided into younger pre-school children and older pre-school children.

**Procedure: Ethics**

When conducting research in early childhood, informed consent, choice, privacy, confidentiality and cultural issues have been identified by Coady as pivotal (Mac Naughton *et al* 2001, pp. 64-72). These issues were taken into consideration for this research. Cultural issues have been identified in the past as leading to misunderstandings in findings and how the findings are interpreted (Mac Naughton *et al* 2001, Flick 2006). For example one pre-school (15) was managed by non-Irish national. Her English was unclear at times her preferred and default language was French. During the interview she was offered an opportunity to speak in French. However, she opted to speak slowly and her interview was clear and relevant to the research questions.

In terms of informed consent and choice, a letter sent to each pre-school in keeping with best practice, participants have had the research process explained to them in everyday language in the ‘question and answer information sheet’ (Appendix two and three). The information sheet template was supplied by the ethics committee of the University of Limerick. The template outlined twelve questions likely to be asked by a participant, each question is answered concerning this particular research project. In the event of the question and answer information sheet not covering all aspects of questions potential participants were invited to ask their own question. In relation to privacy and confidentiality, data was coded and key codes kept separately, in the University of Limerick.
After much debate concerning children as subjects, specifically the level of involvement of pre-school children in the research, the ethics committee agreed that the children present in pre-schools were not directly involved in the research, as subjects. More specifically, it is the environment in which the children spend their day is the subject of the quantitative research. The children are present in pre-school when the environmental rating scale is being carried out, but they are never individually or as a group rated on the scale. The pre-school practitioner's discretion was used to act in *loco parentis* to sign off on the researcher spending time in the pre-school setting. However an information sheet for parents (Appendix one) was issued to each pre-school, it was a decision for the pre-school management whether or not they passed it on to the parents. Most pre-schools did not issue the letter. The pre-school groups are accustomed to regularly having students visit on work placement or observation in the setting without asking parents to sign off on such visits. The researcher was never in the room alone with the children. The researchers obtained Garda Clearance and findings of the research do not disclose any individual or individual pre-schools details.

**Representativeness in selection**

This next section discusses selection of participants and the emergence of new pre-school typologies as the statutory information available was found short on detail.

A system of random sampling was used in order to get the widest and most representative sample of pre-schools. This was not an easy task on two fronts. Firstly, no national list of Irish pre-school services was available from any of the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCO’s) or elsewhere. Secondly, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for registering and inspecting pre-schools, playgroups,
nurseries, crèches, day-care, and pre-school. The lists of pre-school services were intermingled amongst all services for children from birth to six years of age. The list of all services is freely available on line for the public on the HSE website under ‘List of pre-schools by county’ (Ireland, Department of Health Service Executive).

In order to create a list of pre-schools the list of all ECEC services was examined. The list did not clearly indicate age range of children attending or pedagogical data. The HSE dataset on ECEC services show no pedagogical awareness. The focus of the data is concerned with what can be described as ‘health and safety’ issues. The rationale from the HSE’s perspective of categorising the pre-school is driven by requirements concerning, health and safety obligations, food storage, food preparation and the provision of sleep facilities. Consequently, the data sets are grouped to this arrangement. The first task was to capture the pre-schools by disentangling it from the HSE data. A manual elimination of groups running services for children under three years of age was made by going through the list county by county eliminating what appeared to be services for children less than three years only. For example, table four below county list of ECEC reduced to pre-schools. In County Carlow there are 47 ECEC services listed, yet when eliminated services for children under three years of age the number were reduced to 13 pre-schools.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Listed ECEC</th>
<th>Elimination ≤ there years</th>
<th>Pre-school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavan</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork A-L</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork M_Y</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin A-D</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin E-L</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin M-R</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin S-Y</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway A-L</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway M-Y</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kildare</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laois</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leitrim</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longford</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meath</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offaly</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roscommon</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wicklow</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>Reduced to</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total      | 3,471       | 2,610                     |

Table 4: County list of childcare reduced to pre-schools.

All integrated services such as FRCs running pre-school were included (it was made clear in the research invitation documentation that only the pre-school part would only be visited). Thus, the pre-schools were disentangled from the HSE list of childcare services. The total of ECEC 3,471 services for children from birth to six years of age was reduced to
2,610 pre-schools. After disentangling of pre-schools from the HSE list of childcare providers a clear picture of pre-schools county by county emerged. From the remaining group of 2,610 pre-schools a process of random sampling that would lead to a representative sample began. The application of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to select randomly three services from each county. This was done in order to have a fall back pre-school in the event of a refusal to join the research from the first pre-school selected. For example a list was created from the SPSS that showed Carlow pre-school 1, 2, and 3, Cavan pre-school 1, 2, and 3 and so on. Pre-school number one was sent a letter of invitation. In the event of a decline, the second group was invited to join. Of the twenty-six groups invited to participate thirteen agreed on the first round. Four agreed on the second round, five on the third round, and it took four or more rounds to secure visits to four counties. The research visits commenced as soon as the consent reply was received from the first round of pre-schools, despite not having the full 26 sites secured.

**Emerging pre-school typologies**

The HSE dataset lack of pedagogical awareness and lack of national uniformity is further exemplified by the variation on how ECEC services are categorised. The HSE used the following headings, I.D. Number, Name, Contact, Address, Type, Status and Phone'. The information filed under these headings varied from county to county. In particular the status and type headings were frequently confused. In many cases, these were left blank or type listed in status and or visa-versa. The following county lists did not have a status listed: Carlow, Kerry, Dublin, Cavan, Kerry, Kildare, Louth, Monaghan and Waterford. Table five below shows the variation in what is understood in terms of typologies of services by the HSE. The 'type' section did not hold a national uniform description; the types listed in Mayo offered 10 typologies Wexford offered 20 typologies of early year's settings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mayo types</th>
<th>Wexford types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Child minding Service</td>
<td>Part-Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Full Day Care Service</td>
<td>Playschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. FDC</td>
<td>Full Day Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Full Day Care Part-time Day Care Sessional</td>
<td>Montessori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Full Day Care Service Part-time Day Care &amp; Sessional Pre-School</td>
<td>Playgroup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Pre-school Service in a temporary drop in centre</td>
<td>Full Day Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sessional Pre-school Service</td>
<td>(Respond) Creche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Full Day Care</td>
<td>Full Day Care Montessori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Full Day Care Service</td>
<td>Childminder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sessional</td>
<td>St. Nicholas, Montessori Full Day Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Crèche for Guests</td>
<td>Crèche Preschool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: HSE ECEC Typologies

Table five above is found short on detail. After visits to pre-schools, essential information was mapped onto this newer and more comprehensive ‘Typologies’ list. The following Table six has been developed by this research it includes details of funding, training, and management structures.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Pobal staff &amp; Capital secured.</th>
<th>Private No funding secured</th>
<th>Private Capital Funding Secured.</th>
<th>Traveller Group in transition Dept. Ed. Funding</th>
<th>Community Traditional No Pobal funding</th>
<th>Community Pobal Staffing Grant only</th>
<th>HSE Capital &amp; Pedagogy training.</th>
<th>NQF Level</th>
<th>Group Exist Prior To EU €</th>
<th>Pedagogy</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7/5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Group play</td>
<td>FRC/J.I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7/7/5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Montessori 'play</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 *Special Ed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5/5/-</td>
<td>Play</td>
<td>FRC/JI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7/5/</td>
<td>Montessori 'play</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Table 6: Emerging typologies captured in Irish ECERS Pre-school study
Table six demonstrates that pre-schools are located across family enterprises, community enterprise commercial provision and state provision. Listed beside each service is the pedagogical provision based on observed practice and discussions with the practitioners. The distilled list sets out a template that improves on the HSE’s list from the perspective of parents wishing to access information on pre-school provision. The list also serves as a tool for policy makers and planners in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

**ECERS/R/E empirical data analysis**

When all the data was collected, it was then transferred to SPSS programme. The aggregate value for each of the sixty one sub-measures was totalled and divided by 26 to achieve the average results of all participating pre-schools. Then, at that point, it was possible to use the results to make graphs for pre-schools results and compile a result based on the average findings. The data provided clear empirical results concerning pre-school environments. The use of SPSS programme offered a mechanism to transform the results into graphs. The following figure six represents the findings across the Irish pre-school cohort examined in this doctoral research.
Figure 6: Irish Pre-School ECERS- R and E findings

The finding from the research as seen above in figure six offers comparative data relating to the UK research (2004) and the Northern Ireland research (2006). The next section expands on how the Irish data was analysed using qualitative methodologies.

**Qualitative Methods**

**Triangulation**

This doctoral study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods known as triangulation. The ECERS/R/E study is augmented by three sources of qualitative data. Firstly; a phenomenological study was conducted with 16 practitioners through the use of semi-structured interviews and discussions on a piece of Art which the Practitioner was asked to bring to the interview. Secondly, eight „practice samples“ are drawn
from observations of interactions between children and pre-school practitioners. Finally, a case study concerning three pre-schools for children deemed by the state to be experience educational disadvantage is conducted.

Flick (2006) advances the value of combining qualitative and quantitative methods: “The different methodological perspectives complement each other in the study of an issue, and this is conceived as the complementary compensation of the weakness and blind spots of each single method” (Flick, 39, 2006). In this research the qualitative data helps clarify the underpinning pedagogical issues in Pre-school practice thereby adding greater depth to the ECERS/R/E results. The methodology of each of the three qualitative approaches is now elucidated.

A phenomenological study conducted with practitioners by interviews and observations

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand/discover what meaning Pre-school practitioners ascribe to their work. Using semi-structured interviews this part of the study captures Pre-school practitioner experience/views/beliefs. The Pre-school practitioner is defined in this doctoral research as an individual who works directly in a Pre-school setting with children between the ages of 3-6 years of age. According to Hayes: “the history of the dominance of positivist and developmental type research poses a unique challenge to those researching in early education to qualitative methodologies” (Hayes, 2005p.153) this research answers that challenge. This is done by developing a contemporary phenomenological qualitative method of enquiry to complement other survey methods to find the common experience of pre-school practitioner’s using interviews. To date, the common experiences of the individuals working directly with children within the pre-school phenomenon has been given little attention for a variety of reasons:
• First the Pre-school practitioner sector is relatively new phenomenon in Ireland. Unlike the local school teacher, found in every parish pre-school practitioners do not have traditional role models.

• Second no specific tertiary training is in common practice for the sector, consequently there is no collective union or professional body to commission research.

• Third, to date most research in the area of pre-school has focused on Children’s wellbeing, child development and teaching and learning leaving the Pre-school practitioner for the most part excluded as a focus of research.

It has been well established in early year’s literature the importance of maternal health and wellbeing in children’s development (Bolby 1956). The role the Pre-school practitioner plays in supporting children’s development is vital since the Practitioner’s approach impacts on the child’s experience. Hayes points out the “The Pre-school process and what happens in pre-school is influenced by variables such as adult training and ratios” (Hayes, 2005, p. 156). This research seeks to explore the lived experience of the Practitioner. To focus on the phenomenon of the Pre-school Practitioner draws the attention to adult issues. Pre-school Practitioners act in loco parentis yet we know little of their world. Having identified a gap in what we know about Practitioners, such as how they came to work in the field, their wellbeing and aspirations this study addresses that shortfall.

The method comprised of recording (semi-structured) interviews using a conversational style approach and the use of open ended questions (See Appendix 8: Interview guide). In order to make interviewers comfortable talking about their work the Practitioners were requested to bring an image (picture, painting, sketch) of pre-school that relates to their own pre-school experience as a child or an adult. This enabled a space for the introduction
of the Practitioners ideas and for their perspective to be acknowledged (this is an attempt to address the hierarchical nature of the interview process).

The conversations took place after the rating scale was completed and the direct work with the children had come to an end and the children had departed. The Practitioner and interviewer had an opportunity to concentrate exclusively on the conversation. The recording was downloaded to a hard drive in the University and transcribed. The interviews produced a wealth of data from which to draw textural and structural descriptions; moving the findings towards a better understanding of the essence of the experience of being a Practitioner. The open-ended questions were concerned with recent public policy changes in ECEC. For example how Practitioners felt about the introduction of the ECCE scheme and how they perceived their role to be understood and valued. Space for the Practitioner to bring her own voice to the interview was also included. Flick (2005) suggests that the best sequence of questioning should begin with an un-structured question, in this research the sequence followed, such as ‘how did you come to be working as a pre-school practitioner?’ Followed by a semi-structured question that defines the issue but the response is left open such as ‘How do you feel your work is understood and appreciated in the community?’ A structured question where both issue and reaction are defined for example ‘When the preschool free year was introduced in the most recent supplementary budget did you think it was a positive policy development?’ In terms of the image (picture, painting, sketch) that Practitioners were invited to bring to the interviews questions followed along the lines of:

1. Why did you choose this picture?
2. The little girl in the picture is playing with sand, why do you think sand play relevant?
3. Structured questions will not be asked during the picture analysis, as they cannot be pre-arranged.
In total 16 practitioners who work directly with children were interviewed while all 26 pre-schools had the rating scales applied. The reason for selecting a cohort of 16 was that it was a practical number of interviews to work with, and offers variety. It is posited that “no more than 25 and no less than 5 individuals who experience the same phenomenon make a suitable study cohort” (Polkinghorne 1989, p.41).

In this study, in most cases, the practitioner was also the pre-school manager. In cases where managers or committee members did not work directly with the children, yet held a gatekeeper position concerning the visit, they were asked to identify a staff member fitting the selection criteria. In the Family Resource Centers (FRC) the center managers arranged the visits to pre-school component of the FRC provision. The centre managers arranged interviews with the practitioners on three occasions (pre-schools 1, 17 and 24). One manager (pre-school 3) had said she would be the practitioner in the room during the data collection. In practice, she was only present twice in the room. She explained that she had administrative work to attend to as she also managed the community work placement schemes. The interview was conducted. It is the only interview conducted with a practitioner who was not the key practitioner in the room during the data collection. The purposive selection of practicing Practitioners is consistent with the study’s main aims (Collingridge et al, 2008) which were to find the common experiences of the individuals working directly with children. The decision to get a wide range Pre-schools (26, representing one from each county) was made in order to get a broad representation of Pre-school services as well as the widest possible variety of types of services. It also offered an opportunity to see how various regional supports and inspections impacted on quality.
The EPPE research in UK and Northern Ireland interviewed ECEC staff. They interviewed managers. This doctoral research (in keeping with its Relational Pedagogical approach) purposefully selected key workers who work directly with children during the pre-school session. The reason those who work directly with children were targeted is because they are the individuals that relate to the children on a day-to-day basis.

In addition to the interviews, eight ‘practice samples’ are drawn from observations of interactions between children and pre-school practitioners.

**Observations**

The observational protocol allowed for methods of recording notes in the field, which included descriptive and reflective notes. A short portrait of each setting was written with particular events or occurrences noted which might have been overlooked. For example, it was noted when visiting a pre-school that a volunteer was present. This was the sole volunteer seen during the field research; such observations contribute a depth of information that may not have been captured using the ECERS methods.

This multi-layered approach has resulted in a deeper set of data for analysis. Furthermore aspects of how effectively practitioners employ Relational Pedagogical practice is analysed from a post-modern perspective (attention to use of language, power, gender and diversity) in the eight situational samplings.

**Situational Samplings**

ECERS/R/E score Relational Pedagogical practice highly. The situational samples are narratives of events, which occurred during the data collection. The observation protocol helped capture eight situational samplings, which focus specifically on how practitioners apply RP or in many cases, report missed opportunities for RP. Beyond this thesis, they offer reflexive teaching practice samples to assist as discussion pieces in training towards
the development of RP practice in the future. The situational samplings are boxed and shaded throughout chapter four and five. 

**Case study concerning children deemed to experience educational disadvantage.**

The research noted the state's efforts to tackle educational disadvantage in pre-school through ‘Social inclusion’ measures. This became the subject of a case study. The research reports on specifically designed ECEC programme structures for children who are deemed to experience educational disadvantage. These are found across the Department of Education and Science, the Health Service Executive and a Community based company (Pre-schools 7, 9 and 23). In measuring the category ‘Diversity’ a comparative case study focusing on issues of funding, employment, pedagogical support, pre-school pedagogical provision and training are made.

**Procedure**

Pre-school visits November 2009-May 2010

For collection of ECERS/R/E data visits to the groups were carried out in clusters of two, three or four groups. Each group was allocated one full day. The visits required the researchers to observe practice from greeting to departure. Generally, the visit comprised three to four hours of observation and scoring followed by discussion with the pre-school practitioner when the children had left the premises. As well as scoring the provision from observations, the researchers also needed to ask the practitioners questions concerning issues not directly observable, such as staff training provision, child observation records, etc. The scores were calculated immediately after each visit.

**Analysis**

The analysis uses the Relational Pedagogy paradigm to interpret the case studies because Irish ECEC policy is moving towards a Relational Pedagogical approach (*The National Childcare Strategy 2000*, *Síolta* 2005).
In consequence it is worth examining to what extent RP approaches are in effect in Irish provision. Research in contemporary RP approaches involved both desk and field research. In order to see Relational Pedagogy in practice two site visits were conducted the first was to the integrated early years services in Norway (Field trip A) the second to the world-renowned pre-schools in Reggio Emilia (Field trip B). The outcome for the analysis of attending the *Professor and Student Study Visit* and exploring the *Reggio Children* phenomenon was to deepen Relational analysis for this thesis.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the value of ECERS/R/E as an international rating scale and its suitability as an assessment instrument for Irish pre-schools.

The emerging themes in *Aistear* - exploring and thinking, communicating, identity and belonging and wellbeing (*Aistear: NCCA 2009*) match well with the *ECERS/R/E*. In particular the extended scale had been revised in order to give higher marks to pre-schools where a balance of child-and adult-initiated activity is in evidence. Relational pedagogies and pedagogies where children’s individual and group learning needs are taken into consideration also score well on the scale.

The use of ECERS/R/E in the Irish case is justified as a means by which to find the level of environmental quality, albeit in a context where pedagogy is not regulated to the same degree as in the UK. The value of the rating scale is in its clarity, measurability and international application, as well as its capacity to work as a self-assessment and quality improvement tool. In this chapter the distinction between Irish pre-schools and the ECEC sector was demonstrated which, together with weak evidence of pedagogical awareness in current HSE data and records collection suggests that Irish pre-school pedagogy has no firm institutional base. This is further supported by
the various kinds of pre-school and ECEC provision revealed in the typology list illustrated in table six.

Against this environmental backdrop, situational samples have been used to augment the survey results with greater qualitative depth. The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings from this doctoral research is a valuable tool to add to the body of knowledge in terms of the strength and weakness of Irish Pre-school services. The findings are shown and analysed over the next two chapters.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL RATING SCALE/ REVISED

This section reports on the ECERS findings concerning seven categories the areas under examination include: Indoor space, Furniture for routine care play and learning, Furnishings for relaxation and comfort, Room arrangement for play, Space for privacy, Child related display and Space for gross motor play, gross motor equipment (Harms et al. 1998, pp. 9-11). It contrasts how ideas about space and furniture are understood in Irish policy and in Relational pedagogical practice as found in Reggio. The views of practitioners on converting a building, training, equipment and standards are reported.

Category One: Space and Furniture

Children must feel that the whole school, including the space, material and projects, values and sustains their interaction and communication (Rinaldi 1993, p. 36).

In different pedagogical practices, space and furnishings are thought of in different ways. For some they are basic amenities, for others they reflect a particular construction of what is deemed appropriate for child development. In tracing the use of space and furnishings in Irish pre-schools, three distinct phases are identified. These are:

1. The influence of theorists such as Frobel (in his Chief Writings on Education (1912)) and Montessori (in her Scientific Pedagogy as Applied to Child Education in the ‘Children’s Houses’ (1912)) on the use of space and the design of furniture for young children is immense. Their ideas have been advanced in the United States by John Dewey (in the School and Society and the Child and the Curriculum (1919)).
2. The expansion of Pre-schools in the 1960’s in *ad hoc* settings such as farmhouses to community centres on which current provision is founded (discussed in chapter two).

3. Finally, recent investment in Irish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) through Social Partnership processes over the past two decades along with Health Service Executive (HSE) inspection tools influences how space and furniture become visible in this research.

**First Kindergartens**

Froebel and Montessori’s ideas influence is immense on what is now regarded as suitable space and furnishing in pre-school. Froebel developed a radically new educational method and philosophy based on structured, activity based learning. He established his Play and Activity Institute, which he renamed in 1840 The Kindergarten. The Kindergarten essentially had three areas of curriculum: toys for sedentary creative play (these Froebel called gifts and occupations), games and dances for healthy activity and observation and nurturing plants in a garden in order to stimulate awareness of the natural world. The Kindergarten advanced the idea of children’s space being outdoors as much as indoors. The Kindergarten was both a garden for children, a location where they can observe and interact with nature and where they can grow and develop in freedom (Froebel 1912).

Montessori’s pedagogical method focused on the education of the senses with didactic material. Montessori understood the importance a good environment. She worked in conjunction with The Roman Association of Good Buildings to modernise the homes of the Italian poor living in slum conditions. The development of the ‘Children’s Houses’ (pre-school’s) were established within the new tenements. The houses directly modified the environment of children and made it possible in a practical way to implement the fundamental principles of Montessori’s scientific pedagogy.
A portion of the rent paid by tenants maintained the children’s houses. The service offered not only a safe place but also aimed to offer a place where children had “every advantage”. The chief aim was to offer “free of charge, to the children of those parents who are obliged to absent themselves for their work, the personal care which parents are not able to give” (Montessori 1912, p.70).

The influence of these European first Kindergartens influenced educationalists such as Dewey in the United States. He advanced the idea that children learn when their interests are stimulated and that children’s play is an important part of that learning. The importance of the various types of play such as imaginative play, constructive, creative play, messy and pretend play ideas, which have influenced how pre-schools are furnished and how space is used. Consequently, the home corner, sandpit and workbench are now a standard feature of Pre-school settings. After World War Two in Italy, Malaguzzi posited the importance of context, friendship and community in young children’s learning.

Montessori’s materials inspired many of the toy manufacturers who found a steady increase in sales for educational toys and furniture. One such company was the New York Toy Manufacturing Company Fisher-Price (established in 1930), which successfully sold toys and games to the general market. In 1960 it developed a special preschool range ‘Play Family’. This proved to be largely successful and the company continued its leadership in the million dollar infant and pre-school plaything market, achieving record sales into the mid-1990. On the decision to move into the production of outdoor playthings the president of the company James Eskridge said “We aren’t getting outside of what we do best: toys for children zero to five years of age” (Fisher Price 1994). Fisher Price saw outdoor play yard toys as a means of increasing its sales without the risk associated with diversification.
outside the infant and preschool toy category” (Fisher Price 1994). Other companies such as Lego, Playskool, and many wooden toy manufacturers benefited from the upsurge in the educational toy and pre-school furniture market.

**Space and Furniture in Irish Pre-school**

The mixture of buildings found in the random sample for this research includes community centres, private homes, converted garages, retail shopping centres, disused classroom and purpose built new buildings. In practice, the HSE inspection team governs how space is allocated in each setting. 28 days’ notice must be given to the Pre-school inspectorate before the commencement of a Pre-school service. “The HSE measure each room and fix the maximum number of Pre-school children each room can cater for” (Ireland, Department of Health and Children 2006, p.11). A ratio of one adult to eight children is set by the HSE for children aged between 3-6 years.

Grants to purchase equipment and furniture have been made available through the social partnership process. The majority of the pre-schools that hold a play pedagogical approach are furnished with the ‘Play Family’ type furniture and equipment. The Pre-school inspectorate check that the toys meet the Certification Experts (CE) certification which ensures that experts have identified hazards, assessed risks, carried out all applicable tests to determine the safety of the appliance or toy. Few groups (Pre-school 14, 21, 25 and 26) used equipment that is in any way different to this standard. Pre-school (14) is the Montessori School. The equipment used there in is the traditional Montessori equipment. The others are Montessori, HighScope and Reggio Emilia influenced in their pedagogical philosophy.

The next section reports on research findings concerning space and furniture as measured by the ECERS/R rating scale. Contrasts are made between
findings and Reggio practice and the chapter concludes with the views of practitioners relating to space and furniture.

Irish Findings for Space and Furnishings

![Category - Space & Furnishings](image)

Figure 7: Category One: Space and Furniture

Analysis of Space and Furniture: The overall category scored 3.98.

1. Indoor Space 4.62
In all but one setting the pre-school room amounts to one large room where everything happens, messy play, story time, artwork, dining, and mostly all activities are understood to be large group affairs. Some effort to section off some areas of play by the use of tables, bookshelf’s and curtains are found.
Only one group had an area capable of welcoming and maintaining the interaction of children in small groups. The groups did not reach a score of five (good) because “indoor space that allows adults and children to move around freely” (Harms et al. 1998, p.9) is not a feature of the majority of pre-schools.

2. Furniture for Routine Care, Play and Learning 6.35
This sub-measure scored well, largely due to funding (EOCP and NCIP) which has supported the purchase of pre-school furniture. This is one of the highest scores across all the sub-categories. The fact that adaptive furniture which permits inclusion of children with disabilities is found in most pre-schools is reflected in the scoring of over 5. A score of 7 was not achieved as Woodwork bench, sand/water table or easel use is limited in most groups. While some groups take out an easel and or sand/water table for part of the day this play is largely restricted to the first hour of ‘free play’ and due to the limited space is removed to make way for another activity as the morning progresses.

3. Furnishings for Relaxation and Comfort 2.96
This low score between 1 (inadequate) and 3 (minimal) reflects the fact that very few cosy areas were found. Pre-schools are modelled on classrooms. While some soft furnishings were found, in general pre-school classrooms are set up for children to play and work. A minimal score of 3 was not reached as groups do not have some soft furnishings, for example a soft carpeted play space with cushions. This emerges again in terms of a space for books to be read. The daily routine in pre-school does not allow for relaxation, the ideology that pre-school prepares children for ‘big school’ dominates. Consequently relaxation and comfort are not seen as a necessary feature. One pre-school (10) had a soft couch. The practitioner explained that it was part of a Drama Society prop. The Pre-school shared
the community hall and consequently had the use of it. However, it was due
to be removed in the near future as the Drama Society were returning it to its
owner. On the day of our visit the couch proved to be a great success as a
parent (in attendance to settle her child) sat in comfort and her child came to
join her on the couch for reassurance on several occasions.

4. Room Arrangement for Play 4.35
In order to achieve the full score, at least five different ‘interest centres’
(activity locations) must be recorded –labelled open shelves containing toys
must not be over crowded and additional materials available to add to or
change centres” (Harms et al. 1998, p.12). The 4.35 mark reflects that some
interest centres were available but on many occasions the overall
pedagogical approach revealed that practitioners encouraged all children to
do the same work as a group. Consequently the practitioner distributed the
work she prescribed according to her time schedule. As identified earlier,
the limited space available to create centers of interest where children can
independently use equipment is a drawback in room arrangement. While
some centres have labeled open shelving with play space near toy storage, in
general the leader decided the activity and the children followed, with the
exception of five playgroups (10, 12, 15, 23, 25) where children were
allowed to choose their own activities for a portion of the session.

5. Space for Privacy 2.62
–The intent of space for privacy is to give children relief from the pressures
of group life” (Harms et al. 1998, p. 13). The minimum standard was not
reached by the majority of pre-schools. Whether or not practitioners see the
need for children to have relief from the pressures of the group is
questionable. This low score is a result of a combination of lack of space
and no pedagogical belief in, or provision for, children requiring privacy and
peer interaction.
In practice, the complete opposite pedagogical approach is found. Practitioners supervise children at all times. This is reinforced in policy documents that suggest pre-school room lay-outs to “monitor” children at all times (Ireland, Department Justice Equality and Law Reform 2005, p.51). The children are not trusted to be alone or to play in pairs or small groups.

6. Child Related Display 3.69
Many centres had children’s pictures on display and much of the display related to current activities, in particular the seasons. However in order to score 5 many of the items had to be displayed at child’s eye level. In fact all of the displays were at adult eye level. The optimum score of 7 (excellent) required three dimensional child created work to be on display as well as flat work. On discussion with one practitioner (Pre-school 6) it was identified that the children had made paper maché busts of their own heads. However, in tidying up for the research visitors arrival the work had been stored away. Similarly in (Pre-school 16) the practitioner reported that up to the week prior to our arrival child related art work was on display. In preparation for the research team’s arrival, the manager of the Family Resource Centre FRC had commissioned her sister (a trainee teacher) to make a Spring theme display for the main wall. The display was a well crafted yellow themed depiction of lambs and daffodils mounted up very high. On both occasions we could not credit the practice with the higher scores.

7. Space for Gross Motor play 4.35
This measures both outdoor and indoor areas. A score of 5 (good) was not achieved as space is often tight and issues such as easy access to space that is on the same level and near the classroom was not found often enough to reach the score. The safety aspects of provision are all well met. A distinct lack of ease of movement between outdoor and indoor spaces was noted. On
several occasions it was noted that in order to access the outdoors, all children had to tidy up, put on coats, get in line, wait until doors were opened and on occasion walk from their building to another space. The ideal situation is that the doors to an outdoor garden can be left open so that children can decide to come and go as they please. On one occasion it was noted that a child was punished for being “bold” by not being allowed to play outside (Pre-school 18). Outdoor play being used as a reward to the group for being “good” was noted twice (Pre-schools 12 and 15).

8. Gross Motor Equipment 2.88
Most groups did not score past 3 as 3.1 required that some gross motor equipment accessible to all children – “For programmes of 4 hours or less, at least half an hour of access is required” (Harms et al. 1998, p.16). Examples of gross motor equipment included swings, slides, balls, ropes etc. both indoor and outdoor. Due to weather conditions many groups did not venture outside. One group (Pre-school 10) working in a large community hall provided indoor gross motor activities for up to thirty minutes. Both stationary and portable motor equipment are recommended. All groups that offered outside play had stationery equipment, swings and slides. However only two pre-schools (14 and 23) had outside portable equipment, i.e. bikes, tumble mats, jump ropes etc. The overall result shows that the investment in pre-school structures and equipment is evident.

Reggio Emilia theories on Space and Furniture
In contrasting elements of Reggio Emilia with pre-school provision evidenced during the field research issues of room layout, standardisation of services, inspection, furnishings, and outdoor space are considered. In Reggio Emilia, space is seen as an essential element of educational approach. Specifically, the Reggio philosophy introduces two areas as vital in the pre-school setting the piazza (centre of activity) and the atelier (the workshop). The piazza communal space is not part of the classroom, or
dining area. Where possible it is surrounded by windows. Parents and visiting groups can meet in this area, where refreshments are available and opportunities to engage in discussion can happen. *Atelier* (the workshop) is part of the classroom. In essence, the *atelier* is an area where materials and projects can be worked on over a period. The materials include not only traditional ‘make and do’ materials but also materials that would be regarded as dangerous in other pedagogical approaches, such as hammers, nails, glass, wire, and tweezers, a place children can use technology e.g. shadows, to make a virtual environment. The dangerous aspects of the environment are not hidden; rather they are exposed and explored. No equivalent space exists in Irish Pre-schools for comparative analysis.

The kitchen is not sectioned off as a dangerous part of a separate world. Children observe food preparation and the smells of cooking are experienced, which makes for a homely and familiar atmosphere. Figure eight below displays the layout of a typical setting. In this case the setting is an integrated service which caters for nursery as well as Pre-school. Small group work as well as large group gatherings are catered for. Sleep, class, dining, areas are all-important and capable of welcoming and maintaining the interaction of children. Such spaces allow co-operative work and the option to share with others the work done. Space for children is seen as a crucial part of the Reggio Pedagogy. A parent of a child attending a Reggio school described the essential architectural features as defined by the Reggio approach as ‘circularity, transparency, access to the outside from each classroom and the *piazza*’ (Hunter 2001, p. 41). She goes on to commend the flexible entry and leaving times as offering an opportunity to chat and exchange information.
Irish discourse on Space and furniture

Ireland is at a different stage in providing space and furniture in pre-school settings. The Irish discourse is concerned with issues of development. In *We like this Place: Guidelines for Best Practice in the Design of Childcare Facilities* (Ireland, Department Justice Equality and Law Reform, 2005) the main focus deals with issues pertaining to planning for building rather than pedagogy. For example issues of planning permission, site service size, estimate cost of purpose building childcare facility where no building exists, choosing colours, building conversion and many aspects of building legislation are described in terms of how design relates to development. The guidelines suggest that messy play *may* be provided, while the role of the adult is to monitor the children.

All rooms must be designed specifically to support children's stage of development. Separate arts/messy play area may be provided for communal use. Construction of low walls or partitions helps to create different environments and allows staff to monitor easily the
children, without being intrusive (Government Ireland, Department Justice Equality and Law Reform 2005, p.51).

In all but one of the groups visited, pre-school takes place in one big room. See figure nine below. The room is often sectioned off into various corners, home, messy play, book etc. Snack time requires a clean-up to wipe down the tables the children work at. Then a waiting period while the snack is being brought to the tables, after the food, activities re-start. Kitchens are out of bounds to children.

Pobal, the state agency, uses the term “childcare provider” to describe the role of practitioners with responsibility for ECEC expansion, which indicates the many roles involved. In Ireland not only does a practitioner run a pedagogical service but she is likely to also be involved in many aspects of provision for example, funding applications, building construction, ownership of property, working as part of a fundraising committee, dealing with leasing agreements. It was noted that these duties have been observed happening during the session counting money and taking telephone calls (Pre-school 5).
Reggio and Irish practice contrasted

A myriad of agendas govern the labour and work of the Irish practitioner. The Reggio Emilia practitioner, in contrast, is not task loaded. Rather, he or she is a professional pedagogue who is concerned with the issues of the child and the family.

In Reggio there is an understanding that how services are designed and furnished is somewhat standardised. "A parent enrolling a child in one or another group can expect to find a commonality in how space is used and furnished from one service to another” (Hunter 2001, p.39). There is great variation in terms of furniture and room layout in the Irish system. Newly built services all had individual architectural design; older buildings were more likely to be converted garages or community centres.
A case in point is pre-school 12, a Family Resource Centre (FRC), which runs a crèche, afterschool and pre-school. It is an award winning design. The service evolved from a traditional rural community pre-school to a fuller service. Capital and employment Equal Opportunity Childcare Fund (EOCP) grant aid has supported its development. The FRC also offers FAS training opportunities. The Pre-school’s curriculum is play based and influenced by HighScope. This service is an example of how financial investment without pedagogical awareness resulted in a building that meets the needs of the children poorly. It was noted that during the ‘do’ phase, when children play freely that few toys were available for the children to use. Later it was noted that toys and equipment were not offered to the children although they were in a locked cupboard. This re-emerged as a theme during the data collection. Whether it is lack of awareness or practitioners not knowing how to use the equipment the reason is unclear. During the ‘review’ phase of the session, the soft voices of the children were hard to hear because of the ambience. The building attached to a catholic church has ‘award winning’ high cathedral ceilings and windows with eight fluorescent sensory lights which automatic light if people are in the room. The room has state of the art equipment and furniture. It is large with marmoleum floors, which the manager has decided militates against the use of sand, which ‘would destroy the marmoleum’. Consequently, no sand is available for the children to play with. This illustrates both bad planning and bad pedagogy. The concept of parish pedagogy is evident here in terms of the variety of space and furnishings found and the strong connection to the place the Pre-school is located.

The Reggio group’s self-inspect for safety, health; hygiene and pedagogy; groups plan and self-govern their curriculum. They are not inspected by anyone else in terms of pedagogy. The buildings are inspected by outside agencies for building regulations and standard compliance, as are all public
buildings. In contrast, the Irish Pre-school Inspectorate inspect for all aspects of building regulations, safety, health and hygiene, as well as children’s well-being. Safety standards and technical data requirements exist for Reggio schools. The designers of these buildings consider such requirements as a basis for the creation of an environment in which children live and learn. In Reggio, the furnishings stay the same throughout the day in the main room. Children are not constrained to stay there (in one room) all day. Other places include the dining room, the piazza square, or the atelier. The atelier would be regarded as a danger zone by the inspectorate as hammers and nails are available for children to use. In the study cohort children are constrained to spending the entire morning in the same room for all activities.

All Reggio buildings have outdoor spaces attached to pre-school rooms in keeping with the European Kindergarten tradition. The outdoor space is incorporated into the room whereby children can choose to play outside or inside. This happens because the design allows double doors to open out into the garden from the pre-school room. This is a different door than the entrance door by which the children enter the building. In the average family home, it relates to the sliding door to the garden. Outdoor covered canopies allow for storage of outdoor equipment and provide shade. The outdoor play equipment is not limited to swings and roundabouts. Messy play sand, water, and nature activities such as planting and caring for birds are part of the pedagogical approach.

In Ireland five pre-schools (1, 12, 18, 23 and 24) offered this type ‘outside inside’ design. Eight pre-schools (5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17 and 22) did not have outdoor play on offer. However, pre-schools 13 and 17 were in the process of building outdoor facilities.
The Reggio philosophy holds as crucial that children be made visible in the community. Children have exhibited in art galleries and are encouraged to be visible in the town. This is achieved by taking the children to important places in the town such as the municipal meeting rooms. A belief that all civic places in the community ought to be suitable for children has led to projects which advance the visibility of young children. Children are taken to the city council meeting room and civic groups can equally go into the schools. The *piazza* is a suitable place for such events. The Reggio philosophy sees that children's culture can be legitimised by introducing them into places of high culture.

The Irish debate on provision of outdoor space is concerned with issues that are more basic. In *Planning Now, for the Future* a coalition of organisations seeking to advance early years education have called on the Government to—Amend the Childcare (Pre-School Services) Regulations to require all early care and education services to have – or have access to – outdoor play areas” (Start Strong 2010, p.16). Reggio ECEC services and Irish services demonstrate considerable differences in terms of room layout, standardisation of services, inspection, furnishings and outdoor space.

**The practitioner’s Perspectives**

Increased government funding has enhanced the provision of space and practitioners acknowledge this. The practitioners who addressed the issue during interviews highlighted that what appears is not always a true indicator of quality:

On equipment:

**Interviewee:** There are new centres opening up of very high quality. Centres got a lot of funding over the last few years, so a lot

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13 Another example of a project that brought the children and the teachers together to explore the city both without and with rain is discussed in category 10 (Science and Environment).
of the centres are of very high standard and very well equipped and their staff very well trained.
(Pre-school 3)
On converting building:

**Interviewer:** So you physically reformed this building that was your mother’s bakery?

**Interviewee:** Yes ‘twas a garage first then it was a bakery and then we turned it into the school. The only thing is I’d love if it was a little bit bigger space wise, like a lobby area, just more space for things, but sure.

**Interviewer:** What would you do if you had more space?

**Interviewee:** I’d knock that wall and maybe have another toilet I’d put a lobby area from the toilets to the room.

**Interviewer:** an area to change the wind from the toilet area?

**Interviewee:** Yea, I’d have an area for the parents that they could look in and wouldn’t be standing out in the rain (Pre-school 2).

On standards:

**Interviewee:** The Health Board Inspection teams were brought in to check on all pre-schools and crèches to see that thing were done right. But they are more concerned with your premises and how it looks and whether you have the right lighting and the right heat on. Granted that is all important but there are other things within your three hours. What you would do, what you produce with the children, what they learn, what they sing.

I think there is a huge emphasis on work that is not necessarily important. I would be more in agreement with children slopping with water and playing with sand. I’d say it’s a very mixed bag the
standard is very mixed because we don’t have a standard (Preschool 5).

Here the practitioner (a graduate herself) describes her experience of standing in for a supervisor

**Interviewee:** One experience I had when I was covering for her just broke me. It was the very limited amount of toys that the children had to play with. Then, I was sweeping up the floor and there was a cabinet that was never ever moved so I twisted it and it was actually a row of toys that had been pushed into the wall and I was there four weeks and I had never ever seen them. I thought it was a shelf that you put stuff on top of it was a cabinet of toys pushed into the wall.

**Interviewer:** And have you seen good practice in Ireland?
Oh I have yea I have but am it’s just a lack of vision, it’s just unfortunate that we don’t have a curriculum to follow
(Pre-school 10)

**Conclusion**

Issues of expansion have dominated the modern Irish discourse on space and furniture in terms of pedagogy. With a few exceptions, furnishings are sourced from Fisher-Price or similar sources. While these provide the optimum in safety and are developed with play, sharing, and school preparation in mind, they are not tools associated with any particular pedagogical philosophy.

The issue of protecting the marmoleum floor illustrates that finance invested without a national view of how pre-schools ought to be designed and furnished is at the very least the wrong sequential order.
Clearly the use of space and furniture in Irish provision needs to be addressed. Central to the improving standards is how space is allocated. The Pre-school Inspectorate fixes the maximum number of pre-school children each room is permitted to cater for. This needs to be reviewed as good pedagogical provision requires more space than is currently found in this study. As no mandatory training is required or those providing and inspecting ECEC services it is hard to imagine how improvements of a pedagogical nature may come about. This is in clear contrast with the lack of inspection in the Reggio Emilia approach by outside inspectors. Instead, each pedagogical practice is inspected in "many ways" through collegial reflexive practice.

The use of the word "policing" by a practitioner in terms of how the new ECCE scheme will be implemented is telling. It conveys a sense power and dominance by an external force with the power to punish. This mirrors the panopticon nature of the stated government policy. Government publications advising practitioners of ways to "monitor the children" have missed the essence of an approach that places children in the centre of their own learning.

The disciplinary nature of power by an authority is central in the post modern discourse (See Foucault). If Ireland was to follow the Reggio method in this instance it would involve a significant paradigm shift whereby there would be a major power transference from an inspection of HSE officials to empowering practitioners to analyse their own day-to-day work.

Irish practitioners have shown their flexible nature and ability to be actively engaged with social partnership. They have proven to be trustworthy with funding and providing services, albeit by adapting their homes and local
community centres. A new challenge now faces the sector; the achievement of effective pre-school standards. The need for strong local governance and specialist staff trained in Early Childhood is necessary. This has been identified as part of a ten year action plan currently proposed by a coalition in the field of Early Childhood:

[T]he overall responsibility for policy is of course at national level, but implementation should be managed at local level. What matters here is less the precise body chosen for the role, than the principle of decentralisation and the inclusion in local structures of specialist staff with experience in ECCE (Start Strong 2010, p. 33).

The expansion of pre-school services has seen the public and voluntary sector enjoy enormous growth. The construction and toy manufacturing industry also benefitted. If pre-school is to be a site for equal opportunities, it is important that all children enjoy spaces that are well furnished. Practitioners also ought to enjoy their day-to-day labour and work in a collegial fashion in a space that meets their professional needs.

Many practitioners are aware that there is more to providing quality care than just developing ‘childcare places’. It is clear that professionally and intuitively practitioners realise that the inspection of services that values ‘whether you have the right lighting and the right heat on’ is not a comprehensive measure of quality. Yet, on an inspection with a narrow remit, all seems well. The practitioners report that the emphasis of inspection is misplaced on measurable elements. What are not measured are the more intuitive pedagogical issues of practice such as listening to children, encouraging children to form friendships and encouraging children to express themselves.
Category Two: Personal Care Routines

The essence of a care dynamic to a perceived or inferred need is the response of the practitioner to be present for the child (Noddings 2002, p.45)

The six sub-categories under examination are; Greeting and departure, Meals and Snacks, Nap/Rest, Toileting and diapering, Health Practices, Safety practices. This measure reports on the ECERS/R findings and contrasts how ideas about how documentation are understood in Irish policy and in Reggio Emilia. Practitioner’s views on care routines concerning snack time and on pedagogical qualifications are reported.

Care theory and Relational Pedagogy

The roots of care theory, like that of education, are found in philosophical questions of moral reasoning, moral education and theories of justice. Current theories of care draw a clear distinction between “care as a virtue and care as an attribute of relation” (Noddings 2002, p. 29). Traditionally care is associated with virtue, kindness and goodness. Strong religious Christian overtones concerning morals and rights dominate the literature on ethics of care. Traditionally ethics of care focused on high end moral issues, such as fairness, famine etc. at a philosophical level. This measure is concerned with care as an attribute of a relationship, the caring for which is also known as natural caring. Traditionally less emphasis has been placed on its value, as it was associated with the work of domestic slaves and women (see Arendt 1958).

The essence of a care dynamic to a perceived or inferred need is the response of the practitioner to be present for the child (see Noddings 2002). Expressed needs are generally expressed by a cue from the child. Inferred needs do not find expression in a cue from the child. The simplicity of the message must not in any way diminish the skill involved by the practitioner in just ‘being there’ for the child.
The early texts on pedagogy outline the importance of familiarity with the child and his or her family. Rousseau’s observations of a child called Sophie show that he was familiar with her likes and dislikes; she liked “dairy products and sugared things, gaiety is natural to her” (Rousseau 1979, p.394). On Sophie’s attention to cleanliness he notes “The result is that to do what she does well is only the second of her cares, the first is always to do it cleanly” (Rousseau 1979, p.395). This knowing and relating to the individual child continues to be a key factor in caring for children.

The energy of the ‘carer‘ towards the ‘cared for‘ has been defined as “motivational displacement” (Noddings 2002, p.17). This concept is best described as the practitioner standing beside the child offering a supportive presence, a nod, a smile (this may be without talk). It is as if the practitioner, by her very presence, helps the child to a place of knowledge.

Motivational displacement builds on Vygotsky theory of the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky 1981, p.137). This attempts to describe the intellectual space between the learner and the practitioner. The theory holds that adults provide a child with ‘scaffolding‘ e.g. supports of familiar repetition, only possible in that individual child’s context that helps direct their cognitive development, within a cultural context.

Dunphy’s research suggests that “authentic assessment reflects new understandings about learning and about human development, and recognises the holistic, contextualised and dynamic nature of learning in early childhood” (NCCA 2008, p.21). In practice, this involves the practitioner understanding the nature of the child and having familiarity with the family and culture.
This category is concerned how the children are cared for and how they are supported to self-efficacy. The combination of intellectual and manual work associated with this measure calls on practitioners to be mutable across a range of issues from meeting the emotional needs of a child and comply with HSE standards in sanitary, health and safety practices. Issues of how practitioners relate to children, in terms of knowing their individual needs, the capacity to empathise and motivate as well as the skill required to perceive unspoken cue’s from children are key to good practice concerning the issues involved in this measure.

The current discourse in Irish pre-school is concerned with the ‘split system’ between care and education (OECD 2004 and Hayes 2003). Hitherto, pre-school has been understood to provide children with simple pre-primary school activities and real learning would not occur until primary school. Relational pedagogical practices challenge this idea.

The next section reports on research findings concerning personal care routines. The issue of nap/rest is not applicable in the Irish context due to the sessional nature of Pre-school provision and this sub-set is the only set that was left blank.
Irish Findings for Personal Care Routines

Figure 10: Category Two: Personal Care Routines

Analysis of Personal Care Routines: The overall result for Personal Care Routines this category is 4.56.

Greeting and departure 4.54
Greetings and departures were generally positive in that each child is greeted individually by the practitioner using the child’s own name. The overall score is between minimum and good. Two issues prevented settings reaching higher scores. Parents are often left waiting outside until children come out of the building. On many occasions children were observed spending long waiting times with their coats on, awaiting collection, without activity.
The research was conducted as the ECCE scheme was introduced. Consequently, eight occurrence of children’s ‘first day’ in pre-school was observed. No specific introductions or system of settling in new children was noted. In pre-school eight it was noted twice that the practitioner called out to the assistant on two occasions — ‘What’s the new girls name again?’ During discussion the practitioner was asked if a system to settle in new children existed her response was — ‘Ah sure, they all know one another here’ (Pre-school 8).

No policy on parents participation exist. In one pre-school the practitioner did not meet or greet parents, when asked about this she said — ‘I just want to work with the children. Meeting parents: that's what I have staff for’” (Pre-school 19).

**Meals and Snacks 2.65**

Each setting had individual arrangements for snack time. Some said prayers, a couple had a rota of children’s involvement in passing out food. Yet the score is less than minimal. Although attempts to maintain sanitary conditions were made in most settings, for example tables wiped down, children wash hands. In many settings tables were not wiped down, lunch boxes were taken from the floor and placed on the table. It is not possible to score above five (good) unless practitioners sit with children during meals and group snack (only on two occassions did this happen).

In pre-school (25), which professed to use the Reggio approach, the practitioner seemed to know that a protocol around discussion was inherent in the pedagogy. It was noted that after the children sat for their snack the practitioner told the children from a distance, — ‘Sit down now, have a polite conversation with one another, as if you are in a restaurant” (Pre-school 25). Yet she did not make herself present or available to the children.
Research in health and hygiene has drawn a strong and positive relationship between the health status of children and their ability to learn: “Dietary patterns influence short term memory attention span, analytical abilities and social and emotional functions” (Williams et al. 1992, p. 332). These factors are vital to development. In one setting where children from designated areas of socio-economic disadvantage attend the snack was provided; Rice Krispies and milk. The issue of whether children brought their own snacks or the service provided the snack emerged as a possible way for practitioners to charge more for the services. “€75 is what I am charging now and I was hoping to charge €10 for the snack and for the extra half hour” (Pre-school 4).

Nap/Rest
For programmes of 4 hours or less that do not provide a nap or rest, this item is not scored.

Toileting and diapering 5.85
No diapering was observed. The overall score between good and excellent is testimony to the investment and supervision by Pre-school inspections teams in making sanitary conditions adequate. Toilet schedules tend to have children take turns and wait in line just before snack time, incorporating hand washing into the system.

Health Practices 4.54
The score is on the higher end of minimal to good. Anti-bacterial soap, disposable towels and luke warm water feature in all settings. Issues to develop self efficacy in children, for example children having instruction on techniques to put on own coat or apron, are not a common feature of provision. The practice of putting on coats is a task preformed by
practitioners or assistants. Children being encouraged to use a technique of putting the coat on independently was observed in one setting.

**Safety practices 5.15**
The score between good and excellent is a result of very safe pre-school provision. Excellent record keeping, and play areas arranged to avoid safety problems. It is not possible to score 5.2 unless practitioners Relational pedagogical practice such as –“staff explain reasons for safety rules to children” (Harms *et al*. 1998, p.22 ). The score reflects a high level of discussion and reasoning about safety rules.

**The Pre-school Inspectorate’s role in Personal Care Practice**
In Ireland after a decade of monitoring pre-schools, it was noted that, in practice, inspections varied from district to district. This, along with the outstanding issue of child wellbeing and development hitherto not explicit in the regulations, was addressed. A *Standardised Inspection Tool (SIT)* (HSE 2006) was developed. The inspection tool gathers data on eight areas of concern; Management and staffing, Information on health, Welfare and development of the child, Information on premises and facilities, Information on safety measures, Information on food and drink and Information on records. The inspection tool pays much attention to the measures of concern in personal care routines. The HSE’s standardised inspection tool is applied much the same way as the ECERS tool by the inspector visiting the pre-school for the duration of the session. It differs in that the inspectors arrive unannounced and examine in detail the record keeping, temperatures etc. The tool has the capacity to ascertain an overall picture of the setting through a tick box system rendering provision compliant or not.
The SIT captures a picture of safety, health and hygiene provision, yet does not have the progressive feature to move provision towards improvements. This, along with the lack of an agreed pedagogical practice underpins the weakness of the SIT. The SIT is used in a hierarchical system of seeing and recording precisely what practitioners are doing in Pre-school. The inspectorate holds the power to close the Pre-school, if it deems the practice non-compliant.

Because the regulations in pre-school are implemented by an inspectorate without pedagogical qualifications or specialties in the field of Early Childhood practitioners find inspections problematic. This occurs when practitioners are asked to justify their daily timetable and issues of pedagogical choices and pedagogical ideologies. The inspectorate holds statutory powers with power to shut down pre-schools services. This can be contrasted to the world of the practitioner whose service is monitored. It evokes ideas concerning Foucault's theory on 'descending individualism' which holds that individuals at a lower point on the socio-economic scale are likely to be closely observed. Overall this measure concerning personal care routines scored second highest of the eleven measures. This relatively high score can be attributed to the intense attention by the inspectorate on the measurable items contained within. The inspectorate is comfortable with a medical hygienic model yet issues of Relational pedagogy are relatively more challenging concept and not measured by the tool.

**Documentation across Reggio and Irish practice**
Pre-school practice is documented in different ways in Reggio and Irish Practice. Documentation in Reggio is part of self-reflective practice. In Ireland, its function is to prove compliance to the SIT.

In Reggio documentation is understood in a radically different way; the practitioner documents what children say and do. It can be described as
taking a verbal picture or freezing a moment. This is followed by reflection on the occurrence to deconstruct the language used and the attitudes noted. Teachers working within this Post-modern paradigm are concerned with becoming ‘critical reflective practitioners’. For example, they have an interest in questions of knowledge and power. Specifically, they ask how particular ideas and ideologies come to dominate our understandings of and actions in the social world and contribute to inequities in it. Ideology is seen as the shared sets of ideas that guide our actions and enable us to justify them. — By inserting the ‘critical’ into reflective practice therefore links education to a wider social project to create social justice and emancipation and freedom for all through education” (McNaughton 2005, p. 3).

Pre-schools that practice critical reflective practice can be seen as sites to bring about democratic change. For example, practitioners can challenge social norms, by not accepting them. Books and storytelling can be used to question issues of fairness, equity and truth. Moreover, documentation can be used as part of a critical pedagogical approach shared within the pre-school between staff to develop curriculum, and projects. It is a written reflection by the teacher that captures the work, language, and desires of the child. Observations by the teacher serve to plan the curriculum that is varied and fluid, creating new compositions instead of repeating old patterns and traditions. Documentation gives practitioners the opportunity to pause, write, reflect and develop narratives about their work and to share with colleagues. It is a way of professionally growing. — From this perspective documentation becomes a form of visualization which brings forces and energies that can open up to new possibilities, to the possibility of transformations – to difference” (Dahlberg et al. 2005, p.119).

Documentation in Ireland is understood in terms of keeping records in order to be compliant with statutory regulations. The SIT is concerned with a wide
range of issues such as management and staffing. This requires documentation showing training levels and compliance with Companies act and so on. Premises and facilities; require documentation on issues of cleaning schedules, fire safety compliance. Safety measures; records of fire drills and for Food and drink; the pre-school must be registered in accordance with Hygiene of Foodstuffs Regulations 2006. Finally, in terms of the Health Welfare and Development of child, information on programmes of care which set out a daily and weekly routing must be inspected. Thus, curricula are planned with no space for emergent curriculum that may arise because of listening to the children. In terms of recording pedagogical approaches, records that show “Key observations of care procedures, behaviour management, interactions, activities and children’s responses” (HSE 2006, p.18) must be available for the inspectorate to see. Inspection for this measure in the absence of an agreed pedagogical approach is an empty exercise.

It has been established now that the role of the practitioner varies greatly between Reggio and Ireland. This has a profound impact on the capacity of practitioners to relate to children in their care. In the Irish case the use of one large room results in practitioners spending large amounts of time cleaning up from one activity in order to move to the next. The burden of the cleaning usually falls to the pre-school assistant thus reinforcing a further hierarchical of division of labour. Children spend long periods of time waiting in addition to drifting aimlessly during the scene changes that are a feature of provision. This stands in contrast to the Reggio set up where the cook prepares a healthy snack, children are called to dine together, with their practitioner who sits and enjoys conversations and encourages children to talk about events of the day. Auxiliary cleaning staff ensures a high standard of cleanliness.
Reggio has evolved and been established over 60 years, IPPA over 40 years and Irish government expansion of services over 20 years. Consequently, Reggio has had more time to perfect their pedagogical approach. Irish curricular frameworks background documents attest the emergence of Relational pedagogical policies. The workforce development paper acknowledges the need to “to add value to childcare places created under the capital and infrastructural development programmes” (Workforce Development Plan DES 2009, p.6). Relational pedagogical theory is reflected in a background paper commissioned by the NCCA: “The quality of children's interactions with adults and the environment plays an important part in the quality of their learning at all ages” (Hayes 2007, p. 3).

Reggio, with its established pedagogical practice, is mature, post-modern in its attitude to power and knowledge, and confident enough to be self-reflexive and questioning of ideologies by comparison. Over the past sixty years, structural issues of buildings, finance and employment have matured to a place where the focus of the practitioner's attention can be fully devoted to the child.

Practitioners Views
Practitioners take a mixed view on the new inspection regime. Some see it as an improvement that benefits children, while others see the fundamental lack of pedagogical approach at the root of the inspection dilemma. Furthermore, issues of mixed pedagogical practice as well as unreliable qualifications are cited as problematic in the standardisation of Pre-school services:

On the inspection of Pre-schools:

**Interviewee:** The HSE was great you know they get you to pull your socks up where needed. The kids are benefiting really (Pre-school2)
On the inspection of Pre-school curriculum:

Interviewee: This is my third year working with County Childcare on that curriculum. But you see the first year I was here you could have done anything with the children you know you could have come in today and thought what we will do today you know? But now you have to know what you are doing.

Interviewer: Is anybody going to come in to spot check that you are doing it?

Interviewee: Oh the Health Board they can arrive any minute and check the curriculum that is the first thing they do they go to the wall there and then they look for your folders say in that press there I have the last three years work and plus this year we had them in May this year they just arrive two of them they come in – they could be here for the whole day and for my curriculum this year she also looked for last years and she picked out certain weeks of this year and weeks of last year just to make sure they were not corresponding.

Interviewer: And…

Interviewee: They were not the same (Pre-school 1).

This practitioner outlines how in her district —you have to know what you are doing” in terms of curriculum and must be —doing it” when the pre-school inspectorate arrive. Here we find evidence of a mind-set that sees curriculum as linear, and agreed in advance. The emergent curriculum which is child led is not accommodated in this structure. Moreover being inspected for written evidence that curriculum is changed and not corresponding to the same as last year shows mistrust that practitioners would just repeat previous work is a level of micro-management which does not recognise the practitioner as an independent professional.
On socialisation at lunch time and internal policy

 Interviewee: the only time we tell them to sit down is for lunch but that is kind of society, to sit down and talk to your friends to be part of it but now we do find with the fast eaters that’s fine but with the slow eaters they are bored stiff – then we introduce going over to the library corner for a few seconds, that’s something I discourage because they get the idea that’s just something we do to pass the time we have only read three pages and now we have to go outside – but that’s something we have to fix. But the only time they are asked to sit down in the day is lunchtime and then another time it’s their choice, we have some kids and they have lots done, but that is what it is it’s choice, its independence do as much as possible (Pre-school 10).

This practice is run by a graduate with international pedagogical experience. Here we evidence the practitioner and staff in discussion on a pedagogical approach concerning their practice. While the aim of their pedagogy is underpinned by wanting to encourage independence they are observing, listening and adapting to make the service better through observation and discussion.

On unreliable qualifications

 Interviewee: I came back to Ireland ten years ago all these preschools were set up all over the place. I was kind of shocked really to find that all these people were doing these very short courses and setting up quite big schools. Some of them were being operated as Montessori schools and they weren’t and I thought there was a lot of ignorance around and it was playing on people – parents ignorance charging a lot of money they really were not trained they would not be accepted in England. I know that when I set up in
England the girl I went into business with she was very well qualified she had been to college did a year’s certificate course – but she wasn’t allowed to be the leader of the school when we set up. Because they felt that she was not qualified enough, but over here you could do a very quick course and set up a pre-school (Pre-school 18).

This practitioner brought a special perspective to Irish ECCE as she had trained in Canada. She then worked in England. She brought an international perspective describing above how she looked for a pre-school place for her own child.

**Conclusion**

In this study, one pre-school (7) had auxiliary cleaning and cooking staff to support the practitioner to be present and available for the children. The current role of the Irish practitioner includes a variety of tasks, cleaning, housekeeping, building management etc. It is acknowledged that children ought to be cared for in clean environments and are encouraged towards self-efficacy in hygiene practices such as toileting, self-care, hygiene and diet. In practice, few supports exist to allow the practitioner sufficient time to engage individually with the child. The mixture of ECEC expansion programmes, investment and inspection of pre-school services have contributed to the personal care routines sub-category scoring well. It also exposes a considerable level of poor practice in terms of how children’s relational needs are met, (although practitioners are well intentioned). Issues of child staff ratio and workloads affect how the adult can get to know each child.

If theories of care which require the practitioner to be disposed to the needs of children are to be implemented, ways to provide opportunity for
Practitioners the time and space to do so are necessary. The findings reveal that practitioners in this study held advanced diplomas and some had full degrees in ECEC or equivalent, reflecting the national pattern where the workforce is becoming better qualified. While background papers on ECEC curriculum development look towards Relational pedagogical provision, they fall short of calling for Practitioners to become Critical Reflective Practitioners. Existing social partnership structures, which have swelled the administrative and inspection sector have a lot to lose in terms of power, influence and above all their very jobs should Practitioners analyse too much and seek to monitor their own pedagogical practice. The ‘split system’ between care and education is shifting, where it shifts to will depend on who pushes and in what direction.

**Category Three: Language and Reasoning**

We say of an ox, what would he be if he knew his strength? and I say of man, what would he be if he [wholly] knew his power of speech and [wholly] used it? (Pestalozzi J.H., 1894 eds. P 201)

This category is concerned with how the pre-school encourages children to communicate. Four sub scales are measured; Books and pictures, Encouraging children to communicate, Using language to develop reasoning skills and Informal use of language. Theories on how educators and philosophers have come to understand how children learn these skills are discussed. The Irish ECERS/R/E results are analysed. The listening pedagogy of Reggio is compared with the practice found in Irish pre-schools and finally a situation sampling called ‘A little bird told me’ provides a practice insight in this vital area of Relational pedagogical application.
Theories on Language and Reasoning

The development of theories on language and reasoning has interested philosophers and educationalists through the centuries. The discourse includes, Leisure and wisdom, Parental example, Teaching of morals, The object lesson, Gifts and occupations, Scientific pedagogy to a modern day paradigm that recognises the role of the child in its own learning. These philosophical thoughts have filtered like threads through the ages.

From Plato to Piaget to the present a quest for how children develop reasoning and language has interested philosophers and educators. Plato took the view that;

Leisure is essential to wisdom, which will therefore not be found among those who have to work for their living, but only among those who have independent means, or who are relieved by the state from anxieties as to their subsistence (Russell, 1982.p181).

Locke (1632-1704) believed that a child‘s language and reasoning is determined by his education and experience – so parents must instruct children in self-denial and discipline. This approach was based on the fundamental belief that the child had been born with original sin and the aim was to make a perfect moral being. Locke‘s theory of learning held that skills and knowledge are acquired by example and practice rather than forcing children to learn by rote and with stern rules. In terms of power he posited –Parental power is nothing but that, which parents have over their children, to govern them for the children’s good, till they come to the use of reason, or a state of knowledge” (Locke, 2005.p 381).

During the Reformation and Counter Reformation, the moral development of the child dominated educational thought. Rousseau posited that children had an intuitive knowledge of right and wrong, but society interferes with
the natural development. Rousseau published important works on politics, music and in 1762; he published *Emile*, which mainly focused on the education of boys. Strict discipline and rote learning were not part of his educational theory. While such theories from the Continent were of interest to the liberal minded classes Rousseau’s revolutionary political ideas and his rejection of original sin made his writings unacceptable to conservatives” (Whitbread, 1972, p. 17). Although Rousseau had several children, they were raised by others. Both Locke and Rousseau came to their philosophical beliefs through speculation they did not have any direct involvement with children.

In Switzerland Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi had become disillusioned when he tried to use the Emilian principles with his own son. He developed the ‘object lesson’ to encourage studying objects in their natural environment that involved exercises in learning form, number and language. In *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (1801) he developed his ‘doctrine of Anschauung” (Pestalozzi, 1894 eds, p 217). This involved direct concrete observation which led to ‘object lessons' which encouraged the teacher or parent to ‘teach by things’. He promoted the use of the senses in teaching, as well as the power of imagination and judgment; he posited that the child must not only be able early to call a round or square thing, round or square, but he must, as soon as possible, be impressed with the idea of roundness or squareness as a unity, as a pure abstraction” (Pestalozzi, 1894 eds, p. 207). On language;

Language is an art it is an infinite art, or rather it is the sum total of all arts, which our race has reached. It is in a special sense, a giving-back of all impressions that nature, as a whole, has made upon our race. Thus I use it, and try by the associations of its spoken sounds to bring back to the child the very same impressions, which these sounds formed and gave rise to in the
human race. The gift of speech is infinite in itself, and becomes
daily greater as it ever grows more perfect. It gives the child in a
short time, what nature needed ages, to give to mankind. We say
of an ox, what would he be if he knew his strength? and I say of
man, what would he be if he [wholly] knew his power of speech
and [wholly] used it? (Pestalozzi, 1894 eds, p. 201).

Friedrich Froebel was trained by Pestalozzi. He advanced teaching
philosophies and developed links with parents and pedagogues in Europe
and Great Brittan. An Irishman John Synge had taken the _grand tour_ of
Europe and met Pestalozzi. He was interested on the welfare of the tenants
of the estate he was about to inherit. After three months at the Pestalozzi
Institute in Switzerland, he became convinced that the philosophy was
worthwhile. On his return to he opened an elementary school in Co.
Wicklow (See Whitbread, 1972). Froebel opened the first Kindergarten at
Keilhau Germany in 1837. He developed Pestalozzi's philosophy furthering
the concept _of a child centred approach_. He introduced the pedagogy of
_gifts_ and _occupations_. Gifts are objects or things given to the child such
as a piece of equipment to help them understand shapes, sizes and
dimensions. Occupations are items such as paint, clay, or art and craft
materials, which encourage the child to externalise ideas existing in their
own minds.

During the late Nineteenth Century and the start of the Twentieth Century
Alfred Binet contributed to the understanding of child development; Binet
worked for the department of education in France and pioneered the first
I.Q. tests.

In 1912 Montessori's book _The Montessori Method – Scientific Pedagogy
as applied to Child Education in the ‘Children’s houses’_ presented new
pedagogical ideas which continue to be practiced thought the world. Jean Piaget continued the tradition of observing the behaviour of his own three children. He published on the child’s conception of space, geometry, time physical casualty and on the child’s moral judgement. His analysis concluded that children pass through roughly the same stages in the same order whether negotiation the domain of causality or the domain of morality. The child was now seen as capable and having intelligence in its own right. With supportive adults and materials the child acquires language and reasoning skills. Consequently, the role of play came into focus leading to concept of ‘play therapy’ as a way to advance children’s education. Piaget’s theories caught the imagination of philosophers, teachers, policy makers and practitioners. The impact Piaget has had on western civilisation in terms of how it has come to understand cognitive development is immense.

Dewey and Vygotsky’s writings introduced an understanding of the importance of the social environment to foster learning. Both share similar ideas concerning the relationship of activity and learning/development, especially the roles everyday activities and social environment play in the educational process” (Glassman, 1991, p.3). Close observations of children at play led to a theory of knowledge and learning that posits that children actively engage with their world – people experiences, materials- and build their beliefs and knowledge through interaction and internal processes” (Follari, 2011, p.74). This is known as constructivism, relational and contextual pedagogy (hereafter Relational Pedagogy). Now Post-modern constructivism places the child in the centre of his or her learning. The ‘emergent curriculum’ found in Reggio reflect on what children say and interrogate (through documentation) the child’s voice. The individuality of the child is acknowledged and his or her right to have a view is accommodated. Moreover, children are seen as entitled to have original
points of view, which are a step further, challenging ideas on power and dominant discourses.

**Irish Findings for Language and Reasoning**

**Figure 11: Category Three: Language and Reasoning**

Analysis of Language and Reasoning: The overall category scored 4.12.

This figure show each of the four sub categories concerning language and reasoning under examination are, Books and Pictures, Encouraging Children to Communicate, Using Language to Develop Reasoning Skills and Informal use of Language.

**Books and Pictures (3.4)**
To score Good (5) a wide selection of appropriate books should be organised in a reading centre, which is accessible for a substantial portion of the day. In order to progress from Good (5) to excellent (7) evidence must be recorded of –Staff reading books to children informally for example
during free play, at naptime, as an extension of an activity” (Harms et al. 1989, p.23).

Few pre-schools scored well in this sub-measure due to the way in which books and their function are understood in the running of the services. Observations identified two ways in which books were used.

(I) Books as story time just before departure, where children all sit together and listen to the story. In practice, this offered the assistant or trainee the opportunity to clean up the room, while children were corralled into the story time. In some cases chaotic scenes of bored children forced to sit, not able to see the picture in the book being read, unless seated at the top of the story time circle, as the assistant swept and cleaned around them.

(II) Children told to sit at tables then handed a book of the practitioner’s choice. This offered an opportunity for practitioners to prepare for departure or for a transition to another activity.

Three groups (4, 10 and 25) had a story with a linked theme concerned with an activity during the session, and one group offered an opportunity to children to act out the story (Pre-School 10). With the exception of these three groups books served as a way to pass time or as a breather for busy practitioners. Rarely were books which relate to current classroom activities or themes found in pre-school settings.

**Encouraging children to communicate (4)**

The score of 4 is between minimal and good. To score good (5) in this measure “evidence of children communicating with their peers, staff striking a balance between listening and talking and staff linking spoken communication with written language” (Hams et al. 1989, p.24) must be evidenced. Groups which used the HighScope pedagogical approach score
well in this as the pedagogical processes uses a system of Plan, Do, and Review in their daily routine. Finally, after tidy up time the children are encouraged to become knower’s and tellers’ by reflecting verbally for the group on their mornings work. The practitioner’s job is to encourage the child to share their mornings experience in their own words. Furthermore, to help the child make meaning of what happened in the Do phase. It follows on then that the groups of which we had three in our study would score well.

Using Language to develop reasoning skills (3.84)
This score was between minimum and good. In order to score 5 (good) children must be encouraged to raise their own interests and practitioners respond to them. “The introduction of concepts in response to children’s interests or needs to solve problems” (Harms et al. 1998, p.25). This requires staff to talk about logical reasoning and encourage children to explain their reasoning. To foster this level of dialogue requires quality time with the children. In practice, this is difficult for practitioners as they are responsible for many aspects service provision. The majority of settings are concerned with preparing children for school, and give them the social skills to sit down and prepare to learn by rote.

Informal Use of Language (5.07)
In general, staff spoke with children, exchanging information and adding information to expand on ideas presented by the children. The maximum score was not achieved as staff in general did not encourage communication among children, engage in individual conversations with most of the children or encourage children to answer questions by asking complex questions such as what, where, why, and how” (Harms et al. 1998, p.26)
Examining Irish practice
Ten groups of the twenty-six pre-schools had a dedicated time when children were asked to speak on what they either did during the play session or news from home. A common factor in these groups is that they were run by a graduate or if not they were implementing the HighScope or Montessori curriculum. It was noted that room ambience affects children’s participation. One pre-school had a high ceiling, with eight fluorescent lights, three large yellow walls and one full wall of windows. The ‘Review’ time did not work well as twenty children’s soft voices trying to be heard. In two groups, children were observed writing/drawing their plans and practitioners offering genuine encouragement to support children to speak. Overall, the results show that pre-schools offer a mediocre practice in encouraging children to use language and reasoning.

The Reggio “Listening Pedagogy” contrasted with Irish Pre-school
The citizens of the Reggio area were traumatised by the effects of war and want. The Reggio ideology is born of a post war aspiration that children, their families and teachers are subjects of rights. Central to this approach is the conviction that the intolerance experienced during the war years would be addressed in the classroom. This is done by a specific ideology which holds that from birth, the child has the right to learn to communicate and be communicated with by the world. The child’s inner strength, knowledge and wisdom are accepted. The role of the practitioner is unambiguous; it is to help the child express their ideas through language and reasoning into the world.

The Irish experience instead was not marked by a traumatic event but rather a continuation of generations of poverty and emigration. At this time, Ireland had a different social and cultural experience. Accordingly, Ireland

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14 During the Second World War Ireland remained neutral. The period is referred to in Irish history as ‘The Emergency’.
did not enjoy this critical and reflexive consideration of pedagogy. Unlike Reggio, religious institutions continued to dictate pedagogy at all levels in training and practice in Ireland.

In Reggio the child is a subject with rights from the day he/she is born. Children have the right to be recognised as subjects with legal civil and social rights as both sources and constructors of their own experiences. Thus, children can be active participants in the organisation of their identities, abilities and autonomy. Each child is viewed as having a wealth of inborn abilities and potential strength and creativity. This strength is acknowledged. If policy makers and practitioners do not acknowledge the abilities and strength of the child irreversible suffering an impoverishment of the child results (Edwards, et al. 1998).

When teachers/practitioners use this approach, education is seen as a form of dialogue. Therefore, children are listened to in a meaningful way. The adults are sensitive to questions that children ask with their bodies, their eyes, sometimes their research is silent and their refined gestures can be silent. Children‘s language and thoughts are documented, reflected upon and used to develop an emergent curriculum.

In Ireland, most practitioner‘s respect the dignity of all children though the same attention to dialogue is not a feature of pre-school practice. Nor is it a feature of pedagogical training. In training practitioners in this methodology Irish practice will have to challenge practitioners to radically reduce their ‗talking and instructing‘ and instead to allow the child time, and encouragement to speak on topics of the child‘s own choice.

Gjems explains that in terms of communicating with children it is vital for practitioners to expand their questions past ‗assumed questions‘ i.e. where
the teacher knows the answer. Instead the use of 'prefaced questions' which are questions asked when an adult understands that he/she does not know what the child may think. It offers the child an opportunity to formulate an answer. However, the practitioner must be prepared to wait for the child to form the answer and use language to communicate their thoughts on a question. For example, the practitioner may ask 'how was your visit to your Granny's? Key to helping the child use language to formulate their response is the ability for the practitioner to communicate distinct attention to the youngest children, for instance by nodding and smiling, to promote the child’s effort to answer (Gjems, 2010, pp.142-146).

In Reggio the role of the practitioner is that of fellow explorer with the child. Practitioners work as part of a professional team. They develop projects of interest based on hypothesise from their experience that may happen given the current group of children for whom they are planning and from their documentation (Edwards et al. 1998).

In Ireland, the role of the practitioner is multifunctional and the professional identity of the practitioner has not developed (JELR 2002, OMC 2009, Moloney 2010). For some practitioners funding from a cross border initiative run by Border Counties Network has been directed into training and quality provision. One such group visited as part of this study showed evidence of traits of reflexive practice and documentation. It occurred in pre-school 24, where the practitioner holds a full degree to level 8 on the NQF. She alone scored Item (5.2) –Children often observe staff writing own what they (the children) say” (Sylva et al. 2007, p.22). During her degree taken in a Belfast college, she was exposed to post-modern philosophies. In Dublin Donnelly (2001) studied the value of dialogue in the early year’s classroom in the primary school with young children. Teachers encouraged children to think in the abstract. She found that there is educational value in
having dialogue as a process of teaching and learning in our schools. —Reflective teachers encourage reflection in children” (Donnelly, 2001, p. 294)

The following Situational Sampling exemplifies the use of ‘assumed questions’ and damaging pedagogical practice. The lead practitioner had finished her formal school at 15 years of age. She has run the pre-school (11) for the past 20 years, without training. She works with her sister in-law as her assistant. Both are now attending training in a local private college in compliance with funding procedures associated with The Free Pre-School year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. The setting is in a classroom in a convent school.

**Situational Sampling (1): A Little Bird Told Me…**

At greeting time the lead practitioner spoke with a Mother who explained that, her son had been anxious the previous night; he had slept in the parent’s bed. When the parent left the classroom, the practitioner addressed the little boy in question in the company of his classmates. She said ‘A little bird told me that (child’s name) slept in his Mammy and Daddy’s bed last night’. She continued to explain that he is ‘a big boy now’. Each child was asked ‘Do you sleep in your Mammy’s bed?’ As each child said ‘No’ the response was ‘Good girl/boy, you are big now’. Finally, the practitioner extracted a promise from the boy in question that he would not to go to his parent’s bed in the future.

**Situation Sampling 1: A little bird told me**

The situation is an example of non-reflexive practise. The child had not been consulted; his original point of view was not heard. The practitioner set herself up to be extra powerful and all knowing; even to have super human power to understand birds. It was a missed opportunity for expression and a
meaningless exercise disempowering and maybe even embarrassing the child to have his private family life discussed with the entire group. Later in discussion with the practitioner issues of pedagogical training emerged these issues are reported in category seven parents and staff.

Conclusion

A profound turn in how educators encourage children to speak and reason in ECEC settings occurred at the end of the 20th Centuary. This was charactererised by a move towards encouraging children to talk through or explain their own reasoning. This changed the role of the practitioner from the all knowing supreme adult in relationship to the child. Now the practitioners role is to provide RP practices, such as listening, reflecting, providing supports and relating to the chid as a fellow researcher. The approach raises issues of knowledge and power in terms of who speaks and who listens. Without relevant training in relational pedagogy practitioners are forced to rely on returning to old traditional familiar teaching techniques. When practitionrs are without any training they revert to running services similar to primary intake classes without opportunity for children to “learn to talk and talk to learn” (Gjems, 2010, p.141). This research argues that children’s voices are not always ‘listened for’ at a deep and meaningful level; they can be marginalised, ignored, and or considered cute or funny. Moreover, unless post-structural techniques (Constructivism and Relational Pedagogy) are incorporated into all ECEC practitioner training causes a shambolic mix of standards are certain to prevail across ECEC.
**Category Four: Pre-school Activities**

In the classrooms of the Municipal Preschools of Reggio Emilia you will find children actively and excitedly engaged in creating visual and graphic representations of their ideas. Children employ their artistic talents not as a way to support content delivered by an adult but as a way to accurately document their thinking (Turner 2008, p.51).

This category has the largest number (10) of sub categories under consideration; Fine Motor, Art, Music and Movement, Blocks, Sand and Water, Dramatic Play, Nature Science, Math & Number, Use of T.V. & Video and or Computer and Promoting Acceptance of Diversity.

Of the ten areas at question in this category four sub-measures command their own full category (Literacy, Maths, Science and Diversity) in the UK *Extension four Curricular Subscales* (Sylva et al., 2006). Consequently, an amount of overlap occurs when analysing the following items Nature Science, Math & Number, and Promoting Acceptance of Diversity. A fuller examination the items in question are found across measures 8 through 11 which are reported in Chapter 5. In an effort not to duplicate analysis the discussion on these sub-measures in this section concerning *Nature Science, Math & Number, Use of T.V. & Video and or Computers* and *promoting acceptance of diversity* a brief comment is made when discussing the findings. This approach leaves space for a comprehensive analysis in the next chapter.

In this category provision of activities reveal a conflict between theory and circumstances in Irish pre-school provision. The Post-modern pedagogical practice of Reggio is contrasted with the Irish Practice. Finally, two situational samplings from observations on pedagogical practice during the course of pre-school activities are considered.
Theories of best practice in provision of ECEC activities

Pestalozzi divided educational material into simple steps he urged to ‘teach by things’. He developed the ‘object lesson’ to encourage studying objects in their natural environment that involved exercises in learning form, number and language. He promoted the use of the senses in teaching, as well as the power of imagination and judgment. A range of pre-school activities (and how they are introduced to the child) is a primary component of all pedagogical approaches.

Montessori expanded on the work of Pestalozzi by developed an entire range of equipment which expanded into Math, Writing, Nature and Personal care. Her inventions included jigsaw’s type objects to promote an understanding of math and shape. The equipment also developed fine motor movement, hand eye coordination and pincer movement. In turn, this promotes skills that are vital to reading and writing. She also developed equipment to promote children’s learning called ‘Practical life equipment’ which focused on personal care. They consist of a range of timber frames measuring about one foot square; cloth material is attached and on the cloth buckles, (buttons, laces) are attached. The teacher demonstrates how to open and close the buckle then encourages the child to take a turn. These proved a great success when used with the children in her children’s houses - Casa dei Bambini. Montessori refused to patent her Practical life equipment she was happy that from the tenements of Rome her ideas pedagogy would spread. In Montessori’s prepared environment real works of art hung at the child’s eye level and were changed frequently. The rooms had to be well kept, clean and attractive to the children with fresh flowers and plants or objects from nature. Activities such as weaving, sewing, stationary tools and stencils which are of an artistic nature were promoted.
In terms of Art; Friedrich Froebel's developed Pestalozzi's philosophy furthering the concept of a child centred approach by the use of 'gifts' and 'occupations'. Gifts are objects or things given to the child such as a piece of equipment to help them understand shapes, sizes and dimensions. Occupations are items such as paint, clay, or art and craft materials, which encourage the child to externalise ideas existing in their own mind. These theories were advanced in his Play and Activity Institute.

Theories of music and movement were advanced by the Hungarian ethnomusicologist Kodály. This approach uses a child-developmental approach to sequence, introducing skills in accordance with the capabilities of the child. Kodály understood that children have a compulsion to sing and make mouth music. He also discovered that very young children will sing when shown hand signs to represent the music scale in syllable names (do, re, mi, fa, so, la, and ti). In the Kodály approach children are first introduced to musical concepts through listening, singing, or movement. Great care in selection of songs is taken so as to ensure that children enjoy 'in tune singing', as opposed to singing songs beyond their tender vocal range. During his research in Europe after the Second World War Kodály noticed how children sing street songs, he realised that children enjoy in tune singing. Children spontaneously make 'mouth music' naturally within the (mi, fa, so) range. Children enjoy mastering new musical skills (See Kodály, 1971).

The following passage describes the joy a young boy experienced learning to whistle.

This new interest was a valued novelty in whistling, which he had just acquired from a Negro, and he was suffering to practice it undisturbed. It consisted in a peculiar bird like turn, a sort of liquid warble,
produced by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth at short intervals in the midst of the music—the reader probably remembers how to do it if he has ever been a boy. Diligence and attention soon gave him the knack of it, and he strode down the street with his mouth full of harmony and his soul full of gratitude. He felt as much as an astronomer feels who has discovered a planet—no doubt, as far as strong, deep unalloyed pleasure is concerned, the advantage was with the boy, not the astronomer (Twain, 1989, p.5).

In the Kodály method new concepts are introduced beginning with what is easiest for the child and progress to the more difficult. Concepts are constantly reviewed and reinforced through games, movement, songs, and exercises (Choksy, 1999). In the Steiner Waldorf approach, geometric forms are explored in math class through painting, drawing and sculpture. Eurhythmy is a form of dance in which body movements correspond to musical tones and spoken words; eurhythmic dance is performed with arms reaching out in different angles. The use of Blocks in children’s play provides a creative learning device where children can play alone or with others. These and other ‘manipulatives’ such as Sand and Water offer children opportunities to play, fill, pour, and facilitate children’s internal processes of knowledge construction through hands-on experiences” (Follari, 2011, p.75).

By the end of the 20th century the inclusion of ‘heuristic play’ which encouraged play with everyday objects becoming a feature in pre-school equipment. Exemplified in ‘home corners’ where children use fine motor skills such as pretending to cook dinner. Farm animals, Sylvain friends, train sets and Lego are now provided in most settings.
Dramatic play occurs when children pretend or make believe. This type of play occurs when children act out roles themselves and when they manipulate figures such as small toy people in a doll house (Harms, 1998, p.32). It is also called pretend play. The child benefits by having the opportunity to experiment at various roles in life that involve social skills and emotional responses in the play.

**Findings for Irish Pre-school Activities**

![Graph showing the mean score for different categories of pre-school activities]

**Figure 12: Category Four Pre-school Activities**

Analysis for Pre-school Activities: The overall category scored 2.84

**Fine Motor (4.5)**

The score of 5 (good) was not reached because many developmentally appropriate fine motor materials of each type are not accessible for a substantial portion of the day. Although most of the materials are in good
repair and complete. As described earlier in terms of storytelling, the one room syndrome mitigates against good practiced. In practice, play items are given to children. Shortly after items must be put away in order to adhere to pre-arranged curriculum, this practice has capped this score. The ongoing repetitive practice of ‘tidying up’ and ‘putting things away’ plays a significant part in the following subset low scoring. The pre-schools are equipped with materials for fine motor activities. However, the programme structure goes against children having a choice to engage with the equipment for periods long enough to be of benefit.

**Art (3.85)**

Artwork in general follows an example originating with the practitioner. Themes such as Halloween (witches), Christmas (Rudolph), Easter (bunny rabbits and daffodils) and Mother’s day (love hearts) were observed. Often the children are put under pressure to make complicated cards. Because these craft activities are not initiated by children their value is questionable. In practice they serve as tangible evidence to show parents that the children are being socialised and learning about the seasons and cultural occasions. Often they double up as cards or presents for parents. The idea that each child has a Mammy and Daddy is accepted as the norm in this use of art. During a visit one practitioner was heard advising a child to colour a picture “do it for mammy, no that’s NOT finished do a little more – do a nice one” (Pre-school 8). This reinforces a concept of the weak child who needs adult guidance in how to express their inner ideas.

The art work is usually done in step by step directions by the adult. The results are twenty uniform items made without the involvement of children’s ideas or thoughts. Their production requires little if any mental processing on the part of the child. This approach to art and craft is removed from
Froebel’s original pedagogical ‘occupations’ which encourage the child to externalise ideas existing in their own mind.

The findings from this sub-set show that ideas of children being entitled to original points of view (a cornerstone of post-modern pedagogy) has not yet found its way into Irish pedagogy. Varieties of art materials were not accessible for a substantial part of the day. Where art materials were provided it was often paint only. Many instances of all the children having to sit down wait for paper to be handed to them, then given a colour, and told what to paint was observed. Three dimensional art materials such as paper machete or clay were rarely found which contributed to the low score.

**Music and Movement (2.58)**

The score is short of reaching score 3 (minimal). The findings show that games, movement, songs, and exercises are not provided so that children enjoy and learn new concepts. Mostly pre-schools have a daily routine where nursery rhymes are sung. Little or no care is taken to ensure the choice of songs, are within the vocal range of the pre-school child. The low score is due to lack of accessibility to simple instruments such as music toys and tape players. The lack of instruments prevent the score from progressing past minimal standard. Where instruments were used, the experience turned into noisy free-for-alls, resulting in the practitioners becoming annoyed and removing the instruments (Pre-school 24).

**Blocks (2.35)**

In order to reach score 3 (minimal) the children must have access to blocks and accessories for three or more children to build at the same time. Space for block building is not available in most Irish pre-schools. A lack of understanding of the value of blocks as a ‘pre-school’ activity and the free play nature of the process poses a challenge in Irish pedagogical practice.
The challenge for practitioners is in having the confidence to allow children to spend time on an activity without producing a tangible outcome that can be displayed, recorded in a workbook or taken home to parents. These outcomes are valued and appear to parents and practitioners to make the activity worthwhile.

**Sand and Water (3.31)**
The minimum standard is met in this sub-scale. This indicates that some provision is made for sand and water play. In practice, most groups have either one or the other at some stage during the session. In general, sand or water is taken out for the first part of the morning and put away or covered over for the second part of the day. The use of instruments to support children to learn basic concepts such as floating and sinking (cork and stone) measuring (pint jug and half pint jug) are rarely found accompanying the sand or water tray. In order to score a higher mark the provision for sand and water play (outdoor or indoors) should incorporate a variety of toys and be available to the children for at least one hour daily.

**Dramatic Play (3.46)**
The use of materials and dress up equipment and their accessibility is measured here. While a minimum standard is reached, progression to score 5 (good) would require that dress up clothes should include work clothes, hard hats etc. Evidence of good practice was found (Pre-schools 10, 16, 19, 23, 25 and 26) whereby a good variety of dress up equipment was available and the children used it in their pretend play. The materials were displayed on hangers, or hung on hooks as well as a suitable size. Several pre-schools did not accommodate supports for dramatic play others had a box with dress up equipment which did not include work clothes, uniforms, etc.
The following four items are briefly mentioned here, as they are the subject of individual measures and expanded on fully in the following chapter.

**Nature Science (2.38)**
In order to score 3 (minimum) required open-ended nature/science materials that children can explore. Some evidence of nature/science materials was found. However, developmentally appropriate games, materials, or activities from at least two nature/science categories are generally not accessible for a substantial part of the day. The sub-category and the following sub-scale math and number are the subject of focus in category 9 and 10.

**Math & Number (2.69)**
The minimum score was not achieved here as developmentally appropriate math/number materials which allow children to use concrete objects to experiment with quantity, size and shape are not available.

**Use of TV & Video and or Computers (0.85)**
No T.V. and Video was evidenced during the data collection. On two occasions, a computer was switched on for a very short time. This did not translate to a score of 1 being achieved.

**Promoting acceptance of diversity (2.46)**
Two pre-schools had materials promoting cultural diversity (pre-school 7 for Traveller children and pre-school 23 catering for children of asylum seekers). On one occasion a discussion to counteract prejudice was noted. Other than that no evidence of promoting acceptance of diversity was documented. This issue is explored further in category 11.
Examining connections between Reggio and Irish practice

In his study of the Reggio approach *Listen, Move, Think - Communicating through the Languages of Music and Creative Movements* (Turner 2008) examined how music and creative movement promote communication. He explores Kinesiology - the study of the way in which certain gestures and movements of the body serve for non-verbal communication. He makes a link to how children as youngsters are kinaesthetically focused and the ease this idea has in terms of Reggio practice. He argues that because children’s primary mode of exploration and learning is kinaesthetic, this marries well with the philosophy of Reggio, which encourages self-expression. Movement and music aren’t simply a cute performance or a clever way to memorize information; they are as potent and powerful as the mighty pen in representing the intellectual genius of children” (Turner 2008, p.3). Dance, art, music and movement are included in Reggio and the role of the practitioner is to help the child express those languages. This has nothing to do with learning by rote traditional dances, songs and producing art and craft work on jaded themes. This is concerned with self-expression. The finished product is not important, what is important is the process. In terms of movement dance and art, how the child enjoyed the experience and grows in ability to express ideas is valued above a tangible product.

In Reggio, the practitioners work to find ways to help children represent their thoughts and visualise their thinking. The use of creative movement or music or sculpture or paint, is used as an authentic vehicle from which, and through which, practitioners can support children to grow intellectually. Turner’s (2008) research reports on how the Reggio approach to children’s physical movement help children by “expanding children’s vocabulary of movements begins with exploration, through exploration children, increase their skill at communicating effectively with their bodies” (Turner, 2008. p. 42). Although there are difficulties for practitioners in incorporate this type
of movement into activities as it usually commences with ‘horseplay’ expressions of happiness even giddiness. He advises the practitioner to start by drawing attention to the difference between moving and stillness. Proceed to attending to clues from stopping and starting music and encouraging children’s ideas. This is done by the practitioner being sensitive to their power to limit the scope of the child’s imagination through imposing suggestions. A tip he gives here is for the practitioner to eliminate their use of nouns during such an exercise. Practitioners have to practice listening for the voice of the child.

In Ireland, pedagogical practice concerning activities involving art, music and movement and manipulatives tend to be predetermined in their thematic approach. In most cases ideas are conceived by the practitioner in advance. The results (paintings, nativity play, concerts) are thus displayed as a decoration in the classroom found around Christmas, Easter, Mother’s day, etc. or as a performance for parents. The teacher and the season determine the length of the theme. These projects do not appear to be driven by questions or contain elements of problem solving as in Reggio project work. No evidence of original input from the child is seen in Irish provision (Pre-schools 10 and 25 are exceptions). In practice, the dominant adult directs projects that prove that the children are being prepared for primary school. This is not what the founding theorists of early childhood education intended when they advanced ideas (gifts and occupations) about children’s preschool activities. The commodification of children’s art and drama is not practiced in most European or Nordic pre-school provision. In the absence of sound theoretical knowledge and without skills in Relational pedagogical practice this practice will continue. The two following situational samples were observed during data collection and are indicative of how activities are not led by children.
Situational sampling (2): "I'm watching who is singing - They Will Be the Ones to Get Sweets" (Pre-school 5). The pre-school visit took place in early December. The practitioner explained that the messy play equipment had to be put away for the month to make space in for nativity play rehearsals. Throughout the morning Christmas themes were reinforced (Rudolph, Santy and presents). The second part of the morning (one hour) was spent in rehearsals. The Nativity scene of Joseph and Mary and the Baby Jesus (doll) was acted out. A pre-school boy in the role of Joseph had difficulty pulling a rocking horse (with the Virgin Mary on top). The practitioner was visibly frustrated with him. She finally acquiesced, allowing Mary to walk beside the donkey. The hymns were poorly selected – in that the range on the musical scale was far beyond of the children’s capacity. No evidence was seen that the children were enjoying ‘in tune’ singing. In order to improve (bribe) the choir the practitioner produced a large of box of Cadbury’s Roses – she sat with the box opened on her lap – ‘I'm watching who is singing they will be the ones to get sweets’ she said.

Situation Sampling 2: "I'm watching who is singing - They Will Be the Ones to Get Sweets"

Situation sampling (3) “Oh I’ll give you a Hand though I know I shouldn’t” (Pre-school 3) Further evidence poor pedagogical knowledge concerning activities was recorded in a Family Resource Centre (Pre-school 3). Here the activity involved making Christmas cards. The practitioner had cut out the shape of a Christmas tree which had to be stuck on cardboard. All the children were given the task of gluing the tree on the card. This was complicated by the squeeze bottle which required a strong squeeze. One little girl signalled for help; a trainee staff member responded ‘Oh I’ll give you a hand though I know I shouldn’t’.

Situation Sampling 3: "I'll give you a hand though I know I shouldn't"
These two observations highlight disregard in practice towards the imagination of the child. The child’s inner ideas and voice is not included in how they express themselves during pre-school activities. The underdeveloped skills of the child (sticky glue jars and glue brushes) were poorly chosen as an activity. The exercise reinforces the child to seek adults help. In the Reggio pre-schools, children are encouraged to draw their ideas on paper with pencil. In so doing, the production is used as a way to get to know the child. The children are encouraged to write messages to each other, each child having been allocated a post-box.

**Conclusion**

In Ireland, no clarity exists around what constitutes good practice in Music, Art, Drama in pre-school provision. Without an agreed pedagogy, pre-school activities are provided as tools to socialise the children in preparation for transition into primary school. Games and toys are geared to help children become familiar with numbers, figures and colours.

Inspections from the HSE vary from district to district. One district holds that a planned curriculum of activities must be documented in advance (Pre-school 1) others do not hold this requirement. The findings show that most pre-school settings have acquired a wide variety of equipment to promote activities, yet poor pedagogical knowledge results in most of the equipment not being used to its full advantage thus rendering investment in equipment a poor investment.

In Ireland, post-modern ideas are gradually starting to find a way into practice where practitioners have been encouraged to reflect and think critically. During this research, only one pre-school was found to encourage children to draw their ideas and encouraged to discuss those ideas (Pre-school 25). This is the work of a graduate. In reality, it is not surprising that
the other practitioners do not use this technique, as practitioners have not been trained in this pedagogy. In early years, training modules that cover theory and practice of ‘music and movement’ ‘drama for pre-school’ and ‘providing art materials to encourage expression’ are not found. Instead, ‘art and craft’ is taught where old overplayed themes are reinforced. This issue is discussed further in measure six.

Category Five: Social Interaction

Knowledge is not something absolute existing outside context and unchangeable – and, as such, transmittable to the child. From Reggio’s perspective, knowledge is the product of a process of construction, involving interpretation and meaning-making (Moss, 2001 p.128).

This section reports on the ECERS findings for Social Interaction the five areas under examination are, Supervision of Gross Motor Activities, General Supervision of Children (other than gross motor), Discipline, Staff-child Interaction and Interactions among Children. Modern paradigms and post-modern paradigms of social interaction in ECEC theories are explored. The tensions in moving between both paradigms are exemplified in the situation sample (4) Behaviour – versus – Ideas, and (5) Polite conversations.

Theories on Social Interaction

Montessori identified stages of particular sensitivity where young children acquired different skills and concepts more readily than at other stages which she called ‘sensitive periods’. These are defined as periods during which a child shows intense fascination with a particular thing or skill, i.e. going up and down steps, counting, reading, or putting things in order. At this sensitive time, it is much easier for the child to learn this particular skill than at any other time an adult might choose.
The need for order in the child’s environment was seen as crucial and pre-school activities were set out to promote what Montessori called the child’s ‘instinct for order’.

Order - things in their place. It means a knowledge of the arrangement of objects in the child’s surroundings, a recollection of the place where each belongs. And this means that he can orient himself in his environment, possess it in all its details. We mentally possess an environment when we know it so as to find our way with our eyes shut, and find all we want within hands‘ reach. Such a place is essential for the tranquillity and happiness of life (Montessori, 1995, p. 52)

In order to develop skills in math and reading the Montessori Method offers children a planned environment where materials are carefully designed to help the child develop along a programmed path. A clear sequence of activities and equipment that allow a single correct application with a single correct answer for example the post-box of shapes where the circle will not fit into the square, the equipment is therefore self-correcting. In practice, the teacher will demonstrate an exercise that the child is encouraged to perform with ‘accurate replication’. The role of the teacher is to connect the child with the most suitable materials to his or her developmental stage, thus encouraging progression in the programme.

But not all aspects of the curriculum required direct instruction. For example the prepared environment offered a place where children would absorb aspects of their culture: ‘Ours was a house for children, rather than a real school we had prepared a place for children where a defused culture could be assimilated from the environment, without any need for direct
instruction” (Montessori, 1967, p. 32). Montessori’s modernist approach focused on syllabi and results as set out on a developmental linear scale, from social perspective the approach tends to emphasise adults protecting and providing for vulnerable children. The child is seen as a universal child – passing through the same stages of development the world over. This developmental approach is now contested by Penn.

Developmental psychologists largely believed that psychological processes could be investigated through the study of the individual behaviour and learning of children; and by aggregating the findings from many children and from many studies, universal norms or laws can be established. Children are assumed to pass through the same stages and to show the same age-related characteristics whether they live in remotes parts of Nepal or in Chicago (Penn 2005, p.105).

The Social Child
The writings of educational theorists in the early and mind twenty century highlighted the importance of the role of the social environment in learning (Dewey 1919, Vygotsky, 1978). Advancing these ideas in the 1960’s the work of Professor Bronfenbrenner linked child development to family and society through the child ‘Ecological Systems Theory‘ which posits that development echo the influence of five identified environmental systems on a young child’s development. As far as the external world is concerned, he set out a theory of environmental connections and their impact on the forces directly affecting psychological growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The five systems consists of Microsystems of immediate family influence, Mesosystems are of neighbourhoods and school, Exosystems of local government Macro systems made up of dominant beliefs and ideologies that permeate through each system and finally Chronosyste which involve patterns of and transitions and environmental events over the life course for
example the moving from pre-school to school. The individual’s own biology may be reflected in part of the microsystem; thus, the theory has been reconceptualised as the Bio-Ecological Systems

Lev Vygotsky highlighted the social nature of development and its influence on learning. His theory of the ‘zone of proximal development’ describes the intellectual space between the learner and the teacher. Thus, adults provide the child with ‘scaffolding’ e.g. supports of familiar repetition, only possible in that individual child’s context that helps direct their cognitive development, within a cultural context.

**Post-modern perspectives on ECEC**

Post-modern philosophies draw a great deal from philosophers such as Foucault and Derrida. They are concerned with issues of knowledge, power, equity, language, truth, freedom and ethics. Post-modern approaches see children as active contributors who can be creative partners with adults. Each child is valued for its individuality; this is based on a strong belief that no two children are the same. Co-operation and collaboration stress the value of social learning. Children must become part of a community that is working together, therefore attention is paid to helping the children find friendships and become part of a group/community.

For example in the HighScope ‘plan, do, review‘ approach questioning by teachers and fellow students is thought to facilitate more connections and extensions with people, places and ideas. When the child is questioned on their explanations new ideas or occurrences are brought to bear on the child. Therefore, the child is extended and enriched. Malaguzzi’s envisions knowledge not in a linear way but rather as a ‘tangle of spaghetti‘ (Edwards et al. 1998, p.156) with no beginning or end, no linear progression but always open to new possibilities.
Within the post-modern pedagogical paradigm, reflective practitioners are removed from the modern theory of developmental certainties assuming instead responsibility to choose experiment and discuss. Thus, the focus shifts to new learning opportunities rather than perusing outcomes. Documentation (written reflection by the teacher) that reflects the work, language, and desires of the child from observations by the teacher serve to plan the curriculum that is varied and fluid, creating new compositions instead of repeating old patterns and traditions.

Going beyond this, critical reflective practitioners have an interest in questions of knowledge, justice and power. Derrida’s work on politics of language is a source of inspiration (Derrida, 1998, 1982). For example, in terms of language, how words and images are used to prove something and to fix how the child understands it. The use of ‘Dichotomies’ (sharp division of two) and ‘Binaries’ (paired) oppositions are studied. For example gender relies on dichotomies of male and female to help us grasp its meaning. Genders form a binary opposition in which we see two mutually exclusive meanings. We know what one word means as it is the opposite of the other, black/white, fat/slim, normal/abnormal, etc. Critical reflexive practice see the significance of binary oppositions as pairs and are always ranked so one part of the pair always has higher value than the other. The ‘other’ is not equal to the main part of the pair. The ‘other’ can then be seen as abnormal, or inferior. –The hierarchy within a binary is not inherent in the words and so is not inevitable or accidental; it is socially produced (Mac Naughton 2005, p. 85)”.

Practices of inclusion and exclusion rely on these binaries. If practitioners deconstruct (take apart) binary opposites and learn how binaries are maintained and policed in classroom life they have an entry point to disrupting the continuance of the practice. Therefore, the practitioner using critical pedagogy is concerned with what is being
_othered’ what is being silenced in the literature offered to the children, in the language used and in every aspect of how the classroom operates.

The tension between old and new ways of interacting with pre-school children can be understood in terms of both modern and post-modern paradigms. There is no agreement in the literature as to what paradigm dominates ECEC now, on the one hand Alderson believes that modernist _developmental stages’ dominate while Soto posits that last part of the twentieth century _children’s dispositions’ dominate:

Metaphors of _developmental stages’ now dominate pedagogical practices. Child development theory is the main approach to not only understanding and managing children in personal individual cases but also to informing public opinion and policy generally. For example, all children are given the same lesson, based on their chronological age (Alderson 2005, p. 128).

Soto describes the transition to a post-modern approach:

In the last part of the twentieth century, children’s dispositions rather than development are key – with the constructive, reflecting, inventive, and problem solving child being key to an envisioned future. Now the social administration of the child is located deeply in the soul of the child at the level of problem solving (Soto, 2000, p.27).
Irish Findings for Social Interaction

The five areas under examination are, Supervision of Gross Motor Activities, General Supervision of Children (other than gross motor), Discipline, Staff-child Interaction and Interactions among Children.

Figure 13: Category Five Social Interaction

Analysis for Social Interaction: The overall result for this category is 5.08. This scored the highest of the eleven areas under investigation.

Supervision of gross motor activities (4.08)

This score is between minimal (3) and good (5). While staff showed great attention to safety and some positive staff-child interaction gross motor activities are not a high priority in the Irish pre-school curriculum. Eleven of the twenty-six groups visited took the children outdoors to play. Indoor gross motor movement was not provided in most cases. A significant numbers of instances where staff assist children to develop skills needed to
use equipment” (Harms  et al., 1998, p.37) was not recorded which would have moved the score to good (5).

**General supervision of children (other than gross motor) (4.96)**

This score is sufficiently close to measure it as scoring well. Supervision is careful and while staff give children help and encouragement when needed, it is difficult for practitioners to be with the children at all times due to the variety of tasks to which they must attend. There was little evidence of staff talking to children about ideas and encouraging children to share their ideas.

**Discipline (5)**

A score of good (5) was achieved. In general practitioners do not use punitive approaches. However, in two pre-schools (8 and 15) punitive discipline was noted. In pre-school (8) the assistant (a Community Employment CE worker) threatened to call a child’s mother on the telephone to complain him for not sitting in a circle to listen to a story. Furthermore, she tried to include the researcher in the process by saying that the researcher would call the mother. Other incidents of not being allowed to play outdoors until work was finished were recorded in (pre-school 15 and 18). The most severe form of discipline found in pre-school (8) is reported later in this section in Situational Sampling 4.

The practitioner rules the room in which she works. Written policies (written by committees and management) matter little when the practitioner is alone with children. The two instances where conflict was recorded were both occasions where the practitioner was forcing a child to conform to rules of sitting down and not speaking. When practitioners are trained to encourage children to speak to one another and to explore their surroundings the basis for conflict is removed.
Staff-child interaction (5.81)
In general, practitioners are kind and warm to children. They respond sympathetically to children who need help, and show respect for children. Trainees who do not bring pedagogical knowledge to their practice are a cause for concern in that they often do not promote good pedagogical practice. Instead, a type of ‘kind parenting’ is employed, where practitioners are kind and nice to the children, yet they do not expand on curriculum where it exists or help children express their originality.

Interactions among children (5.54)
Positive peer interaction is found where children interact and play with each other. Conflict is usually dealt with through discussion and sharing and turn taking is encouraged. The level scored indicates that staff successfully help children to develop social behaviour with peers which scores good (5). To progress to the next level (7) excellent staff need to provide opportunities for the children to work together to complete a task, such as a project.

The following situation sample demonstrates punitive discipline practice found during the data collection. The setting is a flat roofed pre-fabricated building with where all equipment must be put away at weekend. The research visit happened to be a Monday morning. We were informed that a relief staff member would take the class this morning as the practitioner, was absent. The substitute practitioner and a Community Employment (CE) staff member ran the session. A new girl started pre-school that day as part of the roll out of the ECEC scheme. The ambience was not good. Twelve fluorescent long bulbs lit up a big blue cold room.

It became apparent that the practitioner was not in control of the group. One particular young boy’s behaviour annoyed her so much that she asked him
in a threatening tone — do you want to come to the kitchen with me and sit for 5 minutes?” he replied – “Yes” at which point she screamed – “NO”. As the morning progressed the use of a Bold chair emerged. In essence the aim of the practitioner was to get the children to sit down to work on jigsaws, colour in artwork prepared by the teachers earlier and to make and play with play dough. If a child was not sitting down he or she was asked – “Do you want to get a star today? – Last chance”.

The children spent long periods waiting for activities. At one stage the practitioner shouted to the assistant – “What’s the new girl’s name again?” A chaotic morning of activities and children’s names being called out for “not sitting down”. At last it came to break time, all the children were finally sitting down when the practitioner pointed to a large Behaviour Chart Rules. The chart was high up on the wall and is now replicated word for word below under Behaviour Chart Rules.

**The Situation sample (4) Behaviour – Versus – thinking (Pre-school 8)**

This sample is so called as is clear that the practitioner was focused on the children’s behaviour rather than the child’s ideas.

**Behaviour chart rules**

1. Good behaviour gets a gold star
2. Not good behaviour loses a gold star
3. Team with the most stars on Friday gets a sticker and extra treat sweets.

**Good Behaviour**

Tidy up, sharing, please and thank you, listening, ask nicely, sitting on chair.

**Not Good Behaviour**

Kicking, hitting and slapping, pinching, cursing, biting, spitting, not listening, and screaming
When the children sat for their snack the practitioner took the opportunity to draw their attention to the chart. Then she turned to each child asking the rhetorical question ―Jack, were you good today?‖ each said yes. If the practitioner deemed that his/her behaviour was "good today" a star (sticker) was stuck on the child’s chest. On a few occasions, her response to her rhetorical question was ―No I don’t think so – no star today‖. The shame and disappointment on the faces of the little children was a sad and sorry sight.

**Situation Sampling 4: Behaviour-Versus-Thinking**

Later it was observed that one child who had been awarded a sticker for good behaviour was subsequently made sit on "bold chair" and ate his sticker out of boredom. As the morning progressed, the procedure of taking away stars if behaviour is not "good" was observed. The children were visibly distressed; the reaction of the practitioner on a number of occasions to distressed children was to say "I've had enough of this‖.

The children were also separated into teams, so those who did not get a sticker were also reminded that they were letting down the team. Later in discussion with the practitioner, the star chart and the use of the "bold chair" she explained was the invention of another Community Employee (CE) worker. The chart had been adapted from a Marte Meo communications checklist she received when training with the IPPA. She copied me on the checklist and while it did originate with the IPPA; it did not contain anything like the star chart she had used.

I asked about policies of settling in new children she responded that would introduce the new child the practitioner's response was "Ah they all know each other". She had trained to level 5 on the NQF. She had only found out the previous evening that she was working this pre-school session. She saw herself as an experienced Childcare worker, having worked and trained with
a private childcare company. It was outside the scope of this research to examine in detail individual management structures. A voluntary committee of parents and community stakeholders runs this group. The physical space is poor and unsuitable; the practitioner training level is low. The pre-school is part of a suite of services run in the underprivileged community to stimulate back to education initiatives and social employment. The pre-school fosters punitive and degrading treatment of children. In this case, the work experience of the pre-school trainee was negative. She was not in a position of power to address the practitioner’s behaviour, though she was kind and helpful to the children at all times. This is an unfortunate work experience for her.

**The Situation Sample „Polite Conversations“ (5)**
The trained practitioner (manager) was not in the room, the children were due to sit for their snack. The trainee practitioner encouraged the children to converse and enjoy their break time. She organised the clearing of tables she kindly advised the children to “Now sit down eat your snack and make polite conversations pretend you are in a restaurant” (Pre-school 25). This example illustrates that she had a sense that the children should be encouraged to talk and relate to each other. In this instance the trainee been exposed to Relational pedagogy ideas yet the basics were missing – she did not sit down herself with the children. Training in Relational pedagogical principles as outlined in Chapter 1, should fostering co-operative learning groups, case studies, linking content to personal experiences, reflective journaling etc.

**Situation Sampling 5: Polite Conversations**

**Social Interaction across Reggio and Irish practice**
When comparing staffing arrangements between Reggio and Ireland it is clear that the Reggio approach to staffing has evolved in such a way as to
promote layers of support for practitioners. The staffing structure of teachers, *atelierista* (a teacher trained in the arts who works with classroom teachers in curriculum development and documentation) *pedagogiste* (curriculum team leaders) and auxiliary staff. Each centre is staffed with two teachers per classroom (12 children in infant classes and 24 in pre-primary classes) and one *atelierista*. The *pedagogiste*, co-ordinates the work of teachers from five or six centers each centre has auxiliary staff for cooking and cleaning. This supported staffing arrangement combined with a policy of maintaining the same group of children and teachers together for a period of three years make possible the sense of community and friendships among staff, parents and children. In the Reggio approach there is no school principal, nor is there a hierarchical relationship among the teaching staff.

In terms of discipline behaviour problems and tantrums there is no punishment, nor use of time out bold chairs. The practitioners try to help the child to verbalise the feelings he or she is experiencing and help the child understand these feelings. The practitioners interpret behavioural problems as a clue that the child’s upset indicates the need for support. Medication for behaviour issues is not accepted as the best response. There is a tolerant approach to children wishing to move around the classroom. Documentation highlights children’s interests, which are brought to bear on the emerging curriculum. Time is available to attend to the set curriculum and to discuss and support emerging curriculum.

The Teaching staff work a total of 36 hours per week, of which 30 hours are spent with the children. The remaining six hours are used for a variety of purposes, including professional development, planning, preparation of materials and meetings with families” (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006, p.16).
In contrast, Irish staffing arrangements compared with in Reggio do not include time for reflection, pedagogical planning and time to meet with parents or the support of a fellow professional pedagogue.

**Conclusion**

This is the highest scoring measure of the eleven measures recorded where the mean of the score is found to be good because adults generally interact kindly with children. The pre-schools tend to rely on one individual to advance the pedagogical approach. Her practice can determine the overall quality of the service. In the event of the lead practitioner being unavailable, no system of peripatetic professional staff replacement exists. On two occasions during the pre-school data collection practitioners who had arranged to run their session and be interviewed did not run their session and a junior staff member ran the session. In the situational sampling (4) earlier in this chapter example, the lead practitioner filled in on short notice although she was not working in the pre-school on a regular basis. It is clear that the individual practitioner’s temperament and epistemological beliefs are crucial. In situational sample (4) Behaviour – versus – thinking, it is clear that the practitioner did not at any stage demonstrate that she had the capacity to listen for a children’s ideas. She appears to be working from the philosophy that - she is the adult she makes the rules. The fact that the children were too young to even read or benefit in any way from her rules was not within her grasp. Why the inexcusable punitive practice is possible is due to failures in both policy and pedagogy. The lack of pedagogical professional training requirement by law and weak and erratic professional support contribute to poor practice. In terms external agencies with responsibility for child protection and quality improvements, such as the Pre-school Inspection HSE, NVCO‘s and CCC have failed this pre-school. The chart on the wall was visible to all who enter the building it is not until the practitioner starts to implement the star reward system that the awfulness
of its function is realised. Since the visit through discussion with relevant authorities, we now know from the relevant Head Pre-school Inspector of the Health Service Executive that the service has since closed down. The service is to re-open in new premises.

No national policy concerning parent's involvement in their children's pre-school education exists. In the absence of a national pedagogical approach to training in the field of ECEC practitioners in low scoring pre-schools were observed as reverting to approaches closer to parenting or to teaching practices found in primary nursery classes. While children are generally safe and occupied in such pre-schools they lack high quality effective early years provision which has a significant impact on children's social, emotional and cognitive development and it is a key factor in improving outcomes for children and their families (Sylva, K. et al. 2004).

**Measure Six: Programme Structure**

The seeds for reconceptualising work in all educational environments have been sown; we are now given the responsibility for supporting and valuing those potentially transformative grains (Cannella 2008, p. 27)

This measure is concerned with four areas; Programme Schedule, Free Play, Group Time and Provision for Children with Disabilities. This section outlines a review of how programme structures have come to be understood in pedagogical practice. A discussion on how Reggio programme structures and how children with Special Education Needs (SEN) are accommodated in Reggio Pre-school is contrasted Irish provision. Finally, the fifth practice sample (5) Getting a new baby is reported.
Programmes Structure Theory

The debate on how the pre-school day is structured is linked to the larger question on the very role of pre-school. Teaching methods and programmes are structured across a spectrum of free play, tasks with ‘accurate replication’ to ‘reflective practice’ and beyond to ‘critical reflective practice’. At the critical reflective practice end of this spectrum practitioners challenge universal truths and mono-culture perspectives, teaching for social justice. One Irish practitioner indicated critical pedagogical ideas. This was exemplified during the interview process by the art object (picture, painting, sketch) brought to the discussion by the practitioner. She brought weighing scales; she explained that her pedagogical approach was to ensure that equality was the foundation of her practice she said ‘Is it equal? If you have got that you have the foundation; any issue that comes up will be OK if you have equality you can handle pre-school’ (10). This is the practitioner who had experience of working in Holland and had shown evidence of Constructivist practice earlier on during the morning by encouraging friendship.

While the approach varies across the spectrum there is agreement that the early childhood curriculum should help children master the basic skills involved in literacy and numeracy. In the Irish case, various pedagogical approaches are scheduled into daily timetables. These can be a fluid, variable and a flexible affair. The preferred option is a balanced approach to daily scheduling that is familiar and provides a routine, yet is flexible to move and capture learning moments that may arise.

Where parents and policy makers push the school agenda onto pre-school practitioners they are expected to deliver pre-school programs to ensure children’s readiness for school. This has come to be known as to ‘push down curriculum’ (Katz 1996). Irish practitioners without ECEC graduate training
are particularly vulnerable to this influence. The practitioners who follow a dedicated pedagogy such as HighScope, Montessori, Steiner and Reggio follow an agreed pedagogy and are less vulnerable.

Effective early years provision has been shown to narrow the gap in educational disadvantage (Bredenkamp 1978, Sylva et al. 2004). In the UK, statutory legislation exists to ensure that Local Authorities go beyond basic pre-school provision into the areas of high quality early learning and care:

The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on Local Authorities and their partners to improve outcomes for all young children and reduce inequalities between them. Fulfilling this duty requires a broad and inclusive strategy, part of which should focus on the provision of high quality early learning and care. (National Strategy Early Years Consultants Handbook, 2008, p.7)

By developed a National Strategy Early Years Consultants Handbook (2008) the Department of Children, Schools and Families outlines clearly the role of support workers called ‘Early Years Consultants’. Their role is to ensure that Local Authorities and Children’s Trusts embed Early Years quality improvement in their plans for Children’s Services. The Early Years Consultants are employed by Local Authorities and are tasked with providing on-going support, training and materials. For example, the consultants implement an Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (EYQISP) therefore the consultants work as catalysts for quality improvement at a local level. Their role is to ensure that a good pedagogical mix of free playgroup time and children’s individual needs are structured into the pre-school programme. The fact that some pre-schools require more
attention is acknowledged and consultants are expected to spend more time with lower scoring pre-schools to develop schedules and good pre-school practices. This acknowledges that support should be targeted at those pre-schools and providers in most need it most, where outcomes for children are poorest. These supports are provided on top of a Graduate Leader Fund (GLF) for settings to recruit, train and retain graduate practice. This practice opens up the issue of programme structure in all pre-schools, and will benefit the pre-schools that are run without an agreed pedagogical approach.

**Irish findings on Programme Structure**

![Category Six Programme Structure](image)

*Figure 14: Category Six Programme Structure*

ECERS/R measures four areas in terms of programme structure. The four areas under examination are; Schedule, Free Play, Group Time, Provision for Children with Disabilities.

Analysis for Programme Structure: the overall result for this category is 3.71
Schedule 4.38
No agreed schedule is found throughout the pre-school visits. Some evidence of written schedules posted on pre-school walls was found. The findings show that a balanced scheduling system is not in place. In some instances, slavish adherence to a pre-written schedule that meets inspection compliance was found. The score indicates that some toys games and equipment are accessible for children to use in free play. If the result is to progress to good (5) free play should be extended to occur for a substantial part of the day.

Free Play 4.65
Free play is defined as “child is permitted to select materials and companions, and as far as possible manage play independently” (Harms et al, 1998; 43). The score reflects minimal (3) provision. In order to reach good (5) free play must occur for a substantial portion of the day. Staff’s interaction must be to help children think through solutions and encourage children to talk about subjects.

Group time 3.92
The score is between minimal (3) and good (5). The tendency found in Irish provision is for children to be kept as part of ‘whole group gatherings‘. This is a recurrent them in pre-schools that run as mini schools whereby the children are made do all activities in a group. Colouring the same pictures and making the same themed cards. The opportunity for children to self-select small groups for play activities is an issue that needs to be addressed if the score is to improve.

Provision for children with disabilities
This item was not as the ECERS/R instruction recommendation that “this item should only be used only if a child with an identified disability is
included in the programme, otherwise score this item N/A” (Harms, 1998, p.45). Only one child in this study presented as having a physical disability. There was no special provision for that child.

While the ECERS/R does not specifically mention special educational needs the use of the term disability is understood to include the five children with special educational needs and one with physical needs in this study. No agreement on multi-disciplinary approaches to sharing of information or therapeutic approaches is agreed nationally. The minimal score reflects that only ‘some involvement‘ in pre-school by children with special needs and their parents occurs. An approach where practitioners work as part of a multi-disciplinary team with other professionals, along with parents in goal setting and reflexive practice is required to score good (5). A fuller discussion on individual children’s needs is found in chapter five under the category 11 Diversity.

In this study, six services had children with special needs in attendance (pre-schools 2, 3, 15, 17, 18 and 20). Five children had intellectual learning disability one child has a physical disability. During this research, a child with special education needs was observed on his first day in (pre-school 18). Two Special Needs Assistants (SNA‘s) were observed (pre-school 2 and 18). The employment of SNA‘s is managed by a voluntary organisation called Enable Ireland outside the remit of the NVCO‘s.

**Scheduling for Children with Special Rights in Reggio**

In the Reggio approach the curriculum is fluid. While the staff have ideas of how aspects of the day will be scheduled, they also leave room for an emergent curriculum.
In keeping with the philosophical stance, that highlights the strength and uniqueness of every child the tag of ‘special needs’ is changed to ‘special rights’. If a child with ‘special rights’ is in the class, another teacher is added to the class (only two children with special rights are allowed per class). This additional teacher works with all children in the class, not only with the child with special rights. The practitioner works as part of a multidisciplinary team focusing on the child’s wellbeing and education. This is apparent in a document called the ‘declaration of intent’, which is a written agreement between the school and health authorities to ensure collaboration. This is a flexible document open to discussion with health authorities, parents and pre-school. The Reggio system develops portfolio documents from observations, which document developmental areas in the child’s progress. Moreover, the practitioner is not alone she is supported by the extra teacher and the pedagogista is a helpful resource to the staff in adapting activities and materials for the child with special rights.

In terms of scheduling timetables in the Reggio system, the pedagogista, atelierista and the auxiliary staff devise a flexible schedule. The schedule may include work with small groups of five children on projects, a visit from atelierista, the routine play based activities, outdoor nature and science, indoor nature and science make believe play and storytelling. There are always enough adults around to see to the children’s needs, and encourage them to communicate.

**Scheduling in Irish Pre-school Provision**

The typologies list in Chapter 3 has shown the variety of pre-school found in the study. The groups that hold a pedagogical approach usually adhere to the scheduling associated with the particular pedagogy. The groups that come under the banner of ‘play based groups’ implement any type of schedule one such case is now explored.
The setting for the pre-school (9) is situated in what was once a hairdressing saloon in a retail-shopping unit. No outdoor play is available. Two staff work in the pre-school one is a well-trained practitioner trained to level six on the national qualifications framework and trained in the HighScope pedagogical approach. Working alongside her is a student currently attending FETAC level five vocational training. The owner/manager works as a professional elsewhere and did not attend during the data collection. The student is a sister of the owner.

The morning was spent observing manic transitions whereby every fifteen minutes all children were made partake and complete a task. Every fifteen minutes all children had to change to another task. The children were thus wound into hyperactivity. A new child had joined the setting that day, due to the dysfunctional scheduling; he was not given any special attention. I discussed the schedule with the practitioner.

She explained that the owner of the business makes out that schedule; her sister is the student/assistant who reports to the owner if the schedule is not adhered to. This was evidenced when the practitioner forgot to say prayers before snack. The assistant insisted on the prayers. The manic morning of activities was adhered to as the owner wants to ensure that if the inspectorate makes an unannounced inspection that the schedule, which she had devised (and hanging on the wall), is adhered to. The owner does not have any pedagogical training and thus has developed what can only be described as Tick Tock Timetabling. This approach is testament to pre-school policy build on social partnership, promoting the placement of pedagogical services in the open market. This is compounded by weak regulation without clarity in what is understood to be good pre-school practice. It also serves as a cautionary note as to how pedagogical training
(in this case HighScope) training is so easily displaced by the ownership/management orders.

The following situational sampling runs a more flexible time scheduling. An example of a flexible and accommodating structure found when visiting a community based group, in a rural town. The setting is scores well, with very suitable equipment and furniture. The outdoor facility is under construction and a high staffing ratio of adult to children allowed for smooth transitions between activities and individual attention. Children worked in small groups at free playtime. The atmosphere was quite pleasant and children were encouraged to enjoy the activities under the supervision of helpful adults.

During the greeting part of the morning the good news of a new baby born the previous night in the parish was shared by parents and practitioners. A boy (the new baby’s brother) would arrive late. His Mother delivered the new baby in question the previous evening in a home birth.

**Situational sampling (6): “We’re getting a new Baby Sister”**

He arrived in due course. She congratulated Dad, on the birth of another son, and devoted time to the boy exclusively. She settled him into an activity, and stayed close, asking questions of him that she already knew the answer to, such as “did ye get a new baby last night?” and “what are you going to name the new baby?”

Spontaneously she turned her attention to the entire room (making sure to include the researchers) she proceeded to tell all present that “Jack’s Mom had a New baby last night now Jack has a baby brother”. Then she asked the entire pre-school class “is anyone else here getting a baby?” one little girl responded “We’re getting a new baby sister” she said. The practitioners face appeared questioning and sceptical “How do you know it’s a sister?”
she asked –Oh my Mommy told me” said the little girl. The practitioner commanded the full attention of staff, children and researchers when she laughed out the response –Well that will be news to her” turning to the staff and the researchers to have a joke. All the staff laughed. The little girl looked puzzled and - the conversation stopped (Pre-school 13).

Situation Sampling 6: "We're getting a new baby sister"

This example illustrates some key issues: in practice the schedule is flexible, community care, kindness but lacks Relational pedagogical knowledge. The practitioner is without relational pedagogical training or a high level of awareness of how to promote the dignity of the child. If she had training, which focused attention on these concepts, she may have related in a different way to Jack. For example, she may have allowed space by remaining quiet thus allowing Jack to bring to the discussion his thoughts on last night’s events. Instead of her spontaneous decision to question all present she may have discussed with her colleagues ways to encourage discussion about new babies which would allow an opportunity to hear the children’s ideas on babies. She may have focused on a special interest of Jack’s when he arrived, as he may have just needed a break from the event and enjoy the comfort of a familiar pre-school activity. Moreover, she should be trained to listen to the voice of the child in a non-patronising way. By joking about the child’s effort she discouraged her efforts to participate. On reflection, the practitioner may well have behaved like this in an effort to be friendly to the researchers and to have a mutual adult connection. Many aspects of the encounter reveal how the flexibility of the community setting (late arrival accommodated) and the genuine best wishes offered to the father by staff members was notable around the happy occasion. It was a warm safe place in his community for the little boy to spend time after the eventful night, yet it could have been better all-around with some reflexive practice worked into the programme structure.
Irish Pre-school - extension of home life

Several practitioners’ common or shared experience of the motivation to work in pre-school provision was influenced by gender role as mothers, family friendly work hours. Programme structure has in the past been seen as an extension of family life. Consequently, practitioners did not perceive work as a ‘real job’- it was something they stumbled into which suited their family situation at the time:

I had two small children and I had given up work to stay at home and mind them. My sister had a baby and asked me if I would look after the baby and I did and then friends approached me so I decided I’d go do a course. I opened a crèche and as my children got older I closed the crèche and just kept on the pre-school which was half nine to half twelve (Pre-school 3).

I decided that I wanted to do something rather than retire and pre-school was the thing I picked. I did a Montessori course and absolutely love it – it is part hobby and it is part business and it’s keeping me young and happy (Pre-school 6).

Two practitioners (21 and 26) used a combination of redundancy payments and government funding to develop businesses in on the grounds of their family home to complement their own family responsibilities. In several instances family members contribute to the business, husbands (pre-school’s 4, and 20) were on hand as back up. Sisters in law (pre-school 11), daughter and mother concern (pre-school 19) and stepmother and daughter in law (pre-school 6) all work together in family businesses. One practitioner /
owner (Pre-school 26) sees her business as a thriving practice for her daughter to inherit.

Conclusion
In the past due to the organic nature of how pre-school developed - as an extension of women's home life the work was seen as a ‘labour of love’. Then programme structures were merely an extension of family life. Throughout this time, a gradual increase in training has taken place. However, these are in the minority. Most worrying is the finding was the skilled practitioner in the HighScope method, who was forced to acquiesce to tick tock timetabling. This finding reveals that so many aspects of how pre-school policy development was left to chance. Pre-schools are vulnerable places when managed by powerful unskilled managers who can influence very bad practice from afar. The emergent curriculum found in Reggio practice is rarely found in Irish practice. In order to implement a fluid curriculum allowing for spontaneity practitioners need to be empowered to take charge of scheduling. This requires confidence. Confidence comes with accreditation. No multi-disciplinary, inter-agency and parental agreements are a feature of care for children with Special Educational Needs. The scheduling issue in pre-school is mixed up in multi-agency inertia. No clarity exists as to whether the HSE Inspectorate. The NVCO’s or the pre-schools themselves are the lead agency with responsibility for scheduling. Unfortunately, the long awaited frameworks have not brought any clarity to the issue.

Category Seven: Parents and Staff
The organic nature of developments of the ECEC sector presented major challenges. However it saw the sheer diversity of experiences that has developed as a result as contributing to rich environments for the production of a set of core values, ideas and principles.
This scale measures six sub categories, Provision for parents, Provision for personal needs of staff, Provision for professional needs of staff, Staff interaction and cooperation, Supervision and evaluation of staff and Opportunities for professional growth. This chapter outlines principles of best practice in provision for parents and staff. The findings are analysed. The post-modern pedagogical Reggio approach is contrasted with Irish practice. Finally, practitioner’s views and experiences of Irish pedagogical training are reported.

**Policies to support Providers and Parents**

In 1998, the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) published the *Report of the Commission on the Family – Strengthening Families for Life*. The report acknowledges the role of curriculum and the training and qualifications of staff as vital in providing quality early years care and education. “Quality early education and experiences are valuable and important to all children” (Ireland, Department Social Community and Family Affairs, 1998, p.269). The National Childcare Strategy visioned “An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and a wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood” (Ireland, Department of Health and Children, 2000, p.32). Fundamental to implementing the recommendatons from these policy documents are the qualifications of those who work in the field of ECEC. The National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (NCCC) identified “childcare qualifications” as a priority area for attention. The Committee commissioned the Center for Social and Educational Research (CSER) of the Dublin Institute of Technology consultation with the ECEC sector to
develop a model in relation to training an qualifications. This dialogue led to the publication of *Quality Childcare and Lifelong Learning: Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector* (2002). Through a consultation process, the research identified sectorial standards in ECEC. Firstly, six core knowledge areas in the field of ECEC were identified, Child development, Education and play, Social environment, Health, hygiene, nutrition and safety, Personal/professional development and Communications management and administration.

The following levels of practitioner knowledge in core knowledge areas was identified in Irish ECEC provision spanning a range of practitioner occupational profiles (see table seven) below. This led to identifying a set of five occupational profiles; Basic practitioner, Intermediate practitioner, Experienced practitioner, Advanced practitioner and Expert practitioner. Each profile is matched to three associated levels of intellectual skills and abilities, process (to carry out tasks) and accountability. For example, the basic practitioner in terms of intellectual skills should have an elementary understanding of core knowledge areas and have the ability to apply solutions to familiar problems and to receive and pass on information. In terms of processes, the practitioner should be able to carry out routine tasks. In terms of responsibility: should work under supervision only.

At the top end, the expert practitioner should possess skills that show a mastery of complex theoretical knowledge and the ability to evaluate critically knowledge, concepts, and a level expertise in research, and policy development. In terms of processes, the expert practitioner should be able to apply diagnostic and creative skills in a wide range of situations. Engage in planning policy development and management and contribute to publication and dissemination of knowledge and skills. Finally, in terms of
accountability the expert should have complete autonomy in professional activities and take responsibility for achieving personal and group outcomes. (JELR 2002, pp.16-18). In mapping out practitioner profiles into practitioner practice, the *Model Framework* brought the work of William Perry’s ‘epistemological beliefs’ (1970) and Van Manen’s ways of knowing with ways of being practical (1977) into and Irish ECEC debate. A move toward standardisation is exemplified in the recent cross-referencing of occupational profiles from the Model Framework with the (NFQ) (Department of Education and Science 2009, p.44). The cross-referencing resulted in the following mapping:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Profile from the 2002 Model Framework</th>
<th>NFQ Level</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Practitioner</td>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>This may need to equate to a major award or the best fit may be to a minor or special purpose award at that level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Practitioner</td>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>This would generally equate to a major award (FETAC Level 5 Certificate) while it may also equate to a minor or a special purpose award.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Practitioner</td>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>This would generally equate to a FETAC Advanced Certificate at Level 6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Practitioner</td>
<td>Level 7/8</td>
<td>This would equate to at least an Ordinary Bachelor Degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert Practitioner</td>
<td>Level 8/9</td>
<td>This would equate to at least an Honours Bachelor Degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Agreed appropriate level of award for each ECEC occupational profile

The *Model Framework* identified the need to invest in education, training and professional development. Due to the organic nature of the ECEC sector, the findings highlight the importance of procedures, which facilitate
the award of credit for prior learning. This should be done through a system of Applied Prior Learning (APL) for practitioners who have established ECEC services and/or have experience across a range of applied pedagogical practice. The practitioner’s level of prior pedagogical experience and skills can be identified through a system of portfolio building and then mapped onto the practitioner occupational profile. The provision of flexible learning options such as part time training courses that allow practitioners to continue to work while training in ECEC would provide for the variety of untrained and those holding some level of accreditation in the field.

Eight years after the publication of the Model Framework and two quality and curriculum frameworks later Síolta (CECDE 2005) and Aistear (NCCA 2009), no clear action has been taken to train practitioners to graduate level. The issue of training in ECEC continues to be the subject of reports, discussion papers and recommendations. In the Developing the Workforce in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector Background Discussion Paper (DES 2009) similar recommendations made eight years ago in the area of qualifications and sectoral standards in the Model Framework are found;

1. To ensure that all new entrants to the workforce are appropriately qualified for their role and level of responsibility.
2. To afford unqualified practitioners the opportunity to achieve a Level 5 award.
3. To facilitate those holding Level 5 awards to progress to higher levels (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 2009, p.43).
The discussion paper recommends that the two practice frameworks, Síolta and Aistear—should be referred to in the setting of sectorial standards for national awards, as they are important national guidelines and benchmarks of professional practice in ECEC into the future and supplement the Model Framework” (Ireland, Department of Education and Science, 2009, p. 44). It is not clear why when the frameworks Síolta and Aistear were being developed that the Model Framework was not referred to.

While research and consultation has been carried out on ways to advance ECEC practitioners on the NQF most practitioners working directly with children in this study were at Intermediate Practitioner level 5.

Irish Findings for Parents and Staff

![Bar Chart: Category Seven Parents and Staff](image)

Figure 15: Category Seven Parents and Staff
The six sub categories concerning pre-school activities under examination are, Provision for parents, Provision for Personal needs of Staff, Provision for Professional needs of Staff, Staff interaction and Co-operation, Supervision and Evaluation of staff and Opportunities for professional growth.

Analysis of findings: The overall category scored 3.64

**Provision for parents 3.27**
This score shows the level of parental involvement where ‘some information’ is shared. Interactions between family members and staff are generally respectful and positive and parents are given, administrative information about the programme in writing. Other key issue to encourage parental involvement is limited. For example, parents are generally not made aware of philosophical approaches to activities and policies. The variety of typologies of services lead to different roles for parents for example parents in community settings may be active committee members and have a level of awareness in terms of management. This is not a feature of other pre-schools such as privately run groups. The findings show no national standard or policy in what is understood as parental involvement consequently the score is minimal.

**Provision for personal needs of staff 4.54**
This sub-scale scores the highest in the across the six scales in this category. It is concerned with staff’s personal space for restroom and breaks. Pre-school buildings vary in provision for staff. Some are new buildings with a lounge/kitchen area and adult size furniture. At worst run down community centres with little or no provision for personal adult needs. The importance of space for staff outside the pre-school room is seen as important not just in terms of storage of personal belongings, suitable spaces for snacks, and toiliting are basic qrirments. In terms of professional needs of staff,
spaces where they can meet with parents, fellow staff members and visitors for planning, discussion and curriculum development are vital. Many new buildings have met the criteria yet many services do not aspire to having staff rooms or staff kitchens for example where pre-schools are run in private homes; the family study and dining room double up for meetings, office, snacks and toileting use the family facility. The importance of staff personal needs is not understood as essential due to the sessional nature of the pre-school part time hours.

Provision for professional needs of staff 4.42
Files, storage, space to meet parents, administration and meeting are measured here. All groups had a telephone and most had enough storage. However, space to meet parents is only a feature of more recently built settings. It is not possible to score past good (5) without policy’s in place that encourage professional development. In practice staff employed in ECEC settings tend to be trainees or low paid workers. Issues of recruitment and retention in the field of early childhood are dominated by the oversupply of trainees, who when trained to a minimal standard are deemed to be competent. Thus meeting the regulation as “a sufficient number of suitable and competent adults working directly with the children in the pre-school setting at all times” (Ireland: Department of Health and Children 2006, p.37).

Staff interaction and co-operation 3.81
In order to progress to good (5) staff duties have to be “shared fairly” (Harms, et al 1998, p.49). The hierarchy in Irish pre-school provision found in this research was always that of practitioner and assistant. In the case of the private groups, the owner can be the lead practitioner or absent. In the case of community groups a hierarchy if found based on training. In other groups, hierarchy is based on employment.
In order to score well in this sub measure a situation where all the staff who work with the same group of children have planning time together. This was found in (Pre-school 23) in all other cases supervision and training issues score between inadequate to minimal. These present many challenges due to the historical complexity of the workforce involvement in training schemes and lack of clarity in progression. The elasticity of supply of pre-school practitioners entry into the sector is fueled by the lack of statutory requirements in training levels. Anyone can set up a pre-school, the only suggestion the HSE inspectorate could make was that practitioners attend training to level five on the National Framework Qualifications (NQF).

**Supervision and evaluation of staff 3.12**

This score indicates that pre-school providers receive minimal supervision and evaluation. No annual supervisory observations or written evaluation outlining strengths and areas for improvement are a feature of employment in the cohort. The skill-set required to supervise and evaluate staff would require a trained pedagogue. The lack of expertise in the area contributes to this low score. When evaluating practice, it is crucial to have an agreed pedagogy to evaluate. Here the cohort practice is found to be weak and minimal.

**Opportunities for professional growth 2.69**

The low score reflects that no staff meetings, no in service training and no orientation for new staff are common practice in the research cohort. Only in two settings (pre-school 13 and 26) were some professional resource materials found. These were books on issues of pre-school, play, child development and books with ideas on pre-school activities. The issue of accreditation for training is found to be problematic, in that training provided for *Síolta* is not mapped on the National Qualifications
Framework. It remains to see if training for *Aistear* will be provided by the National Voluntary Organisation NVCO‘s in the same way. Practitioners are expected to attend training by NVCO‘s in their own time and without pay. Progression to attend degree courses is stymied as no system of Applied Prior Learning APL is in operation when applying to third level institutions. The courses are costly and no Graduate Training Fund is available to practitioners wishing to peruse ECEC studies. Only in certain cases is there a clear link to a financial incentive to progress to graduate level on the NQF. This is found where a practitioner can capture the higher payment on the ECCE scheme. For staff working in a community setting there is no obvious incentive to invest time and money in third level training. The most worrying score by far is the very low level of supervision for staff and the lack of opportunity for professional growth. These issues will require investment to remedy.

**Examining connections between Reggio and Irish Practice concerning Parents and Staff**

Parents played a founding role in the start-up of the Reggio pre-schools. Their right to be included is defined by Lori Malaguzzi:

> It is the right of parents to participate actively and with voluntary adherence to the basic principles, in the growth, care, and development of their children who were entrusted to the public institution. This means no delegating and no alienation. Instead, it confirms the importance of the presence and the role of the parents, who have always been highly valued in our institutional tradition. First, we have the school, which makes strong and concerted efforts to involve the parents, in the awareness of how much can be gained from close collaboration with the families for the greater security and well-being of the children. Parent participation enables a communication network
that leads to fuller and reciprocal knowledge, as well as to a more effective shared search for the best educational methods, content, and values (Reggio Kids Childcare Centers Loris Malaguzzi Reggio Emilia, 1993).

In order to facilitate parents and families to participate in the Reggio system, the teachers make the rooms welcoming for parents. The classroom environment is warm, inviting, and reflective of the children’s cultures. The Reggio philosophy holds that family’s lives should be visible within the classroom, photographs of family and pets visible. In terms of how parents engage with the services, they can; serve on committees, contribute to the projects/investigations/studies, contribute to the environment, participate in activities. Parents can also participate in and contribute to; studies, investigations, projects, the environment, education/learning, celebrations, classroom meetings and plan and implement change.

Because a strong relationship between families and the Reggio schools exists a special project was developed for parents. The project is reported in Time for Families (Mantovani, 2001); “The project aimed to sustain isolated parents of children and increase parent’s confidence as educators of their children” (Mantovani 2001, pp. 67-74). The project came about from the observations made on the changing nature of families over the years since the founding of Reggio. For example the role of grandparents, the increase in mothers having their first child after the age of thirty are identified as changing the culture and experience the children bring to pre-school.

Parents and guests in the Reggio schools can use the area of the Pizza Square this is a space within the school for parents. Parents can bring their lunch into the square to dine with their children or to discuss issues or volunteer on projects.
Reggio Staff interaction and co-operation

One of the winning aspects of the Reggio Emilia application is the way in which staff members are supported by the atelierista. This is as outlined in *The Role of the Atelierista* (Vecci, 1998, pp. 119-127) written with the wisdom of 20 years’ experience in the role. She describes her working day. Every morning she makes a tour of each classroom, with an interest in the larger on-going projects and the smaller, independent activities. Talking to teachers briefly about how to introduce certain things to the children and what to anticipate, suggestions may be made. In the middle of the morning, another circuit is made checking out what interesting projects are happening, or a teacher may come looking for advice or suggestions. At the end of each morning 15 minutes is spent in consultation with each teacher. The atelierista sees herself as the teacher’s constant consultant. She has the time and space to invent and create. For example of a direct intervention once she noticed that the sun shining behind one of the trees outside the window, cast a shadow of the leaves onto the glass. She taped a sheet of translucent white paper onto the glass. As the children came in, they exclaimed with surprise and pleasure at the sight of the shadow of leaves on the paper. Here the creation of a rich environment does not require expensive toys or equipment it requires an awareness and innovation around space and light.

Practice concerning Parents and Staff in Research Cohort

Parents – I can’t stand them – I don’t go near them –I work with the children – I have staff to deal with parents (Pre-school 19).

Irish parents are not the bearers of the right to participate in the classroom part of pre-school activities. The quote above was spoken by a practitioner who loves working with the children and provides a well run service. However, she has little tolerance for parents. Her attitude to parents and to the staff she employs to deal with them goes unchallenged in the current system. No particular effort is made to make parents feel comfortable in the
pre-school space. Evidence that parents are made unwelcome was found in pre school (9) which had a notice _No Parents Past this Point_. Another practitioner when asked what she would do if she had more space described the extension she would like → Yea, then I’d have an area for the parent that they could look in and wouldn’t be standing out in the rain” (Pre-school 2). From this comment, it is clear that parents are not encouraged – even at departure time to enter the classroom. Collegiality and respect for parents and the contribution they play in the education of their children is not a strong feature of provision found in this study.

The lack of respect for practitioners is mirrored in how opportunities for their professional growth are supported by the state. For example, the ECCE scheme is available to all practitioners holding a basic level of training at FETAC Level five. The ECCE Scheme has financially incentivised practitioners to progress on the NQF. A lead in time to get this training was permitted under the scheme. In this study Pre-schools 5 and 11 had to comply with these training requirements in order to participate in the scheme. No clarity in how or where practitioners can receive training has been announced. All practitioners must submit their existing accreditation for approval to the DCYA Pre-schools. However, the _ad hoc_ nature of training in ECEC has led to a situation where by many practitioners, believe the accreditation they hold is at graduate level, the DCYA disagree (Pre-schools 4 and 6). Practitioners believed recognition for years of experience in the pre-school sector should have been taken into consideration and used to add value to their accreditation as expressed in the following interview.

**Practitioners Views**

*Interviewee:* Well I am very disappointed actually in the ECCE Scheme. I have loads of experience and we work very hard and we put an awful lot financially and everything else back into the school and the girl that works
with me – one of them has a degree and Montessori and I have the Montessori and Business I mean I know it’s not Childcare, I mean I’ve reared eight children, fifteen grandchildren, loads of experience and I was very disappointed to be graded down rather that up.

Interviewer: You were graded to level?

Interviewee: Was graded to level six.

Interviewer: So you re just one level short

Interviewee: We are just one measure short, we got the €65 rather than the €75 and I have to look around at other people that got it - they would not have the experience. I was disappointed and we were not told in time so that we could grade ourselves up.

Interviewer: So how do you think you’d be able to do that now?

Interviewee: Well at the moment I am planning to go back and study myself after Christmas and grade myself up and there is one little problem in that – when I rang the board they told me that believed we had to have the grade for three years before hand. I don’t know what the truth is in that but I am looking into that at the moment so it may be of no use at all (Pre-School 6).

The pre-school scored well consistently throughout the eleven measures under examination. Although a clear progression path is mapped out that meets her training needs through the Model Framework (2002) and Developing the workforce in the early childhood care and education sector Background discussion paper (2009) neither have been actualised through the colleges and universities or through a regional support network
(NVCO’s) in the area where this provider lives. Contrast this with the next interview to see the Regional disparity.

**Interviewer:** How did you go on to do your degree then?

**Interviewee:** It came about because we had a close link with the IPPA network we shared ideas at a monthly meetings and a lot of us went on from there and we did the level five first. We did that in a college locally, then an opportunity came about to do level 6 with the IPPA in Dublin. We used to go up on a Sunday night and have class all day Monday. I just got the opportunity because the courses were all heavily funded. The degree was heavily funded also. In terms of my young family at the time it was great because it was only one day a week and I did not have to be paying out for it – I could not afford it otherwise. It was all funded through the Border Counties Network. I did the HighScope in Co. Meath with the IPPA as well– heavily funded as well. I think that is the one that set us up well in terms of the timetabling as well we learned so much.

The NVCO’s have been there since day one. I’m not so sure if the training would be as good in the local college as well; having done both I learned a lot from the IPPA. We have the great service of the Border Counties Childcare Network (BCCN) as well we are so lucky to have them, we learned so much from their Quality Assurance Programme.
Interviewer: Your degree was funded?
Interviewee: Yes the degree was heavily funded as well was it €250 a term we had to pay per term and that covered two modules so yes it was quite well funded, so then on behalf of the BCCN they introduced the quality programme and we learned so much from that as well am so I think we are just very lucky to be living in the border counties that’s what I say all the time.

Interviewer: How did you get to build this big building?
Interviewee: We got Equal Opportunity Childcare Programme (EOCP) funding so it was great.

Interviewer: What would you say is the essence of pre-school?
Interviewee: The essence of pre-school care – emotional involvement if you can get that right everything else falls into place I’ve learned a lot about that in our degree as well (Pre-school 25).

Two pre-schools are run by women without the basic level 5 training. They must achieve accreditation if they want to avail of the ECCE scheme next year and after (Pre-school 5, and 11). In the case of the second pre-school the group is run in a disused room (not a classroom) in a convent school. Two practitioners (sisters in law) run the group. The longest serving of the two women – left school at 15 years of age and has run the group with no training for the past twenty years” (Pre-school 11). The ECCE scheme rather than statutory policy on accreditation has resulted in these women now starting pre-school training.
The practitioners have paid €1,000 each to attend a FETAC level 6 the course is run by a local private company. A mixed model of training across private and government funded organisations is policy in ECEC training consequently it is difficult to standardise. The practitioner shared a suspicion that the FETAC training course they have just signed up for is experiencing management and legal trouble. Subsequently, this was confirmed not just for these two women but also for many others. The Irish Times newspaper investigated the scandal and 13th October 2010 reported

The Guards begun a criminal investigation into a training college over allegations it took students’ money without providing the courses promised and continued to advertise courses after its FETAC accreditation had been suspended. The future now appears uncertain for up to 1,000 people who have paid tuition fees but have not yet started or completed their courses, or who have completed courses but have yet to receive formal accreditation. It had been offering hundreds of places on a variety of courses including Montessori teaching. A notice on the door at the college confirmed it had ceased trading (Irish Times Criminal inquiry begins into training college Wednesday, October 13, 2010)

When asked about the training both practitioners described it as “a money racket for training and jobs for the boys”. When asked why they had not undertaken training, up to now they are of the view that they were “working away fine”. Now this scheme leaves them, in their own words “between a rock and hard place”.
It is acknowledged that the ECCE Scheme and the incentive to increase the level of accreditation in practice is a welcome development. However the roll out was introduced without a clear training progression for those in the sector despite years of research, consultation, discussion documents on the subject. This has led to opportunistic rogue training companies taking advantage of practitioners rush to training. It is outside the limits of this investigation to follow up on the outcome, though it would be interesting.

Where training is offered by the NVCO’s confusion about both Síolta and Aistear was found one of the most qualified practitioners interviewed in (pre-school 26).

**Interviewee:** We are also doing Síolta training as well, one night a month on all the sixteen standards.

**Interviewer:** How does that Síolta training relate then to Aistear?

**Interviewee:** That is a difficult one, - me I have not figured it out Síolta is the seeds and Aistear is the tree - I think Síolta is the base line and Aistear is what is actually going to come, it is more curriculum based. It is very grey for me I never figured it out.

For many practitioners the ECCE scheme policy change is overall welcomed. For the private sector:

Its excellent for us it really is to be guaranteed your money and we are all getting paid a decent wage now whereas up to this it was whatever was in the box was what was in the kitty and you had to you know make it with that. Now we are guaranteed our money we have no issues of parents not paying (Pre-school 5).

For the Community groups and private groups holding contracts with Pobal
It is excellent but one of the problems is we are funded by two different bodies and we are required to be open for am 46 weeks per year but the Early Childhood is paid for all the weeks, so the parents then either have to take their child out for the last six weeks or they will then have to pay for the last six weeks – so the children are not getting a full preschool (Pre-school 22).

I have had Pobal funding so I have to do that extra half hour that was a blunder they made an awful lot of people in this country got Pobal funding and with that, we are contracted to 3.5 hours not 3 hours (Pre-school 4).

A sense that young graduates may be attracted into pre-school provision resulting in possible displacement was expressed:

I think a lot of what they are looking for in qualifications will knock a lot of us older ones out of it and we think we have a lot to give the children we are in to arts and crafts, fair enough some of them will have a degree but a degree isn‘t everything you know some of the new people coming - they may not have the nature that an older person would have (Pre-school 5).

**Conclusion**

Despite minimal regulation of pedagogical qualifications, some services have flourished and provide Relational pedagogical practice (Pre-school 25). The findings show that where training is ‗heavily funded‘ (Pre-school 25) good practice follows. In this case, the funding was part of a cross border initiative that invested not only in NCVO’s but also directly paid for students to attend tertiary training. Other parts of the country are not as fortunate with funding. While many policy documents exit on the topic of training in the sector, little application of ideas has occurred.
Institutional quality control problems between FETAC and FÁS have been acknowledged. FÁS has agreed to begin to “upgrading training standards with an emphasis on more regular and robust monitoring” (FÁS, 2010). The involvement of FÁS and FETAC in ECEC training is a legacy from Social Partnership where childcare was viewed in terms of labour market re-organisation. To move pre-school towards professional pedagogical practice, a flexible approach to training practitioners is vital. Colleges and universities must become involved in rolling out modular training linked to APL. In the UK and Nordic countries training for graduate pedagogues is situated in third level institutes. The implementation of post-modern pedagogical curriculum such as Aistear is a complex task and requires a wide knowledge of various concepts of sociology, politics, education, and business best understand post-modern ideals, principles and theory.

In the Irish pre-school expansion guided by Social Partnership process facilitated a divergence in the role of parents in pre-school. On the one hand parents were cast as committee members in community development schemes to draw down funding for pre-school expansion and fundraise. On the other hand they are viewed as potential clients for private pre-schools. No role is evident for the parents of children attending the schools designated for children with special needs.

This concludes the analysis of ECERS/R seven scales. The next four sections report on the extension four curricular subscales concerning Literacy, Mathematics, Science and Environment and Diversity. The same format is used in exploring the results and examining connections to the Reggio approach. The need for Irish practice to reconsider pedagogical training issues is further advanced by the results because each of the following measures scores lower than the measures reported thus far.
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS; EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL RATING SCALE EXTENDED

Introduction
This chapter reports on the findings of the application of the Extension Four Curricular Subscales (Sylva K et al. 2003). The scales (devised in the UK) measure Literacy, Maths, Science and Environment, and Diversity. In the previous chapter, aspects of these four measures have been reported in ECERS/R (category four, activities) which packs together ten sub-measures that overlap to some extent with the four measures found in this chapter: Math and number, Promoting acceptance of Diversity and Nature/Science as well as use of TV Video and Computers. The value of the newer Extension Four Curricular Subscales (Sylva K et al. 2003) is in their awareness of new technologies from the twenty first century. It has been posited by Papatheodorou (2004) that the UK Extension Four Curricular Subscales are a better fit than the original ECERS/R scales, if academic achievement is valued as an outcome. However this may overstate the case, the extended scales take a more in depth look at four aspects: Literacy, Math, Science and Diversity (individual children's needs).

Category Eight: Literacy

To survive and, occasionally, to prosper in these "new times", individuals will need skills associated not only with reading and writing and reckoning, but with creating, deconstructing and generally 'understanding' the diverse textual products of the new times (Rowan and Honan, 2008: 198).

The six items under investigation are, Environmental Print Letters and Words, Book and Literacy Areas, Adult Reading with the Children, Sounds
in Words, Emergent Writing/Mark Making and Talking, and Listening. This section reviews theory on best practice in these areas under observation. It reports on the findings and examines the connections between how these measures are applied in Reggio and in Irish practice. Three situational samplings ‘Rudolph, Plumbers, Firemen and Garda and No Writing Materials allowed’ illustrate the levels of environmental print, mark making and talking and listening practices found in the Irish research.

**International Theory on best practice in Literacy in ECEC**

Traditionally literacy has been understood as ‘reading and writing’. It is through these skills that children learn about their culture and learn how to reflect, critique and analyse the world. Teaching literacy to students involves instilling skills that give children the ability to read, write, interpret, and create messages. The trajectory of pedagogical thought on how best to encourage children to become familiar with print, literacy, sounds and writing practice has evolved from ‘rote learning’ to more current ideas children now are expected to think and problem solve.

Currently a variety of methodologies in terms of how literacy is thought is found in Irish practice. The Montessori Method encourages children to write and recognise letters and numbers from about four years of age. The Steiner approach holds off on introducing numbers and letters until much later. The effect of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) on popular culture has not bypassed the pre-school classroom. Current debates and practices concerning literacy extend reading and writing and introduce various new media technologies. New types of cultural literacy include texting, personal games stations and teaching and learning games are finding space in pre-school pedagogies.
In the past when change was less rapid, educators trained students towards academic or vocational training. These dichotomies have existed for over a century in education and the role of the teacher was to prepare students for these ‘known situation’. The rapid nature of change in communications and global economics has forced educators to rethink how education should prepare children for what many now agree to be an unknown future. Advisors in the UK on education policy point to the need to promote other skills that go beyond reading and writing. In the future individuals need to develop qualities of flexibility adaptability and creativity (Robinson, 2001). Creativity is not confined to traditional arts and crafts. Creativity is seen as vital in all aspects of how the human brain is applied in problem solving across all fields and disciplines. It has been argued that the traditional literacy teaching is merely ‘operational’ (Rowan and Honan 2008). For example examinations in the past measured cultural literacy as the child’s ability to construct certain types of texts in culturally appropriate fashion. Now ‘critical literacy’ recognises that beyond this there is the ability to reflect critically on how literacy practices in various contexts influence wider social patterns and influence power and ideas. Now literacy practices involving texts that reflect new realities support this philosophical stance. For example a simple text in pre-school can be introduced in terms of learning ABC’s, colours or numbers. Or the text can introduce the children to wider social issues such as what happens when people get old.
Irish Findings for Literacy

Figure 16: Category Eight: Literacy

Analysis for Literacy: The overall category scored 3.79

The six sub-categories concerning literacy are; Environmental Print Letters and Words, Book and Literacy Areas, Adult reading with the Children, Sounds in words, Emergent Writing/Mark making and Talking and Listening.

Environmental print: letters and words 4.03
A minimal to good score was reached. This item measures all printed words in the child’s environment other than books. In order to achieve a score
good (5) many labelled pictures (5 or more examples) have to be evidenced. Adult interaction must encourage children to recognise printed words must be recorded. While many settings had pictures on the wall of interest to children, two main reasons have been identified for the score. The first that the pictures were not labelled, thus not making the connection between language and the written word. Secondly, pictures were not displayed at children’s eye level. In many play based settings evidence of children learning by rote, in groups calling out the names of letters and numbers (preschools 4, 6, 20 and 22) were recorded. Most play-based pre-schools spend some time on simple letter recognition through games and matching dominos.

Books and literacy area 3.38
It is not possible to score past minimal (3) unless “an easily accessible area of the room is set aside for books” (Sylva et al, 2003, p.19). Many groups are stymied at this point because of limited space. In practice, most groups have a bookshelf, from where a child can access a book and take it to a desk. To score good (5) a wide range of books must be available in the literacy area. In this study the literacy area books were interrogated for variety (science, story, gender and cultural balance) and condition of books and the level of their availability. A minimal standard was found. In two pre-schools (4 and 16) children used a computer.

Adult reading with Children 3.23
Adults were found to read with children most days. Many read short stories with big pictures. This is a minimal standard. However in order to progress to a score of good (5) the children must take an active role in group reading, and to conjecture about and comment on the text. This was found in preschools (10 and 25).
Sounds in words 3.96
This measure is concerned with rhymes, songs, and poems. In most pre-schools children perform rhymes and songs. However to score good (5) on this component the practitioner must bring the attention of the children to the alliteration or rhyming components. This aspect was scored in measure four where the findings showed that little attention was paid to selecting songs and rhymes that introduced alliteration or rhyming components. Only in four pre-schools (10, 14, 15 and 25) evidence of a practitioner possessing a repertoire of songs and rhymes that were suitable for young children was witnessed.

Emergent writing/mark making 3.31
This item measured if children had access to writing materials, in a place set aside in a designated area for emergent writing. In order to score past minimal (3) children had to sometimes observe staff writing down what they say. The theory guiding this is to emphasise the link to reading and writing. On three occasions this was noted pre-schools (10, 23, 25) and each of the three cases varied. In Pre-school 10 the children sat with the practitioner they related something about their day, the practitioner recorded it in a notebook, which was taken home to share with parents. In pre-school 23 Practitioners implemented the HighScope approach and at review time the practitioner made notes of what the children reported for her own records. In Pre-school 25 the Practitioner listened in as children were playing, she recorded their words and discussion. The purpose of this was for reflexive practice, to hear the child and through listening, understand better the child. From her records, she would go on to build the curriculum. This emulates the Reggio Emilia approach. Unfortunately, the good work of the three was not enough to bring the mean score any higher than a minimal standard.
Talking and listing 4.81
Pre-schools are busy places where lots of conversations and communications happen. While children are spoken to, it emerged that adults ask closed questions. Initiating conversations, which offer opportunity for extended questions and providing scaffolding in conversations with children, was found in groups 10, 14, 23, and 25.

Reggio approach to Literacy
The Reggio approach makes available pens, paper, crayons, and pencils in a variety of sizes in a designated writing area. The approach works at making a link with expression. Pictures drawn by children are acceptable narratives and the purpose of writing is emphasised. This is done by encouraging children to _write_ and _read_ messages to each other. The messages can be exchanged, and the use of individual post-boxes (boxes labelled with a picture of the child) is a feature in classrooms. These messages can be drawings and can used as a basis to encourage practitioners to encourage discussion. What the children say is not dismissed as cute or funny rather it is reflected on maybe used in turn or in developing an emergent curriculum.

What children see in environmental print in a Reggio pre-school room consists of mostly their own work, drawings, paintings and project work in the making. Pastel shades create a relaxed environment and no evidence of commercial wall charts showing numbers and alphabets are on view. Promotional material about the philosophy of Reggio and _Reggio Children_ was on view during visit (Field trip B) in both pre-schools visited.

A designated book area with a beanbag and small rocking chair allows for reflective time with a book for the child to find individual inspiration. The story time is optional for the children to join in. The Reggio approach is known as the Listening pedagogy. This is instilled into the practice through
training practitioner to hear the voice and ideas of the child and in order to express them children are encouraged to draw their ideas.

**Irish mark making and literacy practices**

The various pedagogical approaches found in Irish practices hold a variety of approaches to practices concerning literacy. During the data collection, mixed approaches were found. The following three practice samples illustrate the range of practice present in the absence of a national policy of ECEC pedagogical approach. The following Situational Sampling (7), was observed in a privately run setting (Pre-school 5) where the practitioners held no accreditation on the NQF. A folder for each child is prominently displayed on a shelf high up and out of the reach of the child. Each child is strongly encouraged to submit a piece of art or written work each day; folders are given to parents at the end of term. The only art available on the day of the pre-school visit consisted of an A4 sheet of paper with an outline picture of Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer. The task was to colour between the lines. The procedure was conducted as follows: The practitioner scribbled (illegible) each child’s name on the A4 sheet and handed out sheet to all children present. No evidence that the children experience ‘ownership of their work’ as practitioners and other children scribble on sheets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational Sampling (7) Rudolph</th>
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<td>One little boy did not mark his sheet. He was reminded to do so, he displayed no interest. In an effort to make him complete the task the practitioner encourages him to fill in the nose – colour it red” she says, – colour the hoofs brown”. The boy ignored her directions. She was keen to ensure he performed his work (to use put in the folder) and in a final attempt to make him do, she resorted to saying – If you don’t start colouring in Rudolph – I’m going to start crying”. With this, she put on a sad face and threatened to be upset.</td>
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**Situation Sampling 7: Rudolph**
Here we see very weak pedagogical practice, which must be discontinued. Her words did not help the child to advance in his thinking or to understand and make sense of the world. It was a dismal attempt to get him to perform. The performance was to advance a portfolio, which had no real meaning for the child. The practitioner was not sensitive to her power to limit the scope of the child’s imagination through imposing suggestions. This practitioner had no awareness that as a professional she could allow the child to express himself by eliminating her use of nouns during such an exercise.

The ECCE Scheme will be responsible for closing this pre-school down as after the lead period of year one all practitioners must hold FETAC level 5 training. The contract conditions for the ECCE scheme have gone a step further by shedding older pre-school establishments running without basic training (pre-schools 5 and 11) that were beyond the reach of the pre-school inspectorate. This has occurred as lead in time of one year to achieve certification is over and now pre-school Practitioners must hold a certification for a major award in childcare/early education at a minimum of level 5 on the NQF.

The following Situational sample (8) was observed in a privately run setting (Pre-school 25). Evidence of Relational pedagogical practices was practiced. Relational practices have come to devise a system of a Key-Worker who is assigned to work with small groups of children. The key-worker takes a special interest, documenting and linking with parents and family for each child. This affords the opportunity for relationships to develop. Learning moments can be captured at a close level. The approach in conjunction with the practitioner observing play serves to extend and scaffold play and language development.
Situational Sampling (8) Plumbers, Firemen and Garda

(a) The practitioner asked a boy what he wanted to dress up as. He replied he wanted to be a Fireman. However, he was about to don the vest of a Garda (Irish Police). She pointed out both vests showing the different writing between Fireman and Garda. She made clear the connection between writing.

(b) The practitioner asked a child busily at play with tools and hard-hat —What are you fixing” he replied I’m fixing the toilet” —Oh you’re a plumber then” she said. Here she entered the zone of proximal development whereby she introduced a concept ‘plumber‘ extended his vocabulary and making a link between people, places and ideas.

Situation Sampling 8: Plumbers, Firemen and Garda

The issue of denying children tools with which to ‘make marks‘ and engage in pre-writing activities emerged in a Traveller playgroup. The type of service is funded by the Department of Education and Science, as a ‘special needs‘ initiative. The setting is a house owned by the local dioceses. The house is divided; a nun lives in one part while the pre-school is run in the other part. The practitioner‘s salary is paid from Department of Education and Science. The setting offers sand play and jigsaws. The children appear happy, the practice is friendly, pedagogically focused on ‘Play with a Purpose‘ philosophy. Children made jigsaws, play with train sets, dressing up, chatted. One practitioner was in attendance. An assistant was on call in the Nun’s kitchen multi-tasking and preparing lunch. She also came on yard duty at outdoor playtime. She was also a Grandmother of one of the children present. Free play took up most of the morning. After outdoor play, hot food is served by the Grandmother.
In terms of *Emergent Writing and Mark making* no pens, crayons, pencils are available to the children. The unavailability of material to “make lines and squiggles” (Sylva *et al.* 2006 p.22) in terms of literacy is seen as a starting point on ECERS/R/E. The practitioner reports the lack of mark making equipment to be the policy as “Advised by Department of Education not to involve numbers or writing as part of the curriculum” (Pre-school 7).

This policy is problematic when applying the rating scale as ‘mark making’ is rated highly across several categories. This is the only pre-school visited that does not offer ‘mark making’ materials to the children.

The service was developed by community voluntary groups in conjunction with the Department of Education and funded as part of a ‘Pre-school Education Initiative for Traveller Children’ in early 1980. The Traveller preschools initiative was funded to offer a space for play, because the children at that time lived in caravans and crowded conditions. In order to support such children the services are offered free of charge and a hot meal included. Special ‘ethically appropriate toys and books’ that reflect the traveller way of life are part of the curriculum rather than ‘mark making’. The Department of Education advise not to involve numbers or writing as part of the curriculum.

This pre-school is currently in a period of transition with forthcoming implementation of a *Síolita* and *Aistear* and the Free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme. The use of mark making materials, as well as current employment structure and universal access will come under review.

**Conclusion**

This research found that in general pre-school provision is weak in providing suitable reading and mark making areas. Practitioners display
little skill in reading stories and mostly ask ‘closed‘ questions. However, some good practice such as initiating conversations, which offer opportunity for extended questions and provide scaffolding in conversations with children, was found in groups 10, 14, 23, and 25. We know that these practitioners are at the top end of the NQF and have training in the field of early childhood studies. The other practitioners tend to veer more towards traditional teaching scenarios such as building portfolios for parents. This can be interpreted as a replication their own experience in infant class, with a little bit of ‘play‘ added in. The findings offer a forewarning of the complexities involved in implementing new pedagogical approaches across such a wide variety of existing provision. Moreover, it is testament to the very uneven understanding of what is good pre-school pedagogy in Irish provision. The wide variety of pedagogical approaches is a legacy of the fragmented policy structure inherent in Irish pre-school provision across the private, voluntary and public sector.

From a policy perspective the need to increase the qualifications of practitioners is acknowledged in the ECCE scheme and in the future only practices that operate from at least a FETAC level 5 will be eligible to enter into the scheme. Nevertheless, level 5 is very basic, it equates to leaving certificate level. Technically, however, the legislation governing the level of accreditation to open and run pre-school remains unchanged. It is technically possible to run a pre-school in Ireland with no training on the NQF (without the benefit of the ECCE scheme). The service can be run with contributions from parents. The ECCE scheme is offered for one year leaving parents to pay for a second pre-school year. This is testament to policy decisions that are reactionary and not guided by long term strategies to raise pre-school standards.
Category Nine: Mathematics

Aside from counting, number recognition, growing plants and learning food groups, math, science, and technology are generally given short shrift during the pre-school years. Nevertheless, the roots of later competence are established long before school age, and recent findings from neuroscience confirm the importance of the link between early experience and subsequent achievement (Bowman, 1999, p.40)

This measure is concerned with four areas, Counting and the Application of Counting, Reading and Writing Simple Numbers, Mathematical Activities Shape and Space and Mathematical Activities Matching Sorting and Comparing. This section looks at theoretical approaches on the value of mathematics in pre-school. The findings of the research are reported. How mathematics is encouraged in the Reggio schools is reported from a well-documented piece of work called The Multiple Symbolisation in the Long Jump Project. This outlines how concepts of measurement, numbers, counting, time, distance and fairness came to be part of a project involving children and their family. Finally connections are examined in terms of how Irish pre-school encourages children to understand simple mathematical activities such as sorting matching and comparing provision of mathematics.

Theoretical Approach to Mathematics in Pre-school

The natural curiosity of young children should be nurtured to explore patterns, investigating quantities and learning through all the senses (Gardner, 1991). The foundation for mathematical concepts relating to numbers, matching, sorting and grading begin in early childhood. However, math, science, and technology are not generally thought of as curricula for young children. Nevertheless, intentionally teaching mathematics in pre-
school is a good idea. Because children from low-income homes often struggle with maths in later school and early success can narrow the gap for those children. Pre-school can provide significant support by making available developmentally appropriate mathematical experiences.

Pre-school theories on how children begin to build a foundation for the understanding of mathematical concepts in has been guided by Montessori, Froebel and Piaget. For example during the data collection in a Montessori school practitioners were observed using Montessori ‘red rods‘ these set of ten rods vary in size sequentially from one to ten. The rods are used for introducing the concept of comparative length through laying out the red rods one at a time the child learns at the most basic concrete level how the quantities one to ten relate to one another. Upon mastery of the red rods, another challenge is presented. In addition to this activity further use of cards, counters, cut-out numerals, spindles, and numerical rods are part of the math’s curriculum in this pre-school. Variations of these concepts have been replicated by toy manufacturers and are available most Pre-schools.

Learning off by rote and counting aloud as a group is not enough to foster deep number intelligence. The role of the practitioner has been to act as a ‘facilitator to make the child’s informal connection to mathematics more explicit” (Linder, et al. 2011 p.30). Offering the opportunity for young children to develop number intelligence requires meaningful tasks over time.

New ways of helping children understand numbers seek to contextualise numbers in everyday activities have been explored by Brennerman and Louro (2008) in Rutgers Univeristy in New Jersey. For example when five seeds are found inside an apple, children are invited to represent accurately the observation through drawing. Another experiment weighed fruits of
different size with children. The children were tasked to represent the
difference accurately in their drawing. During such observations the
researchers report that “In addition to recording quantifiable aspects of a
collection of items, children sometimes attach verbal or numerical
descriptions to them” (Brennerman and Louro, 2008, p.117).

A major deterrent to implementing math is the inadequate preparation of
teachers has been identified:

Even college-level general education courses are
often focused on operations, not problem solving.
Pre-school teachers, many of whom are
paraprofessionals without a general education
background, are even less able to implement the
ambitious programs recommended by professional
associations (Bowman, 1999 p. 45).
Irish Findings for Mathematics

The four areas under examination are; Counting and the application of counting, Reading and writing simple numbers, Mathematical activities shape and Space and Mathematical activities matching sorting and comparing.

Analysis of Mathematics

Findings for Mathematics: The overall category scored 3.23

Counting and the application of counting 3.35

This score reflects that some attention is paid to number activities using books, games, songs and simple routines. However, children are rarely encouraged in terms of counting to associate objects to spoken numbers. For example, children could be encouraged to count the segments of an orange as it is peeled.
Reading and writing simple numbers 2.85
Children rarely read and write numbers. This is not practiced in pre-school provision where the emphasis is on play and socialisation. When children use mark-making tools such as paintbrushes or pencils or crayons, it is usually to draw or paint. Exceptions were found in Montessori and HighScope services. In the Montessori schoolchildren had their individual workbooks where they practiced number and letter writing in conjunction with sand paper number and letter cards invented by Montessori.

Mathematical activities shape and space 3.08
Some different shapes are available, in the form of jigsaws and games in general. In order to progress past the score of 3 evidence of shape being an explicit part of activities is required. While some evidence of this was found in graduate led pre-school settings and in the Montessori School the overall score remains low based on the national average

Mathematical activities matching sorting and comparing 3.65
Some sorting comparing and matching occurs in activities. In order to progress to good (5) this would have to be extended to “sorting and matching skills that involve more than one criterion and sorting in different contexts and/or using objects in the child’s everyday environment” (Sylva et al. 2006, p.28).

A Maths project in Reggio Emilia
From the Reggio Emilia’s emergent curriculum a well-documented project known as The Multiple Symbolisation in the Long Jump Project sourced from the seminal work on Reggio The Hundred Languages of Children the Reggio Emilia Approach- Advanced Reflections (Edwards et al. 1993).
The report outlines how concepts of measurement, numbers, counting, time, distance and fairness became part of a project. The project lasted about eight weeks. Two pedagogical theories central to the philosophical underpinning principles of the Reggio approach are *Multi symbolic work* and *Cycles of Symbolisation*. The former is explored in this section the latter the next section on Science and Environment. In the Reggio process, the project began with a series of teacher meetings. The teachers agreed that the following principles were vital to pedagogical project.

—(i) The use of the children's own ideas, (ii) the constructive use of debate among children, (iii) the involvement of parents and community, (iv) practical application of science and math and (v) the use of multiple forms of representation —{(Edwards *et al.* 1993, p.172). Keeping these principles to the fore, a group of four children volunteered to plan and design a long jump athletic event. As the project developed the class the entire school, the Pedagogista and parents became involved. To start the children's own ideas of initial knowledge were explored in the 'verbal outpouring' phase. Here the children say all they know and understand about the topic at hand. This was followed by looking at photographs of the Olympic long jump and making sketches of tracks, how to jump and how to score.

The children draw to represent their understanding and make graphic representation of their discoveries and inventions. This helps in two ways. Firstly, it helps them get a better understanding of the topic and helps them to communicate their knowledge to others. Some drew long run up space and others longer landing space. The drawings are seen and discussed with the other children and adults. In drawing, the children commit to specifics. These are used as a way to help the children look at how each other is thinking. The value of these initial drawings is that they bring relative distance to consciousness and help the children test ideas for when they later make the
track outside. Gradually the children come to understand that the run-up distance will be much longer than the long jump itself. This is new learning for many.

**Multi-symbolic work**

The children used seven types of symbols to construct their knowledge: drawings of figures, footprints, fingers, printed words, practical actions with their body, reference to photographs and the use of small wooden dolls. The dolls were used to show how the jumping rules would work. The use of the dolls as replica objects serves as a presentation tool of the child’s ideas. They also support the child to keep the complex relations of size, jump etc. in mind when transforming the doll into an athlete. The cognitive demands of verbal expression are therefore helped and the child can focus on the subject matter in this case the stride, take-off and landing associated with the long jump. The next section of the project led to drawing posters to set out the rules of the long jump sequence.

**Measuring the Distance Jumped**

The children wanted more than just a footprint in the sandpit to record the jump. They decided that each jump would be measured by cutting a string in the linear distance from the landing footprint to the jumping line. The longest string would win. However, this would not allow the children to say by what amount one jump exceeded another. Cycling back to their earlier drawings and discussions (as recalled by the teacher), they revisited the measuring issue. The issue of a tape measure was now to be reckoned with. Now the children were keen to learn how measuring tape works. They had now developed their own research question of interest. This is key to motivating learning at all stages. The complexity of understanding the workings of a tape measure with red numerals, red superscript and black numerals, which reoccur every meter, posed a challenge. The physical separateness of a one-
meter strip laid end to end made it clear that one meters ending was another meters beginning. However, how would they translate the marks on the tape into a reliable record? The introduction of different symbol systems a tape measure and a carpenter’s ruler helped them in understanding that length can be measured precisely not just approximately. The finer points of the measuring were not mastered by the children by the time the actual Long Distance Jump involving family, community and teacher’s competition came about. This is work which will continue as part of their quest for measurement symbolisation understanding as they progress in their education. In the Long Jump project, children worked on some science and math concepts, such as speed and measurement. The Long Jump project is an example of two important features of Reggio ‘graphic representation’ and ‘small group debate’. Graphic representation of ‘how to jump’ helped children reflect on their own thinking. For example, after they discussed details of the competition orally, they started drawing graphic representations and then realised that some points were missing or problematic.

The practitioners involved in the project reflected that children learn best when they can use multiple symbol systems to understand complex relations, particularly when these complex relations are part of a real world project that gives these relations a holistic gestalt. This holism assures that the symbol systems will ultimately converge to deepen knowledge rather than increase facts (Edwards et al. 1993, p.188).

**Irish mathematics provision**

In the research cohort, the overall score shows that little attention is paid to mathematics in pre-school with the exception of the Montessori schools where mathematics is part of the curriculum. The HighScope approach used
counting in meaningful ways during the Pre-school 23 and 25 sessions. One example is that of a cardboard cut-out of a large hand with five fingers mounted on a stick. This is given to a child to show to all her classmates that it is five minutes to tidy up time. No maths projects were observed. The pre-schools do not have the space to leave projects on a table devoted to math work as described in the Long Jump Project. In Reggio the work took eight weeks to bring to fruition. In Irish provision space is of a premium in order to fit as many children in as possible as these are profit making institutions. Where attention to maths was observed a system of learning off by rote and counting aloud as a group was recorded. Few the opportunities for young children to develop number intelligence were observed.

**Conclusion**

Currently in the study cohort young children are not given the opportunity to express their intelligence on serious topics and apply their emerging and academic skills to problem solving. The Long Jump project has shown an example that ‘graphic representation‘ and ‘small group debate‘ are key to stimulating learning. While new curriculum framework *Aistear’s* themes of: Well-being; Identity and Belonging; Communicating; Exploring and Thinking speak to post-modern approaches no specifics on the introduction of mathematics in pre-school are forthcoming. The theory of multi-symbolism encourages verbal outpouring and the use of many symbols to help young children understand issues are practical examples of how practitioners ought to be exposed to on training programmes. Multi-symbolism supports the child to his or her full senses to understand a topic not only in Mathematics but also in Science which is explored in the next measure. A response to the low score would be the inclusion of such training as a component of future third level Irish ECEC training in order to focus attention to the weaker areas of provision.
Category Ten: Science and Environment

This measure is concerned with how current provision in pre-school provide for and encourages children to conduct scientific enquiry with natural materials. The five areas under examination are, Natural materials, Areas featuring science/science resourcing, Science activities science processes non-living and Science activities science processes living processes.

This sections starts with a discussion on the history of Science and Environment in traditional pedagogy. The results of this study are reported and analysed. An example of a Reggio Sceintefic project using theories of Multi symbolic work and Cycles of Symbolization is outlined. A discussion on how the theory and theme has been replicated discusses a project from Massachusetts. In conclusion issues for Irish provision are discussed.

Theories on Science and Environment for young children

The aim of pre-school science programs is to develop the science process skills of observation, classification, and communication.

In the hands of a skilled teacher a good science programme emerges from a carefully designed environment, clear goals and children’s interests questions and play. Science is not confined to a science table or focused on learning facts. Nor is it found in projects that focus on a narrow topic that does not involve direct experience such as the study of bears or penguins (Worth and Grollman 2003, p.18).

Pestalozzi’s philosophy saw the importance of balance between elements - head, hands and heart. He was conscious of the danger of attending to just one element. His lessons included taking care of plants in the garden. The name Frobel gave his school was ‘Kindergarten‘ which literally translates as garden for children. Through the name he highlighted the importance of outdoors and nature in the education of the young child. The Steiner
philosophy introduces scientific concepts such as bread baking in the pre-school. The Montessori Scientific resources are categorised into six areas, the Life cycle, Science experiments, Models, Botany, Zoology and simple Machines. These include resources such as models of the human heart, the human skeleton, parts of flower, branch and tree nomenclature cards (from Latin – the assigning of names).

The work of Brenneman and Louro has done much to dispel the concerns that science is an abstract, theory laden discipline and, as such is too difficult for pre-school children. Working together as a teacher and researcher their work turns this idea on its head. This is done by providing children with individual notebooks for recording and drawing observations. They encourage simple classroom direct observations and because most young children do not write, childrens observations and ideas are communicated through drawing. These focused observations encourage attention and discussion on the object. For example in a class of four year olds observing a pumpkin children are motivated to observe carefully in order to record it in their science journal.

Because scientists date their work, we ask children to do the same using a date stamp, at first children use these new tools to decorate their journal pages by stamping multiple times and as the novelty wears off they stamp just once (Brenneman and Louro 2008, p. 115)

Eventually the children get to record the same item or scene over days or weeks such as growing sunflowers in the sun (others not in the sun) and get to understand that growth happens gradually over time.
Irish Findings for Science and Environment

The five areas under review are; Natural materials, Areas featuring science/science resourcing, Science activities science processes non-living, Science activities science processes living processes and the world around us and Science activities science processes, food preparation.

Analysis of findings: The overall category scored 1.54

The scoring scheme in this measure is different to the others. Sub-categories 1 and 2 must be assessed then select one item from 3, 4 or 5. The selection from 3, 4, or 5 sub-set was to be selected based on which sub-set was found to be strongest in the pre-school setting. In practice little science practice was found in the Irish provision.
Natural Materials, 2.58
Little access indoors to natural materials resulted in an inadequate score overall. To reach a minimal score (3) evidence of five natural materials had to be observed. A few groups had ‘nature tables’. Space is so limited in most groups did not. In many settings the only material for children to touch was plastic. The low score was compounded by the stipulation ‘Only count sand and water if they are used purposefully for the learning of science e.g. floating/sinking, comparing, properties of wet/dry sand’ (Sylva et al. 2003 p.29). In order to score minimal (3) five items of natural materials have to be accessible both indoors and outdoors for the children. In three pre-schools (10, 15 and 25) children had planted bulbs.

Areas featuring Science and Science Resources 2.65
This score is short of reaching the minimal standard (3). In order to achieve the minimal standard the pre-school should be well resourced with items such as magnets and lenses to explore science concepts. Posters should have a science purpose and discussion on science and the world around us should be part of daily activities. This was touched on in some groups, by discussing the weather.

Science activities science processes: Non-living, 1.58
An inadequate score is recorded. This is largely due to lack of staff interacting (hypothesizing and experimenting) with children at water tables and sand troughs. On one occasion an exploration of a science experiment was carried out. An attempt to conduct an experiment with an egg that floats in water or sinks in water was a full group activity. All the children had to sit down quietly, while the manager practitioner tried to get the children to guess why one egg floats and another sinks. English is not the practitioner‘s first language which made understanding difficult. The activity had been used with the ‘After School Programme‘ the previous evening. This
programme caters for older children. The practitioner promised to return to the experiment before the end of the session; she did not. The presentation was done in such a confusing way that it could not be counted as a score (Pre-school 15).

Science activities: Living processes 0.73
In this item an attempt to assess living processes such as plants, animals and caring for living things is made. A lone goldfish was recorded in pre-school (23), hamsters in pre-school (25) but in general little attention is paid to living processes. Two Montessori and four Montessori/Playgroups did pay attention to planting seedlings.

Science activities: Food preparation 0.15
No preparation of food or drink is undertaken in front of the children. Consequently no group scored on this sub-measure. The HSE Pre-school Inspectorate check to ensure that “the kitchen inaccessible to children” (HSE, 2006, p.60) thus it is not likely that food preparation will be included in pre-school scheduling.

Reggio Scientific Observations
There are many science projects conducted in the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy and in the Reggio Emilia inspired pre-schools in other parts of the world. Two observations in the Reggio centers concerning science enquiry are noted. The first feature is a light table or light box, which is a table with lighting underneath. On top a glass or Plexiglas cover is used for drawing and examining in microscopic scale leaves and other science processes. Secondly a space in the classroom is devoted to an overhead projector (left turned on) where children can place a shape and examine its components in shadow by the light underneath. The shape can be projected onto the wall;
items can be added or taken away. This is a very pleasant exercise with beautiful outcomes in terms of size and colour.

The City in the Rain Scientific Project in Reggio

The City in the Rain – Multi-symbolic work

This provides a Multi-symbolic example of how children learn by using a long term project called The City in the Rain. The long term project comprised a number of phases: first the children's were encouraged to discuss the project, verbal outpouring or brainstorming about rain. Then they drew their ideas on large poster paper and some drew their theories of the source of the rain. The drawings were used as a platform from which to expand and discuss children's ideas.

The next stage of the project included activities such as making audiotapes of the rain sounds on different surfaces. Systems of pipes that capture rain and bring it to family homes were drawn. Images of the city with and without rain and photographs of changing sky to inspire drawings were used. Multi-symbolism encourages the children to use all their senses to understand a topic.

How well does the Reggio approach travel to other countries for implementation by practitioners not trained directly in the Reggio philosophy? In the book the Hundred Languages of Children a reflection on how The City in the Rain long – term project was replicated by a group of practitioners in the United States is recorded. In 1988 the challenge was taken up by four practitioners in Amherst who decided to adapt the Multi symbolic approach. The outcomes are reported in The City in the Snow; Applying the Multi symbolic Approach in Massachusetts (Edwards et al. 1998, pp. 233-251). The Cycles of Symbolisation theory holds that practitioners encourage children to discuss and review their ideas. Thus
boost the reflectivity of the children as they drew and cycled back to redraw their current assumptions, ideas and theories.

The City in the Snow; Applying the Multi symbolic Approach and cycles of symbolism in Massachusetts The project blended planned objectives with emergent objectives, the emergent objectives were derived from discoveries the practitioners made during the course of the project.

A similar sequence to the Reggio project was followed and some extra events occurred. For example after the children’s verbal outpouring and drawing of snow scenes, the practitioners realised that a major concept of the project was the relation between form and function. Did the form of a certain roof serve as a suitable shelter from snow? The practitioners used symbolism to imagine falling snow by sifting baking flour onto miniature wooden blocks made up to replicate a city. This led to many discussions and anticipation for the real snow to fall. In January 1989 the snow came. Through listening and reflecting it emerged that the children were interested in the silence of the snow. Other sounds such as the noise it made when they ran on it and when it was shovelled. The sounds were audio-recorded and the children made graphic representations of the sounds. They watched a video on the growth of a snowflake in time lapsed photography.

Cycles of Symbolisation
Eight cycles of symbolisation were identified: “The children were using symbolisation, not only to represent what they already know, but also to reflect and question what it is they say they know” (Edwards et al. 1998, p. 327). In essence the children draw or discuss their knowledge in order to improve its coherence. In this case eight cycles of symbolization occurred;
Cycle One: Verbal outpouring. Here the children outpour all their knowledge, assumptions and ideas on the topic.

Cycle Two: Initial drawings and further discussion. The combinations of these ideas make the drawings powerful. Small discrepancies are the engine behind questioning and problem solving that occur. For example a child drew a picture of a house with snow on the roof but not on the car parked outside. In group discussion the child explained that the car had just arrived.

Cycle Three: Simulation. Practitioners help the children imagine by simulation how the rain will wet buildings by sifting flour over the blocks then encouraging the children to “predict – then – observe”. The strategy maximises the opportunity for an observation to be more than an interesting occurrence, but also relevant evidence for a hypothesis.

Cycle Four: Using the drawing to denote “the real object”. Over the course of many days a huge mural with drawings and paper cut-outs of houses, cars, and trucks was made. After a week of looking at the city they returned to add white paint. One child added the white paint (snow) not just to the roof top, but also to vertical walls, instead of resting only on the upper surfaces of the house (practitioners had an option to recycle through to cycle three - simulation but chose not to). The field trip was next and the functional differences in vertical and horizontal surfaces seemed to emerge for many children.

Cycle five: The Experience. Finally the snow arrived. The children were now primed to seek answers for the questions raised in the previous cycles. The prior cycles of symbolisation – the hands off activities make the hands on activities more educational.
Cycle Six: The Post experience drawings. It becomes clear that the same children who drew that cityscape mural are no longer placing snow along the vertical walls of the buildings.

Cycle Seven: Broadening. Here the making a picture of a non-visual experience (sound) becomes a cross-modal representation. In this case the children drew graphics to represent walking running and shovelling. They discussed similar sounds and agreed that “Snow shovelling sounds like sanding wood” (Edwards et al. 1998, p.244).

Cycle Eight: Deepening. Snow making machines, water transformation and empirical experiments were to follow as topics the children became interested in.

**Provision of Science and Environment in Study Cohort**

The provision is inadequate. No evidence of practitioners training in the play based groups were found. The FETAC list of training modules in ECEC does not contain any training for science and environment. A second factor that contributes to the weak provision are the health and safety regulatory approach of the pre-school inspection teams who advise against the use of cookers in pre-school settings which explains why no baking occurs. No evidence of food preparation was observed in the research. The high dependency on easy clean plastic materials as equipment and toys was noted.

The internet provides a wide range of supports for practitioners wishing to incorporate simple science experiments in the pre-school. Details of suppliers of science resourcing tools which promote science activities in the pre-school are also available on line. In this study these materials were not found, though they are a relatively inexpensive material.
Conclusion
The ‘Cycles of Symbolisation’ theory is a well tried and tested approach which can be applied beyond Reggio. Three components have been identified which would be problematic in current Irish provision. To use the theory is the involvement of children in their own learning is vital; this is not a feature of the pre-school cohort practice. The concept that children can work on a project which does not produce immediate results is new to Irish practice. The physical space to allow projects to mature is lacking in space and furniture.

The lack of training in the areas of Science and Environment for Irish practitioners has direct impact on the poor provision found during this research. Although where the Montessori and HighScope philosophy was used the scores were better. In contrast the Reggio schools take the enquiry a stage further with the use of light and new media. The use of short and long term projects initiated by the children and supported by the teachers and parents in their science enquiry is a much replicated aspect of the Reggio approach.

The research identified a lack of provision of direct experience with materials for the children that are important in later learning. Science inquiry should not be seen as a narrow focused pursuit rather it requires the use of language, reasoning, thinking and social skills. This weak finding highlights the need for science and environment training and resourcing to be addressed in the pre-school curriculum as a matter of urgency.
Category 11: Diversity

This measure is concerned with three issues; Planning for children's individual needs, Gender equality and awareness and Race equality and awareness. This section explores theory's concerning these issues in the field of early childhood studies. The findings of the research are analysed. Three case studies concerning pre-school initiatives that have been specifically set up to promote Race Equality and Awareness are discussed (Pre-schools 3, 7 and 23). The three groups are targeted and funded to support both non-Irish national children and for children from the travelling community. Finally the approaches used in Reggio to promote individuality, race and gender are discussed.

Diversity in traditional pedagogy

The origins of the current beliefs and practice in field of early childhood education originate in the philosophy of the Enlightenment and the thinking of educators, philosophers and psychologists of the twentieth century including Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori. In the past, the issues of individuality, gender and race equality and awareness were viewed from a different perspective and were not seen as a relevant issue in early years discourse. In the history of Irish education, gender separated the sexes by firstly educating only males. Then a segregated system of school provision emerged. The last few decades saw many of these schools ‘go co-ed' allowing for mixed classes. The issue of gender in pre-school from a post-modern perspective is seen as a very important issue and is understood as a social, political, and cultural construction. The general field of early childhood studies has been criticised for not examining gender in a critical way and its relationship to teaching, learning, and identities. Practitioners—instead convey a simple and unproblematic notion of children’s gender role development” (Blaise and Yarrow, 2008, p.49). Sexuality can be dismissed as being unnatural for young children and practitioners do not tend to cross
social boundaries by following up on gender issues which emerge in pre-
school play.

Furthermore, Critical Post Modern Pedagogical Practice challenge hidden
beliefs and their dominance are questioned. Hidden and explicit beliefs are
decomposed. Foucault advocates such an approach as he believed that
questioning dominant discourses brings the potential for improvement
(Danagher et al., 2000 p.26).

When applied to early childhood studies deconstruction refers to taking apart
concepts and meanings in texts, concepts and language to show the politics of
meaning within them. To begin to deconstruct our image of the child
challenges us to pull apart that thinking and take each child that stands
before us as a complex, diverse, individual that operates from a place of multi
perspectives” (Mac Naughton, 2005, p.77). This type of pedagogy challenges
the practitioner to change practice from the place of working within theories
of developmental certainties to achieve agreed learning outcomes. The
practitioner changes practice to become a fellow researcher with the child.
This involves discussion, and more focus on capturing learning opportunities
rather than perusing outcomes. This calls for specific training in political
issues in areas of gender, race and justice studies to encourage reflective
practitioners‘ to challenge old assumptions and to bring about change.

**Special Needs Pre-schools**

Pre-schools for children with special needs in the past were supported by
various voluntary organisations such as St. Michael’s House, based in Dublin.
The emphasis on pre-school development has since changed and now children
with special needs (in Reggio practice the term used is Special Rights) are in
the majority supported by staff working on Individual Plan’s (IP’s) to attend
their local community pre-school (St Michael’s House 2011). Integration of
children with special needs is now becoming the norm. Six groups visited as part of this study had children with special needs in attendance, as well as special needs assistants present in two groups. However the levels of multidisciplinary and interagency sharing of Individual Plans were mixed and not uniform. It varied from parish to parish.

The following Irish results show low levels of gender and race discussion in Irish provision. This may well be because practitioners do not see it as their place to introduce such subjects, discuss, reflect and encourage children’s views on the topics. In this research three groups were set up specifically to promote race and equality. In two of the three pre-schools devoted to race and equality, awareness of the topics was not visible. In the remaining 23 pre-schools these topics are not addressed as part of pre-school curriculum. The findings show that on several occasions dominant discourses on gender were reinforced.

**Irish Findings for Diversity**

![Figure 19: Category 11 Diversity](image)

*Figure 19: Category 11 Diversity*
This category measures, Diversity planning for individual learning needs, Gender equality and awareness and Race equality and awareness.

Analysis of Diversity: The overall category scored 2.35

Diversity planning for individual learning needs (2.38)
To get an accurate measurement of this score the researcher asked to see records kept on individual children. Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) for children with special needs were not available where children with special needs attended. The records (with the exception of three pre-schools 10, 13 and 26) were concerned with the requirements set out by the Pre-school Inspectorate. These issues are concerned with immunisation and allergies etc. Subsequently, the overall score is inadequate but moving toward a minimal (3) score.

Gender equality and awareness (2.5)
One Pre-school (15) which practiced HighScope and is exclusively attended by children of asylum seekers showed evidence of addressing issues of stereotyped gender behaviours in texts, concepts and language. Children are often categorised into boys and girls at break time. In general, books, dolls and pictures conform to gender stereotypes. In most pre-schools, practitioners do not make gender an explicit part of the curriculum. “Males and females are shown in stereotypical roles and no specific activities are developed to help the children discuss gender” (Sylva et al., 2006 p.36). This is because the practitioners are not aware of post-modern pedagogical practice.

Race equality and awareness (2.15)
In most cases books pictures dolls and display show little or no evidence of race diversity in a wider world. In order to improve this score it is not
enough to furnish pre-schools with culturally appropriate toys and books. Improvements will only happen when practitioners are trained in the use of the resources designed to promote cultural understanding.

**Provision concerning issues of diversity in Irish pre-school**

It is not surprising to find two non-Irish nationals working in the field of early childhood as ECEC was classified as part of a system of *equal opportunities* during the expansion phase of ECEC. One Practitioner (Pre-school 15) came to the job by chance.

**Interviewee:** I have a degree in accountancy – I am an accountant but I never wanted to sit in an office. Then after that I start working in the customs I changed career from custom agent for goods import and export and then when I moved here in 1994. Yea I moved in 1994 didn’t have any English so I had to stay home. So I did some a courses to learn English and then I did a computer course and then I just saw an ad. in the paper. My daughter was born in 1994 and then I saw an ad in a local paper looking for Pre-school assistant but I thought I‘d be doing office work working in accounts not with the children and when I started I ended up to be the Pre-school assistant, that how I started so

**Interviewer:** Had you training at that stage?

**Interviewee:** No I started with FÁS so am, so I just took it and I just stuck with it and while I was on the work placement I had some training. I started with level 5 no level 4 and then at the end of the year they ask me if I want to stick on. I say yes and then I became the preschool leader and then that was only part time and I have to work full time and so I’ll take the job as afterschool assistant and then I moved to the supervisor.

The practitioner is now a supervisor for two other FÁS trainees. Moreover the practitioner’s story tells of a community that had been awarded finance
to _increase childcare places_ without thinking through a pedagogical approach. Her application as a FÁS trainee was sufficient to get her the post. This is by no means a rarity in Irish pre-school provision. This study found Non Irish nationals involved in Irish pre-school provision in management and ownership.

**State and Community endeavour in Educational Disadvantage**

This next section introduces a case study concerning three Pre-schools set up to promote _Social inclusion_ in Irish pre-school practice. These Pre-schools are specifically designed to tackle educational disadvantage. Irish policy concerning educational disadvantage has been described as _something of a muddle_ where _experts_ have had the freedom to develop policy in directions that are uncontested_ (Tormey, 2010 p.197). Tormey’s thesis is proved in this study. It shows that three organisations provide a range of services without an agreed pedagogy or standard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Funder</th>
<th>NVCO’s Síolta and Aistear</th>
<th>HSE Inspection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Asylum Seekers</td>
<td>Community and</td>
<td>HSE Pre-school Inspectorate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Children attending</td>
<td>voluntary group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Religious</td>
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<td></td>
<td>premises</td>
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<td>Pobal</td>
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<td>IPPA, NCNA, CCC</td>
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<td>Employer</td>
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<td>MC&amp;YA</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Asylum</td>
<td>Community and</td>
<td>HSR Pre-school Inspectorate</td>
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<td>seekers</td>
<td>voluntary group</td>
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<td>12 Children attending</td>
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<td>HSE</td>
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<td>Pre-school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Inspectorate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travellers</td>
<td>Community and</td>
<td>Dept. Education &amp; Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-school</td>
<td>voluntary group</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Children attending</td>
<td>Religious</td>
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<td>NCVO’s</td>
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<td>Science</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 37 Children                      |                |                           |                 |

Table 8: Pre-school’s to advance social inclusion
Table eight has mapped out the stakeholders across the three pre-school services set up to tackle educational disadvantage. It is remarkable that the three services in question have a multiplicity of leadership, administration, funding and decision making processes involved. No two services are the same in terms of administration, funding or pedagogy.

The first pre-school (3) in this case-study was developed for children of non-Irish nationals in a large county town. The management structure is that of a FRC. The workforce is made up of FÁS trainees. They have little training in any pedagogical approach and no training in issues of race equality and awareness. During the data collection in was noted that no language and numerical development was catered for. No messy play available. Free play all morning with short ‘make and do‘ dance and story time. The low level of pedagogical awareness was noted and recounted earlier in this chapter when a practitioner was asked by a child to help with Art and Craft her response was ‘I'll give you a hand though I know I shouldn’t. The staff showed no awareness of race or gender or individual needs. The staff were disappointed that the researcher would not talk about travel, accommodation, and the inclement weather’s. During the pre-school session the conversation amongst the staff about their own issues were noted, such as last night’s TV —the highlight of the evening was the Apprentice” was agreed by all.

A voluntary committee developed the service, which has a state of the art building in the grounds of a Catholic Church (although no natural light in the room).

The Pre-school service is open to everybody in community in the hope that this would encourage integration in the community from an early age. One child from the Irish community is in attendance.

**Pre-school for Asylum Seekers (1)**

This second pre-school (15) for the children of asylum seekers could not have been more different than the first. Here the staff had an awareness of race, gender and the individuality of each child.
In this case-study the second pre-school (15) offers a welcoming space where arrival. The first thing that is seen is pictures of each child with family members prominently displayed and used in discussion throughout the morning (using Aistear ideas). The practitioners sit with children to plan the morning’s activities. A fruit platter is passed around and discussed in terms of colour, taste, juiciness, likes and dislikes the fruit is eaten by practitioners and children. Large low size pre-school chairs suitable for adults easily fit under the tables. They make adults sitting at low size table more comfortable. From the start, the HighScope room and trained leaders emulate collegiality and are concerned with children’s language development. A clear system of turn taking, feeding the fish and checking for bubbles occurs. Then the children plan their mornings work. The practitioners used a clever technique to encourage the children to speak out their plans by using unplugged telephones. The child speaks in one phone (setting out their plans) while the practitioner listens on a matching phone. English is not the children’s first language. The practitioners work hard at making eye contact, nodding and waiting for children to respond to simple questions and suggestions.

The space and furnishing scored well, with outdoor and indoor play offering a wide variety of activities including science and math.

During feedback a discussion at table about colour of eyes and hair was recorded by practitioners for discussions later.

The staff consists of two practitioners operating the HighScope model. The initiative was developed by a local partnership group. This pre-school is one of two childcare services supporting asylum seeker families living in a hostel and provides an integrated community-based pre-school service in the grounds of a former convent. Both services provide 66 childcare places each week and employ four childcare staff. The pre-school service is open to everybody in community in the hope that this would encourage integration in the community from an early age. This integration had not occurred during the data collection but it may in the future.

It is clear that this project differs from the (pre-school 3) project in one crucial area the issue of trained pedagogical staff employed and working directly with the children.

Pre-school for Asylum Seekers (2)
This pre-school targeted Traveller children. This service was previously discussed in Situational Sampling nine (No Writing Materials Allowed).

The service is run by a voluntary committee and funded by the Department of Education under the ‘Pre-school Education Initiative for Traveller Children’. Special services such as hot meals and transport are provided.

The Department of Education advise not to involve numbers or writing as part of the curriculum.

It is part of the numerous approaches throughout the state departments in providing ‘equal opportunities’ for the pre-school children.

**Pre-school for Traveller Children (3)**

**Race Equality and Awareness Programmes**

This figure shows that to provide services to 37 Children a plethora of multi-departmental and interagency bureaucracy and overlap is evident. The findings show that each group is structurally diverse, involving different departments and led by different philosophical approaches. In the case of the Travellers pre-school the pedagogical philosophy is dated and promotes inequality.

Recent research conducted with asylum seekers in the west of Ireland has highlighted the importance of English language acquisition for children entering and progressing through the schools system. But despite all the rhetoric by policy makers and politicians resulting in various action plans stressing the need to enhance the provision of English language teaching, there have been significant funding cuts for language support” (Ní Shé, 2011, p.311).
Provision concerning issues of Diversity in Reggio Pre-schools

Ireland and the Reggio area have undergone significant change due to increasing from other countries both within and outside the European Union. “The number of non-European immigrants resident in Reggio Emilia has risen from 5,090 in 1997 to 15,052 in 2005” (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006, p. 1). Reggio has had to embrace the children of immigrants and that has put considerable strain on municipal funds. Yet it is interesting to see that these children are enrolled not in special pre-schools, but alongside all other children. The philosophy of Reggio is rooted in an understanding that the child is a unique and valued member of society. It is explicit in the pedagogy that issues of gender, race, justice and fairness are part of both types of pre-school curriculum emergent and philosophical. The use of documentation takes account of the individuality of children as indeed does the capacity of the practitioners to listen to the child express his or her individuality.

Conclusion

The research found the organic development of most pre-schools in the open market economy made no special arrangements for children having intellectual disability who have Special Education Needs (SEN). The Travellers pre-schools are inspected by the HSE inspectorate. The Travellers pre-schools are not directly managed by the Department of Education though they are funded by the department. They are managed by voluntary committees that draw down finance to pay the practitioners and auxiliary staff and a bus to collect and drop children to the service. These structures are likely to be reconsidered now in light of the ECEC scheme. In the meantime, the services contribute to the variety of typologies in employment, structures and pedagogies found in Ireland.
In the Reggio practice, direct work with children is valued. The best support a practitioner can have to implement post-modern pedagogical practice is a colleague. Irish practice has tended to place development workers at a distance from the child. This is a critical difference between the approaches. The variety of ‘support workers’ in Irish practice include regional inspectorates in NVCO’s, Pobal, the Department of Education and Science and CCC. None of the staff in these groups meets with children face to face. Nor do they carry a caseload directly involving children and families.

The function of the support agencies to date has been concerned with the development phase associated with the past two decades. The pre-school buildings are built, tax issue and notification to HSE have been formalised. Now a shift to implement new frameworks requires different skill sets to implement post-modern pedagogical training. Training courses on Síolta and Aistear are not mapped onto the NQF. This is problematic as training in the framework do not progress the practitioner’s accreditation.

The role of the support agencies NVCO’s and Inspectorate are not aligned to that of the atelierista found in the Reggio practice, where both the support worker and the practitioner work as a team. A shift in the number of workers in administrative positions to change would align practice closer to the Reggio model.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This final chapter presents an overview of the research findings. Good pedagogical practice was identified during the research across home based groups and community based groups. The components that make practice effective across provision are explored.

Four areas have been identified that can improve the quality of pre-school; Effective pre-school provision, Graduate training programmes, Management/support and Pre-school legislation. Recommendations that span short-term, mid-term and long term timeframes are made relating to each area.

Overview of research findings

Chapter one identified the current pre-school pedagogical provision in the research cohort is made up of a variety pedagogical approaches with a wide variety of stakeholder involvement.

Chapter two revealed that Irish pre-school provision is stratified and fragmented across a mixed market model. Current provision maintains uneven educational advantages, which in turn uphold a unique 'Parish Pedagogy', whereby provision varies from parish to parish. Few children attend private or community run services that rate as excellent on the ECERS/R/E scale. Although the provision of support services to pre-schools was not directly measured by this research it became clear that NVCO’s support and HSE inspection services are not nationally uniform. This emerged by examining documentation (HSE and NVCO websites and publications) pedagogical practice observed and interviews with practitioners. Some NVCO’s are all island institutions others are confined to the republic. The influence of cross border funding, and UK standards have increased quality where all Ireland institutions (HighScope) have influenced Irish practice.
Chapter three outlined the methodology used in data collection for the research and justified ECERS/R/E as a valid research tool.

Chapter four reported on ECERS/R results. Pre-school activities while meeting limited ‘health and safety’ standards do not provide space for children to express themselves through Relational Pedagogical practices that foster opportunities where children express original points of view. Irish practitioners are not encouraged to critique or monitor their own practice.

Chapter five identified that the provision of pre-maths, pre-science and strategies to care for individual children’s needs score very low on the ECERS/E scale. Clearly, a national pre-school strategy that seeks to improve outcomes for children, reduce inequalities in education and involve parents is urgently needed.

**Interrogating the research findings**

The ECCE scheme has not addressed the fragmented nature of provision. Its rushed implementation without consultation with pre-school providers, NVCO’s, and various stakeholders has sent the pre-school sector into a period of transition without a clear policy direction. However, the scheme does bring a structure in terms of practitioners payment linked to training levels for the pre-school sector under the newly formed Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). This now means that although the pre-schools operate in a mixed market model providers are now contractors of services to the DCYA.

Irish pre-school has entered a post expansion phase in terms of physical construction. Government investment in the pre-school scheme over the past two years of recession is acknowledgement that a shift to understanding the
important of children's early learning has occurred. Now there is an acceptance that effective early year's provision has a significant impact on children’s social, emotional and cognitive development and it is a key factor in improving outcomes for children and their families (Sylva, K. et al. 2004). The ECCE scheme must go beyond meagre provision to ensure high quality.

**Components of Good Irish pedagogical practice**

In this research some pre-schools across the mixed market model were found to have reached good and excellent practice. Three groups imbue high quality into their pre-school practice. The three key components of the high quality services they provide are identified and outlined in table nine below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Pre-school 23</th>
<th>Private Pre-School 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children of asylum seekers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rural home based on farm</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td><strong>Management/Support</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FETAC (NQF level 6) and HighScope.</td>
<td>Managed as private enterprise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree (NQF level 8) and HighScope</td>
<td>University, HighScope training grant aided by Cross Border funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Management.</td>
<td>Quality assurance programme run by local NVCO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HighScope training funded by HSE, Pobal.</td>
<td>Supported by management committee consisting of HSE Pre-school Inspection team and local volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Premises</strong></td>
<td><strong>Premises</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large pre-fabricated building, with suitable space for children and space for staff’s needs. Doors opening out to large well-equipped playground with natural materials, bikes, etc. On grounds of Religious Order. 100% HSE sourced funding</td>
<td>Large indoor space suitable for a wide variety of play. Excellent outdoor space allows for, garden, growing vegetables, flowers, pets and outdoor percussion instruments. Pobal capital funding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9: Effective pre-school provision components*
In terms of training it was found that in both cases (Pre-School 23 and 25) the Practitioners held accreditation in ECEC at the high end of NQF. A second training factor is that both practitioners are trained and implement the HighScope pedagogy. In Pre-school 25 the owner/practitioner had benefited as her university training was ‘heavily funded’ by a cross border initiative. The support from NVCO’s in implementing quality assurance programme has enhanced the training received in university and the HighScope institute. The mix of college training, HighScope training and the NVCO support (spending time in the pre-school focusing on pedagogical ‘quality assurance’) works well. In both pre-schools Pobal funding has been used across the mixed market model to build premises. The regional nature of finance for training and support approaches by NVCO’s cannot be overlooked. Both pre-schools have benefited from existing in parishes where these components were strong.

In this study it was noted that not only HighScope services scored well but also Montessori ECEC services. The conclusion was reached that where ECEC services implement an agreed pedagogical philosophy; the scores are higher in quality provision.

**Recommendations for improvements in pre-school provision**

(1) **Effective pre-school provision (Short-term)**

Recommendation on Effective pre-school provision

Conduct a joint audit of participating pre-schools in the ECCE Scheme by the newly appointed Síolta Co-ordinators and practitioners using the ECERS R/E. The assessment would highlight for individual practices a tangible outline of the strength and weakness in provision. It would serve as training for both co-ordinators and practitioners and a starting point for
improvements. The audit may be extended as a self-assessment which would bring about immediate improvements in pre-school practice.

The use of the scales in ECEC quality improvement is recommended. The value of the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales R/E* are in their transparency, clarity, measurability and international application, as well as its capacity to work as a self-assessment and quality improvement tool. This clarity was found lacking in terms of what is understood by practitioners forthcoming frameworks. The confusion was highlighted in chapter four under category eight Parents and Staff when the practitioner who was attending *Síolta* training was asked how *Aistear* frameworks relate to each other:

That is a difficult one, - me I have not actually figured it out *Síolta* is the seeds and *Aistear* is the tree - I think *Síolta* is the base line and *Aistear* is what is actually going to come, it is more curriculum based. It is very grey for me I never figured it out (Pre-school 26).

Practitioners would benefit from the clarity the scales offer. For example, from the research the practitioner (Pre-school 26) that encouraged the children to have „polite conversation – like in a restaurant“ this practitioner had the Relational pedagogical idea that she should promote conversation yet she did not know *how* to do it. Using this as an example of how the scales would help (if applied) the practitioner would clearly see that to make the move from minimal (3) to (5) good. In order to score 5.1 on the scales „most staff sit with children during meals and group snacks“ (Harms *et al* 1998, p.19). It becomes clear that she must sit with the children to relate with them. The scales have the capacity to play an important role in self-assessment and quality assurance in pre-school practice.
For practitioners as self-assessment the scales provide a tool which can generate a superb discussion for use with fellow workers. Small changes in practice can improve scores but more crucially improve pedagogy. For example changing how books are provided. Including inexpensive natural materials into practice are among small changes that can move a service from inadequate to minimal, good to excellent. For groups wishing to raise their pedagogical practice in Maths, Science, Gender and Race the Extension (ECERS/E) four sub curricular sub scales are of value. The measures themselves suggest Relational pedagogical practice. For example to move from Minimal (3) to Good (5) in terms of gender equality and awareness “20%-50% of books which portray gender as well as displays, pictures dolls show men and women in non-stereotypical roles (e.g. female doctors or plumbers)” (Sylva et al 2003, p.36). It may take some months to build up a library in this way. However, it is also training in that the practitioner is thinking of the gender issues - the seed is planted and this will transfer into practice.

During the four-year period of this doctoral research, the ECERS scales have become popular due to successful marketing, positive academic reviews and practical application in the field of early childhood education. Now with the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) the scales ECERS/R can be applied with user friendly computer software. This recommendation is made in conjunction with a suite of modular training packages (recommendation 2) that will increase quality.

There is however a dilemma in recommending the introduction of the ECERS/R/E scales into pre-school practice before practitioners are competent in understanding pedagogical approaches. Chapter one has outlined that the process in training students in ECEC is complex, crossing social, educational, pedagogical and policy domains. ECEC training aims to
up skill students to master the domain of pedagogical theory in order to understand why they do what they do. Moreover, the practice of RP (*Síolta* and *Aistear*) requires practitioners to progress through complex and integrated ways of viewing the world in their studies. The *Aistear* guidelines fail to provide theoretical training in pedagogical theory. Modelling pedagogy instead, the document “describe good practice and uses a number of learning experiences to show what this practice might look like” (2009, *Aistear* p.5). Practitioners are encouraged to reflect in a “Thinking about my practice” exercise. Where Practitioners have pedagogical training, this is of value; however, for those without the resource of a pedagogical training merely thinking about practice without a solid pedagogical foundation is less satisfactory as a way to enhance quality. Moreover, the busy world of inspection and quality assurance in the field of ECEC now involves *Síolta*, *Aistear* and Regulation 5 (HSE).

Therefore this recommendation is made in conjunction with the next which calls for access to continued professional development for ECEC practitioners.

**(2) Graduate Training Programme (Mid-term)**

**Graduate Training Fund**

Develop a Graduate training fund to financially support practitioners to directly take modular third level ECEC training.

A central contradiction in ECEC training policy has been to agree to implement a graduate led ECEC workforce by signing up to targets 25-29 (European Commission Network on Childcare 1996, p.30) yet in practice cast ECEC training as part of a labour market paradigm outside of tertiary training institutions. *Síolta* and *Aistear* are not mapped onto the NQF. This research concludes that *Síolta* and *Aistear* frameworks are particularly difficult to implement, as they are post-modern and relational in their
philosophy. These Post-modern approaches call for a graduate led workforce to work from sophisticated epistemological beliefs (Brownlee and Berthelsen 2005). The approach requires practitioners to seek to develop active teaching and learning partnerships with fellow workers, children and their parents.

A training fund would identify practitioners at level five on the NQF and financially support the individual to move to level eight on the NQF by financing their studies. The practitioner in Pre-School 25 benefitted from such a scheme. This is the most direct and expedient way to ensure that graduates work directly with children.

Irish third level institutes have been developing training in the field of ECEC over the past decade. Now the institutions have the benefit of *Síolta* and *Aistear* as well as existing ECEC theoretical pedagogies to guide the development of modular training. By financing students to attend graduate training the Irish field of early childhood studies will develop beyond practice into research and further curriculum development.

The focus of Irish pre-school expansion has concentrated on building construction to the neglect of academic and graduate training. The Irish pre-school sector therefore cannot be expected to have the pedagogical capacity or skill sets to implement the Relational pedagogical practice as set out in *Síolta* and *Aistear*. An attempt to implement the frameworks without the fundamental pedagogical skill sets will be doomed to failure.

**(3) Management/support (Mid-term)**

Recommendation on Management and Support: Conduct an audit that (i) quantify the number of administrators in pre-school management. (ii) Measure the accreditation of administrators in ECEC training. Then develop a system for pre-school in Ireland that slims down non-ECEC graduate level
Management/support workers' that do not work directly with children in pre-school settings.

Management: In the day to day running of pre-school practitioners are likely to engage with a multitude of agencies that include, DCYA (finance - large amount of administration by the scheme reported in Pre-schools 3, 6, 15), the HSE (pre-school inspectorate), the NVCO’s and CCC’s (training and support) Pobal (funding), Management Committees and Voluntary organisations such as Enable Ireland in the event of children with special needs attend the setting.

The case study in Category 11 (Diversity) explores three pre-school initiatives set up to promote Race Equality and Awareness. It shows that to provide service to 37 children a plethora of multi departmental and interagency bureaucratic overlap exists. Each group is structurally diverse involving different departments and led by different philosophical approaches and quality standards. This panoptic volume of external bureaucracy takes the practitioner away from directly working with the child. The focus for the Reggio practitioner is exclusively on pedagogical issues concerning families and children. The governance in Reggio Emilia municipal structures takes responsibility for many aspects of management such as building maintenance and finance.

Advocates of the Partnership process will argue that local Social partnership structures from Partnership II (Pobal funded NVCO’s and CCC’s) and Partnership III 52 - local Partnership Development Companies will fill the (municipal) role in terms of training and support. However, the Social Partnership process is experiencing strain in light of current social and political changes and those wishing to copper fasten support for pre-school services will interpret the Partnership as an unsure foundation on which to
build services to insure quality assurance programmes in pre-schools. The partnership process is highly administrative thus absorbing finance, which could be directed towards provision.

Support: During this research, the practice observed showed that existing management/support workers’ HSE, CCC and Pobal advisors vary in terms of how they understand and implement policy. This is exemplified across two HSE Inspectorates that inspect pre-schools eight and 23. For example, the HSE Inspection team which visited pre-school 8, where the Situational sampling Behaviour – Versus- Thinking, (Category 5) occurred, overlooked poor practice such as bold chairs and behaviour star charts. The Bold Chair was clearly visible and the chart was posted on the pre-school wall so this practice went unchallenged. In contrast the HSE inspection team concerned with pre-school 23 supported good pedagogical practice. This was done by initiating the setup of the pre-school service by securing funding from Social Inclusion funding and also by ensuring that the HighScope pedagogical approach was implemented. Clearly the inspectorate range in their capacity to support good ECEC practice.

In good Relational practice (Reggio) practitioners are self-regulating as professionals. Reggio and the Nordic countries employ support workers pre-schools (professional pedagogues) to work directly in pre-school settings with children, practitioners and parents. This approach is reinforced by recent policy documents in the UK highlighting the need for Early Years Consultants similarly to be available attend ‘more time spent within the provision’ (The National Strategy Early Years 2008, p.19).

Since the research was conducted the changes to the General Terms and Conditions governing participation in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme strengthens the role of the Partnerships in
training. New contractual arrangements for the first time insist on participating practitioners accessing local support in pedagogical practice through Síolta Co-ordinators ( Newly appointed positions to NVCO‘s) and their local City or County Childcare Committee. The new contracts between providers and the new department for the 2011-2012 make that explicit:

Participating service providers must agree to provide an appropriate educational programme for children in their pre-school year which adheres to the principles of Síolta, the national framework for early years childhood education. Participating service providers will be supported in meeting this requirement through the assistance of Síolta Co-ordinators and their local City or County Childcare Committee (CCC). Participating service providers must agree to accept assistance visits and advice from Síolta Co-ordinators and staff of the local CCC. (General Terms and Conditions governing participation in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme 2011-2012, page 3).

The NVCO’s must now shift their focus from supporting construction (as in the expansion phase) to supporting quality in pre-school practice. Whether the skill sets are transferable from administration to ‘pedagogical quality assurance‘ needs to be explored. Síolta and Aistear are national frameworks that traverse all services for children from birth to six years of age. In primary schools the Department of Education implements and assesses the Aistear curriculum framework in infant classes. But they are not involved in Pre-school curriculum assessment as of yet. In pre-school there is now a move toward three inspections for Síolta, Aistear and Regulation 5 in the
Beyond the departmental involvement centralised systems for pedagogical oversight that would ensure quality standards and would tackle the existing bureaucratic overlap. Such a system would mirror the primary school sector. This would be difficult to establish given the current multi-agents stakeholder involvement. Nor will it guarantee quality implementation, however it ought to embed pre-school in the education sector, rather than the health care sector.

(4) Legislation and policy development (Long-term)

Recommendation on legislation and policy development
Extend education legislation to include a mandatory graduate training level for those working directly with pre-school children and for the Department of Education to inspect for pedagogical quality on a statutory basis.

The (Pre-School Services) Regulations 2006 are the only statutory policies governing pre-school provision the regulations are implemented by the Pre-School Inspectorate. No statutory policy on national pre-school curriculum implementation and inspection exists. The centralised systems for pedagogical oversight as recommended above aims to address this absence. The development of policy documents has been a long drawn out affair which produced two frameworks on quality and curriculum The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education Siolta (CECDE, 2006) and The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework: Aistear (NCCA, 2009) yet as late as 2011 no clarity exists as to how these ‘frameworks’ are to be implemented. Here changes that shift the responsibility from the HSE to Education in terms of inspection and support of pre-school curriculum need to be explored. The ECERS/R/E results show the shortfalls in standards of
pedagogical quality, equally worrying are the shortfall in the legislation to protect children from poor and dangerous pedagogical practice.

To conclude, the research has established the standard of care and education in among a representative pre-school cohort. It has explored the historical economic, social, pedagogical and political issues in the field of pre-school in Ireland. The research adds to the body of knowledge concerning Irish pre-school services by showing the outcome of forty years of state involvement in pre-school services. In assessing whether or not Ireland has addressed the *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children* (European Commission Network on Childcare 1996) this research provided empirical pre-school data across many of the targets.

In terms ECERS/R/E findings, adherence to the research methodology has brought forth rigorous Irish empirical data on pre-school. It provides a detailed baseline, which can be used in the field of early childhood research. The data gathered in developing a research sample is captured in the typologies table (chapter three) which was developed during the research. Here patterns and themes on aspects of provision are captured. For example, the high level of involvement of family business in provision emerges from the data. It is suggested that support agencies replicate the table format as it paints a more detailed picture of Irish pre-school provision. This insight is of value for policy makers and parents. The data captures the remarkable wide variety of provision in a mixed market model governed by a variety of policies.

Both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study highlight the importance of practitioner training and workforce development for those who work directly with children to improve quality in pre-school services. Finally, the study calls for further research in the field of pre-school to
identify and quantify the current national standard of pre-school inspection (Explore current examples of HSE inspection) assess current pedagogical support (NVCO’s) and measure the quality of per-school provision. All this will feed into a data set as a base line to develop a national pre-school policy.

Revealing the truth behind the current pre-school provision will not be an easy task but is a task worth undertaking and worth doing right. The introduction of the ECCE scheme now provides an institutional home for pre-schools in the DCYA. While all the groups visited on this research had signed up for the ECCE scheme, it is not compulsory. Some pre-schools have declined the scheme. Most children attend pre-school for two years and as the scheme only pays for one year. Parents must then resource a second year for which they must pay. It has been posited by well-established pre-schools that pre-school is a two year cycle (three years in Reggio) and for that reason the ECCE scheme can be interpreted as a good start but much more must be done to develop ECEC in terms of providing Relational Pedagogy.

It is hoped that statutory bodies and policy makers respond positively to this research findings and recommendations. Further investment in training for those who work directly with young children is money well spent. Such investment holds the promise of reward in the recognition of each individual child and ultimately for Irish society as a whole because as a wise man who had experienced educational disadvantage and prejudice said “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men” (Fredrick Douglas)
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Information Sheet for Parents

The Quality of Care in Irish Early Years Care and Education Services

Information Sheet for Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child’s pre-school playgroup has agreed to take part in the above named research project.

A researcher from the University of Limerick will conduct an observation using an Early Childhood Environmental rating scale concerning: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, Parents and Staff, Literacy, Maths, Science and Diversity.

The playgroup will be under observation by Gerardine Neylon M.A. for the entire class session.

On Monday 10th Sept 2009

Your child is not the subject of this study. The researcher will only observe the setting and will not directly interact with the children in the room.

When completed the findings will contribute to the current understanding of Irish Early Childhood Care and Education issues as well as provide data for comparison with existing international studies.

______________________________________________

Signed Pre-school Practitioner.
Appendix 2: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

Title of project
The ‘Quality of Care’ In Irish Early Childhood Care and Education ECCE Services,

What is the study about?
The study comprises of both qualitative and qualitative research.

A: The former is concerned with applying an Early Childhood Environmental rating scale in pre-school setting that measures Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure and Parents and Staff. Literacy, Maths, Science and Diversity

B. The latter is concerned with a one on one interview with profiling those who work directly with children. 15

This research examines Pre-school care environments using an internationally recognised environmental rating scale called The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS). The research does not involve children as subjects.

What will I have to do?
Allow the researcher to observe and complete the observational scale in your pre-school setting, this should take a full morning.

Participate in an interview concerning what it means to be a Pre-school Practitioner.

Bring to the interview an image (picture, painting, sketch) of Pre-school. This can relate to your own pre-school experience as a child or an adult. This picture will be used as a discussion topic during the interview. (The picture will not be kept by the researcher)

What are the benefits?

15 This research is concerned with those who work up to 20 hours directly with children.
All research results will be made available to you. Your contribution will have greatly helped to profile the Pre-school practitioners and raise issues concerning the sector.

You will have contributed to profiling the Irish Childcare worker.

What are the risks?
None

*What are the alternatives?*
You may decline the invitation to participate.

What if I do not want to take part?
Return the Decline Letter Attached.

What happens to the information?
It will be analysed, shared with the participants, and written up as a Ph. D study. No names of personnel details of any kind will be used.

Who else is taking part?
26 groups have been randomly selected and invited to participate.

What if something goes wrong?
You are free to withdraw and have any information regarding data collected withdrawn from the study at any stage.

What happens at the end of the study?
The work will contribute to the current understanding of Irish Early Childhood Care and Education issues and the issues concerning those who work directly with pre-school children.

What if I have more questions or do not understand something?
Please feel free to make contact me (Ger. Neylon) you will find details below.

What happens if I change my mind during the study?
You are free to change your mind at any stage.

Contact name and number of Project Investigators.

Dr. Maura Adshead,  
Dept. Politics and Public Administration  
University of Limerick  

Gerardine Neylon  
Dept. Politics and Public Admin,  
University of Limerick
If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact **The Chairman of the University of Limerick Research Ethics Committee c/o Anne O’Dwyer**

*Graduate School University of Limerick Tel: (061) 202672*
Recruitment Letter

The Quality of Care in Irish Early Years Care & Education Services

Department of Politics and Public Administration,

University of Limerick,

086 8301050

July 2009

Dear

The Tiny Tot’s playgroup has been randomly selected by the research team at the University of Limerick to participate in research which will take place over the next year. I am a PhD student in the University of Limerick; I have trained and worked in pre-school provision for over 23 years. I am interested in researching what it is like to be a pre-school practitioner, in Ireland right now and also interested in the quality of environment of Irish pre-school settings.

I now wish to invite your playgroup and a staff member who works directly with children attending the group to partake in the research. There is no obligation on you to participate and should you decide not to take part in the research I would appreciate if you would return the note marked ‘decline offer’ in the Stamped Addressed Envelope to me at your earliest convenience. Please see the attached information sheet with details of the research topic and method. Should you wish to participate kindly return the note marked ‘accept offer’ in the Stamped Addressed Envelope to me by the 30th August. I will make telephone contact with you to arrange a date and time that suits the research visit.

Thank you for your kind attention,

__________________________
Gerardine Neylon PhD Candidate
Appendix 4: Consent Form

The 'Quality of Care' In Irish Pre-school services

Consent Form.

I have read and understood the research information sheet.

I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for. I am fully aware of all of the procedures involving myself, and of any risks and benefits associated with the study.

I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the project at any stage without giving any reason.

I am aware that my results will be kept confidential

Signed ____________________

Block Capitals________________________

Name of Pre-School_________________________

Address of Pre-School_________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Telephone ______________________________________________
Appendix 5: Decline Offer

The Quality of Care in Irish Early Years Care & Education services

Date

DECLINE OFFER

We choose not to participate in the research

The proposal was too vague and unclear.

The research is too personal and invasive.

We have never been involved in research and want to keep it that way.

None of the above

_________________________

Signed on behalf of Playgroup

Name & Address of Playgroup
Appendix 6: National Qualifications Framework

National Qualifications Framework

National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (2009)
## Types of Pre-school Buildings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community centres (Two pre-schools shared with other groups – equipment and furniture having to be stored away after each away). Pre-schools 8&amp;10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converted garages all groups were private sector. (Pre-schools 2, 6, 14, 18, 20 and 21)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House (Pre-school 4, 5, 7, 15, 22)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family resource centers purpose built or renovated community caters for babies, pre-schoolers and after school. (Pre-schools 1, 3, 12, 24)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family resource centers pre-school only (Pre-schools 13, 16, 17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose built pre-school attached to private home. (Pre-school 25 &amp; 19)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail shopping unit. (Pre-school 9)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disused room in school setting (Pre-school 11)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-fabricated building (Pre-school 23)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private crèche purposely built for babies, pre-schoolers and after school (Pre-school 26)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Interview guide

The Quality of Care in Irish Early Years Care and Education Services

Qualitative Questions Interview Details.

1. How did you come to be working as a pre-school practitioner?

2. With regard to the issue of your work status, how do you feel your work is understood and appreciated in the community?

3. Has the quality of care/education in Pre-school groups reached a high standard?

4. Tell me about this picture/painting/sketch and what you find relevant/ significant / interesting about it?

(Structured or semi structured questions will not be asked during the picture analysis, as they cannot be prepared.)
Appendix 9: The Hundred Languages of Children by Loris Malaguzzi

The child
is made of one hundred.
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts
a hundred ways of thinking
of playing, of speaking.

A hundred, always a hundred
ways of listening,
of marveling, of loving,
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding.
a hundred worlds
to discover,
a hundred worlds
to invent,
a hundred worlds
to dream.

The child has a hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)
but they steal ninety nine.
The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy
love and marveling
only at Easter and Christmas.

They tell the child
to discover the world already there
and of the hundred
they steal ninety nine.
They tell the child
that work and play
reality and fantasy,
science and imagination,
sky and earth,
reason and dream
are things
that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child
that the hundred is not there.
The child says:
No way
The Hundred is there.